

THE rapid amassing of primary source works and auxiliary documents at Brigham Young University through the purchase of large collections and sets both in this country and abroad, has made it possible for the first time to examine the Latter-day Saint position with reference to many ancient and valuable texts, which it has been the custom of Christian scholars in general either to pass by in silence or to interpret arbitrarily. This article is in the nature of a preliminary survey dealing with a subject which has meant little to church historians in the past, but on which in recent years a surprising amount of evidence has been brought to light.—H. N.

I

IN 1895 there was found in Egypt a Coptic papyrus purporting to contain an account of the teaching of Christ to his Apostles after the resurrection. The most learned church historian of modern times, Adolf von Harnack, was prompt to point out that this document was neither "a provincial production of the Egyptian Church" nor a brain-child of the Gnostics, but an authentic statement of certain important doctrines of salvation and resurrection common to the whole Christian church at a very early date. Shortly after, Carl Schmidt, second only to Harnack in his knowledge of early Christian documents, produced a number of ancient fragments, matching the Coptic text word for word in a half dozen languages and showing it to be derived from the Greek original of an apostolic general epistle which had enjoyed widespread authority and popularity in the church at least as early as the second century. The subject of this epistle was salvation for the dead, a doctrine which, as Schmidt demonstrated, was believed in the early church to have been the main theme of Christ's teaching after the resurrection.

As the early texts were compared with each other and with the testimony of the oldest church writers, it became apparent that the main weight of early Christian doctrine was not on the cross (the *Blut und Kreuztheologie* of later times) but on the work of the Lord as a teacher, marking the way of eternal progress for the living and the dead according to a pattern first followed by Adam, to whom the texts attribute an importance out of all proportion

to the teachings of the later church. This new light on the early Christian teachings was not hailed with enthusiasm by some people, who for obvious reasons preserve a discreet silence regarding the many discoveries of recent years which call for a complete readjustment of accepted patterns and concepts. For Latter-day Saints, however, the new findings should be thrice welcome, proving as they do the keen interest among the Saints of the Primitive Church in the subject of work for the dead. The purpose of the present paper is to pass in review those passages from early Christian sources which can shed some light on beliefs and practices connected with baptism for the dead in ancient times. We shall see how the early Saints answered the question, "What is to become of the righteous dead who have never been baptized?" a question that sorely perplexed the doctors of the medieval church who, lacking the knowledge of earlier times, were forced to choose between a weak law that allowed the unbaptized to enter heaven, and a cruel God who damned the innocent.

THE MORAL QUESTION

WHEN the Jew, Trypho, discussing the New Jerusalem with Justin, a Christian convert, asked, "Do you actually believe that you people will be gathered together and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs and prophets, both those of our race and those who became proselytes before the coming of that Christ of yours?" the latter answered emphatically in the affirmative,* having shortly before pointed out that

... those who have done that which is naturally, universally, and eternally good are pleasing to God, and shall be saved through this Christ in the resurrection just as much as those righteous men who were before them—Noah, Enoch, Jacob, and the like—or even as those who have actually known this Christ, the Son of God, who was before the morning star."

Says Clement of Alexandria:

It is not right to condemn some without trial, and only give credit for righteousness.

*Numbers refer to bibliography at end of article.

ness to others who lived after the coming of the Lord."

For, he observes:

... certainly one righteous man is not different from another as far as righteousness goes. For God is not the God of the Jew alone but of all men. . . . Those who live righteously before the law are to be counted as faithful and reckoned among the just. . . . God is good and Christ is mighty to save, according to principles of justice and equality, those who turn to him, whether here or in the next world."

Peter, in the straightforward and convincing Clementine account, has only contempt for Simon Magus' doctrine of limited salvation:

He saves adulterers and murderers if they know him; but good and sober and merciful people who don't happen to know him, simply because they have received no information concerning him, he does not save! A great and good god, forsooth, whom you proclaim, not only saving the wicked but showing no mercy to the good!"

Wrote Irenaeus in the second century:

Christ did not come for the sole benefit of those who believed in him at the time



LEAD in Ancient Times

By Hugh Nibley, Ph. D.

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of Tiberius Caesar, nor has the Father a plan for those only who happen to be living today; but it is for all the human family (*propter omnes omnino homines*) who from the beginning by righteousness pleased God and feared him in their generations, and dealt justly and religiously with their neighbors, and yearned to see Christ and hear his voice."

This doctrine of universal salvation of the righteous is matched by the contemporary teaching of the Jews that "all who die hoping for the Messiah will be resurrected to eternal life."

The most conspicuous pre-Christian candidates for salvation were, of course, the prophets of old. Says Ignatius:

They too have proclaimed the gospel, and hoped for Christ and waited for him. Believing in him they were saved, through union with Jesus Christ, being worthy of love and admiration, holy men (or saints), borne witness to by Jesus Christ and counted among those who share our common hope in the gospel."

While it would be hard indeed to deny salvation to God's chosen men

of old, it was another class of the dead whose redemption concerned the Christian convert most closely: what about his own friends and family who had never heard the gospel? That is the natural and inevitable question.* One of the first questions that Clement, the ardent investigator, puts to Peter is, "shall those be wholly deprived of the kingdom of heaven who died before Christ's coming?" To this the Apostle gives a most significant answer: he assures Clement that the people in question are not damned and never will be, and explains that provision has been made for their salvation, but this, he says, is "as far as we are allowed to declare these things," excusing himself from telling more: "you compel me, O Clement, to touch upon things which we are forbidden to discuss."¹⁰

THE RETICENCE OF THE APOSTLES

WHY was Peter forbidden to discuss salvation for the dead with an investigator? If this text is called in question, we need only point to the New Testament, where on a number of occasions Peter and other Apostles are forbidden to talk about certain things. That work for

the dead is one of the best-known episodes in the book, the promising of the keys to Peter.

Being alone with the Apostles, the Lord began to sound them out with the question, "Whom do people say that I am?" The ensuing discussion led to the next question, "But whom do you say that I am?" To this Peter gave the right answer and was assured by Jesus that that knowledge had come to him by a revelation from the Father." Having passed the test, the disciples were ready for more knowledge, but the momentous teaching to which they were introduced is merely hinted at in three short verses of Matthew (16:17-19), and passed over in complete silence by Mark and Luke. Plainly the Apostles had no intention of publishing this thing to the world at large, and all three of them emphasize the Lord's insistence on secrecy, Luke (9:21) employing a remarkable formula which has puzzled all translators and which rendered literally reads: "But he, having pronounced a penalty (*epitimesas*), instructed them not to tell it to any man." The word for "instructed" used here is a military term meaning "to give a watchword" and has an air of great solemnity and secrecy.

Now whereas Matthew has the discussion end with Christ's admonition to secrecy, Luke and Mark tell only what he said *after* that warning, that is, after the great things had been revealed, and in both these accounts the words of the Savior are almost exclusively confined (as also in Matthew 16:21-28) to the strangely negative announcement that the work is to be utterly rejected by the world, and that only suffering and death can be expected by the Apostles themselves, who are charged, moreover, not to be ashamed of Jesus and his doctrine. Why ashamed? It was certainly no conventional teaching that the Lord was imparting, and he certainly predicted no rosy future for it in that dispensation.

The extremely abbreviated nature of this account (Mark and Luke do not even mention the "rock" though Eusebius tells us that Mark, Peter's own secretary, omitted nothing of importance from his gospel) has led to much misunderstanding regard-

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Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives



—Photograph by Adelbert Bartlett

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ing the awkward and ungrammatical passage found in Matthew 16:18. But it may be assumed that if we do not understand everything, at least the Apostles did. And that is exactly the point: they heard everything, but of what they heard they have left us but a few terse sentences which run no danger of divulging "the mystery of the kingdom" to the uninitiated. If we are to believe Eusebius or the Apostolic Fathers, the New Testament scriptures are little more than a sketchy outline which without a special interpreter are as a code-message without a key."

But why this emphasis on secrecy? The great Migne was hard put to it to explain how Christ could order his disciples to be silent on a matter which he wished divulged to the world." The only possible answer is that he did not wish it divulged to the world, so Migne remains hesitant and vague, eschewing any positive answer, for to admit the obvious would be to admit that we have in Matthew 16:17-19 not the public proclamation which later ages made it out to be, but reference to a special doctrine. And that we have here the teaching of a very special doctrine indeed is sufficiently indicated by the significant association of "the keys," the sealing, and "the gates of hell."

THE GATES OF HELL

To the Jews "the gates of hell" meant something very specific. Both Jews and Christians thought of the world of the dead as a prison—*carcer*, *phylake*, *phroua*—in which the dead were detained but not necessarily made to suffer any other discomfort." In the Jewish tradition the righteous dead are described as sitting impatiently in their place of detention awaiting their final release and reunion with their resurrected bodies and asking, "How much longer must we stay here?" The Christians talked of "the prison of death" to which baptism held the key of release"—a significant thought, as we shall see.

It is the proper function of a gate to shut creatures in or out of a place (Isaiah 45:1); when a gate "prevails," it succeeds in this purpose;

when it does not "prevail," someone succeeds in getting past it. But *prevail* is a rather free English rendering of the far more specific Greek *katischyō*, meaning to overpower in the sense of holding back, holding down, detaining, suppressing, etc. Moreover, the thing which is held back, is (Matt. 16:18) not the church, for the object is not in the accusative but in the partitive genitive: it is "hers," part of her, that which belongs to her, that the gates will not be able to contain. Since all have fallen, all are confined in death which it is the Savior's mission to overcome; their release is to be accomplished through the work of the Church, to which the Lord promises that at some future time he will give the Apostles the keys. In one of the very earliest Christian poems Christ is described as going to the underworld to preach to the dead, "And the dead say to him, 'Open the gate to us!'" whereupon the Lord, "heeding their faith," gives them the seal of baptism." Baptism for the dead, then, was the key to the gates of hell which no church claimed to possess until the nineteenth century, the gates remaining inexorably closed against those very dead of whose salvation the early Christians had been so morally certain. In passing it should be noted that this poem in its conclusion definitely associated the release of the dead with the "rock."

Thus thy Rock became the foundation of all; upon it didst thou build thy kingdom, that it might become a dwellingplace for the saints."

TEMPLE SQUARE AT DUSK

By Georgia Moore Eberling

How quietly the gentle dusk walks here:
On mauve-shod feet with violets in her hair

She steps among the flowers, clad in sheer Dove-gray, as pale as star dust and as fair. The swirling yellow skirts of passing day Have veiled the pansy faces, in the gloom They drop their eyes and bow their heads to pray

Where dusk shadow waves a sable plume. Dusk creeps into the folding arms of Night

As trees stand phantom-like, serene and tall.

The full round moon above is golden-bright,

And silence dwells inside the garden wall. Here cradled in the city's close embrace A spot of heaven sleeps, in moonbeam's lace.

The same idea is even more obviously expressed by Ignatius in what is perhaps the earliest extant mention of the rock after New Testament times, making it equivalent to:

... the high priest ... to whom alone the secrets of God have been confided. This is the Way which leads to the Father, the Rock ... the Key ... the Gate of Knowledge, through which have entered Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and all the host of prophets. ..."

From which it is clear that Matthew 16:17-19, with its combination of gates, keys, and rock, definitely hinges on the subject of salvation for the dead, and the work by which they are admitted to the presence of the Father.

Those who fondly suppose that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" is a guarantee of the security of the church on *this* earth" are inventing a doctrine diametrically opposed to the belief of the early church. If there was one point on which the primitive Saints and their Jewish contemporaries saw eye to eye, it was the belief that Satan is "the prince of *this* world," nay, "the god of this world." It is here that men are under his power, and here that he overcomes the kingdom of God by violence." "The days are evil," says the Epistle of "Barnabas," "and Satan possesses the power of this world." Beyond this earth his power does not extend; Jehovah alone rules in the spirit world, according to the Jewish doctrine, and *his* angels stand guard over the wicked ones." It is on this earth that the devil is to be conquered and his power finally broken—he has no other stronghold to which to flee. ... When he goes to hell, it will not be in triumph, but to be bound and imprisoned there." His bonds are the "snares and deceptions" that "bind the *flesh* of men with lust," and which will be meaningless after the judgment, when none may enjoy the prerogative of being deceived." When the devil rules hereafter it will be only over those "sons of perdition" who willingly follow his example.

