

SALVATION AND THE NON-CATHOLIC

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THE religious problems discussed most frequently in French intellectual circles are, in all probability, the suffering of the innocent, hell, the story of human origins and original sin, the salvation of non-Catholics, the value to be attached to other religions. All of these, it will be observed, represent points at which the positive economy of salvation comes into apparent conflict with the aspirations of modern man and his compulsion to give an account of human history and of human destiny in purely rational terms. Such circumstances cannot but guarantee a sympathetic public for a book of some four hundred pages bearing the promising title of *The Salvation of the Unbeliever*, especially when it comes from so distinguished an author as Father Riccardo Lombardi.¹

Profoundly aware of the distress caused by the fact that thousands of men and women have never come, and indeed never have had the chance of coming, to an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and his Church, Fr Lombardi approaches his subject with the avowed intention of trying to establish as wide and as optimistic a solution as possible. Such a solution appears to him to be justified, demanded even, by what St Paul says in 1 Timothy 2. 3: 'It is (God's) will that all men should be saved, and be led to recognize the truth.'

In line, however, with the numerous Catholic authors whom he mentions or whose opinions he discusses, he resists the temptation to belittle the difficulty of the problem, and quite deliberately discards all facile solutions. In his view, the problem is dominated by another text from St Paul, a text which states the minimum but essential requirements: 'Nobody reaches God's presence until he has learned to believe that God exists and that he rewards those who try to find him.' (Hebrews 11. 6.)

These two Pauline texts, in fact, provide the two principles upon which is based the solution offered by Fr Lombardi in this

1 R. Lombardi: *The Salvation of the Unbeliever* (Burns and Oates; 30s.).

book. The first of these principles is the necessity² of a belief in a God who rewards and punishes; the second is God's will for the salvation of all mankind. From these it follows that the act of faith, which is the indispensable means of salvation, is a real possibility for all men. Such is the essential thesis of this book which attempts, by detailed discussion of the various opinions which have been put forward, to define the conditions under which all men can actually make this act of faith.

It is to the objective condition³ of this act of faith, and therefore of salvation, that Fr Lombardi, in our opinion too exclusively influenced by the text from Hebrews, devotes practically the whole of his attention. Seeking, as we have seen, the widest possible solution, his principal concern is to show that these conditions are realized in a very large sector of mankind. Not only non-Catholic Christian communities, but Judaism and Islam also, propose this minimum material object of faith to their adherents. Nor indeed can we stop short with these great monotheistic religions which are expressly connected with the main stem of historical revelation, but must add even those of the world's false religions which have no such connection and which at best can claim only a more or less problematic echo from 'primitive revelation'. The pages which treat of this point and whose importance is equalled only by the degree of prudence with which they are written, deserve close attention. Fr Lombardi admits (p. 194) that in territories where its missionaries have penetrated Protestantism has succeeded in introducing and implanting more, as far as the objective conditions are concerned, than is barely necessary for salvation. He finds the same minimum of necessary truths in more than one non-Christian message: in Amidism in China and Japan, for example (p. 208 sq.). He explains, discusses and ends by making his own, though not without certain prudent reserves, the idea put forward in much bolder terms by Père Pinard de la Boullaye in his Lenten conferences at Notre-Dame in 1936, namely that salvation, hence faith, would be possible to quite an extensive degree by means of what the

2 This necessity Fr Lombardi, supported by the whole of Catholic tradition, characterizes as a 'necessity of means', an ontological necessity arising from the nature of things. It is not to be thought of as a 'juridical necessity', one, that is to say, which arises simply because God has issued a commandment.

3 By this somewhat technical but usefully-condensed phrase is meant that condition which consists in the act of faith having as its object or content a God who rewards and punishes.

false religions and their prophets teach. This, after all, corresponds to St Paul's conditions: belief that God exists and that he will reward in greater measure those who seek him (cf. p. 274).

