

throughout the world. It is not surprising, or even regrettable, that nearly all these documents have disappeared, when we remember that the Church has guaranteed with her divine authority only those on which she has set her seal as inspired by God.

It would again be very unlike Luke if, as some have supposed, he were here criticizing unfavourably the many accounts that had preceded his own, as though he wished to put Theophilus on his guard against them; and there is nothing in the text which warrants such an assumption. On his own showing, his predecessors had done only what he himself had ever been careful to do: they, like himself, had appealed to the voice of living tradition. How could he censure them for committing to writing what those 'had delivered who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word'? For Luke this was the established rule for obtaining that security of faith, desired by all reasonable men, which he sought to convey to his friend Theophilus. And it is very much *apropos* to insist on this point in speaking of the primitive Church. It was the charge of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, as it was the charge of some groups in the early ages of the Church, that Catholic doctrines and practices were not primitive, and it was their claim to return to the teaching of the primitive Church by the aid of the written Scriptures.

(To be concluded)



FROM SYNAGOGUE TO EARLY CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY: I

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THE purpose of this paper is to show how the Synagogue as an institution, as it was organized by the Jews on their return from the Exile in Babylon, not only provided the early Christian Church with a whole set of services, customs and ritual laws, but also supplied a certain kind of atmosphere which played an important part in the development of early Christianity.

¹ Translated from a talk given at N. D. de Sion, Paris, July 1955.

Our Lord and the Apostles first preached in the Synagogue

This appears at the very beginning, when we find our Lord Jesus Christ himself using the institution and attending the Synagogue. It was in the Synagogue at Nazareth that Jesus first proclaimed himself the Messiah, when he read from 'the book of Isaias the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .' and added, "This day is fulfilled this Scripture in your ears".² Again on one of the first days—and a decisive one—in his public life (described by St Mark³) after he had chosen his first Apostles, Peter, Andrew, James and John, he went to Capharnaum and it seems that his first move, when he arrived there, was to enter the Synagogue and address the congregation. Later in his public life, after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and the subsequent outburst of enthusiasm, the important thing was that the crowd should go beyond the fact of the miracle itself and grasp what the real Food was which our Lord had brought them. This was one of the decisive moments in our Lord's life, for now the people would have to make their decision—and it was in the Synagogue that he asked them to do so, delivering the speech on the Bread of Life⁴ which was to lead most of them in fact to break with him. It was also in the Synagogue that he strengthened the faith of the Twelve and there too Peter pronounced the words which marked such a decisive step for all of them: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'⁵

What our Lord did, his Apostles did after him. They too went straight to the Synagogue, to announce the good tidings of Christianity. When we read the Acts of the Apostles, we find much the same thing as we find in the Gospels: in Antioch in Pisidia, as well as in Iconia, Lystra, Thessalonica and Philippi, St Paul went to the Synagogue, and there, usually, came the division between those who were prepared to receive the message and those who rejected it. The author of the Acts does not attempt to conceal the fact that the majority of the hearers refused or rejected the Gospel tidings—broadly speaking, at least. It was there, nevertheless, that St Paul made his first converts.

Thus it may be stated as a matter of sober fact, that Christianity was born of Judaism, not only because it was born in Palestine and born from Jesus, a Jew, but because wherever the Apostles preached, they did so first in the Synagogues. No doubt in all

² Luke 4. 17-21.

³ Mark 1. 14-29.

⁴ John 6.

⁵ John 6. 69.

these places it was the Jewish nucleus, however small, which formed the starting-point and centre of the first Christian communities. We may regard this as a series of providential dispositions which provided the Apostles with their first opportunities, but it was also quite natural for them to go to the Synagogues first. They gave them both the place and the opportunity: general meeting-places where they were sure to find an audience among their own countrymen, who were already well-acquainted with the Scriptures; and opportunity, since according to custom every Jew was welcome to address the congregation. As everyone knows, the ordinary meeting in the Synagogue consisted fundamentally in a reading from the Scriptures, followed, if need be, by a translation and commentary. The Church has kept this pattern in her own liturgy. We still have the Epistle, which is normally a text from the Old Testament, the Gospel, which gives, so to speak, the tidings that the times are accomplished and the prophecies of the Epistle fulfilled, and finally a sermon, the expounding of the Scriptures.

The Life of the Synagogue and the Mystery of Israel

These facts show the undeniable mark of divine providence. Let us not, however, stop at these preliminary points. The Synagogue did much more than provide the suitable place and opportunity for the preaching of the Gospel. It reflected the very structure of Israel, her whole being and future destiny—what is sometimes called her *Mystery*. This means not only that Israel was a people, and as such had her own assemblies, but also that she was a people specially created by God himself. In those of her institutions where God's influence exerted itself most vividly and deeply, such as the meetings in the Synagogue, let us now try to discover the supernatural being of Israel and her supernatural destiny.

