

unity of the mystical body that faith can here be supplied by the Church. As the child is brought to the doors of the baptistry the question is put: 'What do you ask of the Church of God?' And the answer: 'Faith'.

Baptism then is the means by which we are joined to the body of our Redeemer. It is therefore the gateway to all the other sacraments, which would be meaningless and ineffective to those who had not been so joined. Indeed it is not possible to understand the other sacraments until we have grasped the significance of baptism as the cause of our incorporation in Christ. I hope to develop this theme in later articles.



THE SACRAMENT OF FAITH

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ONE of the early names for Baptism was the 'Sacrament of Faith', and those who were baptized became the 'enlightened'. To think of this Sacrament simply as an initiation rite, performed once and then left in the background as one would walk through the front door of a house and shut it before settling down in the drawing room to be comfortably at home; to think of it simply as the formal entry into the Church is to miss its constant power to raise the Christian to the heights of holiness. The earlier Christian understood that it brought an entirely new light into the newly baptized's life and that light shone and transformed everything so that as his eyes grew accustomed to its power they could eventually perceive the glory of God, and sustained by baptismal grace reach to the heights of prayer and union with God. For the spiritual reality into which the Christian is introduced cannot be divided into neat little pieces to be digested stage by stage as the Christian makes his way along the road, refreshed by one grace after another. Ultimately every grace is the same, a share in the divine life, which is undivided and indivisible. It has sometimes been thought that the mystical life of unitive prayer and the heights of contemplation were above the normal life of faith, that the gifts of the Holy Spirit brought something quite different from the general run of grace and faith. But this would make a radical division

between the gifted few and the ordinary Christian, which leaves the perfect love of union outside the possibility of the baptismal graces received on entry in the Church.

Our Lord did in fact present the whole extent of the mystical life to Nicodemus when he revealed to him the immense power of the baptism by water and the Holy Spirit which he was about to introduce. Archbishop Goodier has written: 'The words of Jesus to Nicodemus are the basis of all true mysticism.' (*The Public Ministry*, I, 65.) And from that revelation the work of the great Fathers and theologians has carried on the same tradition of the foundation of the true mystical life being in the sacrament of initiation. Père Boulanger, writing of the treatise on Baptism in St Thomas's *Summa*, has said: 'If the philosopher does not here derive pleasure from subtle distinctions, the theologian will savour what is more desirable beyond a doubt—some brilliant glimpses of the profound mysteries of our divinity and of our belonging to Christ . . . paragraphs that are the most substantial nourishment for true piety and for a virile Christian life.'

We are becoming at last familiar with the meaning of the Pasch as the centre of the whole Christian life. The new liturgies for Easter have brought us back to the importance of 'Easter duties', not merely as the minimum due from any practising Catholic but as the source from which spring the living waters, cleansing and nourishing the child of God from year to year. The principal sacrament of that season is in fact not so much penance or even the Holy Eucharist, as the sacrament of Baptism for which the whole of Lent is an active preparation. If we glance at the significant ceremonies of the Wednesday before Holy Week, on which day the 'Fourth scrutiny' summed up the ceremonies and teaching of the forty days, we find those who were being prepared for the sacrament receiving solemnly from three deacons the Gospels, the Creed and the Pater Noster. They had been instructed in the faith and the prayer of the Church, and here these life-giving symbols were handed to them formally so that when they arrived at the baptistry on Holy Saturday evening they should be already armed with the words which would take fire from the living waters—that is the mysterious paradox in our Lord's revelation to Nicodemus, to be born again of water and fire. Before they received the sacrament itself they had been

immediately prepared by the prophecies concerning the power of water to give life once the sign of the life of Christ, the living flame of the Candle, had been plunged into the font. All this is still to be found in the rite of baptism with its formal recitation of the Creed and the Pater Noster and in the revived ceremonies of the Easter Vigil. Those who are baptized or renew their baptismal vows then stand forth with the candles in their hands lit from the great, single flame of the Candle. The baptized Christian is 'illumined' by the '*Lumen Christi*', the light that is substantially the same in the purgative way, when he is purified by the waters, in the illuminative way, when he is enlightened by these same waters, and in the unitive way when the flame has merged into the one flame of heavenly life and glory.

