

Persius, and Seneca each witness to the fact that, in the words of the last named :—

‘The customs of this most criminal people are received throughout the world.’

Jews encouraged this and went so far as to forge sayings of the pagan Sybil in favour of monotheism. More effective, however, was the Septuagint version of the Scriptures completed over a century before the coming of Christ, which spread the doctrine of the Jews in the popular language of the day. Romans who did not attend the synagogue learnt to respect these beliefs. As Juvenal notes in his Satires ‘Some adore nothing but the clouds and the deity of heaven’.

All this did not constitute Judaism but formed a climate of opinion ready to welcome Christianity as it extended a helping hand towards the proselyte struggling under a load of petty restrictions, or the Gentile sinking in the mire of materialism. The world was gorged with the fruits of its own self-sufficiency and was athirst for a knowledge of God. Greedily it snatched scraps of truth from any system offering them. Judaism like a mirage in the desert only intensified that thirst, offering a glimpse of the Truth—a reflection of that which was yet further afield. When Christianity came, Jewish communities offered a foothold and presented the Apostles with an audience of enquiring Gentiles in every city and port of the Empire.

‘The harvest is great but the labourers are few.’

B. JONES.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is the ‘Millennium’, or ‘Thousand Years’ of the Apocalypse the peaceful expansion of the Church from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries?’

The answer might very well be an affirmative, if it were agreed that the way to interpret the Apocalypse is to regard it as St John’s inspired prophecy of the future chronological history of the Church. But such an approach is not verified by facts. The world continues *seated in wickedness* (I John v, 19), and the Church continues to pray that God will ‘thrust down to hell Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls’. Moreover, such an approach is comparatively modern. Joachim, Abbot of Flora in southern Italy (d. 1202), a saintly man, was the first to parcel out the Apocalypse into descriptions of seven succeeding periods of the history of the Church. The seventh age, the final one, would be the golden age of the Church, when the contemplative life would be spread everywhere. This age would begin in the year 1260 (cf. xi, 3 : 1260 days), and it would close with the final judgement. Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1340) followed the same

¹ See Editorial.

principle, but of course interpreted the ages differently. The principle continues to attract (cf. the Seventh Day Adventists, the Jehovah Witnesses) just as it attracted Luther and Calvin. Yet it fails to remove the obscurity from the prophecies—even when those prophecies are claimed to have been fulfilled. Indeed, it adds obscurity; for if it is true that chapters xvii and xviii refer only to the fall of the Roman Empire, where are we now to identify the adversaries of the Church? After the conflict described in those chapters hardly any further conflict between the Church and enemies is mentioned. This theory of regarding the Apocalypse as a foretelling of various periods in the history of the Church is now abandoned by Catholics.

Father Ramos Garcia, C.M.F., in his book *Summa Isagogico-Exegetica*,¹ Vol. II, favours the eschatological approach. For him, the Millennium has still to come. It is that period between the imprisonment of Satan and his release. During that period, the great length of which is denoted symbolically by a thousand years, the Dragon which had led Christian nations to apostasy, and which had thus prepared the way for the Beast, or Antichrist, will be rendered powerless. The period will be inaugurated and closed by the Parousia. The first act of Christ when He comes again will be to receive from the Father the kingdom on earth. This will involve the 'first resurrection', which is that of the saints. Then Christ will reign with His saints in the world until the final judgement, the last stage in the Parousia, when He will give back to the Father the kingdom He received (I Cor. xv, 24), and when the second resurrection, that of the dead, will take place.

Christ and the risen saints, continues Fr Ramos, will not be visible on earth; they will be invisible, as befits their incorruptible bodies. They will be among men as the Risen Christ was among men during the forty days preceding the Ascension. Hence, both the ecclesiastical and the civic hierarchy will continue, and nations will be changed very much for the better—though the change will be one of degree and not of kind.

Cutting away excrescences, exaggerations, errors and points in detail either hotly disputed or about which there is no sound agreement among the Fathers, Father Ramos reduces the essential features of the Millennium theory to six, and these, he claims, are maintained by the Fathers. The six features in order are:—

- (1) The first resurrection, that is to say, of the elect.
- (2) The Universal Judgement of the living. This is the social reign of the elect among the nations.
- (3) The reign of a thousand years; which is only another way of saying that the reign will last a long time. It denotes the peaceful reign of the Messiah as foretold by the OT prophets, their prophecies being understood in a literal sense.

¹ Rome, 1940.

- (4) The General Resurrection of the good and bad.
- (5) The Final Judgement.
- (6) Eternal life or eternal damnation according to merits.

In support of these points Father Ramos brings forward not merely St Irenaeus. He asserts that it is ridiculous to say that Irenaeus was the author of the Millennium theory. He claims that before Irenaeus there were Papias, the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, St Justin and even St Paul in I Cor. xv, 22-26 (against which interpretation of St Paul see Père Allo, *Revue Biblique*, 1932, pp. 187-209). And after Irenaeus there were Hippolytus, Tertullian, Lactantius and even (so claims Father Ramos) St Jerome and St Augustine. All these are supporters of the six essential points in the Millennium theory.

There is not enough space here to set out a criticism of this view of the Millennium. We mention the view, first because of its topical interest, and second, because the questioner can now see how the Millennium is interpreted by some Catholics as referring exclusively to the future and having nothing to do with the past.

Most commentators prefer the eschatological system of interpreting the Apocalypse to that which regards the book as a description of the successive periods through which the Church militant has to pass.

