

wise broke the sabbatical law, although the Jews falsely reproached him: 'This man can be no messenger from God; he does not observe the Sabbath' (*Jn.* 9, 16).

(ii) Christ is showing that food of itself cannot be regarded as contaminating the soul. Certain types of food were designated unclean in the Law, as a kind of outward sign. On this subject Augustine writes (*contra Faustum* lib. 6, cap. 7): 'On the matter of clean and unclean food, both are wholesome for God created both; but in the Law mutton is deemed clean and pork unclean'.

(iii) The action of the disciples in plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath was irreprehensible on account of the necessity of hunger. Thus also David did not transgress the law when, ravenous with hunger, he ate the loaves of proposition, which was legally forbidden.



THE HEIR

BY

COLUMBA CARY ELWES, O.S.B.

HERES UNIVERSORUM' occurs in the accusative case in the first sentence of the Epistle to the Hebrews. St Paul is intensely conscious that Christ's coming is the summing up of the past, the completion of an immense cycle, the climax of a great series of stupendous events, the crowning act of a drama, the final interference of God in his own creation. Not only that; Christ's coming, for St Paul, gathered up all the past, gave it shape and substance, explained it, since all things pointed to or prepared for him. He was the heir of all things. In this title we have a glimpse of the Augustinian vision that history was summed up in Christ,¹ that all the golden threads in pagan life and worship led ultimately to *heredem universorum Christum*. Thus there are two lines of thought: Christ heir to the Jewish tradition, and Christ heir to the pagan tradition.

Multifarium, et multis modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis: novissime diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio; quem constituit heredem universorum (Heb. 1, 1-2).

¹ Cf. 'The Bread of Life' (*Life of the Spirit*, June, 1947, p. 403), where a passage is quoted from St Augustine.

We must begin by showing how Christ is the heir to the Jewish tradition. This will be manifest by following the golden threads of the prophecies about his person. They are of two kinds: on the one hand the particular incidents, frequently picked out by the evangelists, and the main outlines on the other. The first are difficult to use as apologetics because (a) it would have been easy for Christ to do the things on purpose, as Christ indeed sometimes seems to have done; and (b) the writers of the Gospels might pretend he had fulfilled the prophecies by inventing incidents to fit them. The second type of prophecies is not fakable. But we are not in the realm of apologetics. We have left that stunted country behind us, we are in the rich pastureland of Faith. Yet even though we may stress the broad outline, those particular echoes of the past that run through his life, the serpent cursing the People from the tree, Christ drawing all to himself, and so on, are too full of doctrinal point to be overlooked, more especially as it is precisely these truths—unprofitable for apologists, a type we all tend to be—that are continually being ignored these days.²

One of history's problems is how the Jews did not recognise Christ when he came. This we may with the help of the Old Testament explain as we proceed. In general we may divide the revelation of the coming salvation into three periods: that of the Patriarchs, that of Moses and the early kings, and that of the professional prophets.³

The very first prophecy of all, the promise by God in the Garden, after the Fall, is clearly one concerned with sin and its remission. The crisis had been one of sin; that was the calamity to be rectified. The woman and her seed who were to tread on the head of the serpent, whoever they referred to, had a clear work to do, to overcome sin and the author thereof. We so often concentrate on the Messianic side, the personal side, which after all is vague and by itself not clear, that we forget the crystal clearness of the nature of the work that would be done: the overcoming of sin. Now, this aspect, though present in all succeeding prophecies, by implication at least (if there was any continuity of thought), was not always so clearly expressed. Consequently some prophecies, if taken alone, could have referred to some other work. This, in fact, is what happened. Take for example the promises to Abraham. He must have known of the earlier promise, it would be the treasured inheritance of his race, through Noah and Sem; but when the promise

² 'But if I should rehearse all that the prophets . . . foretold of Christ . . . I should never make an end'. (City of God, Bk. 17, ch. 1).

³ In this meditation I follow Pascal as interpreted by Lagrange in *Revue Biblique*, 1906.

was made to him there is no mention of the previous ones. For us and the Jews, who tend to look at each separately, the connection might not immediately be made; but for Abraham the one would be the fulfilment of the other.

