

In the case of the Bible, background knowledge is more necessary, and, some books of it being more accessible to us than others, there are fairly obvious distinctions to be made; but there can be no substitute for reading. This is not something that every person can easily and immediately begin to do, and some people are obviously in a better position to begin than others. Only if we have idealist notions of democracy will this upset us; the point is that the works of the Christian tradition are available, essentially—they are not specialist. They are available since 'there is a continuity from the inescapable creativeness of perception to the disciplined imaginative creativeness of the skilled artist'.¹ (The indebtedness to Blake in that remark emphasizes the centrality of creative literature; Blake gives us this truth a century before its theoretical implications begin to be spelt out.)

Criticism is concerned with establishing the poem—or the novel—as an object of common access in what is in some sense a public world, so that when we differ about it we are differing about what is sufficiently the same thing to make differing profitable.²

In that notion of the function of criticism there are many of the answers to our questions about the democratic nature of the Church; and in the wider conception there is much to help us understand what the Church is, before we continue our efforts to be relevant, meaningful, dialectical, historical, engaged in dialogue, and pursuing the right life-style.

¹F. R. Leavis in *Dickens the Novelist* (London, 1970), p. 236.

²F. R. Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time and the University*, p. 50.

The Manifestation of Baptism by Simon Tugwell, O.P.

In a previous article,¹ we were considering the Pentecostal doctrine of the 'baptism in the Spirit', and concluded that it all really belongs to the full New Testament understanding of baptism, of what it is to be a Christian at all. Baptism should be—indeed (so far as the evidence shows) clearly was—a real spiritual turning point, leading a person into a whole new world of experience, with its own canons of understanding and behaviour, its own distinctive principles of action, moral and charismatic. We saw that there was an indissoluble complex of faith in the exalted Christ, *metanoia* (conversion, new heart), renunciation of Satan the Prince of this world (dropping out, *apotaxis*), the experience of the Spirit of God 'who explores even the hidden things of God', who 'convicts the world', who 'leads us into all truth'.

¹*He will Baptize you with the Holy Spirit*. New Blackfriars, June 1971.

We then had to admit the fact that this is not, generally, *our* experience of being baptized, and saw that the Pentecostal theory is one way of coping with this situation, though one that we cannot follow, as such. I shall now mention various other ways, and, with the theological basis thus broadened, shall attempt some theological and practical synthesis, showing how I think we can learn much from the Pentecostals, without betraying anything that the Church has always held dear.

Already in the New Testament we find some important guidelines. For instance, there is a very significant shift between Matthew and Mark.¹ For Matthew, faith is a key concept, closely tied to his concluding scene, the exaltation of Jesus. The question Jesus asks is, 'Do you believe that I can do this?' (9, 28). The answer must be, simply and totally, 'Yes, Lord', an answer that entails a radical abandonment of care, a total upheaval of the normal procedures of social life. Mark, by contrast, introduces a process of growth, a time lag. Mark alone develops the parables of growth (especially 4, 26–32); for Mark the life of the Church issues, not from a sudden and glorious Pentecost, but from an empty tomb and a few frightened women. For him the Christian is the one whose faith grows: 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief' (9, 24). There can be a gradual healing (8, 22–5); the miracle does not necessarily come all at once (11, 12–14, 20–24).

Paul, as we might expect, has it both ways. For him the Christian life is strung between 'you have been saved' and 'you are being saved'. In Christ 'you are dead'; therefore 'mortify your members that are upon the earth' (Col. 3, 3, 5). Everything is rooted in the once for all death of Jesus, in whom we too die once for all in baptism; we have put on Christ, we have the mind of Christ, the Spirit has revealed to us 'what eye has not seen nor ear heard'. Yet the experiential realization of what has been given may not mature all at once. Thus Paul prays for the Ephesians 'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of himself, that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the exercise of the might of his strength in raising Christ from the dead' (Eph. 1, 17–20).