In order to see clearly the implications of this sacrament as the foundation of the whole mystical life of the Christian it will be well to follow the general distinction of the different aspects of the sacrament—the external sign, the interior sign, and the ultimate grace effected (*Sacramentum tantum, Res et Sacramentum, Res tantum*). The exterior rite of baptism welds the natural and the supernatural together by the use of a primary natural element, and words that convey the entire mystery of Christ. Water has inevitably been regarded from primitive times as the element of purification as well as of fecundity. The peoples who lived by the sea observed the sun buried by the waters at night and rising to the new life of a new day in the morning—the fire of life rising from the waters. Those whose livelihood was derived from the rich river valleys recognized the generative power of living streams. So the ancient religions used water ritually to cleanse mother and child—with some rudimentary conception in their minds of man's defilement; they observed ablutions and lustrations in their ceremonies; they poured water from the living brook upon the altar, or formally on the fields to obtain the blessing of rain at the appointed times for their grain or cattle. This element was used probably by the Essenes for their initiation rites and St John the Baptist chose it as the most telling symbol of his message of change of heart in preparation for entry into the new kingdom of God.

To the use of this mysterious and dynamic element, then, our Lord, and following him the early Church, added a formula of words conveying the depths of the Christian mystery. The

neophyte was cleansed and regenerated in the name of the Blessed Trinity by water into which the human body of the Son of God had descended in Jordan. By this act the Blessed Trinity was to come and dwell in his heart and thus was begun a continuous life destined to reach its fulfilment in the face-to-face vision of the Blessed Trinity. When our Lord was baptized the heavens were opened, the voice of the Father was heard, and the Spirit descended so that the event was in effect the first visible revelation of the mystery of the Trinity; and cleansed and regenerated the neophyte is thus introduced into the 'family circle' of the Godhead.

The symbol of the cleansing and regenerative element bathing the body of the applicant for membership in the Church, in conjunction with the words of the mystery into which he is being introduced, weld the natural with the supernatural in the new divine life which the entire man, body and soul, is now going to live. But the key to the 'mysticism' of Baptism lies in the second aspect of the sacrament, namely the interior sign, the sign which is made in the soul by the powers of the water and the Word. Baptism is not just a 'signing on' as Mr Massingham seems at one time to have imagined. In an autobiographical section of one of his books he mentions having been received into the Church as though it was a question of having his name down on the ecclesiastical books, a method of insurance. The sacrament imparts a permanent Christian character, which again is something more than a mark on the soul—an idea which sometimes seems to mean little more than having one's name down on the Register of the Church. The character imparted by baptism is a permanent, ineradicable power or faculty—the word used by the theologians is *potestas*—which is itself an effective sign or sacrament. By baptism the neophyte receives the *form* of Christ, a word which stands for the more external sense of *schema* or character and the interior form of *morphe* in the scriptures. The Christian is 'another Christ' externally as a visible member of the Body of Christ and internally as living by the life of Christ, and he is this through the permanent effect of his baptism. This 'figure' of Christ gives something of the appearance of our Lord and of his power as Word Incarnate and, by sacramentally reproducing, as it were, the great mystery of the hypostatic union, it gives authority to the phrase that the Christian is another Christ. He is another Christ

certainly if he is in a state of grace; but another Christ also even without grace, as the branch still belongs to the tree even though it is not virile through the sap; the hand to the body though paralysed; the son to the family though in disgrace. But when this figure is a living figure we are put in mind at once of the main burden of the mystical teaching of Walter Hilton who shows how the Christian is first re-formed in faith and finally re-formed 'in faith and feeling', the form of Christ having become all embracing. In *The Scale of Perfection* Hilton speaks of baptism as re-forming the soul in faith: 'As soon as [the child] is christened, it is reformed to the image of God . . . and when [the Jew or the Saracen] fall meekly to the truth in Christ and receive the baptism of water in the Holy Ghost, soothly without any more tarrying they are re-formed to the likeness of God so fully . . . that if they might as soon after baptism pass out of this world, they should flee straight to heaven without any more letting.' (Book 2, ch. 6). For Hilton this was the first and fundamental con-figuration to Christ and the Trinity; the second and higher was that in feeling as well, through the flowering of the gifts instilled by the waters of baptism. The final forming occurred on entry into heaven. But the character or image of Christ is the ground-work of the whole mystical structure of the divine life of grace. It gives the Christian the form of Christ as King because he becomes part of the Kingdom of God; it gives him the form of Christ as Priest because it introduces him to the other sacraments, gives him a share in the central priestly act of the Mass, makes him a mediator between God and man, and constitutes him an 'organum Christi', as our Lord's humanity was the 'organum divinitatis', an instrument producing supernatural effects in all his human acts, as rays from the Word made flesh. The character too is a sign of distinction, marking off the Christian from all those who are not of Christ; it is a sign of dedication, committing the Christian to all the rights and duties of a fully constituted member of the Church, a right to the other sacraments, a duty to offer the common sacrifice with his fellow Christians, a duty as well to build up the Church by deeds of virtue towards his neighbour. And so the Christian character bestowed by baptism provides the essential material for the Christian mysticism, which perfects the 'alter Christus' as a member of the Church, the body of Christ, and leads him to the heights of holiness.