The medieval idea that the devil is the proper ruler of the dead is a borrowing from obvious pagan source, popular and literary." In the

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THE IMPROVEMENT ERA

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD IN ANCIENT TIMES

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earliest versions of what eventually became the medieval Easter drama, *The Harrowing of Hell*, Satan and Death appear as rulers of different spheres: in the dialogue between them Death begs Satan to retain Christ in his realm, which is the earth, so that he might not descend and cause havoc in the underworld.³⁸ This idea appears in the very old pseudo-gospel of Nicodemus, wherein Satan, boasting that he has overcome Christ on earth, asks Death to make sure that the Lord's mission is likewise frustrated in his kingdom below.³⁹ No less a scholar than Harnack after prolonged searching declares that he knows of no passage in which "the Gates of Hell" signifies the realm of Satan, or is used to refer to the devil himself or to his hosts.⁴⁰

"The gates of hell," then, does not refer to the devil at all; though his snares and wiles might lead men sooner or later to their death, delivering them "to the destruction of the flesh" (I Cor. 5:5; Luke 13:16); his power ends there. The gates of hell are the gates of hell—the "holding back" of those who are in the spirit world from attaining the object of their desire.

There is a great wealth of oriental legend and liturgy recalling how a divine hero overcame Death in a knock-down and drag-out contest—the central episode of the famous Year-drama.⁴¹ Sometimes the hero smashes the door of the underworld as part of his campaign. Contamination from these sources was sure to occur in the Christian interpretation of Christ's mission to the "underworld," but as Schmidt has shown at length, the early Christians never connect the two traditions: there is no fight when Christ goes to open the way for the release of the dead; he meets absolutely no opposition, and does not have to smash the gates, since he has the key.⁴² How incompatible the two versions are is apparent in those early accounts

which, characteristically, attempt to combine them. Thus when Prudentius, the first great Christian poet, tells of Christ's visit to the underworld, he includes the gate-smashing episode, derived not from any Christian source, however, but bor-

rowed from the tragedy *Hercules Furiens* of the pagan Seneca.⁴³

Thus in the Odes of Solomon:

And I opened the doors that were closed; I rent asunder the iron bolts . . . and nothing appeared closed to me, since I myself was the gate of everything; and I went to all my imprisoned ones to free them, so that I left none in bonds; and I imparted my knowledge without stint, sowing my seed in their hearts and turning them to me. . . .⁴⁴

Christ would hardly smash the gate if he himself were the gate.

THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS AND THE END OF ALL THINGS

THE unfolding of the great plan of salvation with "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" was continued a week after the "gates of hell" discussion, when the Lord took Peter, James, and John with him up onto the Mount.⁴⁵ The two events are remarkably alike: there is the same great care to insure privacy, the same limited and selected number of participants, the same mention of a long and important conversation, with the same reluctance to reveal what was said; in each case there is an outburst by Peter, mention of a direct revelation from the Father regarding his Son, the same strict admonition to secrecy, and the same full and explicit declaration that the message is not going to be accepted by the world at that time.⁴⁶ The whole thing reminds one strikingly of the restoration of the gospel in the latter-days;

Around the World On Christmas

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day School general board is carried out, with some possible adjustments to fit in with local conditions, on the Sunday nearest Christmas. Our sacrament service on the Sunday evening is devoted to music and talks.

The day after Christmas, excepting when the 26th of December falls on Sunday, is observed as "Boxing Day" or the day to celebrate by going to "Bios," or the beaches or the time to have parties.

Both Christmas and Boxing Day are public holidays.

when the great key revelations came in just such quick, wonderful succession to just such a selected few and by the ministrations of the same heavenly beings. Could Joseph Smith have worked that all out?

The Apostles awoke from sleep to find Jesus conversing with "two men," Moses and Elias. Of this consummately important discussion not a word is given. The first utterance reported on the Mount is Peter's ecstatic reaction to what he had heard, and the Apostle is described as answering someone: no mere Hebraism, as the churchmen would have it, for we are told that a conversation was already in progress.⁴⁷ On the mountain the three Apostles saw Moses and Elias not as essences, historic allegories, or lovely old legends, but simply as "two men." They also saw Jesus glorified, and he did not dissolve into an ocean of being: "The fashion of his countenance was altered," as was his raiment, but he still had a countenance and wore raiment, and the Apostles, though they had been sleeping, recognized who he was. They did not see the Father, however, because, we are explicitly told, a cloud came and "screened" or "shielded" them from the sight, as was indeed necessary, since they had already had as much as they could stand and "were sore afraid."⁴⁸ Even if one renders *episkiazō* "overshadow," as the King James version of the Bible does, one has but to consider that a cloud can overshadow an object only when it is between that object and something brighter than itself: if it "overshadowed" the Apostles, the cloud, brilliant though we are told it was, must have shut off a still greater light. It was by just such a cloud that Jesus at the Ascension was "caught up away from their eyes." (Acts 1:9.) Is God the Father a cloud? If not, then this was either a gross misrepresentation, or else the cloud was provided to screen a presence so glorious that the Apostles could not support the sight. The voice they heard through the cloud was not an inner voice or a rational conclusion or the clink of a chain of syllogisms, but something that actually came "out of the cloud"; the voice of the Father did not come, as it might have, from any other direc-

tion by the light the man were Christ are, the perience real p could

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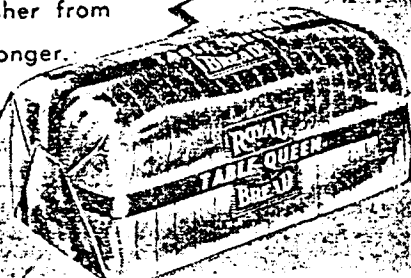
tion but from the same direction as the light, for in this revelation when the most privileged of the Apostles were seeing Moses, Elias, and Christ in their glory as they really are, they were also allowed to experience as great a proximity to the real person of the Father as they could stand.

Is it not strange that in the endless philosophical speculation that has gone into forming the creeds of Christendom from Nicaea to the present day almost no mention is ever made of the one instance in which the true nature of the Godhead was plainly revealed? Until the days of Joseph Smith it apparently never occurred to anyone to take the scripture at its face value. Why has this most illuminating passage of scripture been consistently ignored? Plainly because the whole episode has not been understood. The whole story of the Transfiguration passes for little more than a theatrical interlude—something for plasterers and painters to work on. Yet as the four descend from the mountain, their talk is of "the restoration of all things." That explains why Moses was there, for to him had been entrusted the covenant of the Old Testament, while the mission of Elias, the Lord explains, was "to restore all things." As in their former conversation, Jesus warned the Apostles to tell no man what they had seen and heard, and announced again with the greatest emphasis that the work was to be completely rejected by the world, even as Elias had been rejected. It is hardly surprising, then, to find these same Apostles announcing a few years later that "the end of all things is at hand" (Peter), that "it is the last time" (John), and that the Saints should be "an example of suffering affliction" with no hope of rescue save in the world to come (James). What was meant by "all things" coming to an end? The universe and heaven and hell were not coming to an end, and neither was the world itself, for John states that the antichrist is just beginning to take over the church, "whereby we know that it is the last time." (1 John 2:18.) For the Apostles, the beginning of the antichrist's rule is the sign that something else has reached its end, and what can that be? "The restoration of all things"

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and "the end of all things" obviously refer to the same thing—the fulness of the gospel. What Elias restored, the antichrist, as the Lord predicted, put an end to, "until the times of restitution of all things" predicted by Peter (Acts 3:21) as a future event, when the fulness of the gospel would again be brought to the earth (Peter speaks of "restitution" and "refreshment") as it had been in the days of the transfiguration.

Here it is time to mention a third instance in which Christ insisted on secrecy. No more obvious allegory could be imagined on the face of it than the parable of the sower; and yet the gospels treat it as one of the greatest of mysteries, as "the mystery of the kingdom of heaven" itself, whose meaning the Lord divulged only to the Twelve when he was alone with them. In every gospel version the challenge, "he who hath ears let him hear!" announcing that something of great import has been said, follows immediately upon mention of the three degrees, thirty, sixty, and one hundred. They are "the three degrees of glory," referring not to the world at all, but only to those who have heard the gospel, understood it, accepted it, brought forth fruit, and persisted in patience. "This is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved," says Irenaeus, citing a doctrine which he attributes to "the elders," i.e., those who had been actual hearers of the Apostles:

The Elders say that those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of Paradise, and others shall possess the splendor of the City; for everywhere the Savior will be seen, according as they shall be worthy to see him. But that there is a distinction between the habitation of those who produce one-hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold; for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second class will dwell in Paradise, and the last will inhabit the City; and that on this account the Lord said, "In my Father's house are many mansions."

Clement reports that the Lord ordered the Apostles to preach to the world "for the time being" no doctrine beyond that of baptism, of which Peter says:

Be this therefore the first step to you of three; which step brings fourth-thirty com-

mands, and the second sixty, and the third a hundred, as we shall expound more fully to you at another time.¹⁹

The fuller exposition, if it was ever written down, has never reached us, and the whole doctrine, certainly an important one, has no place in the teachings of the later churches, ignorant as they were of the great plan of universal salvation.²⁰

(To be continued)

In the following references "PG" stands for the Greek *Patrologia* and "PL" for the Latin. Roman numerals designate volumes and Arabic numerals columns.

- ¹Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, c. 80 (PG vi. 664)
- ²Ibid., c. 45 (PG vi. 572)
- ³Clem. Alex. *Stromata* vi. 6 (PG ix. 272)
- ⁴Ibid., PG ix. 269
- ⁵Clementine Recognitions II, 58 (PG I. 1276)
- ⁶Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* IV, 22, 2 (PG vii. 1047, 259)
- ⁷Baruch 85, 15; 30, 1. A treatment of this Jewish doctrine may be found in A. Von Gall, *Basileia tou Theou* (Heidelberg, 1926) pp. 303-8.
- ⁸Ignat. *Epist. to the Philadelphians* V, 2 (PG v. 701)
- ⁹St. Bruno notes the eagerness of the primitive Christians "to secure the salvation of a father or a mother" who had died without hearing the gospel. *Expos. in Ep. I ad Cor.* PL ciii. 209.
- ¹⁰Clem. *Recog.* I, 52 (PG I. 1236)
- ¹¹Matthew 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21
- ¹²R.V.G. Tasker, "An Introduction to the Mss. of the New Testament," *Harvard Theological Review* XLI (1948), 77. Such an obscure and puzzling text as Matthew 16:17-19 would be just the one to receive such helpful treatment.
- ¹³See Ad. von Harnack, "Der Spruch über Petrus als den Felsen der Kirche," in *Abhandlungen der Berlin Akad.*, Phil.-Hist. Kl. 1918, 368-9.
- ¹⁴Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III, 39, 15; V, 8, 3
- ¹⁵Op. cit. III, 24, 3-7; cf. Clem. *Recog.* I, 21: "Which things were indeed plainly spoken—(by

Christmas List for Europe

(Concluded from page 779)

is to place the other thirteen in this category as soon as possible.

ECA THUS FAR, under Mr. Paul G. Hoffman, has carried forward this huge program with an organization of some 1,150 employees, 350 of whom are overseas, 150 are on loan from other U. S. government agencies, and about 650 are on the regular ECA payroll.

Bread grains and coal; bread grains and coal—this is the European letter to Santa in 1948. Food and warmth; food and warmth. For those of us who have these precious items, and are all too unmindful of what is involved in their availability, what shall we ask in seeking Merry Christmas? We cannot give sunlight; nor soil; nor photosynthesis; nor plant growth, either to consume or let decay to become bituminous or anthracite basis for warmth. But we might be mindful of a friendly, warm universe with its sunlight, soil, and photosynthesis and, each for himself, give of himself as did he for whom Christmas was named, in order that such a kind world be not troubled with human warrings and turmoils.

Christ) but are not plainly written; so much so that when they are read, they cannot be understood without an expounder.