Her supernatural character appears clearly when we compare the Synagogue with similar contemporary religions, likewise spread over the Greek and Roman world. Unlike ancient Judaism, the nation after the Exile no longer had its centre in one place, Jerusalem. Its worship was no longer confined to the Temple but was scattered over cities and villages, and in each locality it had small groups of worshippers who gathered at definite meeting places. At about this time, a number of cults or self-styled religions likewise hailing from the East—such as the Egyptian

cult of Isis, or more frequently, that of Mithra from Asia Minor—were gradually invading the Roman world. They took the place of the old Roman religion, which seems to have been a cold, utilitarian affair, consisting chiefly of a number of external rites. These new Eastern religions brought with them an element of passion and physical devotion, a kind of communion with a god or with divinity in general. This type of devotion or communion was fostered in small gatherings, in close circles whose members tried to kindle among themselves that religious fervour and spiritual enthusiasm which they missed in the religion of Ancient Rome. Such religious movements, incidentally, may have favoured the expansion of Christianity in so far as they exalted the value of religious feeling and aroused dissatisfaction and a craving for true religion.

Yet although they had some features in common with the Synagogue, these religions were basically different from it. The devout souls who attended the pagan meetings and sought initiation into their mysteries were in search of a personal experience that would bring them into contact with such and such a divinity or such and such a place, but this never led them beyond the level of personal experience. Even when this experience was shared with others, there was no question of its being the religious experience of a whole people, as in the case of Israel. Furthermore, it was an experience lived in a state of exaltation, not, as with Israel, an experience lived in history. The Jews, again, based their assemblies upon the Scriptures. It seems quite safe to say that the whole history of Israel throughout the ages from the moment she was chosen by God and God wrought his work in her, and all the devotion of her saints from Abraham and the Patriarchs to the Judges, Kings and Sages, came to life again in the Synagogue. And there too we find all her institutions. There all her genuine religious life and religious experience, with God himself as its source, and without any trace of the illusions and perils inherent in all pagan experiences, were transmitted to those who attended the meetings. Here we are faced with supernatural facts, and the Apostles and early Christian missionaries who made use of them used something given them by God.

Let us now see what the Church inherited from this institution. There are two main points to investigate: first, how the Synagogue, in so far as it embodied the unity and universality of

Judaism, enabled the Church to affirm her own unity and catholicity; secondly, how it gave the Church the Scriptures.

The Synagogue embodied the Unity and Universality of Judaism

The Synagogue expressed both the unity and the universality of Judaism. Its origins are obscure; we do not know how far back it dates—perhaps to before the Exile. However that may be, it seems that the Synagogue developed with the Exile and with the first dispersion of the Jewish people into Babylon. Thence it spread throughout the world. It is quite true to say that there was never a Jewish community anywhere without its Synagogue. Only ten Jews were needed to establish one and to organize the cult. It was therefore quite easy to start such an assembly as soon as there was a community, however small. The humblest township could have one: even the Temple of Jerusalem seems to have had a Synagogue within its precincts, definite places that is where the faithful could gather to read the Scriptures and meditate on them, independently of the public worship and liturgy. There were hundreds and hundreds of them all over the Jewish world. According to the Acts there seem to have been a great number in Jerusalem itself; other sources say hundreds, but this is probably an exaggeration. It is certain at least, according to the Acts, that as soon as there was any community of Jews outside Israel, not necessarily with its own language but with local roots, the people concerned would gather together on their visits to Jerusalem and form a Synagogue. We can trace a number of different meeting-places of this type from which a certain number of early Christians found their way to the Church. Something of the same kind exists in Rome today, for there each Christian nation has its own church and parish.

Before the Exile

Now it must be remembered that this institution of the Synagogue, spreading its network across the whole world, was quite a recent feature in the religious history of Israel. In a way, it was an intermediary stage between Judaism and Christianity. For the religious tradition of Israel, as we know it from most of the important passages in the Old Testament and as it was ordered by God himself, was one of the great assemblies of the whole People: the great gatherings at the foot of Sinai, the march

through the desert, the compact life under the Kings. When the people did happen to be divided, as at the time of the Judges, this was quite obviously not a normal state of affairs: the function of the Judges and the Kings was precisely to bring all the people together again. Then came the Exile, of course: but immediately after they returned there were again great assemblies at Jerusalem under Esdras and Nehemias, who endeavoured to gather the People together in one great unity.

