

represent the world ; they are the true adversaries of Christ. The same is true of the Lithostrotos : the real antagonists present are not Jesus and Pilate but Jesus and the Jews. Jesus is represented here as the judge of the Jews, but basically it is the *krisis* of the world which is accomplished. The exceptional importance of the scene of the Lithostrotos is explained by the fact that here is revealed in a figurative way and at the symbolical level that which is to constitute the true meaning of the Cross and of the Pasch of salvation, namely the exaltation of the King-Messiah and the condemnation of the sinful world.

I. DE LA POTTERIE, S.J.

Rome

*CHOSEN IN HIM BEFORE  
THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD*

When we think about salvation, that is to say, the business of getting to Heaven, of being with God for ever, of being saved, we usually do so in personal terms either of ourselves or of other individuals. This makes the fact of predestination, met with so frequently in the apostolic writings, difficult to understand and it has often to be accepted by Christians simply as a mystery. It is a mystery, of course, but it need not be mystifying, and the purpose of this article is to examine, quite briefly, the part played by baptism in establishing and extending a redeemed community, the Church, in the hope that some light may be shed thereby, on one aspect at least, of a problem which continues to cause anxious thoughts in the minds of many ordinary readers of the Bible.

It is desperately important to each individual soul to be 'found written in the book of life' (Apoc. 20:15), and because this is so it is easy to forget the relationship which exists between all the redeemed, the 'great multitude which no man could number' (Apoc. 7:9). The fact is that the saved belong to a community and are saved as members of it, while the lost do not belong to a community in the same sense and it is as individuals that they are rejected.<sup>1</sup> If salvation is thought of in terms of community, predestination becomes much easier to understand, and many of the difficulties connected with it disappear. Two examples of this communal thinking by the Apostles, selected

<sup>1</sup> This is not meant to imply that those who are ultimately lost, if they belong to the visible Church, are not just as truly members of it on earth as those who are ultimately saved.

from among many, show very clearly that it is the Church that is saved, that is, all those individuals of which it is composed and the position of each separate soul in isolation does not arise.<sup>1</sup>

St Paul, bidding farewell to the elders of Ephesus, speaks of ‘the church of God, which he hath acquired with his own blood’ (Ac. 20:28) and in writing to them refers to ‘. . . our inheritance, unto redemption as the chosen people’ (Eph. 1:14). St Peter, in a catena of Old Testament quotations, calls the Christian community ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, . . . ye who were once not his people but now are the people of God, who once had not found mercy but now have found it’ (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

This communal emphasis does not reduce the individual to a mere unit, and to show that this is true we need only to recall St Paul’s words, ‘I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself for me’ (Gal. 2:21). An analogy may make the position clearer. If I belong to a group, a family perhaps, or a community, I love the other members of it as individuals because they belong to the group as well as for any lovable qualities that they may happen to possess. In fact, co-membership of the group can make it possible to love the unlovable. This is often startlingly true in the case of parents and children.

Our Lord’s discourse on the true vine shows that the Christian does not exist as an isolated individual with regard to his eternal destiny : ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away ; and every branch that beareth fruit he cleanseth, that it may bear more fruit. Ye are already clean, because of the word which I have spoken to you ; abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine ; so neither can ye, unless ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye the branches ; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit, for apart from me ye can do nothing. If anyone abide not in me, he is cast forth as the branch and withereth ; and they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned’ (Jn. 15:1–6). It is clear, then, not only that the Christian does not exist in isolation, but that he cannot so exist. He must be a part of the organic whole, whose head is Christ. Severance from that whole means death to the one severed. Thus we can understand how it is that Christians of apostolic times can be referred to so frequently as saints, as being saved, as having been redeemed and even as being

<sup>1</sup> This may appear to be an over-simplification of a very complex problem. The important point is that predestination is not an arbitrary decree by which God makes salvation for some an impossibility. The doctrine of double predestination was condemned at a very early stage in the Church’s history.

predestined (Rom. 8:29, 30 ; Eph. 1:5), without thereby implying that the individual Christian cannot be lost. St Paul says of himself, ‘but I bruise my body and bring it into subjection, lest haply after being herald to others I myself become disqualified’ (1 Cor. 9:27). They were ‘baptised into Christ, have put on Christ’ (Gal. 3:27), they were ‘the body of Christ, and severally his members’ (1 Cor. 12:27), and it is, of course, out of the question that a member of Christ could be lost. It is the community which is redeemed and all the members of it ; because they are members of it they are, with it, predestined to salvation ; but if a member separates himself from the body he is rejected. As Christians we are, here and now, redeemed, but, ‘let him that thinketh himself to stand look to it lest he fall’ (1 Cor. 10:15).