But a more probable system still is that which Père Allo has popularized. The principles behind this system were given in early times by Tychonius, a Donatist (d. 380), and in modern times by Swete. It has been adopted too by Merk and Höpfl. This system may be described as a qualified eschatological system. It interprets the Apocalypse as referring to the eschatological period, but this period is not merely in the future: it began with the Incarnation ('a primo adventu Christi usque in saeculi finem'—St Augustine). The Apocalypse covers the whole period of Church history, but not in such a way that St John describes each period in chronological fashion. St John is interested in history, but not in history for its own sake. He mentions historical events only in so far as he sees them as a type of events in another (spiritual) order. This spiritual order will have its full consummation at the Parousia, but meanwhile St John describes partial fulfilments. Thus, St John has in mind the actual Roman persecutions, but he sees them as a type of the age-long persecution of the Church by external forces, such as materialism. He then shifts his gaze and sees all this as a type of the internal struggle going on in man's soul between the lieutenants of Satan and Divine Grace. Finally he turns his gaze to God, in Whom all things are recapitulated. The principle on which this theory is based is that of 'Compenetration'—a seeing of several perspectives at the same time.

If we adopt the interpretation set forth by Père Allo we should say, then, that the Millennium does not refer to any precise period in history when the Church would be surrounded by peace and external

happiness. It refers rather to the whole spiritual reign of the Church militant. The reign of a thousand years is a symbolic way of describing the victory of Christ over the Devil and the spirit of the world. This victory will be complete at the Parousia, but it has already been put under way, and sometimes we get glimpses of its progress (e.g., in the period between the sixth and sixteenth centuries).

In July 1944 the Holy Office issued a decree, of which the precise point appears to be only this: that mitigated form of Millenarism which teaches that Christ will return *visibly* before the Last Day in order to reign is unsafe ('tuto doceri non potest'). Now we must not read into the decree more than the carefully chosen words connote. We must not say that *every* form of the Millennium theory is now condemned; only that form of Millenarism is now condemned which insists that Christ will return to the earth in visible form for some period previous to the final judgement.

Fr Ramos Garcia, as we have seen, rejects the suggestion that Christ will return during the Millennium in visible form. On p. 281 of his book, Fr Garcia says (I translate): 'I would prefer to call this system (i.e. what he himself teaches) "Millenism" rather than "Millenarism", because the latter term by reason of its historical associations connotes, or at least suggests, that Christ and the saints will be visibly present, and has other fantastic ideas, not to say errors.' Indeed, Fr Garcia has been teaching his interpretation (which he claims to be founded on Holy Writ and Tradition) for several years in Rome, and he has been writing about it at least since 1926. His teaching does not appear to be affected by the decree, and he will, doubtless, continue to see in the Apocalypse how the future events of the Church militant will occur. They are like (he would say) a diptych: on one side we see the first resurrection (cf. Apoc. iv, 5; I Thess. iv, 16; I Cor. xv, 25, 51 ff) leading to the social reign of the risen elect; on the other side we see the general resurrection of good and bad in view of the individual and final judgement. Connecting the first side with the second we see the future peaceful reign of the Messiah *manifested*. This does not mean that Christ and the saints will be visibly present; it means that Satan will be rendered *absolutely* powerless and Christ and His Church will reign in the mass of men's hearts. Hence, in this period (of indefinite duration) mankind will respect holiness, will cherish truth rather than lies—will practise love for the sake of Christ rather than hate for the sake of Satan.

The decree observes that people have been asking the Holy See for some guidance about the truth of the Millennium theory. The Holy Office replied by condemning one exaggerated notion. It is not surprising that many people are wondering if there is anything in the Millennium theory. Apocalyptic literature has its special appeal in times of stress and depression, and doubtless many people are asking

whether the time will ever come on this earth when the Church militant will be seen to triumph over Satan, when peoples will be guided in their actions and policies not by the lower passions but by Christian principles.

D. J. LEAHY.

What is the teaching of Genesis ii, 7 about the human soul?

In the Douay Version Gen. ii, 7 is translated 'And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life ; and man became a living soul'. The Revised Version has : 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living soul'. The matter out of which man's body was fashioned is called 'slime' in the former which follows St Jerome's Latin Vulgate, and 'dust' in the latter. The same word occurs again in Gen. iii, 19, in the sentence of condemnation after the sin of our first parents : 'Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return'. Here both versions use the same word 'dust', which accords both with the realities of death contemplated in the sentence and with the meaning of the Hebrew word elsewhere (Deut. xxviii, 24). And this sentence of condemnation obviously refers back to the formation of man's body in our verse, so that the translation should use the same word in both places. St Jerome's choice of the word *limus* seems to have been dictated by the thought that dry dust would lack the cohesiveness required to form a body. But the use of the word is not confined to the meaning 'dust' ; it also stands for 'soil' (Job v, 6, xiv, 8), and the shade of meaning is conveyed by the context. So that if it were not for the desirability of using the same word in ii, 7 and iii, 19, in the former passage the translation might well be 'soil', a word which avoids the idea of dryness ; and we are told that water was not lacking (ii, 6, 10).

When the body of man had been thus formed, it was lifeless. To give it life God breathed into its nostrils (so more appropriately according to the Hebrew text) the breath of life. This conception is based on the most obvious difference between a living and a dead body. The living body breathes, the dead body does not. As long as there is breath in the body, the person lives (Job xxvii, 2) ; when there is no breath left, the person dies (III Kings xviii, 17, 21 f.). It is God who gives it (Isaias lxii, 5), and it is God who takes it away (Job xxxiv, 14 f.). And it is beyond the power of any man to grant it (Job xxvi, 4). But it is not the special possession of man. As essential to life, it is common to man and the animals (Gen. vii, 22). In all these cases the same word *neshāmāh* is used. In Ps. ciii (civ) 29 f., where the word *rūach* 'wind, breath, spirit' is used, the giving and taking away of the life-breath of animals is directly attributed to God :