But equally, the New Testament is critical of a faith that refuses to mature. 'By this time you ought to be teachers, but instead you need someone to teach you all over again the first principles of God's will' (Heb. 5, 12). We should not shelter too cosily behind the principle of growth, and, under a pretext of 'all in God's time',

¹Although I make no claim to be a New Testament scholar, it seems pretty clear that Mark's Gospel is a highly sophisticated piece of work, much more so than Matthew. I incline strongly to the minority view that Mark and Matthew share a common source (rather than Matthew using Mark), so that Mark's divergences from Matthew are just as significant as the other way round.

abandon ourselves to spiritual *laissez-faire*. Has our baptism shown any signs of bearing fruit at all (and 'fruit' must not be confused with 'works'; we can, by an effort of will, 'put our religion into practice', but that does not necessarily mean a thing)? And if not, why not and what are we to do about it?

One answer is, basically, moralistic. 'They have the form of the sacrament of baptism, but they have no light. For the light is taken away by a dark cloud of sin' (St Catherine). Our baptism is dead, because, when we came to years of discretion, we did not obey the laws of God, and so did not enter into the experience of light. If this is our condition, we must repent and make a good confession, and reform our ways.

A parallel solution is adopted in the East by Symeon the New Theologian, but with him it leads to a detailed and exciting theology of *metanoia* (which he calls 'baptism in the Spirit', in fact), and I should like to spend some time on this.

In his Catechetical Lectures Cyril of Jerusalem warns his catechumens that 'if you persist in any evil purpose, the water will receive you, but not the Spirit'. In similar vein, Symeon maintains that a baptism without genuine conversion is a baptism only in water; he sometimes refers to John 1, 12: it conveys only the *power to become* a child of God. It is only the second baptism, that 'in the Spirit', which actually makes one a real Christian and a child of God, and this is brought about by *metanoia*, manifested in tears (he also calls it a 'baptism of tears').

In spite of terminological similarity, it is clear that Symeon is much closer to Wesley than to the Pentecostals; and his position is open to the same objections. His concern for spiritual efficacy leads him seriously to underrate sacramental objectivity (he does this in connexion with ordination and confession too), leaving him wide open to the charge of mystical subjectivism, as his critics were quick to point out. But, if we discount this, I think we shall find that he has much to teach us.

Symeon's whole theology is based on his own experience. When he was still a layman, without any of the normal ascetic 'qualifications', he was led into profound mystical experience of light by his spiritual Father, Symeon the Studite. Subsequently, if we can believe his own account, he all but lapsed from the faith, and was only reclaimed, again, by his Father, to whose prayers he thereafter ascribed all his numerous spiritual experiences. Even more than most Greeks, he insists on the role of the 'intermediary', the 'friend of God' who procures favours, all undeserved, for his disciples (this has obvious relevance for prayer groups, which I cannot develop here).

The man in bondage to sin, for those with eyes to see, lies there, a gruesome sight, by the wayside, 'mentally paralysed', unable even to 'go to the doctor' for himself. He can only hope that some 'kind physician' will come his way, some intermediary and friend of God, to make peace between him and God. For Symeon there can be no

question of a man working up *metanoia* for himself; he is utterly helpless.

If he is lucky enough to meet up with some friend of God, he must trust and obey him implicitly. 'And if he bids you live in quietness, saying "Sit here without going out, until you are clothed with power from on high", obey him with firm hope and insatiable joy. Such a teacher is true and no deceiver. There will come down upon you too, even in this age, the same power of the all-holy Spirit, not visibly in the form of fire, but you will see it in the form of spiritual light, with all tranquillity and delight. . . . Then every compulsive (passioned) thought and desire will disappear, every passion of the soul is driven off, every bodily disease is healed. Then the eyes of your heart are cleansed and see what it says in the beatitudes. Then, as in a mirror, the soul sees even its smallest faults and sinks to the depths of humility, and, appreciating the greatness of this glory, is filled with all joy and happiness, and, in amazement at this wonder which passes all expectation, tears well up from your eyes. And thus a man is totally changed and knows God as he is first known by him.'