We must now examine the means whereby a branch is grafted into the vine. Baptism is the visible rite, ordained by God (Mt. 28:19) by which the new Christian is admitted to the community predestined to salvation and made one with it, and so one with Christ. It is useful to compare this first step under the new dispensation with the rite of circumcision, also ordained by God (Gen. 17:11), by which a man became part of the Chosen People.

Some of our separated brethren hold the belief that infant baptism is not effective because an infant cannot consciously adhere to Christ. But the older rite was commanded to be performed on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12) and the child was then one of God’s people, even though Moses would have to say to the whole of this people, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side ? Come to me’ (Ex. 32:26). And there are several references in the New Testament to the baptism of converts with their whole households (Ac. 16:15, 33 ; 18:8 ; 1 Cor. 1:16). This does not suggest the exclusion of children. Just as babies are born, in the course of nature, true human beings though completely dependent and with everything to learn, so they can be reborn of water and the Spirit into the supernatural order, truly members of the new Israel and still completely dependent and with everything to learn about the supernatural order to which they now belong. Not all babies grow up to be good men or women ; nor do all baptised babies grow up to be good Christians.

The other point concerns the difficulty that is encountered in reconciling the undoubted fact that baptism is an ordinance laid upon all mankind by our Lord when he commanded the apostles to ‘make disciples of all the nations, baptising them . . .’ (Mt. 28:19), with the impossibility for those who have never had the Gospel preached to them of obeying the Divine command. If it is through membership of the Christian community that those who are to be saved find salvation, what are we to think about the fate of those whom the good

news has not reached? Are we to suppose that they have been born in such circumstances because they are *not* to 'be found written in the book of life'?

That the Church is the Ark of Salvation is clear from St Peter's teaching in his first epistle (1 Pet. 3:21), and perhaps even clearer from his sermon, or rather defence, before the high priests, when he said of Jesus, 'And in none other is there salvation. For neither is there another name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved' (Ac. 4:11-12). On the other hand, St Paul, in urging that prayers should be offered on behalf of all men, tells Timothy that 'This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who wisheth *all* men to be saved and to come to knowledge of truth. For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for *all* men . . .' (1 Tim. 2:3-6).

Without venturing upon the difficult task of attempting to explain how God deals with those souls who remain, in good faith, unbaptised or out of communion with the Church Christ founded, we may fruitfully consider the position of the men and women of Old Testament times who were outside God's people, but not outside His mercy or approval.

Jonas was sent to Nineveh to 'cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me' (Jon. 1:2), and yet God says of them, 'And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left . . .' (Jon. 4:11). The upright man, God's servant Job, was not an Israelite but a man of Uz to the south of Edom. The holy patriarch Abraham, our spiritual ancestor, gave tithes to Melchisedech, a non-Israelite (Gen. 14:20) and, moreover, himself a figure of Christ (Heb. 6:20). Ruth, who figures in the genealogies of David (Ru. 4:17) and of our Lord (Mt. 1:5), was a Moabite, one of those of whom it was said, 'none belonging to them shall enter the assembly of the Lord for ever' (Deut. 23:3). Our Lord himself, preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, reminded his hearers that ' . . . many were the widows in Israel in the days of Elias, . . . but unto none of them was Elias sent, save only unto a widow of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And many were the lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; but not one of them was cleansed, save only Naaman the Syrian' (Lk. 4:25-7). It was on this occasion that his fellow townsmen tried to hurl him down from the precipice because 'they were filled with wrath upon hearing these things' (Lk. 4:28).

Is it now possible, in the light of the inspired texts referred to above, to reconcile the necessity of baptism for salvation with the fact that many souls, through circumstances of time or place, can never know

of its necessity or even that such a rite exists? The easier point of departure is to consider the position of those who lived before the Incarnation.

It is extremely difficult to remember, when considering God's dealings with mankind, that while we (living in time and experiencing change and the succession of events which make up history) find the past completely stable, the future potentially so and the present moment most elusive, God lives in an eternal present. We must, however, bear it constantly in mind because God outside time became man to redeem men, and this had to be at a particular point in human history. This necessarily means that many lived and died before the sacrament of baptism was instituted. If no-one could be saved without actually being baptised, then all who died in those earlier times would necessarily be lost. An echo of this fear is to be found among the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:29). But we have a most definite assurance that this is not so in the manner in which our Lord refers to the patriarchs. He says, for example, 'There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves cast forth without' (Lk. 13:28).

This does not imply that anyone can enter the kingdom of God other than by the saving power of Christ, for he came to redeem 'all men,' and 'in none other is there salvation'; he says of Abraham that he 'exulted that he was to see my day; and he saw it, and rejoiced' (Jn. 8:56). It does mean that we do not need to fear for the fate of all the unbaptised who lived under the Old Law, and we can also say that, as some of the passages quoted above show, there were men and women of those times to whom God showed His mercy or approval although they had never entered into the Covenant effected under Moses.