From beginning to end, it is upon the objective criterion that Fr Lombardi insists. The presence of this minimum material object of faith appears to act as a kind of sacrament of salvation. This sometimes gives the treatment a certain juridical quality which is accentuated by the way in which Fr Lombardi appeals to his authorities or discusses theological opinions.

One sometimes has the impression that we are engaged less in theological research than in a casuistic discussion where what matters is the discovery of the 'safest' opinion and of a criterion of the 'permissible' to be determined in the light of various condemned propositions treated simply as if they were so many legal articles and without any research into their historical context. This might be acceptable to some minds: others, it might be thought, would prefer a more religious tone and, here and there, a more psychological treatment, not to mention some application of what is undoubtedly valid and fruitful in modern analyses of subjectivity and of the ontological relations between subjects. Can one in speaking of these things today simply confine oneself to the purely logical categories which belong to a time before phenomenology and the existentialist philosophies arose? But even if one remains within the limits of classical theology, is not Fr Lombardi's enquiry, however interesting it may be, just a little abrupt?

That enquiry follows, like a guiding star, the minimum material object of faith required for salvation: if this objective minimum is present, one is saved; otherwise, not. This treatment is logical rather than moral, and it is not the only possible one. The theology of the 'intention of faith' as developed, for example, by Père A. Gardcil, O.P., in the second edition of *La Crédibilité et l'Apologétique* (1912: the important preface has, unfortunately, been omitted in subsequent reprintings) surely allows us a yet wider solution of the problem which so rightly troubles Fr Lombardi. This 'intention of faith' consists in the good disposition of the subject as regards his last end and the necessary means of attaining it. And it is supernatural because that last end is, in fact, supernatural, because it is ordered from the first to a supernatural outcome, namely the act of faith itself, and lastly because it is

entirely animated and sustained by the assistance of grace. In the normal order of things, this intention of faith encounters the object adequate to it, thanks to the apostolic preaching, *fides ex auditu*, or, failing that, at least its minimum material object, with which Fr Lombardi deals. If, however, it does not even encounter this minimum object and the man remains invincibly ignorant of God, may it not be said to find an outlet by adhering to some such substitute for God as devotion to a great cause treated as if it were an absolute: justice, truth, brotherhood, duty, progress or peace, for example? Objectively speaking, these are more of the nature of idols, the idols in fact of the modern world; but on the subjective level could they not well be so many species under which, as it were tacitly and unconsciously, men's consciences really honour and really seek the true God? May there not be a salvific faith which is purely implicit? May not the notion of invincible ignorance, which excuses every fault, be extended to cover this minimum material object of faith, the existence of God?

With infinite precautions Fr Lombardi admits (p. 175) the possibility of atheism, even positive atheism (not simple ignorance of God, but denial of him) in good faith; but he thinks that this good faith cannot persist until death, and he cannot foresee salvation for an atheist except through the help by which God leads him, first of all, to recognize his existence. In short, according to Fr Lombardi, there must always be explicit, though not necessarily perfect, knowledge of the minimum material object of salvific faith as specified in Hebrews 11. 6.

It must be recognized that Holy Scripture and tradition seem to favour this view. For if we examine Scripture, we find that whenever the field of salvation is extended beyond the limits of the people of God, there seems to be presupposed not only explicit faith in the existence of God, but also some reference to the positive economy of Judeo-Christian revelation, all the elements of which relate ultimately to Jesus Christ (cf. John 5. 46, etc.). If the Ninivites are to be saved, it is because they have responded to the preaching of Jonas; if the Queen of the South is to be secure at the Day of Judgment it is because she has come from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon (Matthew 12. 38-42). The man who gives a cup of water will have his reward, but it must be given to one of these little ones 'because he is a disciple of

mine' (Matthew 10. 42). The Kingdom will be transferred to those who will yield its fruits, but this refers to the Gentiles who respond to the preaching of the Gospel (Matthew 21. 43). If God shows patience until all men have reached salvation (2 Peter 3. 9), this is to allow sufficient time for the preaching of the Gospel to reach the ends of the earth (cf. the conclusions of Matthew and Mark). It is well said (Acts 10. 35): 'He welcomes anybody, whatever his race, who fears him and does what piety demands'; this, however, presupposes express knowledge of God, perhaps even the attitude of those who were especially known as the 'God-fearers'.