- ¹⁹P. Migne, ed., *Scripturae Sacrae Cursus Completus* (Paris, 1840) XXI, 823-4. (cf. XXII, 795-6, 106-7) suggests that the Lord commanded secrecy as to his true nature lest men afterwards beholding his death, "being offended by the infirmity of his flesh should lose their faith." As if all the disciples did not do that very thing, the lesson of the resurrection receiving particular force when it came as a rebuke to the doubters. Migne also gives as his opinion only, that Christ withheld this information "lest people be offended at his calling himself the Son of God"—the last motive in the world to attribute to Jesus, whom the world hated because he made no concessions to its prejudices, the whole gospel being a "rock of offense."
- ²⁰Peter 3:19; Tertullian, *De Anima* c. 7: 35; 55; The Wisdom of Solomon 17, 15; Book of Enoch 10, 13; 69, 28; St. Jerome, *Comment. in Osee* III, 13 (PL vi, 938): "... a lower place in which the spirits are confined, either in rest or punishment, according to their deserts"
- ²¹IV Esdras iv. 35f. vii. 75-99; cf. Josephus, *Antiq. Jud.* 18, 1, 3
- ²²Tertull. *De Anima* c. 6, 9: "From the prison of death, thy blood is the key of admission to all paradise." He is speaking of the blood of the martyrs, with which they are baptized. It has been common at all periods of the church to speak of baptism as "the gate."
- ²³Od. Sol. 42, 1-19
- ²⁴Op. cit. No. 22, quoted at length in Schmidt (see below, n. 23) pp. 565-6
- ²⁵Ignat. *Ed. ad Philad.* c. 9; the same combination is in *Pastor Hermas*, Simil. IX, xii & xvi; cf. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vi. 6, 46
- ²⁶Thus Migne, op. cit. XXI, 814: "There is no doubt that 'the gates of hell' refers to all the power of the devil." He then proceeds to cite in support of this only the following: Psalm 147:13; Gen. 22:17; 24:60; Judges 5:8; 11 Kings 8:37; and Psalm 106: 16, none of which refers to "all the powers of the devil," but every one of which refers to real gates and the function of gates.
- ²⁷Matthew 12:26-29; Luke 10:18; 11:18; 13:16; 22: 31; Mark 3:23-27; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 2:13; John 14:4-6; 5:19; Ignatius *Epist. ad Ephes.* xi, 17, 19
- ²⁸II Cor. 4:4
- ²⁹John 12:31; 16:11
- ³⁰Ep. Barnabas, c. 2
- ³¹Bk of Enoch 20:2. This subject is fully treated by Carl Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu mit seinen Jüngern* (Leipzig, 1903), being vol. 43 of *Texte u. Untersuchungen zur Gesch. d. Altchristl. Lit.*, ed. A. Von Harnack & C. Schmidt, pp. 547-8, 507, cf. 285f.
- ³²John 12:31; 16:11; Schmidt, op. cit., 549, 556, 573, 462, 571; Gall, *Basil. tou Theou*, pp. 290-301 treats the subject at length
- ³³Matthew 25:41; Schmidt, op. cit., 548, 550, 576
- ³⁴Thus in the *Apostolic Constitutions* viii, 12, 33
- ³⁵Romans 2:16; Psalm 44:21; Jeremiah 23:24; 49: 10; Ezekiel 28:2, etc.
- ³⁶The literary motif is frankly pagan, as in Dante. In folklore it is no less of popular pagan origin, cf. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1934) G 303.82 Cf. Gall, *Basil. tou Theou*, pp. 290-301
- ³⁷Schmidt, op. cit., 572 cites a text of this in use in the Syrian Church as early as 340 A.D.
- ³⁸Evang. Nicodem. c. 15; virtually the same dialogue is found in Ephraim and in a *Descensus* of the 2nd of 3rd century. C. von Tischendorf, *Evangelia* (Leipzig, 1876), 389-91
- ³⁹Op. cit. (supra, n. 13) p. 238f.
- ⁴⁰For the best general treatment of this much-handled subject, see S. H. Hooke, ed. *The Labyrinth* (London, 1935)
- ⁴¹Ignat. *Ep. ad Philad.* c. 9; the "keys of the kingdom of the heavens" of Matthew 16:19 would be useless unless "the gates of hell" of the preceding verse were opened to give-up their dead. Indeed, the first words of verse 19 show a wide variety of readings in the Mss., with a strong indication that Christ said, "I shall also give you the keys to the kingdom of the heavens."
- ⁴²The references to Prudentius and Seneca are given by F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry* (Oxford, 1937) p. 70
- ⁴³Odes of Solomon, No. 17, 8-18
- ⁴⁴C. Tischendorf, *Synopsis Evangelica* (Leipzig, 1834) p. xxxvi, calls attention to the significant emphasis of the gospels of the time of this event as a continuation of the former.
- ⁴⁵Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36
- ⁴⁶Migne, *Scr. Sac. Curs. Compl.* XXI, 837, explains this as a Hebrewism, simply the equivalent of "Peter said." Only he fails to note that verse 4 is an immediate continuation of verse 3. Even the Hebrew never uses "answered" for "spoke" with the first utterance in a story; of course, if Peter answered, he spoke—"answered" necessarily means "spoke," but it also necessarily means something more
- ⁴⁷Matthew 17:5f.; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34
- ⁴⁸Matthew 17:9-13; Mark 9:9-13; Luke 9:36
- ⁴⁹I Peter 4:7; I John 2:18; James 5:7-11
- ⁵⁰Matthew 13:10-15; Mark 4:10-13; Luke 8:9-10
- ⁵¹Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15
- ⁵²Iren. *Heresies* V, 36 (PG vii. 1221-3)
- ⁵³Clem. *Recog.* iv. 35-36
- ⁵⁴Thus St. Augustine scouts the idea of "many mansions," noting that there is but one house of God and but one salvation: there are no degrees of salvation, *De Anima* II, PL xlv, 503, 518, 520



CHRIST PREACHING BY THE LAKE

—Heinrich Holms

8-2

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

PART II

THE TEACHING OF THE LORD
AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

in Ancient Times

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THE LORD admonished the disciples to preserve secrecy regarding what they had seen, heard, and discussed *only* until his resurrection. Until that time they were "to tell no man." But whom were they to tell after the resurrection? Certainly not everyone, if Paul's deliberate reticence towards the Hebrews and Corinthians means anything.^{a*} In what they write after the departure of Christ, the Apostles, like the Apostolic Fathers, seem extremely reluctant to impart knowledge of higher things.^a This is painfully evident in the gospels themselves. The real nature of the

Lord's work escaped the Apostles while he was with them before the crucifixion.^a Such being the case, can a modern or medieval reader of their fragmentary reports be expected to draw any wiser conclusions from the events they describe than the Apostles themselves did? A full understanding *first* came to the disciples after the resurrection, when the risen Lord in a great sermon, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, . . . expounded unto them in all the scriptures the

things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27.) Of this wonderful discourse which at last opened the eyes of the Apostles, *we* are only given the opening words: "O fools and slow of heart!" It was what the Lord said and did *after* the resurrection that established his doctrine (Acts 1:3), yet we are told only what he said and did *before*. If the New Testament, written some time after the resurrection, is silent on those things, we can only assume that they are being deliberately withheld. A goodly part of the Sermon on the Mount has been transmitted to the world, showing that, had the Apostles so intended, the infinitely more important sermons after the resurrection might also have reached us. But the Sermon on the Mount is a social discourse, containing nothing that any honest man could fail to comprehend: this is not the sort of

^aNumbers, which are continued from the last article, refer to bibliography at end of article.

thing which needs to be concealed from the world at any time. We may be sure that it was a very different sort of matter which could only be imparted to a few in private with strict admonitions of secrecy, warnings of danger, and injunctions not to be "ashamed."

What lends weight to these considerations is the fact that it was the common belief in the early church that the subject of that last great discourse was nothing less than salvation for the dead: indeed, that was only to be expected, the Lord having just returned from his own mission to the spirit world.⁶⁴ While it was a favorite device of the Gnostics to gain a following in the Church by claiming to possess written accounts of the secret teachings of Christ after the resurrection,⁶⁵ the rest of the church was not backward in producing scriptures dealing with salvation for the dead and bearing such titles as "*The testament which our Lord Jesus made with his Apostles after his resurrection from the dead and the instructions which he gave them.*" some of these texts being of great antiquity and held to be authentic by the strictest Christians.⁶⁶ The mere existence of these works is indicative of the keen interest which the saints still felt in a subject which the later church ignored. The fact that the Gnostics were able to gain an immense and immediate success in the Church by spurious versions of these "last and highest revelations,"⁶⁷ shows that they were exploiting a genuine hunger which the central church could no longer satisfy. We shall deal with this problem later.

CHRIST'S MISSION TO THE DEAD

THE early Christians believed that Christ after the crucifixion descended to the spirit world.⁶⁸ They had no special term for the place but designated it very loosely by a variety of vague and general expressions as, the lower regions (*infera*), those below (*ad* or *apud inferos*), the place of detention, the wardhouse (*phylake, phroura*), the lowest places (*katotata*), hades, the place of Lazarus, the regions beneath the ground (*katachthonia*—because the dead were buried there), the land of the dead, etc.

Such freedom shows that no definite locale is insisted on, all the expressions making it clear that Christ was to be thought of as being among the dead but not in heaven, while any attempt to specify the location of the place is deliberately avoided.⁶⁹ The early Christians were so averse to a geographical hell (wishing to describe only a condition) that they did not hesitate to use pagan terms which if taken literally would have been very misleading, implying belief in all sorts of outlandish things. Having no understanding of these things, however, the Middle Ages could only take them in the literal heathen sense, with the result that Dante's hell is a faithful reproduction of well-known pagan originals.

As to the purpose of Christ's visit to the spirits in prison, the early sources are in perfect agreement. "What I have promised you," he tells the Twelve in the "Discourse to the Apostles,"⁷⁰

I shall give to them also, that when they have come out of the prison and when they

THIS is the second article in a series in which Dr. Nibley gives his further findings concerning the position of the early church regarding a principle so vital to Latter-day Saints—baptism for the dead. The revealing information herein is based on "ancient and valuable texts" recently acquired in Europe by Brigham Young University.

have left their bonds . . . I shall lead them up into heaven, to the place which my Father has prepared for the elect, and I will give you the kingdom, and rest [*anapausis*, i.e. rest in the midst of work or on a journey, not a permanent stand-still], and eternal life.⁷¹

Elsewhere he says:

I have received all authority from my Father, so that I might lead out into light those who sit in darkness.⁷²

telling the Apostles:

You shall become fellow-heirs with me. . . . Such a joy has the Father prepared for you that the angels and the powers long to behold it . . . yet it is not granted them. (Cf. D. & C. 132.) You shall partake of the immortality of my Father, and as I am in him, so you will be in me.

And when they ask in what form they shall enjoy this blessedness, the answer is:

As resurrected beings: even as my Father raised me from the dead, so you, too, will rise again and be received into the highest heaven.⁷³

Irenaeus says that Christ came "to destroy death, point the way of

life, and set up a common way of life between God and man."⁷⁴ "He himself opens to us who were enslaved by death the doors of the temple," says the Epistle of Barnabas, "and introduces us into the incorruptible . . . spiritual temple builded for the Lord."⁷⁵ "Until Christ came and opened the door, no one, no matter how righteous, could enter the presence of the Father. Only after the resurrection was a common existence with the Father and Jesus Christ possible." Thus Ignatius.⁷⁶ The dead were to be liberated so that they might reach eventually the highest state of exaltation, the presence of the Father, in a word, the celestial kingdom.

Eventually, we say, for the highest glory is not bestowed in an instant, but must be achieved through a definite course of action. Christ opens the gates and points the way, the spirits themselves must do the rest. "Come out of bonds," he cries 'all ye who will,' calling those willingly bound who sit in darkness . . ."

writes Clement of Alexandria.⁷⁷ "Descending to the other world," says one of the oldest Christian hymns, "Christ prepared a road, and led all those whom he shall ransom. . . ."⁷⁸ And Irenaeus: "The Lord

destroyed death and . . . showed us life, pointing the way of truth and imparting incorruptibility."⁷⁹ He is the way, the gate, the key and instrument of salvation, providing the means of passing from one state to another.