After the Exile

Running parallel with this aspect, which appears clearly in the Bible, is another feature of Israel's religious life: its existence in the shape of small communities, in which certain peculiarities of language, and even of race—the result of the dispersion—were stressed. Nevertheless, dispersed and separated though the people seemed to be, the Jewish Synagogue was an instrument of unity. All the Jews met there around something that linked them together. There was constant contact between the Synagogues throughout the Jewish world. There was much going to and fro. People knew one another, and when strangers came along, it was precisely one of the functions of the Synagogue to welcome them. It seems from the texts that in some cases even foreigners could be received and fed on the premises.

From Synagogue to Early Church

Similar customs prevailed in the early Church. The close and constant relationship between the Christian churches was certainly inspired by the example of the Synagogues, where news circulated and visits were exchanged. Possibly the Christian term 'Apostle' is simply a transcription of the Jewish word for these 'envoys', delegated by the authorities in Jerusalem to visit the Synagogues and ensure unity of relationship, doctrine and feeling between the various local communities and the People of Israel as a whole. And this seems to show that materially speaking, as seen from the outside, the existence and life of the Synagogue were very similar to those of the early Church, which was likewise dispersed throughout the world and yet maintained its own identity and unity. The Church of Philippi and the Church of Corinth were not two separate churches. Each was a separate community, but together they formed the same one Church of Jesus Christ. Just

as the Synagogue expressed both the power of expansion of the People of Israel (world-wide, yet at home everywhere) and its belonging together, so with the Church: she adopted the same kind of framework, which expressed and effected, as it were, both her unity and her universality. We must, however, go one step further and see how Christianity and the Church, while borrowing many points from the Synagogue, added a new element of its own. The Synagogue seems to have been a consequence of the Jewish community: where this latter existed, there the Synagogue appeared. The Synagogue followed the Jewish people: wherever there were a number of Jews, they met and formed assemblies. Not so with the Christian Church. The Church herself existed first; the various Churches appeared as a consequence of this. This has always been so. For instance, in missionary countries an apostle or a missionary has only to appear on the scene and the Church at once exists there. Wherever a baptized person lives his faith, Christianity is there and around this Christian living in the spirit of Christ a new 'centre' is formed—the Church. In this appears the proper character, the true creative power, of Christianity. Wherever a missionary arrives, he brings with him the Spirit and the living Church.

Choice and Mission

If we call the Synagogue the expression of a people elected by God, the Church may be described as the expression of a mission. The economy of Israel is characterized by the word 'choice': God 'chose' a people; whereas the economy of the Church is characterized by the word 'mission': God 'sends', Jesus Christ 'sends', and because of this 'sending', there is his Church. The missionary character of the Church resides in the fact that the Christian is conscious of the Spirit living within him and enabling him to raise a Church wherever he goes. The Synagogue needed a community of flesh and blood, the community of the People of Israel; but the Church was from the beginning a spiritual institution.

She was born of the Spirit and in full consciousness of her power and unity in the Spirit, took from the Synagogue those institutions of control and supervision which were used by the Apostles in the service of the Spirit. St John supervised the Churches in Asia Minor, St Paul the Churches he founded in

Corinth and Philippi. Both knew that they carried the word of the Spirit. It was their function to tell their communities what things the Spirit wished and what things the Spirit operated. Conversely, it was the duty of the communities to follow the Spirit which came to them through their ministers. Spontaneously, as new Churches were founded, a deep understanding developed among them and they reacted in a similar way both to the authority of the Apostles and to the Spirit. This is very characteristic of the Church. There were no traditions whatsoever, to begin with, in the Churches that sprang up in the steps of St Paul: they did not even have their own Scriptures, for the books of the New Testament had not yet been written. Nevertheless the Church had a unity, both through the visits and supervision of those in authority and through their spiritual influence. It seems to me that this profound spiritual unity of the Church has been preserved throughout the centuries, down to our own day. The Spirit of Christ expressed itself in the first martyrs, and does so today in the Christians suffering persecution in China. There is a spiritual kinship which is the mark of the Holy Spirit.

(To be concluded)



A SERMON OF ST AUGUSTINE ON THE TITLE OF PSALM 33: I

A psalm for David, when he changed his features before Abimelech, and he sent him away, and off he went.

Translated by EDMUND HILL, O.P.

THERE does not seem to be anything very obscure in the text of this psalm; but its title puts us on our mettle, it cries out for us to knock on its door. However, 'blessed is the man who hopes in him' (Psalm 33. 9), as it says here; so let us all be hoping he will open up to us when we knock. After all, he wouldn't urge us to knock if he didn't want to open up to us when we do. If it sometimes happens that a man who was intending to keep the door shut for the night will get up and open it against his own inclinations, because he cannot stand the din of the door-knocker any longer (Luke 11. 8); surely we have