It is not always easy to define the thought of the Fathers on this subject. It is exceedingly difficult for us to place ourselves at their point of vision: their mental universe, if one may so speak, is a closed one to us. Moreover, it is impossible to consider all of them here. I shall confine myself, then, to the greatest of them all, St Augustine, who also happens to have been the most studied on this point. He concedes the salvation of at least a certain number of souls outside the visible limits of the people of God: Job, the Sibyl and others.⁴ This, however, is always conditional upon a positive knowledge of God and of the ways of salvation, even if such knowledge demands the occurrence of some kind of direct and personal revelation 'per ipsum Deum vel per angelos'.⁵ Battifol and Fr Hofmann are surely right in warning us against the temptation of attributing to St Augustine modern ideas on good faith and its effects: the notion of *fides implicita* does not occur in the Doctor of Grace. The idea of the 'soul of the Church' in the sense in which it has sometimes been attributed to him does not come from him. For him, having the Spirit of Christ involves membership of his Body.

No doubt all this would seem to be leading us to a solution in only the moderately wide terms of Fr Lombardi. That however another view is possible is suggested by certain other texts from Scripture and by other developments of the doctrine.

In the first place, there is to be found in the New Testament a whole series of texts which open up wide possibilities of salvation.

4 Cf., for example, *De civitate Dei*, I, 35; XVIII, 23, 47. Cf. J. Wang Tch'ang-tche: *S. Augustin et les vertus des païens* (Paris, 1938).

5 Cf. *De dono persever.*, xix, 48 (P.L., 45. 1023).

or at least of non-damnation,⁶ those, namely, in which it is said that God will render unto each according to his works. A certain number of these have to do with the conduct of *Christians*, it is true (cf., e.g., 2 Tim. 4. 14; 1 Peter 1, 17); but others speak in quite general terms.⁷ Moreover, St Paul also says that the man who does not have the Law of Moses, does have his own conscience for law, and that it is on this basis that he will be assessed before God's judgment-seat. It is, indeed, rather with what is to happen at the end of the world, than with the question of actual membership here on earth of the Church which is Christ's Body that these texts deal. We have here on earth, as it were, two distinct yet undeniable facts: first the existence of the Church which is the Body of Christ, comprising the faithful, 'the Saints', those who have received the faith and the sacraments which derive from the Apostles; secondly, there is the existence in pagan milieus of men whose acts—thanks no doubt to God's secret help—betray real virtue. When dealing with these latter and their present situation St Paul will not use such formulae as 'adoption', 'the first-fruits of the Spirit', 'the indwelling of the Holy Spirit', nor does he speak of their being the Body of Christ—these are all qualities which seem to be bound up with formal membership of that institution of salvation which sprang from Christ's redemptive death and resurrection. But for all those who obey God's law as heard by them in the voice of conscience and consequently perform good works (not, of course, that this can come about without the help of what we call grace, nor without their coming within the orbit of the sovereign plan of Jesus Christ—cf. Eph. 1. 19-23; Col. 1. 15 sq.; 2. 9 sq.), he does envisage a reward at the end of time to which we can give no other name but that of salvation. Here, clearly, is something of the utmost importance for our present problem, even if no formal affirmation of implicit faith is to be found there.

We can, perhaps, proceed even further along this line by turning to the Gospels, especially that of St John. Since, of course, an exhaustive treatment of this would take us very far

6 These texts, in fact, speak of retribution according to works and do not necessarily imply that there is any question of heaven. Cf. Matt. 10. 15; 11. 22, 24. Certain texts, however, do speak of a taking part in the messianic banquet in the Kingdom: Matt. 8. 10-12; Luke 13. 29.