Primarily this power or faculty is a passive power, or potency, making it possible for the Christian to receive the other sacraments and above all the unitive grace of the Eucharist. It makes it possible for the baptized to be united by Communion with the divine victim sacramentally immolated on the altar. A great deal of the symbolism elaborated by St Paul centres on this fact; immersed in the waters we are baptized in Christ's death, buried with him in order to rise again with him. The Christian is first given the power to become an offering, something offered, a part of the divine victim of Calvary. And here we come to the central reality, or ultimate effect of the Sacrament, for it purified the whole man of sin by this unique contact with the victim of Calvary, so much so that, as Hilton says in the quotation already given, immediately after baptism the Christian is utterly cleansed by his identification with the Passion of Christ, the source of all redemption. Much has been written in spiritual books about the dark nights of the soul and the purgative way; it should be remembered that this work of passive purification derives its effect from the passive 'power' of the baptismal character. All hardships and sufferings, all attacks from the devil are now purifying because the Christian is baptized in Christ's death and buried with him. Without the character the daily pains and anxieties and irksome affairs might pass the sufferer by or at least remain mere penalties for sin; but now the penalties become instruments of purification preparing the soul for further graces. As a member of Christ's body the Christian's wounds have become the wounds of Christ, fruitful for redemption of his own sin and also for the sins of others. Nor is this transformation of man through the new character limited to penalties and pains; in a sense it gives him the power to transform all the circumstances of his daily life into Christian things. He is inevitably subject to a host of external circumstances which otherwise are mere necessities; the need to eat and sleep, the need to be subject to authority in his social life, the need to work for his livelihood. All these necessities which press in upon him now, as a member of Christ's body, he accepts and transforms into sources of grace.

The virtue which is most closely associated with this aspect of baptism is the theological virtue of hope; for now that he has received this permanent faculty of being a Christian, marked in this way by the Passion, the Christian's confidence in God's love

and mercy soars to the full height of the theological virtue. It is said of Martin Luther that when tempted strongly to despair he took his pen and wrote '*Baptizatus sum*', relying for victory on the fact that as baptized he was a member of the victorious Christ. The popular conception of the Lutheran idea of faith or trust as a sort of infallible title to salvation might lead some to suspect this gesture as an act of presumption. But in itself it was the true attitude towards the mercy of God revealed through the sacrament of baptism and continued by the supernatural character. Bearing the marks of Christ crucified the Christian has this supreme confidence in the redemption, and from this hope springs his whole life of prayer. As a child of God he can confidently recite the 'Our Father' from which he can rise to the highest forms of contemplation.

But this permanent sacrament which remains for ever in the soul of the Christian has its active as well as its passive side. For example, the baptized Christian has an active role in the sacrament of Matrimony, each partner actively employing his and her baptismal character in the administration of that sacrament. And in a less formal manner baptism gives the right and the power to take part actively in the liturgy of the Church and above all in the Mass. Not only is the Christian something offered, a part of the Victim of Calvary; he is also an offerer from the first moment of the day when he offers all that is about to take place in his waking hours to the last, when he returns or offers thanks for the loving protection of God's Providence throughout the day. And all this is summed up and made part of the priestly offering of Christ on the Cross through the Christian's active part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, 'the greatest possible work of contemplation'. This is the foundation of the unity of the Christian life in Christ, a unity of actions centred in one act; a unity which begins through baptism making all one's actions Christian, and ends in the perfection of unity in heaven. The groundwork of the unitive way as with all the other aspects of the Christian life is to be found in the effects of baptism.

For the Passion, with its emphasis on suffering and passivity, must always be understood in terms of the Resurrection with its message of joy in the fully active life of grace. We are baptized in Christ's death in order to rise again with him to the new life. We have 'put on' Christ and so become, by this incorporation

into Christ, the new man. Already in baptism the Christian receives the presence of our Lord, to be perfected and concluded by the sacrament of the Eucharist. The close link between these two sacraments which begin and complete the new life is clearly described by St Thomas: 'Baptism is the source (*principium*) of the spiritual life and the door of the sacraments'. The Eucharist is rather 'the consummation of the spiritual life' and the 'end of all the sacraments'. . . . Through baptism a man is directed (*ordinatur*) to the Eucharist. And therefore from the fact that children are baptized they are directed by the Church to the Eucharist. And just as they believe from the faith of the Church, so also they desire the Eucharist from the intention of the Church, and consequently they receive the 'reality' of the Eucharist. (III, 73, 3). Thus already by baptism the Christian receives the first stages of the unity in the body of Christ which is perfected by Communion. Since the ultimate grace of Holy Communion is the act of love or, in other words, the perfection of the unity of the mystical body we can see that the new life of adopted sons of God or incorporation into Christ, which is achieved by baptism, contains the initial grace of loving union with our Lord in charity. This eucharistic grace of actual love and union is in baptism as the fruit is in the flower.