Through the door there is a definite order of exit from the lower world, says Origen, each bidding his time: first "the prophets, then all the rest of the just . . . and finally the gentiles."⁸⁰ Justin states a belief common to Christian and Jew that there are stages or waiting-places along the way from the world of the dead to final judgment,⁸¹ an idea expressed likewise in a logion attributed to Jeremiah and quoted by Irenaeus,⁸² who further informs us of a teaching of "the elders," that all spirits released from confinement had to progress through a definite "order of promotion," the whole process of salvation for the dead taking place "in separate and definite steps."⁸³ All spirits must pass

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BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD IN ANCIENT TIMES

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through various *prokopes*, according to Clement of Alexandria, a *prokope* being literally a stage or station on a journey: "everyone is in a particular station at any given time, depending on his knowledge of God." He compares this progress toward exaltation with advancement in the priesthood on earth:

... for even on this earth, following the order of the Church, there are definite stages of progress: that of bishop, priest, and deacon. Such also, I believe, are the steps of angelic glory in the economy of the other world, according to which, so the scriptures tell us, those are temporarily detained who are following in the footsteps of the Apostles towards a fulfilling of all righteousness in accordance with the precepts of the gospel.⁷⁴

Anselm is thus not without authority (though suspiciously reminiscent of Philo the Jew)⁷⁵ when he writes:

For whoever is baptized in Christ, to him heaven is opened and God above is ready to receive him [note that it is baptism that opens the gate]; but he must ascend by the steps of a ladder, which reaches from baptism up to God. . . . Even so the children of Israel reached the promised land only by a long journey. So let no one who is baptized be lazy, but let him strive to reach his promised celestial home by the road of God's commandments, and by the steps of the ladder of generation let him ascend if he desires to reach God. . . .⁷⁶

CHRIST PREACHED TO THE DEAD

FOLLOWING I Peter 4:6, it was believed in the early church that Christ preached "to them that are dead." "For this reason," says the Lord in the "Discourse to the Apostles," "have I gone below and spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to your fathers, the prophets, and preached to them, that they might enjoy their rest in heaven."⁷⁷ To quote more fully a passage already cited from the Epistle of Barnabas, "He opens to us who were enslaved by death the doors of the temple, that is the mouth; and by giving us repentance introduced us into the . . . spiritual temple builded for the Lord."⁷⁸ "Christ is the king of those beneath the earth," says Hippolytus, "since he also was reckoned among the dead, while he was preaching the gospel to the spirits of the saints (or holy or righteous ones)."⁷⁹ The same writer says Jesus "became the evangelist of the

dead, the liberator of spirits and the resurrection of those who had died."⁸⁰ The idea is thus expressed by the author of the Sibylline Discourses: "He will come to Hades with tidings of hope to all the saints, and (tidings) of the end of time and the last day. . . ."⁸¹ Clement of Alexandria is thus following the accepted doctrine when he says: "Christ went down to hades for no other purpose than to preach the gospel."⁸²

A great favorite with the early Christians was a passage from the Apocryphal Book of Sirach: "I shall go through all the regions deep beneath the earth, and I shall visit all those who sleep, and I shall enlighten all those who hope on the Lord; I shall let my teaching shine forth as a guiding light and cause it to shine afar off."⁸³ Schmidt distrusts the claims that this was a genuine Hebrew scripture, since it is found only in Christian translations;⁸⁴ but for our purpose that fact only enhances its value. Whatever its source, the ancient Church received it gladly, as it did another Jewish text attributed to Jeremiah and quoted by Justin and (no less than five times) by Irenaeus: "The Lord God hath remembered his dead among those of Israel who have been laid in the place of burial, and has gone down to announce to them the tidings of his salvation."⁸⁵ The Christians angrily accused the Jews of having expunged this passage from their scripture in order to damage the Christian cause, from which it would appear that the doctrine of salvation for the dead was a major

issue in those early times, and a most precious possession of the Church.⁸⁶

In all these texts we are told that Jesus did not simply "harrow" hell and empty it with a single clap of thunder, as was later imagined. The whole emphasis in the *Descensus* was on the *Kerygma*, or the Lord's preaching of the gospel.⁸⁷ He preached the gospel in the spirit world exactly as he had done in this one. Our informants insist, in fact, that Christ's mission below was simply a continuation of his earthly mission, which it resembles in detail. The spirits there join his Church exactly like their mortal descendants, and by the same ordinances.

"Descending into the other world," says the old hymn, "Christ prepared a road, and led in his footsteps all those whom he shall ransom, leading them into his flock, there to become indistinguishably mingled with the rest of his sheep."⁸⁸ "I made a congregation of the living in the realm of the dead," says the Lord in the Odes of Solomon, "I spake to them with living lips . . . and sealed my name upon their heads, because they are free and belong to me. . . ."⁸⁹ Another Ode says: "I went to all my imprisoned ones to free them . . . and they gathered themselves together to me and were rescued; because they were members of me and I was their head."⁹⁰ "He went down alone," writes Eusebius, citing a popular formula, "but mounted up again with a great host towards the Father."⁹¹ Tertullian is more specific: "Christ did not ascend to the higher heavens until he had descended to the lower regions [lit. lower parts of the worlds], there to make the patriarchs and prophets his *compotes*."⁹² The word *compos* [singular form] in Tertullian always denotes "one who shares secret knowledge";⁹³ he made them his disciples in the other world.

Though rejected at his first coming, says Irenaeus, Christ nonetheless "gathers together his dispersed sons from the ends of the earth into the Father's sheepfold, mindful likewise of his dead ones who fell asleep before him; to them also he descends that he may awaken and save them."⁹⁴ The philosopher Celsus,

PRAYER FOR THE NEW YEAR

By Laura Emily Mau

DEAR GOD of the New Year, we pray
To enter it with faith in thee.
A faith that's strong enough to keep
All nations safe and strong and free.

To be an inspiration for
Each other, that each one may see
The beauty of a land that's free
To live thy peace and unity.

Then all will see each other as
A world-fraternity of men,
By permitting Christ to be their King
To live on earth as in heaven.

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making fun of the strange doctrine, asks Origen: "Don't you people actually tell about him; that when he had failed to convert the people on this earth he went down to the underworld to try to convert the people down there?" It is significant that Origen answers the question, for all its mocking tone, in the affirmative: "We assert that Jesus not only converted no small number of persons while he was in the body . . . but also, that when he became a spirit, without the covering of the body, he dwelt among those spirits which were without bodily covering, converting such of them as were willing to Himself. . . ." According to this the dead not only have the gospel preached to them, but are free to accept or reject it, exactly like the living.

The resemblance between Christ's earthly and other-worldly missions leads one to conclude with Clement: "What then, does not the same economy prevail in hades, so that there, too, all the spirits might hear the gospel, repent and admit that their punishment, in the light of what they have learned, is just?"¹⁰⁹ A much older fragment offers a parallel to this: "I have become all in all that I might [establish?] the economy of the Father. . . . I have become an angel among angels. . . ."¹⁰¹ In both cases the Savior fulfills the Father's "economy" in other worlds even as he had in this one.

The parallel between the Lord's earthly and post-mortal missions is preserved even to the extent of having his coming in the spirit world heralded by John the Baptist. Origen says John "died before him, so that he might descend to the lower regions and announce [preach] his coming."¹⁰² And again: "For everywhere the witness and forerunner of Jesus is John, being born before and dying shortly before the Son of God, so that not only to those of his generation but likewise to those who lived before Christ should liberation from death be preached, and that he might everywhere prepare a people trained to receive the Lord."¹⁰³ "John the Baptist died first," wrote Hippolytus, "being dispatched by Herod, that he might prepare those in hades for the gospel; he became the fore-

runner there, announcing even as he did on this earth, that the Savior was about to come to ransom the spirits of the saints from the hand of death."¹⁰⁴ Even in the medieval Easter drama, the "Harrowing of Hell," the arrival of Christ in hell is heralded by John the Baptist.¹⁰⁵

(To be continued)

In the following reference "PG" stands for the Greek Patrologia and "PL" for the Latin. Roman numerals designate volumes and Arabic numerals columns.

¹⁰¹1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12

¹⁰²John 16:12: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you can not bear them now." Acts 10:41: "Not unto all the people, but unto witnesses chosen. . . ." Acts 15:28: "For it seemed good . . . to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. . . ." Clem. Recog. 1, 21: "Which things were plainly spoken but are not plainly written. . . ." 23, 52; III, 1: "I (Peter) . . . endeavor to avoid publishing the chief knowledge concerning the Supreme Divinity to unworthy ears. . . ." Clem. Alex. Strom. vi, 7, 61; Euseb. Hist. Eccl. II, 1, 4-5 (citing Clement). Innumerable passages on this head might be cited.

¹⁰³Matthew 15:16; 28:17 (even after the resurrection, "some doubted"); Mark 9:32; 16:14; Luke 8:25; 9:45; 13:34; 24:16; John 2:22-24; 3:32; 6:36; 6:60-67; 7:5; 11:13; 12:16; 13:7; 16:25-33 (This last is another lost teaching; in verse 25 the Lord promises that the time will come when he will speak plainly to the Apostles; after three short verses, announcing nothing new, they declare: "now speakest thou plainly. . . . Now we are sure that thou knowest all things. . . . What brought on such a change? What was it he told them? That we are not told.")

¹⁰⁴Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, pp. 304-336

¹⁰⁵*Id.* pp. 201-8

¹⁰⁶Schmidt, pp. 156-163, gives an extensive list of these; they were strictly orthodox. *Id.* 168-172, 190, 204

¹⁰⁷*Id.* 205: "It was universally believed in the early church that 'the last and highest revelations' were those given by the Lord after his resurrection, and that these dealt with 'the kingdom of God.'"

¹⁰⁸Tertullian left the main church because he did not find there the "spiritual gifts" (especially prophecy) which he felt the Church should have, and which he sought in the Montanist fold; for a description of the sort of thing he sought, Euseb. *Ecl. Hist.* v, 16; 18; Epiphanius, *Haeres.* c. 28 (48). Among other things the Montanists practised baptism for the dead, below n.

¹⁰⁹Origen, *De Principiis*, Praef. 4-10 states clearly the unsatisfactory state of knowledge in the church not on abstruse and detailed matters but in regards to first principles. In the whole discourse that follows his uncertainty is expressed in such repeated phrases as "Some such meaning seems to be suggested by the Apostle . . . as it were. . . ." (II, III, 2), or (regarding whether there be other worlds) "I con-

less myself ignorant, although, if any one can tell it, I would gladly learn." (II, III, 4), or "let each of our readers determine for himself. . . ." (id. 7). In dealing with basic first principles of the gospel, Origen is frankly at sea.

¹¹⁰St. Augustine's unsuccessful and very embarrassing attempt to find a just and merciful settlement to the problem of the unbaptized dead is treated below, notes 163-165. The *Confessions* is the story of a man who sought for revelation in the church, failed to find it, and so with great reluctance turned to philosophy as a poor second best; especially suggestive are passages in *Confess.* Book VI and VII.

¹¹¹For references, PL II, 787f, n. 70

¹¹²On the various terms designating the spirit world see Ph. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York, Harper's, 1919) I, 21, n. 6; II, 46, n. 2. Others may be found scattered throughout Schmidt, *op. cit.*, *passim*. The geographical hell first appears in Tertullian, *De Anima*, c. 55 (PL II, 787-8); in c. 7 (PL II, 998 [657]), he notes that since suffering must be physical, the spirits in prison must have corporeal bodies; a true African, he cannot believe that mere detention of the spirit could cause suffering; it is matter alone that suffers, he says.

¹¹³By this title we shall henceforth refer to the second-century Coptic Ms. found in 1895 and eked out by later texts, the whole edited by, published by, C. Schmidt and Isaak Wajenberg, under the title *Gespräche Jesu*, etc., see above n. 28. The passage cited is from p. 87 (xxi of the Coptic text).

¹¹⁴See *Lexicons*. In Plato's *Timaeus* xxiv (59) *anapausis* is an agreeable activity, devoid of any coercion.