7 Cf. Psalm 62. 13; Job 34. 11; Matt. 16. 27 (cf. 25. 19 sqq.); Luke 14. 14; 2 Cor. 5. 10 (cf. 1 Cor. 3. 8); Rom. 2. 6; Eph. 6. 8.

afield, the reader will, perhaps, be content with the following bare outline of the findings.⁸

Faith is presented in the Gospels as the outcome of a movement which has already begun, some time before the encounter with its object proper is made, in so far as there is present an inner disposition which can be summed up as humility of heart and a completely unegoistic openness to the promptings of the light whatever be the forms under which these are perceived. The soul, in fact, is faced with certain facts which in reality are so many messengers from God, even if they are not necessarily recognized as such, and invited to declare itself accordingly. Thus we read that Abraham bade welcome the three travellers, unaware at the time that he was being visited by angels, perhaps even Jahweh himself. . . . On the one hand the events of a man's life have their normal ordinary aspect according to which they belong to the framework of profane history: on the other there is their inward meaning, their spiritual import, their power of pointing or of attracting us towards God; on this level they have their place within sacred history, the history of salvation. God dwells within them, waits for us there. We find him there, or we miss him, and we know it not. (Cf. Matt. 25. 31-46.) Nevertheless it is our own attitude in all this—be it loyalty and openness, be it exclusion, self-attachment or actual treason—which determines whether the seed of moral intention, then implanted (and it is this that in the end will decide our destiny), grows up to its full flowering, or is distorted, withers and is lost.

But since the last end is, in fact, supernatural, and since the intention of faith is the only adequate disposition which prepares us for that, therefore, this seed of good dispositions as regards God is really the seed of faith. Its normal term is the encounter with the fact of Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Apostles. 'Tell me who he is Lord so that I can believe in him.—He is one whom thou hast seen, it is he who is speaking to thee' (John 9. 36-7). But a man can miss encountering the positive fact of Christ without himself being at fault. Perhaps it is even possible never to

⁸ The whole economy of *signs* or of the accession to faith in John should be studied. See, especially, John 3. 18-21 (cf. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 219). These, at bottom, are what St Augustine calls *inchoationes fidei* and of which he finds an example in the case of the centurion Cornelius. But Augustine includes in these *inchoationes* belief in God rather in the sense of Fr Lombardi; I should prefer to extend the application further than he has, even into the domain of the implicit, which, in my opinion, Augustine never envisaged.

encounter the fact of God as such, but rather give him other names and attain to him only under what amounts to a travesty of himself. In such a case one would be, as it were, struck on the road to God, blind to the signs which beckon us on finally to place our allegiance in him, not going on to reach the end of the journey. As regards men who remain tied to such signs or travesties of God, the one thing necessary would be for them to maintain such an attitude in their works as would not render God's ultimate plan ineffective in itself. In such men of good will the intention of faith would really be present, but it would reach its goal only on the eschatological level. Perhaps it would be at the moment of death—if it is permissible to adapt in this sense the recently suggested hypothesis of Mgr P. Glorieux which Fr Lombardi so carefully discusses.⁹

Fr Lombardi would admit all this. He has not, however, developed it. Further, he would consider the fact that ignorance or denial of God accompanied a right intention as regards the end, as only something exceptional and provisional. But it is important to note that in this question we are concerned more with the knowledge and appreciation of *facts* than with dogmatic principles leading of themselves to a clear-cut solution. However surprising it may appear to some, at least at first hearing, theology in these matters is dependent to quite a large extent upon the knowledge of the facts which in themselves present a different face according to different milieus and periods. Once again this is not the place for an exhaustive treatment; in what follows I shall simply throw out a few hints and examples.

