

will call him 'My Son'; and he will have titles as Counsellor, Strong God, Prince of peace. The Holy Spirit will come upon him, with many gifts, to found a kingdom of justice and to further utter peace. The role of Messiah will begin near the Sea of Galilee, and spread to the limits of earth. He will be king and priest, with a universal kingship 'not of this world': with a priesthood of another order (Melchisedech) perfect and eternal. Triumph of the kingdom will not be without struggles, yet the Messiah will free the human race from sin and the devil's power. He will take upon himself the iniquities of all; he will be mocked, condemned (though innocent), and despised. He will die to expiate the sin of the whole human race. Yet will he rise again from the tomb, and will have the great spiritual posterity of all those who are sanctified by his voluntary oblation of self. He will triumph over all enemies and for ever sit at the right hand of God.

Such is a picture built up from many particular prophecies of the old testament. God's way of teaching was gradual, and proportioned to the chosen people's capacities and weaknesses. And we now are the happy ones to whom 'God has spoken in these days through his Son'; and our Lord has said:

*Many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you see and have not seen them . . . (Luke x, 24).*



## FAITH AND THE SACRAMENT OF FAITH<sup>1</sup>

PAULINUS MILNER

AND he said to them: "Go out over the whole world and preach the gospel to the whole of creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who refuses to believe will be condemned" (Mark xvi, 15). Our Lord shows us in these words that there are three stages on the way of salvation. First there must be preaching: the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ must be proclaimed to all creation; the revelation made to prophets and apostles must be passed on by preachers to all human beings. But God's revelation demands response on the

<sup>1</sup> For many of the ideas used in this article, I am indebted to the excellent book by Fr T. Camelot, O.P., *Spiritualité du Baptême*, in the collection 'Lex Orandi' no. 30 (Cerf, 1960).

part of man. That response is faith. God has taken the initiative: he has revealed himself to us and sent his only-begotten Son to die for our sins, that we may be saved; but as St Augustine says, 'God who made you without your assistance, will not save you without your co-operation'. In response to his initiative he requires our faith. We have to pay him the homage of believing what we can have no proof of; we have to give the consent of our minds, not because we see that it cannot be otherwise, but because we know that it is good to believe God. 'He who believes . . . will be saved; he who refuses to believe will be condemned.'

Faith is our response to God's revelation, and yet the very fact that we believe is itself a gift of God. No human mind could give absolute and unswerving consent to the truths of God except by God's gift. Seen from this angle, faith is already the beginning of salvation. As the epistle to the Hebrews tells us: 'Faith is the guarantee of the things we hope for, the conviction of things not seen' (xi, 1). By believing in God we are already enjoying a foretaste of that knowledge, that vision of him, that will make us happy in eternity. Our faith is not just a recitation of formulas: it is the acceptance of the word of God on the authority of God; it is an adhesion to the Truth of God—that is to the person of God the Truth, the person of Christ who is the Word of God. 'What is it to believe in God?' asks St Augustine, and he answers, 'It is by believing to love him, by believing in him to delight in him, to go to him by believing in him and to be incorporated among his members' (*Tract. in Joann.* 29, 6; P.L. 35, 1631). This faith, the faith that lives by charity, is an intimate relationship that unites us to the person of Christ. As we learn from the gospel of St John, to believe in Christ is to go to him and to walk with him (cf. vi, 66). To believe is to become a son of God; 'To those that received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, to them that believe in his name' (John i, 12); and again: 'All are sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ' (Gal. ii, 20). In the turning of the soul towards God, moved by grace and stirred by preaching, faith is primary.

But besides faith the text with which we began also mentions baptism: 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved'.<sup>2</sup> Faith and baptism are very closely connected; so much so that baptism

<sup>2</sup> The question of the salvation of men who, through no fault of their own, do not come into contact with the Church, does not concern us here.

is called the sacrament of faith. The religion of Christ, the Word of God, is above all an interior religion 'in spirit and truth', and therefore the interior adhesion of faith is primary. But because it is the religion of the Word *incarnate*, it cannot remain purely interior, a solitary and silent adhesion of the spirit alone. It was by becoming flesh that Christ saved us. It is through contact with the flesh of Christ that the spirit receives grace. 'And he put his fingers into his ears, and spat, and touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and sighed; Ephpheta, he said (that is, Be opened)' (Mark vii, 33). So he acted once through his sacred body, and though he is no longer with us in the same way as he was then, the power of his sacred flesh yet reaches us to heal us. We cannot now touch the hem of his garment, but we can make contact with him in a certain way through the sacraments. These are so many sacred and meaningful signs through which passes all the power of that sacred humanity which is the instrument of the divinity. In these humble symbolic actions our faith encounters Christ in a concrete and physical manner. St Thomas Aquinas expresses this truth in a striking sentence: *Virtus passionis Christi copulatur nobis per fidem et fidei sacramenta*; the power of Christ's passion is coupled on to us by faith and the sacraments of faith (*Summa Theol.* IIIa, q. 62, a. vi). The Christian dispensation is not only a spiritual dispensation but also in a way a physical one. Christ has disposed things in this way because man is not a disembodied spirit but a complex of mind and matter. Not only faith but also the sacraments of faith are necessary to salvation.