It is clear from parallel passages that this is what Symeon means by *metanoia*. This it is that leads from darkness to light, and not to desire the light is tantamount to refusing conversion—and Symeon gives short shrift to those who would reduce this light to mere intellectual knowledge. Such men 'do not know the mystery of the economy of salvation' (in Greek more or less equivalent to 'the Incarnation', i.e. a basic and serious accusation).

Symeon keeps reiterating the Saviour's words: "'Repent (*metanoete*) for the kingdom of heaven has come close." It has come close, it is standing at the gates of your heart and your mouth. Open your heart by faith and at once it will come in, and immediately your mouth will open and you will shout out, "We've got the treasure of the Spirit in us, we have, we have! We've got life eternal in our hearts!"'

And this is not just for our private sanctification (though 'those who have not received the light have not received grace'): 'the grace of the all-holy Spirit seeks to kindle our souls, so that he may shine out to men in the world, and direct the steps of many by means of those in whom he shines, so that they too may walk well and come close to the fire, and one by one, all, if possible, may be kindled and shine like gods in our midst'.

Symeon was not alone in regarding tears as the necessary sign of spiritual realization. Centuries earlier, Isaac the Syrian insisted equally that it is only 'when you come to the place of tears' that 'you can know that you have set foot on the way of the new age'. And he specifies that it must be *uncontrollable* weeping, too. This is, in some ways, a more demonstrative equivalent of the western prayer of quiet, in which our minds are forcibly stopped from their normal discursive thinking. This is the point at which Christ is actively asserting his grace in us; we are no longer in charge. And, of course, this is

pretty fundamental. One of the distinguishing marks of Christian baptism, as against Jewish, was that you did not do it to yourself; it is something *done to us*; we have to let ourselves go down under.

And this requires faith. Isaac, following St Matthew, sees faith as the crucial issue. For him, the point of breakthrough comes when you really launch out in faith, casting all your cares upon the Lord, 'exchanging your prudence for his providence'. We should aspire to the measure of faith, in which we 'become fools that we may become wise'. 'Ask God that you may attain to this measure of faith; pray for it eagerly until you get it . . . then you will know beyond doubt, by your own experience, the might of him who is with you.'

It also requires humility, and here let me quote a pleasant little tale from the *Fioretti* of St Francis. Brother Maseo, hearing tell of the virtue of humility, so fell in love with it that he vowed and resolved never to be happy in this world again until he should feel perfect humility in his soul. He prayed and fasted for many days. One day, he went out into the wood, and was praying for humility, and there came a voice from heaven: 'Brother Maseo, Brother Maseo.' And he, knowing in spirit that it was the voice of Christ, said: 'Speak, Lord.' And Christ said: 'What will you give for the grace you seek?' He replied: 'Even the eyes in my head.' And Christ said: 'I want you to have both the grace and your eyes.' And Brother Maseo remained so filled with the grace of the virtue of humility he had longed for, and of the light of God, that from thenceforward he was always joyful and glad; and often, when he prayed, he would break forth into sounds of joy, cooing like a dove, U U U; and he abode thus in contemplation with a cheerful countenance and a merry heart. When Brother Jacques of Fallerone asked him why in his song of joy he never changed his note, he blithely answered him, that when one thing brings us full content, there is no need to change the note.¹

We have come a long way from the simple moralistic view that it is only sin that obscures our baptism. All the passages I have cited are concerned, not just with morality, but with profound psychological processes and upheavals. What we are up against is often not sin, so much as psychological blockages and mental hang-ups (of course, for the Greeks sin itself is usually viewed in these terms anyway). What is required is a transformation at a level inaccessible to reason and deliberation. And I think we can discern a common pattern in all the diverse texts I have used: in each there is a readiness to let something happen to us, to take the risk of making a fool of ourselves.² In each there is some bodily manifestation that does not make any particularly obvious sense at the rational level. In each case the mind has to let go of its prim little clutch on life, and

¹Adapted from the translation by T. W. Arnold.