¹¹⁵Schmidt-Wajenberg, pp. 74f

¹¹⁶*Id.* p. 63

¹¹⁷*Iren.*, *Epidex.*, c. 6; cf. *Haeres.* II, 20, 3

¹¹⁸*Ep.* Barnab. c. 16

¹¹⁹*Epist. ad Magnes.* 8, 1; 9, 2

¹²⁰Clem. Alex. *Stromat.* VI, 6 (PG ix, 265)

¹²¹*Acta Thomae*, p. 265, cit. Schmidt, *op. cit.* p. 558

¹²²*Iren.*, *Against the Heresies* II, 20, 3 (PG vii, 778)

¹²³*Orig. Contra Celsum* II, 56

¹²⁴*Dial. with Trypho* c. 5 (PG vi, 488), c. 45 (*id.* 573)

¹²⁵Cited in Schmidt, p. 489: The logion states that the Lord visited the dead and brought the Fathers and prophets of old from a lower to a higher *anapausis*.

¹²⁶*Ordo promotionis, ordo resurrectionis*, *Iren. Heres.* v, 30, 1; 31, 1 (PG vii, 1203-5; 1208), cf. *Epidexis* c. 56; 78

¹²⁷Clem. Alex. *Ecl. Propheet.* c. 56f (PG ix, 725) *Prokopé* expresses the idea of a temporary rest even better than *anapausis*, cf. above n.

¹²⁸*Stromat.* vi, 107, 2

¹²⁹*Philo. De Somn.* I, 23 (643)

¹³⁰St. Anselm, *Homily* No. 8 (PL clxvii, 637)

¹³¹Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, p. 86f; 315

¹³²*Ep.* Barnab. c. 16 (PG II, 776). It was extremely common in the second and especially third centuries to "spiritualize" actual practices, e.g., baptism, marriage, feasting, etc., without in any way implying that the real thing was done away with.

¹³³Hippolyt., *De Antichristo*, c. 26

¹³⁴*De Elcanam & Annam* frag. 4 (Hipp. I, 2) quoted at length in Schmidt, p. 509

¹³⁵*Sibyll.* viii, 310f

¹³⁶*Stromat.* vi, 6 (PG ix, 268)

¹³⁷*Sirach* xxiv, 32

¹³⁸Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 473

¹³⁹Justin, *Trypho* vi, 6 (PG vi, 645); *Iren. Heres.* III, 20, 4 (PG vii, 945); iv, 22 (PG 1045); iv, 33, 1 (PG 1208); it is also cited by Jerome, *Comment. in Evang. Matth.* iv, 27 (PL xxvi, 213).

¹⁴⁰Justin, *loc. cit.*; cf. Jerome, *ep. cit.* xv, 9

¹⁴¹Though he is inclined to separate the two traditions, Schmidt must nonetheless admit that the *descensus* and the *Keryma* are found inseparably joined from the very first.

¹⁴²*Acta Thomae*, p. 265, *op. cit.*, Schmidt, p. 558

¹⁴³*Od. Sol.* 42, 1.19

¹⁴⁴*Id.* 17

¹⁴⁵"And he was crucified, and went down to Hades, and broke through the barrier which till then had never been breached; and he awoke the dead, and went down alone, but came up with a great host towards his Father." Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* I, 13, 20 citing the letter of Thaddaeus to Abgar, one of the most ancient of all Christian documents.

¹⁴⁶Tertullian, *De Anima*, c. 55 (PL II, 788)

¹⁴⁷References in PL II, 1372, s. v. *compos*

¹⁴⁸*Iren. Heres.* iv, 33 (PG vii, 1081)

¹⁴⁹Origen, *c. Cels.* II, 43 (PG xi, 864-5)

¹⁵⁰*Stromat.* vi, 48, 3

¹⁵¹Schmidt-Wajenberg, *Epist. Apost.* pp. 49, 51

¹⁵²*Orig. in Luc. Homil.*, c. 4 (PG xiii, 1811)

¹⁵³*Orig. in Evang. Joh.*, II, 30 (PG xiv, 181)

¹⁵⁴Hippolyt., *De Antichr.* c. 45

¹⁵⁵Thus in the Anglo-Saxon version, R. P. Wülker, *Bibl. d. Angelsächs. Poesie* (Leipzig, 1897) III.1.177

Let's Talk It Over

(Concluded from page 59)

"speak up"—to be articulate about his whole-souled beliefs. At the risk of lack of finesse, lack of subtlety—even the risk of being "obvious," I would resolve to define the virtues, as I see them, for those who come under my care—that continuity and purpose and understanding should cement the generations and help bring mankind to joy.



—Schoenfeld Collection—From Three Lions
PAUL IN MEDITATION

III

HOW THE DEAD RECEIVED BAPTISM

JOHN'S function in the spirit world, like the Savior's, was identical with his mission on this earth. Yet his very special mission here was to baptize. Likewise the worldly preaching of the Lord and the Apostles was to prepare their hearers for baptism. It is not surprising then to read in the *Pastor of Hermas*, one of the most trustworthy guides to the established beliefs of the early church, that not only Christ and John but also "these Apostles, and the teachers who had proclaimed the name of the Son of God, after they had fallen asleep in [the] power and faith of the Son of God preached likewise to the dead; and they gave them the seal of the preaching. They accordingly went down with them into the water and came out again. But although they went down while they were alive and came up alive, those who had fallen asleep before them (*prokekoi-memenoi*) went down dead, but came out again living; for it was through these that they were made alive, and learned the name of the Son of God."¹⁰⁰ The Latin version (Cod. Vat. 3848) reads: "these Apostles and teachers who had preached the name of the Son of God, when they died in possession of his faith and power, preached to those who had died before, and themselves gave them this seal. Hence [*igitur*] they went down into the water with them;

but they who had died before went down dead, of course, but ascended living, since it was through them that they received life and knew the Son of God."¹⁰⁰

Needless to say, this text has caused a great deal of embarrassment to interpreters, ancient and modern. The source of the trouble is obvious: there are *two* classes of living persons referred to, those who enjoy eternal life, and those who have not yet died on this earth. The Apostles (or whoever "they" were) belonged to the latter class when they went down *living* to be baptized for those who had gone *before*; a sharp contrast is made between their state—they being

I went down and spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, your fathers, and declared unto them how they might rise, and with my right hand I gave them the baptism of life and release and forgiveness of all evil, even as I do to you here and to all who believe on me from this time on."¹⁰⁰

In hotly denying that the Hebrew prophets and patriarchs received the seal of baptism in the other world, the Marcionites only add to our evidence that the early Church did believe.¹⁰¹

Are we to believe on the strength of these passages that the primitive Church held that the Christ *personally* baptized all the disciples? That would make Jesus the only baptizer, and such in fact St. Augustine re-

BAPTISM FOR THE

alive both before and after the ordinance—and that of those who were actually dead and yet received eternal life through the ministrations of baptism. What is perfectly clear is that the Apostles while they were still living performed an ordinance—the earthly ordinance of baptism in water—which concerned the welfare of those who had already died. That it was an earthly baptism which could only be performed with water is emphatically stated in the sentences immediately preceding those cited: "It is necessary, he said, for them to come up through the water in order to be made alive; for otherwise none can enter the Kingdom of God . . . therefore even the dead receive the seal. . . . The seal is of course, the water."¹⁰²

"I think," says Clement of Alexandria, commenting on this passage, "that it was necessary for the best of the Apostles to be imitators of their Master on the other side as well as here, that they might convert the gentile dead as he did the Hebrew."¹⁰³ Elsewhere he says: "Christ visited, preached to, and baptized the just men of old, both gentiles and Jews, not only those who lived before the coming of the Lord, but also those who were before the coming of the Law . . . such as Abel, Noah, or any such righteous man."¹⁰⁴ In the "Discourses to the Apostles" Jesus says:

peatedly insists he is: though acting through various ministers, it is always and only Christ himself who is baptizing.¹⁰⁵ How is that possible? Long before the days of Augustine the "Discourses to the Apostles" gives us the explanation, telling how the Lord promised his Apostles that they would become "fathers, and masters, and servants," which he elucidates thus:

. . . servants [*diakonoi*] because they [the dead] will receive the baptism of life and the forgiveness of sins *from my hand through you*, and so have part in the heavenly kingdom."¹⁰⁶

As the Apostles in all their work are simply acting for their Lord, so all the ordinances they perform in his name are to be regarded as his own but done *vicariously*.

This principle of vicarious work, running through the whole economy of the church, also unties another knot which has no other solution. Were the spirits of the dead actually baptized with water? There is indeed a baptism of the spirit, but as Cyril,¹⁰⁷ Tertullian,¹⁰⁸ and others¹⁰⁹ point out, one simply cannot escape the physical element in baptism: indeed, Paul cites baptism for the dead as definite argument for belief in a physical resurrection.¹¹⁰ How then can the incorporeal dead be baptized? As we have seen, the *Pastor Hermæ* describes the living

¹⁰⁰Numbers, continued from last month, refer to bibliography at end of article.

the interest of the dead, without saying exactly how it was done.¹²⁷ One alternative was to explain the rite as the actual baptism of dead bodies—a counsel of desperation.¹²⁸ Quite unsatisfactory also is the theory that “before the righteous can enter Paradise, Christ must lead them through a fiery river to receive baptism,” since our source (Origen) specifies that no one can be baptized in this river who has not been “first baptized with water and the Holy Ghost on this earth.”¹²⁹ Quite as inadequate as this were theories of a sort of heavenly baptism to take the place of the missing earthly one; thus Albertus Magnus:

the same perplexity, and follow the same violent and arbitrary method of explaining how St. Paul said one thing while meaning something totally different. Because there is only one baptism, we are to be told forever henceforward, there can be no baptism for the dead. But that is the very reason why there *must* be baptism for the dead, which is not another baptism or another kind of baptism but in every detail the identical ordinance which is administered to the living and to them only, and therefore can profit the dead (who must have it if they are to be saved) only when done for them by proxy. Later writers, such as St. Ambrose,

church, Epiphanius explains:

Others interpret the saying (I Cor. 15: 29) finely [*kalos*], claiming that those who are on the point of death if they are catechumens (candidates for baptism) are to be considered worthy, in view of the expectation of baptism which they had before their death. They point out that he who has died shall also rise again, and hence will stand in need of that forgiveness of sins that comes through baptism.¹²⁷

In the fourth century, St. Ambrose recalled, but did not approve, the practice:

Fearing that a dead person who had never been baptized would be resurrected badly [*male*] or not at all, a living person would be baptized in the name of the dead one. Hence he [Paul] adds: “Else why are they baptized for them?” According to this he does not approve of what is done but shows the firm faith in the resurrection [that it implies].¹³⁰

Ambrose is following Tertullian: Paul doesn't approve. Where does he disapprove? It is true that he wishes to emphasize the intention in this case, and not discuss the practice, which like Ignatius he takes for granted¹³¹ (in fact, his casual mention of it without explanation indicates perfect familiarity with it on the part of the saints), but only as a last resort would one pounce on that as proof that he disapproved the custom. He certainly does not cite a practice which he condemns, for that, of course, would weaken his argument: if baptism for the dead is *wrong*, why should it be cited to strengthen that faith in the resurrection which it illustrates? Oecumenius even suggests that Paul says “why do *they* baptize for the dead” instead of “why do *you*” for fear of offending his hearers and possibly causing them to give up the practice.¹³² Attempts to find in Paul's words a condemnation of baptism for the dead were carried to their ultimate conclusion by Peter the Venerable in the twelfth century. His argument deserves to be quoted at length as an example of where this sort of thing leads to.

They were baptized at that time for the unbaptized dead, with good intention but not wisely, supposing that since they had not received baptism while alive, they could help out the dead by baptizing living persons for them. Speaking of which work the Apostle temporizes, praising the intention of the baptizers while not approving the baptism. For as far as baptism is con-

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DEAD in Ancient Times

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He to whom baptism has been denied not through contempt of religion, but by necessity, does not lose the fruits of baptism, but is to be considered as baptized by the baptism of the flame of the Holy Spirit.¹³³

The early church, however, was not obliged to seek such vague consolations, for it had the solution.