The Fathers and the medieval theologians were acquainted with a *religious* world, in which the occurrence of atheism was something quite individual and exceptional;¹⁰ today we are faced with the fact of collective unbelief and of environments in which atheism, at least in its negative form, appears to be possible on a

9 Lombardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 248–66. Mgr Glorieux argues from the indivisible nature of the instant when the soul both *is separating* itself and *is separated* from the body. It is true that this consideration would allow us to speak of a last moment of lucidity and of a last decision which would be those not of a dead but of a dying man. For my part I should wish to stress the necessity of fully satisfying the revealed principle of 2 Cor. 5. 10: 'For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he has done, whether it be good or evil'.

10 St Augustine was aware of the existence of atheism, and he applied himself to the task of refuting its arguments. But for him, 'insania ista paucorum est': *Sermo* 69. 3; cf. *Enarr. in Ps.* 52. 2.

large scale, even if true atheism is less widespread than some modes of behaviour and some statements would suggest. We are furthermore aware of the unrelenting and ever-mounting pressure exerted by the group, of the effect on us of our milieu, and of the real crumbling away of liberty caused by modern propaganda and publicity machines.

The world of the Fathers and of medieval man was one penetrated through and through by the Gospel. They were, of course, vaguely, perhaps even subconsciously, aware that there were people who lived outside the confines of the Christian world, 'in the shadow of death'; but even this meagre measure of awareness was reduced to practically nothing by the way in which the Church held the limelight throughout that vast area over which she held undisputed sway. At any rate such awareness as there was had practically no influence on the then current theological solutions to our problem.¹¹ The picture changed completely when, in the wake of the great geographical discoveries of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, somewhat similar progress was made by missionaries, principally of the Society of Jesus, in the realm of anthropology, and there was revealed for the first time to Christian eyes the existence of whole races of men who were disconcertingly civilized and good. In the long run these discoveries affected the theologian when he reviewed the problem we are discussing. (It has indeed been very pertinently pointed out that the real difference in this matter between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, many of whom had personal experience of India, China and Japan, lay in the fact that the former were ignorant, the latter knowledgeable, about these lately-discovered non-Christian civilizations. Nor does it matter now that the Jesuits may have been tempted to a rather naïve optimism and over-eager concordism that made them see the mysteries of Christianity itself latent in the beliefs of China and Japan.) And gradually still further new considerations had to be taken into account. Men's minds had already quite considerably

¹¹ Cf. A. V. Seusmois: *La Papauté et les missions au cours des six premiers siècles* (Paris and Louvain, 1953), pp. 58-9, 106; P. Derumaux: *S. Bernard* (Dijon, 1954), pp. 68-79. St Augustine, for example, wrote: 'Chorus Christi iam totus mundus est'—*Enarr. in Ps.*, 149, 7 (P.L. 37, 1953); 'paucæ (gentes) remanserunt'—*In Ep. Joann.*, tr. 2, n. 2. And the author of the commentary on the Canticle, *In principio hujus libri*, published under the name of St Thomas, says: 'Quasi universaliter gentes sunt conversæ . . . Quia plenitudo gentium jam intravit Ecclesiam' (Vivès edition of St Thomas, t. 18, pp. 611 and 617).

evolved when at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they had to assimilate an entirely new situation in the ancient Christian countries themselves: whole populations now Protestant for several generations and ignorant of any other Christian influence save that of the Reform; quite considerable sections of society ignorant of any Christianity at all; finally, a factor whose existence cannot be denied, the influence even on Catholic thought exerted by ideas developed during the century of the Enlightenment (freedom of conscience, toleration, etc.).