²As Sir Thomas Browne said (in all solemnity, though he seems to have changed his mind later) about 'this triviale and vulgar way of coition': 'it is the foolishlest act a wise man commits in all his life, nor is there any thing that will more deject his coold imagination, when hee shall consider what an odde and unworthy piece of folly hee hath committed'. (*Religio Medici*.)

let the body and the Spirit conspire against it—only so does a ‘renewing of the mind’ also take place.

At the heyday of hesychast theology, the problem was explicitly diagnosed as how to get one’s religion ‘out of the head’, which seems a fair enough statement of our own predicament today (which is probably why hesychast texts are in such demand). But they also had another premiss, which is theologically unimpeachable, that ‘everyone who has been validly baptized has received all grace hiddenly’ (Mark the Monk). The problem, then, is how to get out of the head, and identify and unite with this grace given ‘hiddenly’ in baptism. The aim of all their techniques of prayer and posture was to draw the ‘mind’ (*nous*, the faculty of direct intuition) out of the head, into the heart, there to discover the working of the Spirit. They call this ‘prayer of the heart’, and by this they intend both a reference to the physical organ (this is prayer of the body, not of the reason; they tell us to pray to Jesus ‘without thoughts’), and to Christ’s indwelling in our hearts by faith. It is the ‘manifestation of baptism’.

It is an open question how far the hesychasts drew on sources deriving ultimately from non-Christian oriental mysticism. It is at least clear that they arrived at a technique, like those of the Far East, designed to quieten the superficial mind, so that, gradually, one finds a new centre of awareness, a new equilibrium, in which conscious and unconscious, mind and body, are drawn into harmony.

The role of the subconscious in the spiritual life is too vast a subject to cover here; but clearly we shall get nowhere if we refuse to face up to it. A negative attitude to the subconscious leaves us prey to all kinds of unconscious motivation, compulsive behaviour patterns, and so on, and carries with it a great fear, a fear of letting go, a fear of letting anything happen to one. But if we are to get beyond a purely external morality, we have to face up to our compulsions and tackle them at the root; and the casting out of fear is traditionally regarded, by St Catherine for instance, as the first stage in the spiritual life. In fact, it is curious that for the Greeks it is *apatheia* (escaping from all one’s ‘passions’, compulsive behaviour patterns) that is associated with the advent of true love, while for St Catherine it goes with the casting out of fear. And without love, however virtuous we may be, it is (from a Christian point of view) worth nothing, as St Thomas, following St Paul, teaches.

So on either theory we have to take the risk of letting the subconscious play its part. But, as Christians, we can believe that if we do so, we shall find that in fact the seed of the kingdom has already been sown there; it is there that we shall find the Holy Spirit at work. So we can afford to ‘let go and know that *He* is God’ (Ps. 46),¹ and, by co-operating with the subconscious, in grace, we shall arrive at an equilibrium in which we are centred, not just on some psychic centre in ourselves, but on Jesus Christ himself. ‘God becomes our

¹*Harpu* in Hebrew: literally, ‘let go, relax’.

hegemonikon' (that which makes us tick), as St Gregory Palamas says.

We are encouraged to turn aside from thinking and visualizing and planning, and sink down to the deeper level of the heart, there to let God's Spirit work in us, bringing us face to face with the reality of Christ in us, the reality and power of God's will for us and for the world in him. And then prayer becomes 'like a fire of gladness springing up from the heart' (St Gregory of Sinai's description of the prayer of 'beginners'). And this prayer is truly 'the working of faith, or rather the immediacy of faith, the manifestation of baptism, the pledge of the Holy Spirit, the exultation of Jesus . . . it is God working all in all'.