Speaking of I Corinthians 15:29, Tertullian expostulates:

Now if some of them are “baptized for the dead,” can we not assume that they have a reason for it? Certainly he [Paul] is maintaining that they practised this in the belief that the ordinance would be a vicarious baptism and as such be advantageous to the flesh of others, which they assumed would be resurrected, for unless this referred to a physical resurrection there would be no point in carrying out a physical baptism.¹³⁴

But later Tertullian has doubts (how far they already seem to be from the Primitive Church!):

I don't believe that the Apostle was giving his approval to the practice, but rather signifying that those who practised it thereby indicated their belief in a physical resurrection, being foolishly [*vane*] baptized for the dead. . . . For elsewhere he speaks of only one baptism. Therefore to baptize “for the dead” means to baptize for *bodies*; for the body, as we have demonstrated, is really dead.¹³⁵

are not disturbed by the types and varieties of baptism practised in their day because, they explain, there is after all really only one baptism, which is the baptism of Christ.¹³⁶ By the same token the argument of one baptism would be worthless as a refutation of baptism for the dead, which is also the baptism of Christ. The Bishop of Bristol observed that Tertullian in changing his opinion on the subject apparently concluded that baptism for the dead was “an idle fancy, on which it was unlikely that St. Paul should found an argument.”¹³⁷ How then do we explain the perfectly obvious fact that St. Paul *did* found an argument on it?

At the beginning of the fifth century Epiphanius reports:

From Asia and Gaul has reached us the account [tradition] of a certain practice, namely, that when any die without baptism among them, they baptize others in their place and in their name, so that, rising in the resurrection, they will not have to pay the penalty of having failed to receive baptism, but rather will become subject to the authority of the Creator of the World. For this reason this tradition which has reached us is said to be the very thing to which the Apostle himself refers when he says, “If the dead rise not at all, what shall they do who are baptized for the dead?”¹³⁸

It is significant to find this practice surviving in those outlying places where, as Irenaeus points out, the pure old Christian doctrine was best

(Continued from page 91)

cerned he does not approve of the baptism of one person for another, living or dead, but he obviously approves and seconds the intention of those who are baptizing, who the works of the living were able to baptize out the dead by such means as baptism. . . . But he recognizes that it is *not* the work of baptism (for there is only *one* baptism) but by various *other* works (and there are many) that the living are able to help the dead.¹²¹

St. Paul wants to say that the living can help the dead *not* by being baptized for them but by certain other works, so of course instead of mentioning any of those many other works he specifies only baptism. Word-juggling, the avocation of the Middle Ages, could hardly go further. Note that the stubborn Paul can only be handled if he is charged with temporizing! "Living or dead" is pure sophistry, since of course the living should not be baptized for the living, and by that very token must be baptized for the dead, who cannot (as the living can) be baptized for themselves. We have seen that the "one baptism" argument, far from condemning it, is in fact one of the strongest arguments in favor of vicarious baptizing for the dead.

Nowhere the Venerable Peter says: "They were being baptized for the dead" refers to the good works which the living were doing for the dead," except, that is, baptism, "for it is *not* by baptism but by *other* good works of the living; it is to these and *not* to baptism that the Apostle refers."¹²² Which is precisely why he says baptism, for by strange logic when the Apostle says black he really means white, and that is why he says black.

To such extremes of wresting the scripture were the medieval churchmen driven in their determination to discredit an ordinance which the church had lost. Thus Oecumenius decides that "for the dead" really means "for those whom you falsely suppose to be dead"; falsely, because "dead" necessarily means perpetually dead, and if they are going to rise again, they cannot be that, so that Paul when he says "the dead" does not mean the dead at all.¹²³ Just as when he said "baptize," he of course meant anything but baptize. Chrysostome and Photius following Tertullian, tried to show that "for the dead" does not

mean "for the dead" but for the *body* which, since it dies, must be considered as dead.¹²⁴ Others (Theodoret, Zonaras, Balsamer, etc.) argued that it means "to be baptized for the dead *works* of sin."¹²⁵ It may mean that, according to St. Bruno, or else "the dead" may refer to "those who are to perish because of sin." He even suggests that Paul is shaming the Corinthians by showing them that even people who are so *wicked* as to baptize for the dead have faith in the resurrection, so why shouldn't they? He does not fail to mention, as all our other sources do, that baptism for the dead was actually practised in the early church by certain members who "would baptize themselves in the place of a dead parent who had never had the gospel, thereby securing the salvation of a father or a mother in the resurrection."¹²⁶ St. John Damascene suggests that "the dead" means either the body or the works of sin,¹²⁷ while Lanfranc was for its signifying "the works of death," but goes on to point out that there are people who believe that the passage is to be understood literally, "but it is not to be believed on the authority of the stupid that the Apostle intended to approve a thing *which has been a subject of so much uncertainty among the highest authorities.*"¹²⁸

By the seventeenth century a German savant was able to produce from the writings of the churchmen no fewer than seventeen different interpretations of I Corinthians 15: 29.¹²⁹

To return to early practices, an interesting aberration of the rite is found among the Marcionites. When a catechumen died, they would lay a living person under his bed; then they would ask the corpse if he wished to receive baptism, to which the living person under the bed would reply in the affirmative; then the living person would be baptized for the dead one.¹³⁰ Theophylactus, commenting on this in the eleventh century, says that when the Marcionites were upbraided for this practice, they would cite I Corinthians 15:29 in their defense; but they were wrong, he insists, since what Paul *really* meant to say (here we go again!) was, what should they do who were baptized expect-

ing their own dead bodies to rise again,¹³¹ i.e., who were baptized for themselves!

The Marcionite practice is a halfway point between baptism for the dead and the later rite of baptism of the dead. "Why do we not baptize the dead?" asks Fulgentius, and rightly points out that baptism is a rite requiring both body and spirit; if a disembodied spirit is not a fit candidate, neither is an inanimate piece of flesh.¹³² "Even though one should have displayed his will and intention in life," he explains, "and shown faith and devotion, yet once dead, even though it means that he is to be without the sacrament of baptism, he may not be baptized; because the will, faith, and devotion which justify such a baptism belong to the spirit which has departed."¹³³ Nothing could be more reasonable; baptism may only be performed on a living person. This of course is an unanswerable argument for baptism by proxy: if the dead may not be baptized and yet is to enjoy salvation, there is no other way out. Baptism of the dead misses the whole point: it is the exact opposite of baptism for the dead, the one rendering the other perfectly useless. Yet in their need to find some official condemnation of baptism for the dead, churchmen have had to resort to citing those instances which deal with condemnation of its opposite, namely baptism of the dead.¹³⁴ This deliberate confusion (the Latter-day Saints have been accused of baptizing the dead) is natural enough and seems to have been an early one, for Philastrius includes "baptizing the dead" among a number of false and exaggerated charges against the Cataphrygians in the fourth century.¹³⁵

WHO in the church performed the actual ordinance of baptizing for the dead? It was "those apostles and teachers" of the first generation according to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, who "went down living into the water" in behalf of those who had died,¹³⁶ and in speaking of the whole affair as a thing of the past that source implies that the work was confined to those men and their generation. This is clearly borne out in our other accounts.

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Opportunity Knocks Again

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To begin with, it was not all Christians who baptized for the dead, for Paul reminds the Corinthians that "they," namely someone else and not the Corinthians (who were "but babes") did the work. But who were "they"? A very large class of believers is eliminated by confining the doctrine to the teachings of Christ's *second* ministry, which were only received by a limited number of people. It will be recalled that in his discussion with the Apostles, the Lord promised them the keys at some future time; since this conversation took place shortly before the crucifixion, and since Jesus himself *postponed* any discussion of the mysteries of the kingdom "till the Son of Man be risen from the dead,"¹¹⁴ we can believe that nothing much was done in the matter during his first mission. In a passage of impeccable authority Eusebius quotes Clement as saying: "To James the Just, and to John and to Peter *after* the resurrection the Lord transmitted the gnosis; these passed it on to the other Apostles, and they in turn to the Seventy, of whom Barnabas was one."¹¹⁵ Note the careful limitation of this teaching: Peter did not announce it to the whole church, nor the Apostles to all the world, nor is there mention of "the gnosis" being handed down any further than to the Seventy, though that would certainly be Eusebius' main interest in the passage if it were so.¹¹⁶ "The gnosis" is that fulness of knowledge, which Paul always speaks of as the highest and holiest of God's gifts, a rare, choice, and hidden thing, reserved for but a few.¹¹⁷ Just how few were eligible to receive the risen Lord is painfully clear in all the gospel accounts of his second mission.

(To be continued)

In the following references "PG" stands for the Greek Patrologia and "PL" for the Latin. Roman numerals designate volumes and Arabic numerals columns.

¹¹⁴*Hermæ Pastor* III, Simil. ix, 16; we are following the various texts given in Max Dressel, *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera* (Leipzig, 1863), pp. 548-9, 631.

¹¹⁵*Stromat.* vi, 6 (PG ix, 258).

¹¹⁶*Id.* ii, 9 (PG viii, 980 [163]); Clement cites the entire passage from *Pastor Hermæ* III, 16; he also quotes Deut. 32, 21; Is. 65, 1-2; Rom. 10, 20-21; 2, 14.

¹¹⁷Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 315; cf. 317f: "Christ not only appears as a preacher in the lower world, but also as one administering baptism; and here, too, his activity runs parallel to his earthly mission." Cf. *Id.* 3, 22-26; 4, 1.

¹¹⁸The Gnostics would not tolerate the idea that any who lived under the Old Law could be saved, but instead they insisted that Christ went to the lower world and liberated only the enemies of the ancient prophets and patriarchs! Thus Theodoret, *Haer. Fab.* I, 24; Epiphanius, *Haeres.* xlii, 4 (PG

xli, 700-1); Iren., *Haeres.* I, 27, 3.

¹¹⁹St. Augustine, *Epist.* 89, in PL xxxiii, 311; *Non minister sed ipse Christus est qui baptizat.* So likewise in PL xliii, 77; 368-9; 371-2; 1419; 1428; 1437.

¹²⁰Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, pp. 135-7.

¹²¹Cyrill Alex., *Cat. iii de Baptismo*, c. 8 (PG xxxiii, 440): "For since a man is two-fold, consisting of body and spirit, so also must be the purification . . . the water cleans the body, the spirit seals the soul." Cf. *id.* c. 4 (429, 432 in PG) and *Cat. xiii de Christ. Crucif. et Sepult.* (Id. 797-800) and PG xxxiii, 41, 44, 193.

¹²²Tertull., *De Baptismo* iv, vii (PL I, 1312; 1315).

¹²³Thus Fulgentius, *Epist.* xi, 4 (PL lxx, 379; 388);

" . . . once one has died without the sacrament of baptism, he may not be baptized, because the spirit, to which belonged that will and faithful devotion (which justify baptism) has departed." Cf. Crisostomus, *Brev. Canon.* No. 147 (PL lxxxviii, 925).

¹²⁴Corinthians 15:29; see below.

¹²⁵Catholic commentators regard the status of living and dead as referring only to spiritual or eternal life, *Hermæ Pastor Similitudes*, *Bibl. Sanct. Patr.* (Ser. 1) iv, p. 291, n. 2. This completely ignores the fact that the dead receive a real baptism in water, no explanation being offered as to how the mortal baptizandi erant.

¹²⁶See below, notes 143-6.

¹²⁷Orig., *In Luc. Homil.* c. 24 (PG xlii, 1864-5); on the river of Bre, Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

¹²⁸Alb. Mag., *De Sacram. euchar.* vi, 2, 1, cited by Elmenhorst in PL lviii, 1042, who gives a list of medieval writers holding the same opinion, *id.* 1043.

¹²⁹Tertull., *De Resurrectione* c. 48 (PL ii, 854).

¹³⁰Against Marcion vi, 10 (PL ii, 495).

¹³¹St. Ambrose, *Epist.* No. 72, PL xvi, 1302; *De Sac.* Id. 443; on the same subject St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon* No. 171 (PL lli, 647).