It also points to this: that just as the Israelites were bound to the Covenant and 'Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant' (Gen. 17:14), although God was not thereby precluded from showing mercy to whom He would, so it is with baptism. To enter God's household we must be baptised; it is the only means open to us. But although God has limited us in this way He has not limited Himself.<sup>1</sup> We may remember that when the disciples, asking about a different difficulty, said, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus replied, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible' (Mt. 19:25, 26). What He can do to overcome circumstances of time He can also do to overcome circumstances of place.

<sup>1</sup> It is salvation that is in question here. To become a member of the Mystical Body, the Church, sacramental baptism is essential.

In fact these circumstances of place are really circumstances of time because we cannot doubt that ultimately the Gospel will have been preached to every creature. Those who have not heard it have, as it were, lived too soon. They are in the same position as the people of pre-Christian times. Indeed, for them their times *are* pre-Christian times.

If then, as the scriptures show, God has approved some of those who were not under the Old Law, there cannot be any reason to suppose that He will not approve some of those not under the New, although in such cases His approval will always be an ‘uncovenanted’ act of mercy. This does not at all alter the fact that in every case salvation depends on the saving power of Christ. There is no way into the Divine Presence except through him and with him and in him.

The reverse of this is just as true. Baptism is not a guarantee of salvation for the individual, ‘For I would not have you ignorant brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised in the cloud and in the sea unto the following of Moses, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink (for they drank from the spiritual rock which followed them : and Christ was the rock) ; yet with the most of them God was not well pleased—“they were struck down in the wilderness ”’ (1 Cor. 10:1-5).

If baptism, then, does not by itself ensure salvation for the individual, nor the lack of it constitute an absolute disqualification, what is its purpose ?

To answer this question we must consider the position that will exist at the end of these ‘last times’ which began with the coming of the Messias. There is no intention of dealing with the effect of baptism on those receiving it, but only with its place and purpose in the life of the church as a whole.

When the last day comes everyone then living will be committed one way or the other, to Christ or to Satan (cf. Apoc. 20:7-10). At this time there will be no-one left who is a ‘good pagan’ and no-one who belongs to Christ will be outside the visible church. As God wishes all men to be saved, the Church, by which I mean the supernatural society founded by Christ, ought to be co-terminous with humanity. However, He has given men the freedom to reject Him, and it seems from the Apocalypse that many will do so. Membership of the visible Church does not, as we have seen, make falling away by individuals impossible. Nor do apostasies, however numerous, alter the fact that all the members of the Church are predestined to salvation with it. They are like passengers in a bus : all are certain to

reach the destination—unless they choose to get off, thus breaking their connection with the group and becoming individuals who have decided to go their own way. They may be companions in misfortune, but they are no longer members of a community.

When our Lord taught the multitudes many of those living in the Holy Land heard his teaching directly, though undoubtedly many more did not. The apostles were to continue his work, but belief alone was not enough—‘He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved : he that believeth not shall be condemned’ (Mk. 16:16). Baptism is the rite of initiation by which the believer enters the Christian community and, conversely, the means whereby that community was established and by which it is still being extended. We are living in time and are limited by time ; hence it is slow and painful work. Christ’s Church continues Christ’s work of evangelisation and meets, as he did, with misunderstanding, persecution and rejection. But this rejection must be a refusal of belief and not just a lack of opportunity to believe, because ‘How are they to believe in him whom they have not heard ? And how are they to hear without a preacher ? And how are men to preach unless they be sent ?’ (Rom. 10:14–15).

Baptism, then, is the means whereby the Lord adds to the company day by day those who are being saved (cf. Ac. 2:41, 47), and the process will not be complete until the mission with which he charged his followers has been fulfilled and the Gospel has been preached to the whole creation.

CLARKE TURNER

### BIBLE LANDS BY JEEP—II<sup>1</sup>

#### *Egypt*

The hopeful traveller may be disappointed by his first contact with the ‘mysterious East.’ Its dirt and its noise, its extremes of poverty and wealth, the irresponsibility of its traffic and the excitability of its people—these will almost certainly irritate any but the most phlegmatic, and it is well to be forewarned. Warning is needed particularly that petty officialdom seems to thrive in Mediterranean climates to a degree unsuspected by the untravelled northerner, and that a tight schedule which makes no allowance for it is likely to be disrupted.

<sup>1</sup> The second of three articles offering some practical advice on travel through Bible Lands today, cf. *Scripture* 1961, pp. 88–92