The notion, indeed, of an erroneous conscience had been formulated as early as Abelard, and its analysis carried out by the medieval theologians, St Thomas especially, in such a way as to leave the moderns very little to desire.¹² But it was only from the sixteenth century onwards that its application to the general problem of the salvation of the non-Catholic was seriously taken in hand. It is true that when explaining the formula, *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, St Peter Canisius did not go so far as to introduce the clause: 'except those who are outside the Church through no fault of their own', but this is the explanation that is to be found even in the catechisms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Roman documents from the time of Pius IX onwards the question of good faith is formally dealt with; from then on it forms the counterpart of the extremely severe yet necessary condemnations issued by the Popes on indifferentism in religion.¹³

At the same time the meaning of the formula *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (classical since the time of St Cyprian) has been, if not exactly modified, at least made more precise. From the beginning it has indicated that grace cannot take its birth except through our Holy Mother the Church which is the second Eve and the Spouse of Jesus Christ; at the same time quite often we find the

12 Cf. J. Lecler: *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme* (Paris, 1955), t. i, pp. 117 sqq. (and, earlier, pp. 81-2).

13 Cf. Pius IX, Encycl., *Singulari quidem*, March 17, 1856 (*Acta Pii Noni*, Rome, 1870, II/I, pp. 516-7); Encycl. *Quanto afficiamur moerore*, August 10, 1863 (*Acta*, I, 623 sqq.; Denz., 1646-8); Leo XIII, Encycl., *Satis cognitum*, June 29, 1896 (*A.A.S.* (1895-6), p. 708); Pius X, Encycl., *I. supremi*, October 4, 1903 (*A.A.S.* (1903-4), p. 136); Letter to the Bishops of Canada, July 10, 1911 (*A.A.S.* (1911), p. 564); Pius XII, Radio Message of September 5, 1948, to the German Catholics (*A.A.S.* 40 (1948), p. 419), etc.—I am indebted for several of these references to F. X. Lawlor, *The Mediation of the Church in some Pontifical Documents*, in *Theological Studies*, 12 (1951), pp. 481-504. To these may be added the very important texts of the Vatican Council, 1870, in the *Schema de Ecclesia*, c. 7 (Mansi, t. 51, col., 541-2).

Fathers and medieval writers giving it a *personal* application and understanding it in such a sense as would exclude from salvation any individual not belonging to the body of the Catholic Church: Jews, pagans, heretics, schismatics, the excommunicated (exception being made, following St Augustine, of those who had been unjustly censured in this way). In the modern period, on the contrary, it is seen that its essence consists in the affirmation that God commissioned the Catholic Church, and it alone, as an institution for providing for the salvation of all men in Jesus Christ.¹⁴ The evolution of this formula with its history of misinterpretation in one sense or another has a very exact parallel in the evolution of theological thought as regards what might be the conditions of the salvation of non-Catholics. This last formula indeed is surely preferable to the fashionable 'salvation of unbelievers' which Fr Lombardi has used as the title of his book. A misnomer if ever there was one, since his argument is a negation of his title throughout, chapter following chapter precisely to affirm that there can be no salvation where there is no belief. . . .

All this mounts up, surely, to an evolution in theology. Others, no doubt, will rather see in it a retreat. Catholic theology, they will say, has time after time 'withdrawn to prepared positions' under the irresistible pressure of ideas and facts which have forced upon it only one ruinous surrender after another. If I dissent from this view of things it is because the history of the doctrine which has been the subject of this article would rather seem to suggest that Catholic theology is constantly developing the resources possessed by her from the beginning, while new facts, or a better understanding of facts already known for some time, constantly lead it to work out new applications or new aspects of these resources in a way which would not earlier have been dreamed of.

Nova et vetera. Nova ex veteribus.

¹⁴ Such seems to be the case, for example, in the Letter of Pius XI to Cardinal Schuster, April 26, 1931 (*A.A.S.*, 33 (1931), pp. 146-7), or in his *Encycl. Non abbiamo bisogno*, June 29, 1931 (p. 302). I may be permitted to refer also to the notice *Hors de l'Eglise pas de salut*, to appear in *Catholicisme* (Paris, Letouzey). Cf. B. Panzram: *Der Kirchenbegriff des kanonischen Rechtes*, in *Münchener Theol. Zeitsch.*, 4 (1933), pp. 187-211.