¹³²John, Bp. of Bristol, *Ecclesiastical History* . . . illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian (London, 1825), p. 143.

¹³³Epiphanius, *Adv. Haeres.* I, 28, Sect. 6 (PG xli, 384).

¹³⁴Iren., *Contra Haeres.* III, 4, 2.

¹³⁵Epiphanius, *loc. cit.*

¹³⁶Ambrose, *Comment. in Epist. I ad Cor.* (PL xvii, 163f).

¹³⁷Ignatius in the *Epist. to the Magnesians* viii, 1 and ix, 2, assumes like St. Paul, that his readers know all about the work of baptism for the dead, as Schmidt demonstrates, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

¹³⁸Oecumenius, *Comment. in Epist. I ad Cor.* xv, 29 (PG cxviii, 877).

¹³⁹Peter the Venerable, *Adversus Haereticos*, PL cxxxix, 831f.

¹⁴⁰*Id.* 832.

¹⁴¹Op. cit. PG cxviii, 876f (567).

¹⁴²P. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire D'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris, 1907f) II, I, 380.

¹⁴³*Loc. cit.*

¹⁴⁴St. Bruno, *Expos. in Ep. I ad Cor.* xv, 29 (PL cliii, 209).

¹⁴⁵Joh. Damascene, *In Ep. ad Cor. I* (PG xcvi, 693 [117]).

¹⁴⁶Lanfranc, *Comment. in Ep. I Cor.* (PL cli, 210).

¹⁴⁷It was Heinr. Müller, in 1656; see Cabrol & Leclercq, *op. cit.* II, 380.

¹⁴⁸*Id.* II, 381, citing Mgr. Lamy and Manganot's *Dict. de Theol. Cath.* II, 364.

¹⁴⁹John Chrysostome, *Homil.* 40, in I Cor. (PG lxi, 347).

¹⁵⁰Theophylact., *Epos. in Ep. I ad Cor.* xv, 29 (PG cxvii, 768).

¹⁵¹Fulgent., *Epist.* xii, 9 (20) (PL lxx, 388).

¹⁵²*Loc. cit.*, cf. 379.

¹⁵³Cabrol & Leclercq produce no laws or regulations against baptism for the dead, but cite as having the same force those specifically directed against baptism of the dead, e.g. 3rd Council of Carthage (PL xli, 734), Canon law in PL xcvi, 1049, 9; Cf. Theodoret, *Haeres. Fabul.* I, xi (PG lxxxiii, 36), which they also cite.

¹⁵⁴Philastrius, *Lob. de Haeres.* c. 49 (PL xli, 1166); the Cataphrygians were a branch of the Montanists, noted, if nothing else, for their sobriety. Yet Philastrius mentions rumors of savage and bloody sacramental rites.

¹⁵⁵*Supra*, n. 106.

¹⁵⁶It is precisely in ordering the Apostles "to tell no man that thing" that the Lord tells them how he is presently to be put to death, Mark 8:30-31; Luke 9:21-22; Matt. 16:20-21. The injunction to secrecy is the same in the "gates of hell" discussion as on the Mount, when "they kept it close and told no man in that day . . ." Luke 10:36, since they were commanded to "tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead," Matt. 17:9; the same in Mark 9:9.

¹⁵⁷Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* II, I, 4-5.

¹⁵⁸Eusebius describes as the purpose of his history "to record the successions of the holy apostles . . . down to the present, and to tell . . . what individuals in the most prominent positions eminently governed and presided over the church. . . ." *Op. cit.* I, I, 1. The "most prominent" offices in the church of his own day he regards as the four great bishoprics of Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria, which are the main lines of succession from the Apostles, yet he is unable to furnish an instance in which "the gnosis" is given to one of these. Tertullian is very clear and specific in this matter: "you are reversing and altering the manifest intention of the Lord in endowing Peter personally . . . for he says 'I shall

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THE IMPROVEMENT ERA

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

IV

in *Ancient Times*

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CHRIST'S second mission caught everyone, from weeping Mary to doubting Thomas, completely by surprise, "for as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead." (John 20:9.) The news of the Lord's return was heard by everyone, within the church and without, then as now, with incredulity, and Matthew can end his gospel with the discouraging words: "And when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted," while the closing scenes in Mark and Luke show the Savior rebuking the Apostles with great severity for "their unbelief and hardness of heart." The gospels duly note the peculiar circumstance that it was apparently possible for some to doubt even in the presence of those who were actually beholding the risen Lord. One is forcibly reminded of the appearance of resurrected beings to witnesses in modern times, and by all accounts we must recognize that Jesus' second mission was not a public preaching but a series of revelations, "not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen. . . ." (Acts 10:41.) In fact it soon became common in the church to doubt that this second mission had ever taken place: the phrases "they deny the resurrection," "they say that he was only a man," meet us from the very first in the writings of apostolic times, where they recur with the regularity of set formulas. Ignatius describes this attitude when he says that he hears people in the church saying, "if I don't find it in the archives, I won't believe it."¹²³ As Eisler has shown, the records in question were the *Acta Passionis Jesu Christi*, the official court transcript of the trial and sentence of Jesus, which did not extend, of course, beyond his death.¹²⁴ To say that one would only believe what was in the archives was to say that one would only believe in the Savior's first mission.

"If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not," the Master had said, "how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?"

(John 3:12.) It is not necessary here to labor the point of "milk and not meat," "pearls before swine," "to you it is given to know . . . but to them it is not given," etc., to show that knowledge of the gospel was anciently imparted only to that degree in which people could receive it.¹²⁵ But if only a few could receive it at first, did it not in time spread to many? Far from it.¹²⁶ Eusebius explains the situation in a citation from Hegesippus: "When the holy chorus of the Apostles ended their lives in various ways, and that generation passed away of those who had heard the divine wisdom with their own ears, at that very time the conspiracy of godless error took its beginning through the deception of false teachers who, when the last remaining Apostle had gone, first came out into the open and opposed the preaching of the truth with what was *falsely* styled the gnosis."¹²⁷ The last expression is the identical term used by Paul when he warns Timothy to beware of the very class of people here described.¹²⁸ With the passing of the Apostles the teachers of false doctrine, as if they had been awaiting a signal, "sprang up like mushrooms," to use Irenaeus' expression, each claiming to have *the* gnosis that Christ had given the Apostles after his resurrection.

This outbreak of gnostic pretenders, which was no passing flurry but lasted for over a hundred years, never could have occurred had apostolic authority remained in the church to overawe the upstarts, or had the true "gnosis" been available to oppose their false ones. In taking the gnosis away from them, the Apostles had left the field free to swarms of impostors; which is exactly what the Apostles themselves had predicted would happen.¹²⁹ As for the gnosis, Paul tells the Corinthians

unequivocally: "the gnosis shall be taken away."¹³⁰ He explains that the three great gifts of prophecy, tongues, and the gnosis are all to be removed from the church, and in their place be left only the more general gifts of faith, hope, and love, "these three." To soften or justify the loss of such great things he explains that at the time those gifts are only partial anyway: "We only know (possess gnosis) in part, and only prophesy in part" (or, "in proportion to our lot, or dispensation"), but he looks forward to the time "when the fulness shall come," and things partial be done away with. "For the present moment," he states significantly, "we see in a mirror [as] in an enigma. . . . For the time being there remain faith, hope, and love—these three."¹³¹ To Paul's hearers an enigma was a concealed teaching, not to be understood without a key: Jesus, it will be recalled, accused the Jewish experts in the law of hiding "the key of the gnosis" (Luke 11:53), while Paul charged that the law itself had become a mere parody of the gnosis. (Romans 2:20.)

IF nothing was lost of Christ's teachings, why do the Apostolic Fathers, the immediate successors of the Apostles, regard themselves as immeasurably beneath the latter in the knowledge of heavenly things? At the very beginning Polycarp protests: "neither I nor any other such one can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul,"¹³² while Clement tells the Corinthians of his day that they are no longer under the direction of proven Apostles or men appointed by such,¹³³ and Ignatius tells the Romans: "I do not as Peter and Paul issue commandments to you; they were Apostles of Jesus Christ; I am but a condemned man. . . ."¹³⁴ This is no special deference to the Roman Church, as Catholic theologians claim, for the Trallians no less he says, "I cannot use a high manner in writing to you . . . I do not issue orders like an Apostle," and he adds significantly:

I would like to write to you of heavenly things [in some versions, "things more full of mystery"], but I fear to do so, lest

¹²³Numbers, which are continued from the last article, refer to bibliography at end of article.

I should mind . . . you are but babes. . . . You would be strangled by such things. . . . For though I am able to understand heavenly things . . . yet I am not perfect, nor am I a disciple such as Paul or Peter.¹⁶⁴

But Ignatius was perhaps the greatest living authority on doctrine. When soon after writing this he was put to death, what became of that knowledge of "heavenly things" which he refused to divulge to one of the oldest branches of the church? The Romans and Trallians had the gospels, which thus cannot have contained the information he was holding back.

THE bankruptcy of the church after the passing of the Apostles became glaringly apparent in her struggle with the "Gnostics so-called." In the first place, the sudden and immense success of the Gnostics showed only too plainly, as Neander has observed, that people were looking for something which the church could no longer supply.¹⁶⁵ Then, too, the fact that the church yielded to the Gnostics on point after point, adopting many of their more popular practices and beliefs, shows that she had nothing to put in their place.¹⁶⁶ The fact that the church finally denied that there ever was a gnosis, and defined the heresy of Gnosticism not as a false claim to possess higher revelations (the early writers are always careful to give it this meaning), but the mere belief that such revelations had

ever existed, is enough that the church no longer possessed "the gnosis" to which the New Testament repeatedly refers.¹⁶⁷ When the church fights shy of the very word and is alarmed at the mere suggestion that there could be such a thing, it needs no argument to show how little of it she still possessed.

The Gnostic pretenders bear important witness to the nature of the thing they were copying. Just as they recognized that the name of Christ was essential to the work and accordingly "went about bearing the name of Christ," so they recognized also that they should not be without the gifts of the spirit, or baptism for the dead, of which they devised various spurious versions, as we have seen. More significant are those purist cults of the second century, striving to return to the original order of the church, who included baptism for the dead among their practices. Such were the Cataphrygian branch of the Montanists, mentioned above. It was the Montanists whom Tertullian joined when he left the big church in his vain search for the lost gifts and blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ.

