

## EDITORIAL

WE are printing this month, as a COMMENT, a communication from Fr Adrian Hastings, of the Collegio Beda in Rome. It is concerned with the article by Fr Sebastian Bullough, *Five Answers from the Catholic Side*, which appeared in our January number on Christian Unity. The comment is on the problem of the validity of non-Catholic baptisms, and the almost automatic practice, prevalent in this country, of conditionally baptizing converts. Fr Hastings finds Fr Sebastian's answer to Dr Asmussen's question on this point less than satisfactory; indeed he implies that, objectively viewed, it is not a completely honest answer.

This judgement is based, it would seem, on a misunderstanding of Fr Sebastian's use of what he calls his *leitmotiv* about obedience. The rite of baptism, when it has unorthodox theology behind it, is liable, in his opinion, to be performed inadequately or at least with a doubtful adequacy. He acknowledges of course that the Church recognizes a properly performed baptism as valid, even when the notions of the baptizer were somewhat confused, and he gives as the reason that the baptizer would evidently be performing the act in obedience to the Church, even without realizing it.

By obedience to the Church, however, it is evident that Fr Sebastian means, not inner consent to, or agreement with, the doctrine of the Church, but obedience to the *rites* of the Church; the adequate performance, that is, of the external acts essential to a sacrament. The Oceania decision, to which Fr Hastings refers, makes clear that notions held about baptism, which may be confused or wholly erroneous, do not affect the validity of the sacrament, even when publicly expressed in prayers accompanying the rite; always provided that the rite itself is adequately performed. Obedience to the rite of the Church must however cover not only the external actions essential to the Sacrament, but the minimum internal intention of the minister: that of doing what the Church does. This can always be presumed since all that is required for it is that the baptizer should intend to be performing a rite held sacred by Christians, and this can be entirely independent of any beliefs or disbeliefs he may entertain about it.

This minimum ministerial intention can of course always be presumed in Anglican or other non-Catholic baptisms. But if the notions of the baptizer are somewhat confused or even quite unorthodox, though 'he would', as Fr Sebastian says, 'evidently be performing the act in obedience to the Church' (i.e., with a right intention), his confusion or error might be mixed with ignorance of what the Church requires in the matter of external action. Thus if he thought it sufficient to dip his finger in the water and so sign the child on the forehead while repeating the Trinitarian formula, this would be inadequate in the eyes of the Church and would necessitate conditional baptism. Fr Hastings himself says: 'I do not doubt for a moment that there are cases where it [baptism] is inadequately performed, and where consequently conditional baptism is required'. Later in the same paragraph he says: 'There is no reason to believe that the normal Anglican baptism is invalid, and therefore a general practice of conditional baptism would seem to be imprudent and without foundation'.

The first half of this sentence is undoubtedly true; but does the conclusion in the second half necessarily follow? How, for instance, is the priest, in dealing with any convert, to know, with the moral certainty required, whether an Anglican baptism was normally or abnormally carried out? A baptismal certificate is no evidence. At least two cases are known to me where an Anglican baptism was performed in the doubtfully adequate manner described above. It is often extremely difficult, therefore, to get the evidence required for moral certainty. In the several cases I know of, and this includes my own, where conditional baptism was not required a statement by two eye-witnesses was available, that the water had flowed, that the proper formula was used and that its repetition and the action of pouring were simultaneous. This gave moral certainty of validity and was a prudent and well-founded reason for not requiring conditional baptism.

But in how many instances can such evidence be available? It might be possible sometimes to approach the clergyman who was the baptizer, if he happens to be still living and accessible; but that would require not a little tact and might well be strongly resented. Eye-witnesses, if procurable, would have to be well instructed Christians or their testimony could hardly be reliable. In fact a busy parish priest seeking to establish moral certainty

would in all probability be confronted by a mountain of difficulties. It is hardly surprising that, unless the convert, himself or herself, supplies the eye-witness testimony, the priest avoids the complex investigation by taking the easier way of conditional baptism. It is, after all, little more than a precaution; but in the few cases where the baptism has in fact been doubtfully valid, and their existence cannot be neglected, it is a very valuable safeguard. One cannot allow room for doubt in such a matter.

The common practice then should not lead our separated brethren to think that we doubt the validity of their baptisms in the vast majority of cases. To those who have any acquaintance with the facts they are quite certainly valid. It is, however, almost equally certain that there are a few careless or ignorant exceptions. If the Bishops of the Anglican communion were to publish the results of an extensive enquiry into this matter, or make it known that every ordination candidate is carefully instructed in the proper way to perform a baptism, and that other steps are also taken to secure uniformity of practice, a time would soon come when the ordinary baptismal certificate could be accepted as evidence of valid baptism. Conditional baptism would then be seldom or never necessary. Perhaps the next Lambeth Conference will take this in hand.



The articles which appear this month are all papers read at THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT Conference at Spode House in October 1956. Their common theme is that the Saints were ordinary people, yet men and women absorbed, as it were, in God, through Jesus Christ; wholly committed to him in their love and service, even to death. In every other way they were and are like us, ordinary people, often leading very ordinary humdrum lives—our Lady was no exception—and becoming holy through the ordinary events and duties of their daily routine of life.

This strikes us particularly in the authentic accounts of the early martyrs. How ordinary they were: girls, young married women with babies, boys, slaves, clerics, soldiers and aged men. Yet they suffered frightful death gaily, gladly, and without question. They were able to do so, and took it as a matter of course that they should do so, because of the way they had lived, short lives some of them, but wholly for God, in Christ.

The Saints therefore are not extras, tacked on to our religion as a luxury for those who like such luxuries. They are integral to the very life of the Mystical Body which we share, and we communicate with them in its life and are strengthened by their example and their prayers.

We need, and do not always succeed in getting, lives of Saints that show them as they were, struggling with experiences of life similar to those we must struggle with ourselves, and sanctifying themselves through those experiences. So, being ordinary, they were able by grace to achieve the extraordinary. Yet all in a way that can aid us to imitate them in the struggle for holiness.



## THE EARLY MARTYRS

DONALD ATTWATER

IT is from veneration of the early martyrs that the whole great business of the *cultus* of the saints in the Christian Church derives. Whatever the dignity and importance and interest of the saints whose festivals figure in the various calendars of the Church, those feasts must all, without exception, give place to the anniversaries of the martyrs in point of antiquity. Already in the second century the annual commemoration of St Polycarp was celebrated in Smyrna from the time of his passion; from the beginning of the third century such commemorations were becoming general.

There is nothing surprising about this. For the first three hundred years of their history Christians lived in an atmosphere of martyrdom, of witness by blood. Persecution was not continuous, and it varied in intensity from time to time and from place to place, but the possibility of being called on to die for the name of the Lord Christ was never far away; and that state of affairs, again at times and in places, has recurred ever since. Mankind was redeemed by the willing death of the incarnate Son of God, who on the third day rose from the dead: redeemed man is never so Christlike as when he willingly goes to death for his Saviour, to