God told him two almost unbelievable things, first that he was to be the father of a race whose number would be as countless as the sand on the sea shore and as the stars in heaven; and secondly that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He believed, and for believing was counted among the just. The salvation promised to Adam was, then, to come at some future date through the race of which he was to be the father. All nations were to be sharers in the benefit of saving from sin, that he in some way was to help to bring about.

Here already we see the beginnings of a possible cleavage in interpretation. Might it not mean to the later Jews, smarting under the lash of successive oppressors, Egyptian, Babylonian, Roman, that their race would, in spite of appearances, one day be the supreme race, the rulers of the earth? Such interpretations are plausible if each prophecy is self-contained, and others are ignored altogether. Such an interpretation was the one put upon the prophecies by the Jews. But they were wrong.

First of all there would be no point in God making the Jews into a 'top nation'. What spiritual advantage could either they or we gain from it? Such things as wealth and power are not things worthy of God's notice considering they are not worthy of ours either. They are not of the supreme order; but inferior even to the intellectual, which itself is not chief, but subordinate to charity.

'Archimedes, without his splendour, would still be honoured. He did not provide battles for the eye to see, but he has given to all intellects his inventions. Oh! what splendour to the eyes of the intellect.

Jesus Christ, without wealth, and without any show of knowledge, is in his realm of sanctity. He has not provided us with any inventions, He has not sat on a throne; but he was humble, patient, holy before God, terrible to demons, sinless. Oh! with what great pomp, with what prodigious magnificence has he come to the eyes of the heart that sees wisdom!

It would have been useless for Archimedes to act the prince in his geometry books, though he was a prince.

It would have been useless for our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to shine forth in his kingdom of holiness, to come as a king; but he really did enter into his kingdom with the glamour of his order!

It is really absurd to be shocked at the lowliness of Jesus Christ, as though that lowliness were in the same order, the greatness of

which he had come to display. Consider that greatness in his life, in his passion, in his obscurity, in his death, in his choice of his own, in their desertion, in his secret resurrection . . . and he will appear so great that there will be no room to be scandalised at a lowliness that is non-existent.

This is so manifest in Christ's life and his teaching, in his behaviour, his scorning of the trappings of kingship, his contempt for wealth and earthly power or glory.

The infinite distance between bodies and mind is a symbol of the infinitely more infinite distance separating mind from charity, for charity is supernatural.

All the glamour of magnificence has no lustre for people who are in search of knowledge. The greatness of knowledgeable men is unseen by kings, rich men, soldiers, and all the great ones according to the flesh. The greatness of wisdom, which is of no worth unless it be of God, is invisible alike to the intelligent and to the carnal. They are three different worlds.

Great geniuses have their kingdom, their glory, their greatness, their victory, their lustre, and have no need of the carnal greatness which has no connection with them. These things are seen with the mind and not with the eye, and that is enough for them.

The saints have their kingdom, their glory, their victory, their lustre, and have no need of carnal greatness nor of intellectual greatness, which have no connection with them, for they neither add nor detract anything. They are seen by God and the angels, and not by bodies nor minds out of curiosity. God is enough for them.

But some there are who can only admire carnal greatness, as though intellectual greatness did not exist; and others who only admire intellectual greatness, as though there were not infinitely higher ones in wisdom. All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth and its kingdom are not worth the smallest mind; for the mind knows all that; and these bodies, nothing. All bodies together, and all mind together, and all their works are not worth the smallest movement of charity. That is in an order infinitely higher. It is not possible to make the smallest thought (from all bodies put together); it is an impossibility, and of another order. From all bodies and minds, it is not possible to elicit one movement of real charity; it is an impossibility, and of another order, a supernatural order'.⁴

Here we have the key to the failure of the Jews. They were not looking for the greatness of charity, nor even many of them for intellectual greatness, but for earthly greatness. They were blind

⁴ *Pensées de Pascal*, No. 793, ed. Brunschvicg.

though they saw. It is the irony of history that this little race preserved and cherished by God, promised, too, the Messiah, should at the supreme moment have all the evidence, all the facts, the person in flesh and blood among them, and yet be unable to see, not by any preternatural blindness, but because they had blinded their own minds by an inversion of values: that seeing they should not see.