'Faith and baptism', as St Basil tells us, 'are two inseparable and interdependent means of salvation. Faith is completed in baptism, and baptism is founded upon faith; both are accomplished by the invocation of the same names. We believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. First comes the profession of faith that leads to salvation, then comes baptism that seals our self-commitment.' (*De Sancto Spiritu* 12, 28. P.G. 32, 117.) Basil is here referring to the ceremony of baptism. When after long weeks of preparation and instruction the catechumen stands at last in the baptistry, he is asked first: 'Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?', and he replies: 'I believe'. 'Do you believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord who was born and suffered?', and

he replies: 'I believe'. 'Do you believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?', and he replies again: 'I believe'. Only after that is he brought to the font and baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The ancient rite described in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome is even more expressive of this dependence of baptism on faith:

'And when he who is to be baptized goes down to the water, let him who baptizes him lay hand on him saying thus:

Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty?

And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. Let him forthwith baptize him once, having his hand laid upon his head. And after this let him say:

Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,  
who was born of Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate,  
and died,

and rose the third day living from the dead,

and ascended into heaven,

and sat down at the right hand of the Father,

and will come to judge the living and the dead?

And when he says: I believe, let him baptize him the second time. And again let him say:

Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church,

And the resurrection of the flesh?

And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe, and so let him baptize him the third time.' (Dix, *The Apostolic Tradition*, London, 1937. pp. 36-37.)

This seems to have been the way in which baptism was administered at least until the seventh century.<sup>3</sup>

According to this rite it is in the very act of proclaiming his faith that the neophyte is baptized. Confessing his faith in the three Persons, he is taken up physically into the mystery of Christ. 'You know well enough', says St Paul, 'that we who are taken

<sup>3</sup> A similar form of baptismal ceremony is described by St Ambrose and St Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century and is found in the seventh-century Gelasian Sacramentary. From the writings of Tertullian and St Cyprian evidence can also be drawn that indicates that they also used the rite. There are more ways than one of interpreting the words: 'Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'. In the Eastern Churches, however, a formula similar to the one we use now was already in use by the fourth century.

up into Christ by baptism, have been taken up all of us into his death. In our baptism we have been buried with him into death, so that just as Christ was raised up by his Father's power from the dead, we too may live and move in a new kind of existence.' (Rom. vi, 3.) In this way Christ accepts and seals our act of adhesion and self-commitment to him by making us live through him, with him and in him. St Thomas explains that although every man who believes in Christ is mentally incorporated in him, afterwards, when he is baptized, he is incorporated into him somehow corporeally, that is by the visible sacrament (*Summa Theol.* IIIa, q. 69, a.v, ad 1).

Faith is the foundation of baptism. Yes, but it would be wrong to think that it is our faith that causes the sacrament to have its effect. That the sacrament effects a divine work in us comes from the power of God who works in the sacrament using the rite as his instrument. This act of divine omnipotence demands a certain participation on the part of man, participation by that faith which opens him to the divine grace. 'Take courage, my daughter, thy faith has made thee whole' (Matt. ix, 22). St Thomas teaches that baptism gains its efficacy in the first place from the power of heaven, but secondarily that the faith of the Church and of the one who is baptized operates for the efficacy of baptism—hence the baptized profess their faith, and baptism is called the sacrament of faith (*ibid.*, IIIa, q. 39, a. v). So faith is truly the foundation of baptism. To quote St Basil once more: 'Baptism is the seal of faith, faith which is the adhesion to the divinity. We must first believe and then be sealed by baptism' (*Contra Eunomium* III, 5. P.G. 29, 665).

As we have already said, although faith is the foundation of baptism, baptism has the effect of bringing our faith to completion. Hence it is called the sacrament of illumination. It lights up the mind of the believer with a spiritual understanding. Commenting on the miracle of the man born blind that St John relates in such detail, St Augustine tells us that in this incident Christ 'sought a man who believed and made him one who understands' (*Tract. in Joan.* 44, 3. P.L. 35, 1715). That is the effect that baptism has on our faith. It gives it depth and light. We find the same teaching in St Thomas. He distinguishes between the instruction given by the catechist or preacher which, although in a certain sense it causes faith, only illuminates outwardly, and God's action on the

mind of the man when he is baptized, which prepares his heart to receive the doctrine of truth. The baptized, he says, are illuminated by Christ concerning the knowledge of truth (*Summa Theol.* IIIa, q. 69, a. v). So true is this that St Augustine can say: 'To the Church has been committed the charge of handing on doctrine, both by catechizing in sermons and readings and saturating through the sacraments' (*Quaest. in Evang.* II, 40. P.L. 35, 1355). Both teaching and sacraments are means of enlightening our minds, of breaking to us the bread of the Word. In baptism we are immersed in those mysteries to which we give our faith. We can never understand the things of God in any proper sense while on this earth, but baptism, because it purifies the soul of all evil and all attachment to wickedness that blinds it, opens the path to that simple contemplation of the truth, that affective knowledge of God, that every baptized Christian is called to.