Already, then, we may find in baptism the roots of mysticism and contemplation in the theological virtues of hope and charity which are infused by it and which constitute the contemplative life. But the third theological virtue, faith, is equally brought into activity by the living waters. The new life thus inaugurated is a human life and therefore a life that springs from the mind and the will. The effect of baptism then is a renewal or regeneration of the mind and of the will. St Thomas shows that it is through incorporation into the mystical body that the baptized are in particular 'illuminated'. 'Just as', he says, 'feeling and movement are derived from the natural head to the members of the body; so from the spiritual head, which is Christ, the members receive his spiritual feelings which consist in the knowledge of the truth, and spiritual movement which comes from the instinct of grace. Hence St John says, "We saw him full of grace and truth; and of his fullness we have all received." It follows then that the baptized are illumined by Christ in the knowledge of the truth and are made fruitful by him in the fecundity of good works through the

infusion of graces' (III, 69, 5). Baptism is the sacrament of faith introducing the catechumen into the society of the faithful, and by establishing him in the faith the sacrament gives him the seeds of the intellectual gifts of wisdom and understanding. His eyes are opened to a new vision, seeing, perhaps, at first men as trees walking, but as he develops the graces and virtue infused by the sacred waters he sees more and more clearly into the deep mysteries of the faith. The Spirit is brooding all the time over these baptismal waters bringing forth a new intellectual life and a new movement of the supernatural virtues. The Spirit descended upon our Lord as he stood in the waters of Jordan and this power of the Spirit has always vivified the new Christian leading him on to the flowering of his faith through the gifts.

In short, all the highest graces of the spiritual life, the genuine mystical experiences of the Christian, the perfection of his virtues both of mind and will in holiness, all is to be found in the seed sown by the reception of the sacrament of baptism. It may be objected that this leaves an artificial and absolute line between the baptized and the non-baptized. But of course baptism by desire which embraces such a vast array of men and women brings these initial mystical graces also. Yet it is never quite the same, never quite so sure, never quite so integral and complete. 'The catechumen', says St Thomas again, 'if he is an adult and has baptism by desire, has already obtained the effects of baptism as regards cleansing from sin and the reception of grace which is the effect proper to God; but when he actually receives baptism he obtains more fully certain sacramental effects, because he receives the character and the remission of the whole penalty due to sin . . .' (Quodlibet, 4, 10). In other words the permanence of baptism remaining always with him, constituting him once and for always a Christian person with all such a person's rights, duties and privileges, makes the development of mystical life more sure and integral. But especially the sacrament shows the necessity of true mysticism being formed within the mystical life of the whole Church, which is the mystical Body of Christ. The lives and teachings of the mystics sometimes appear to be highly individualistic. They live solitary in their anchorhold, cut off as far as may be from their fellow men. They teach those who would follow them to withdraw from all creatures in order to be concerned with God alone. But the background of their teaching is always the sacra-

ments and the life of the Church. They have been baptized into the Church, become members of the mystical body and their life is essentially social, derived from their membership. Each gift of grace they receive, however noble, is bestowed on them not as isolated individuals, separate and entirely distinct; it is given to them because they are by baptism incorporated into Christ; it is a mission, a sending forth of power and holiness to the Word made flesh, to the Son within the Trinitarian life. The mystic through his baptismal character not only has the right to the highest graces of union, but also the duties of a true citizen of the Kingdom of God. He has duties to God in a social life, duties to the other members of the body and to those who should be members.

The unity of the mystical life, then, is derived from the sacrament of baptism. And it is a unity which is horizontal as well as perpendicular. That is to say, it unites the whole spiritual life from its inception to its fullness in the heights of mysticism and eventually in its perfection in the vision of the Trinity in heaven. This grounding in the sacramental character prevents the esotericism into which the aspirants to mysticism so easily fall. And secondly it takes the 'mystic' out of himself and gives him not only to God but also to the Church. Horizontally the mystic is given to the whole world however remote he may seem, because he is baptized into the Church and his graces are Christian and social graces as well as mystical. 'Christ also loved the Church and delivered himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5).