This mighty vision of the coming of salvation for all men was repeatedly given to the prophets of old, but so mighty was the vision, so gigantic the plan to the sight of these people, belonging to one backward tribe among a thousand, that their words, their images, failed them. They spoke of the Coming as the Kingdom, with its armies, its empires, its riches, not because they saw these as earthly symbols of spiritual reality, but because they were the nearest their stammering thoughts could get. Did not Jeremiah say: My heart is broken within me; and all my bones tremble, I am become as a drunken man, as a man full of wine, at the presence of the Lord, and at the presence of his holy words (c23, 9)?

'From this there resulted a mingling of the ideal and the concrete which at times shocks us, but which entrances us also, as does the stammering of a child who is striving to show that it understands. . . . At times we have magnificent glimpses (élans) of a future which we can guess is grandiose; at others we are given instinctive returns towards the past which is somewhat narrow and which we know better; at other times, finally they manage to express the more elevated idea, which is not yet familiar, only by means of features borrowed from archaic ideas or from present realities which are shot through with such antique ideas.'⁵

Consequently it was not a fault in the Jewish people throughout their history that they did not understand completely the purely spiritual content of the Promise, but it was a fault to have considered it entirely in a material,⁶ Power-politics sense; and secondly a great Fault to have failed to understand its purely spiritual content when the Prophet of Prophets arrived, when the fulfilment was at hand, and Christ spoke in no enigmas. As Pascal so justly expresses it:

'In those promises, each man finds what he already has at the bottom of his heart, spiritual profit or material profit, God or creatures; but with this difference, that those who seek creatures find them but with several contradictions, with the command not

⁵ *Histoire du Peuple Hébreu*, par L. Desnoyers, t. III, p. 309, quoted in 'Les Prophètes d'Israël', Ed. Tobac, J. Coppens whose ideas are here used.

⁶ 'Les choses de Dieu étant inexprimables, elles ne peuvent être dites autrement' (*Pensée* 687).

to love them, with the command to adore God alone and to love only him, which is after all the same thing, and finally that no Messiah has come for them; whilst those who seek God find him, and without any contradictions, with the command to love him alone, and that a Messiah did come at the promised time to give them the profit (*biens*) they asked for.'⁷

'If the law and the sacrifices are the truth, they must be pleasing to God and not displease him at all. If they are figures they must at once please and displease.

Now in the whole of Scripture they please and displease. It is stated that the Law will be changed, that the sacrifice will be changed, that they will be without Law, without prince, without sacrifice, that a new covenant or pact was to be made, that the law was to be renewed, that the precepts that they had been given were not good, their sacrifices abominable, that God never asked for them.

It is said on the other hand that the law will endure eternally, that this alliance will be eternal, that the sacrifice will be eternal, that the sceptre will never be taken from among them, since it must never go 'until the eternal king come'.

'Do these passages, all of them, make it plain that it is of reality they speak? No. Do they show that it is figuratively that they speak? No: but that it is a matter either of reality or figure. But the first group, eliminating the possibility that it is reality, shows that they can only be understood figuratively.' (*Pensée* n. 685.)

That is the great point of Pascal's thought in this matter. If you want to understand a writer, the apparent contradictions must be made to agree, otherwise the writer is not talking sense. This must apply especially in sacred scripture. With human authorship we can allow some contradiction, but with divine authorship, clearly, none (*Pensée* n. 684). Thus the visions of the Messianic kingdom such as are exemplified in the Psalmist's cry.

'Thou art my son, it is I that have begotten thee today.

'Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations as a heritage and as thy possession the confines of the earth. Thou shalt smash them with a sceptre of iron; like the potter's bowl thou shalt put them in pieces.' (Ps. 2.)