St Cyprian has left for us a description of the way in which he experienced this illumination at the time of his baptism: 'When the revivifying water had washed away all the stains of my past, and my purified heart was filled with the pure and serene light from above; after the Spirit descending from heaven had given me a second birth and made a new man of me—then in a wonderful way doubts were resolved, clarity dawned where before had been mystery, light shone in the darkness, the difficulties all disappeared and I found myself able for what had seemed impossible' (*Ep. 1 ad Donatum*, iv. P.L. 4, 200).

So baptism is the sacrament of faith both because it presupposes our faith and because it completes and strengthens that faith. Most of us, however, were baptized as infants; we had no faith, for we were incapable as yet of any mental act, so others had to proclaim the faith in our stead. Was baptism for us the sacrament of faith? We are sometimes tempted to regret that we were not able to experience in full consciousness this most wonderful event of our lives. But we should remember that the advantages we gain by infant baptism are of far greater importance than any treasured memory of an experience. Nor is baptism any the less the sacrament of faith because it is administered to an infant. Many non-Catholics who reject the Church's teaching on the sacraments find great difficulty in the idea of infant baptism. To them, a rite which, it is claimed, works an interior change of a moral order in the recipient without the

faith of the recipient being the basis of that change, looks like magic. It seems strange to us to hear effects that are wrought by the power of God and by his command labelled as magic, since the one who performs the rite acts only as an instrument. At that rate all Christ's miracles must be called magic. We can, however, appreciate their difficulty. St Augustine faced it and solved it many centuries ago.

The Church justifies her practice of infant baptism in virtue of two principles. The first is the difference between the sacramental and the moral order, the second is the solidarity of all Christians in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Let us consider the first in the words of St Augustine: 'The sacrament of baptism is one thing, the conversion of the heart is another, but the salvation of man is achieved by both. Nor must we conclude that, if one of these is absent, it follows that the other also must be absent; for the one could be lacking in the infant, the other in the thief, but God made up in both what in each involuntarily was lacking.' (*De Bapt. contra Donat.* IV, xxv, 32. P.L. 43, 176.) The Church of course makes it quite clear that if the child grows to responsible manhood this sacrament will not avail for his salvation unless he makes it bear fruit in a converted life, but the grace of regeneration is really there and the baptized child is truly possessed by the Holy Spirit. 'Just as in a certain way', says St Augustine, 'the sacrament of the body of Christ is the body of Christ and the sacrament of Christ's blood is the blood of Christ, so the sacrament of faith is faith. . . . Because of this, when (the sponsor) replies that the child believes who cannot make an act of faith, he says that he has faith because of the sacrament of faith and that he turns to God because of the sacrament of conversion. Of baptism the Apostle says: "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death". He does not say "We symbolize a burial", but "We are buried". So it is with the child. Although it is not that faith which is based on the will of believers that makes him a faithful Christian, he is made one by the sacrament of faith. For just as it is responded that he believes, so also he is called a faithful Christian, not because he consents to the mysteries with his mind, but because he has received the sacrament of these mysteries. When he comes to the age of reason he does not repeat the sacrament, but he comes to understand and willingly adapts himself to its truth.' (*Epist.* 98, 9. P.L. 33, 364.)

We have shown above how important the act of faith is in adult baptism since it opens the recipient to the workings of grace. If the personal and interior character of the relation of man to God is not to be overlooked, there must be, even in infant baptism, a more immediate connection between the sacramental grace and the human response. The Protestants are at one with the Church in insisting that the sacrament has no effect without faith of a certain kind. It is here that the doctrine of the solidarity of all Christians in grace plays an important part. It is only when it is understood that baptism is an act of the Church that we can see how infant baptism can be efficacious. After all, it is through others that these babies are born in original sin, so why should not the faith of others obtain their purification? The bond of the Holy Ghost, that binds us all into one body in Christ, makes it possible for us to answer for the infant that he believes in the Father, in the Son and in the mystery of his death to which he is to be united. 'Mother Church', says St Augustine, 'lends (these babies) her maternal mouth and mind so that they can be immersed in the mysteries, for they cannot yet with their own minds believe unto salvation, or confess unto salvation with their mouths' (*De Pec. Merit. et Remis.* I, 38. P.L. 44, 131).

The privilege it is to be baptized as an infant should never be underrated. From the time of their baptism these children possess the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, or, in St Augustine's language, are immersed and saturated by the mysteries. As they gradually come to the use of reason they accustom themselves effortlessly to a real conscious faith and grow in spiritual understanding of the things of God. So long as their faith is fed by a good Christian upbringing and proper instruction, they should know nothing of those doubts and fears of which St Cyprian spoke. They must, nevertheless, make the small effort that is required of them. They have to make their own that steadfast confession of faith that their sponsors made on their behalf. They must confirm that renunciation of Satan and that adhesion to Christ in loving faith and they must confirm it by deeds.