The thunder of war rolls through these lines, the slash of swords, the exultation of battle. Yet Christ told Peter to put away his sword, and he fought only with the sword of truth and courage. And Christ our Lord was not belying the prophecies about him. Therefore such passages must have been written in a figurative

⁷ *Pensées de Pascal*, Brunschvicg Minor. Hachette p. 635, no. 675.

sense, or at least as a man would who cannot fully express in words the grandeur of his vision. The kingdom of the soul, its conquests, its peace, can, after all, only be expressed in images, and each generation will choose its own.⁸

For a great number of the prophecies the true solution will consist in acknowledging that the prophets were aware of the accidental and provisional character not only of the poetic form and theme, but also of the historical wrappings, in which their message was enveloped. In some cases the prophet attributed to the historical framework a purely symbolic character. Thus for example the chapter XI of Isaias describes the messianic deliverance on the model of the deliverance from Egypt including the miracles of Exodus, or when Ezechiel describes the condition of the messianic people in Palestine. In other cases, and these no doubt the most numerous . . . this awareness was not so precise; nevertheless the seer felt that human language was powerless to portray the splendours of the future kingdom, and he had the presentiment that the messianic era would bring to being, at least at the time of its full realisation, something far beyond even the most glittering images: in the messianic period the children of God will truly reign and rejoice in a peace, a felicity, a glory with which no earthly thing can compare. It is then a case of the deficiency of human language, as H. Pinard de la Boullaye said: ordinary language with its approximations, its provisional banal images.⁹

Who can doubt, then, that this promise of someone to come who would inherit the earth and bring a blessing to the world, has been fulfilled? It was not made only to Abraham, but again to his son Isaac in almost identical terms—and then Jacob as he lay dying specified more clearly the hope. Juda will be superior to his brothers—though not the eldest—and then

‘The sceptre will not be taken away from Juda nor the rod of command from between his feet Until that One come to whom belongs government. To him the obedience of the peoples.’ (Gen. 49, 10.)

‘That One’ has not been taken to be the Messiah only by Christians but by the Jews themselves. It was of this passage that Ezechiel thought when he wrote of a ruling king;

¹⁰ ‘And thou, profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, now that wickedness is at its term, thus speaks the Lord God:

⁸ In passing, just to round off the subject, it may be worth while to give a reference for the question of whether the prophets were conscious of the figurative and inadequate nature of their expositions. Edouard Tobac has said interesting things on the subject in the brochure already cited.

⁹ Cf. op. cit. pp. 83-4.

¹⁰ Translated from the French.

the tiara is to be taken off, and the crown removed; all will be overturned; that which is lowly will be lifted up, and that which is high shall be brought low. I shall make it into a ruin, a ruin; it will no longer exist until there shall come he to whom belongs judgement and to whom I shall return it' (Ezechieel 21, 25-6).

Thus we find in the early section of the history of the Jewish race, firmly embedded, the ideas of moral regeneration, through a *person* and extending all over the world.

(To be concluded)



THE FOOT OF THE LADDER

SOME FACTS ABOUT A MODERN LAY SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT

IT all begins with a conversion; properly speaking with a second or re-conversion.

This applies to cradle Catholics and converts alike, at least to average normal people. The normal born Catholic is usually well content to use up the spiritual capital of baptism, as it were, and make his religion a reflex action rather than a conscious effort. This is not criticism but a statement of observable fact. To become active, to awaken to the possibilities and responsibilities of the religion he practises, a further jolt of some kind is needed, whether from within or from without. It is the same with converts. It does happen that entry into the Church will coincide with or cause the beginning of an intense and active spiritual life; but these cases are rare. (We speak in general terms and not of special cases, such as direct conversion to the religious life, which have nothing to do with the life of the laity—our subject here—and so are outside our scope.)

From our own experiences and from those we have been privileged to hear of, it seems that this second conversion is necessary. All this may be commonplace, but it is a discovery to the individual layman, and therefore exciting. But many do not realise that this is how their spiritual life has begun, and it is well that they should, so that by understanding what has happened to them they can see what can happen, or is happening, to others, and so play their part not only in developing their own lives but in fostering, through that, the individual lay spiritual revival which is undoubtedly taking place at this time.