It should now be fairly obvious that work for the dead did not outlast that generation for which the "end" had been predicted, nor spread beyond the circle of those possessing what the ancient church called "the gnosis," that is (to fol-

shared the knowledge of those "many hidden things" which are not set forth in our present scripture.¹⁶⁸

EARLY DISAPPEARANCE OF THE DOCTRINE

It is immediately after mentioning the preaching of the gospel "to them that are dead" that Peter ominously adds, "But the end of all things is at hand. . . ." (I Peter 4: 6-7.) In the "Discourse to the Apostles" the Lord thus describes the fate of the great teachings he has given them:

Another doctrine will arise and with it confusion; for they will seek their own advancement and bring forth a useless doctrine. And it will cause vexation even unto death; and they will teach and turn away those who believed on me and lead them away from eternal life.¹⁶⁹

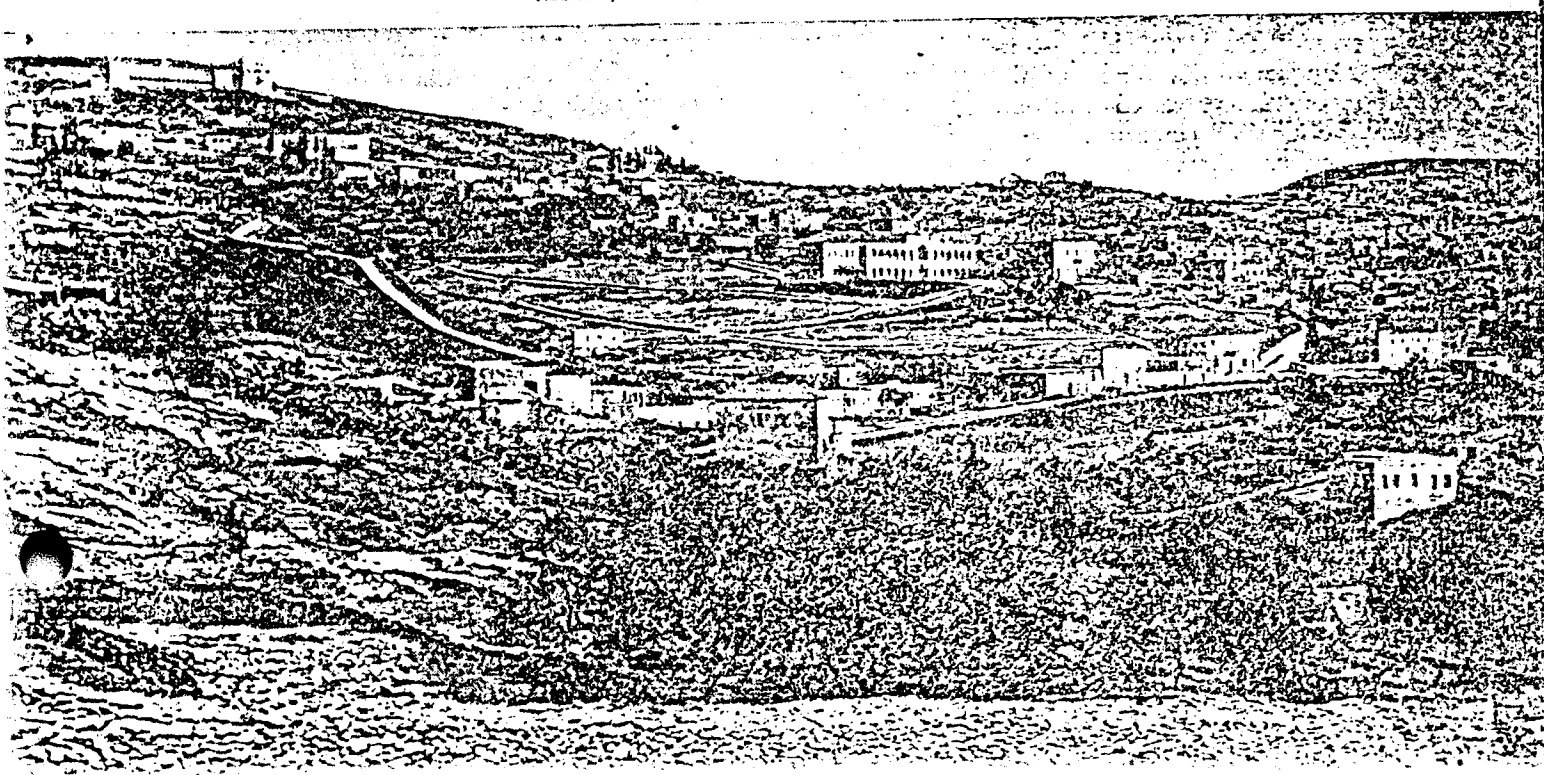
This constant refrain of a complete falling away runs through all the apostolic writings, where the saints are repeatedly warned against assuming (as many modern Christians do)¹⁷⁰ that such a falling away is impossible.¹⁷¹ This is not the place to examine the disappearance of the true church as a whole, but it is in order to point out that the saints had from the first been taught to expect it.

That the people of the primitive church were looking forward to an immediate end is granted by all students of church history, who usually interpret this as a mistaken and

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Nazareth, Palestine, where the Savior lived as a child

—Alice Schalek from *Three Lions*



(Continued from page 147)

starry-eyed expectation of the second coming of Christ.¹⁷² It was nothing of the sort. While the Apostles and Apostolic Fathers all keep repeating that "the end" is at hand, they not only refuse to commit themselves on any time, soon or late, for the coming of Christ, but denounce as deceivers those who do. Peter warns emphatically that "the end of all things is at hand," yet when it comes to the question of "the promise of his coming" he counsels the saints to allow a possible margin of at least a thousand years.¹⁷³ He is speaking of two events, the one immediate, the other absolutely indeterminate, as is Paul when he addresses the Corinthians as at the last extremity of a great emergency, with the time desperately short (I Cor. 7:29ff), only to speak in a totally different tone when discussing the return of the Lord: "be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled . . . as that the day of Christ is at hand," going on to explain that there must be a falling away first, and that that has just begun. (II Thessalonians 2:1-7.) In all their troubles the release that the saints expect is not that Christ shall presently come down to them, but that they shall presently go to him. Paul's attitude is typical: the Lord is not coming down to rescue him, but rather he himself shall quickly depart, and after that departure things shall go ill with the world and the church; there are to be wolves on earth, not angels; love shall wax cold, error abound, the church turn away from sound doctrine; and the mystery of iniquity which "doth already work" shall come to its own. He describes himself as a man working against time:

. . . three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:31.)

Why the terrible urgency, and why the tears, if the church was to win in the end? It is not the coming of Christ that leads John to observe, "little children, it is the last time," but rather the coming of the anti-Christ—the very opposite!¹⁷⁴ "It is wintertime of the just," the Pastor of Hermas proclaims, and it will be a long one, for the Lord "is as one taking a far journey;" at some future time is to burst upon the

world "the summertime of the just."¹⁷⁵ Meantime the people of the early church were as likely to confuse winter and summer as to identify "the end of all things" with "the restoration of all things." A clear and authentic statement of the situation is given in the closing section of the famous *Didaché*:

For in the last days the false prophets and the corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall change to hate; for as lawlessness increases they shall hate one another and persecute and betray, and then shall appear the one who leads the world astray as [the] Son of God, and he shall do signs and wonders and the earth shall be given over into his hands and he shall commit iniquities which have never been since the world began. . . . 5. Then shall the creation of mankind come to the fiery trial. . . . 6. and then shall appear the signs of the truth. First the sign spread out in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead, but not of all the dead. . . . 8. Then shall the world "see the Lord coming on the clouds of Heaven. . . ."

He who is to come forthwith is not the Christ but a deceiver, and before the Lord can come again very special manifestations, "the signs of truth," must precede him.

All this, of course, goes back to the Savior's own teaching (Matthew 24): ". . . many shall come in my name . . . and shall deceive many . . . but the end is not yet . . . these are the beginning of sorrows," etc., with the promise, "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Repeatedly the saints are told that they will be hated of all men, persecuted, and slain, and always a comforting promise is given. That promise is never, either in the New Testament or in the Apostolic Fathers, that the church will be victorious in the end, but always and only that a reward awaits the individual on the other side. Summarizing his career, Paul says, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth . . ." What is to be henceforth? One expects the natural and heartening announcement that henceforth the church is secure, the work established, the devil overcome. But one looks in vain in any apostolic writer for such a hopeful declaration. Instead we are given the frightening promise that

. . . the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. . . .

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth . . . (II Timothy 4:3-4).

as the Galatians (Galatians 1:6) and "all they which are in Asia" (II Tim. 1:15) had already begun to do.

It is highly significant that the hope of final triumph for the cause, that vision of the church filling and dominating the entire world which is the perpetual boast and comfort of the writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, is never so much as hinted at in apostolic times, even when the saints are most hard pressed and that would be their natural comfort.¹⁷⁶ Were those people so self-engrossed that they could never find any cause for consolation or congratulation in the pleasing thought that others would some day benefit by their sufferings? Why this perfect silence regarding the ultimate triumph of the church? Simply because there was to be no such triumph.¹⁷⁷

Astonishing as it seems, then, the immediate second coming of Christ, which everyone seems to take for granted as the basic doctrine of the early church, is not only not proclaimed among its writings, but is definitely precluded by the expected rule of evil, which also rules out completely any belief in an immediate end of the world. There was to be an end, and that end was at hand, with the winter and the wolves closing in: "the night cometh when no man can work." The modern Christian theory is that such a night never came, but the Apostles knew better.

Three things will be taken away, says Paul, and three remain; the former are prophecy, tongues, and the gnosis, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, compared with which, he tells us elsewhere, all other things are but dross. Now it is interesting that almost all Christians admit, nay insist, that prophecy and tongues were lost, but will not allow for a moment that the "higher knowledge" that went with them has disappeared. They claim in other words, that they still have that gnosis—which makes them Gnostics! False Gnostics, that is, since they profess to have the full teach-

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Ancient Times

(Continued from page 148)
ing of Christ while admitting that they lack the gifts which the Lord promised would surely follow those who had his doctrine. The reason for claiming the knowledge without the power thereof is obvious: tongues and prophecies are not easily come by, while doctrines can be produced to order. But the doctrine without the other gifts is not valid; Irenaeus confounded the Gnostics by showing that they lacked those other gifts while claiming the gnosis—and then he gave himself away by conspicuously failing to produce any convincing evidence for those gifts in his branch of the church.¹⁷⁹ After him the great Tertullian argued that the lack of spiritual gifts in the main church of his day invalidated the claims of that church to possess divine authority.¹⁷⁹

If church members were doubting the resurrection itself even in New Testament times and quite generally in the days of the Apostolic Fathers, is it surprising that the doctrine of salvation for the dead, so closely bound with the economy of the resurrection, should also be a matter of doubt and confusion? Or is it hard to believe that baptism for the dead should soon become a lost doctrine when from early times baptism for the living was a subject of the widest disagreement? The greatest fathers and doctors of the church profess a bewildering variety of opinions as to the proper time, place, manner, authority, subject, validity, durability, efficacy, and scope of the Christian baptism.¹⁸⁰ One who would ask, therefore, what became of baptism for the dead need only contemplate the doctrinal shambles of baptism for the living to have an answer.

As early as the time of Justin the doctrine of salvation for the dead, though still preached, was a subject of serious uncertainty that can only reflect a general lack of information. When asked whether he really believes in the salvation of all the righteous Jews of the Old Covenant as well as the Christians, Justin states:

I and others are of this opinion. . . . But on the other hand there are many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, who think otherwise.¹⁸¹

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA

of the early church? A few years later we find both Tertullian and Irenaeus hedging on the question of whether Christ ever visited the spirits in prison—a doctrine repugnant to philosophy.¹⁸² Typical is Irenaeus' statement that though he does not believe it himself, he will not condemn as heretics those who do,¹⁸³ and he sounds a sinister note when he observes that in the church "there are some who even try to turn these things into allegories."¹⁸⁴ There was a period of hesitation after this when some versions of the Apostles' Creed contained the phrase, "He descended into hades," or "He descended to the inhabitants of the spirit-world," while others did not, but in time this annoying fragment of antique arcana came to be generally condemned.¹⁸⁵ With Origen and Clement "wavering between the old faith and Plato,"¹⁸⁶ we are well on the way to the medieval church, where we presently arrive with St. Augustine.

(To be concluded)

In the following references "PG" stands for the Greek Patrologia and "PL" for the Latin. Roman numerals designate volumes and Arabic numerals columns.

¹⁷⁹Ignat. Ep. ad Philad. viii

¹⁸⁰Robert Eisler, *Jesus Basileus ou Basileusas, Die Messianische Unabhaengigkeitsbewegung*, etc. (Heidelberg, 1930) I, xxix-xxxiv, 293, 353.

¹⁸¹Instances in which an actual limitation is placed on the preaching of the gospel are very numerous in the scriptures, e.g., Matthew 7:6-7; 11:14-15, 25-28; 13:11-16; 13:34-36; 19:11; 24:3; Mark 4:9-12; 9:33-34; 11:33; Luke 8:10; 9:36; 9:43-45; 10:21-23; 12:41; 18:34; 22:67-71; John 1:11-12; 3:11-12; 6:60-66; 8:43-44; 10:24-27; 16:12-18; 16:25; 16:29-30; Acts 10:41; 15:28; 19:2; 20:20; 28:26-27; Romans 6:19; 11:30-34; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 3:1-3; 7:25; 14:2; 14:9-10; 14:22; 15:34; II Corinthians 1:13; 3:3; 12:2-5; Galatians 2:2; Ephesians 3:1-5; Colossians 1:26; I Peter 2:2; II Peter 3:16; II John 12.

¹⁸²In this connection should be cited the much-discussed remark of Jesus to the Pharisees (Luke 17:20-21), that the kingdom of God was in their midst, but that it was not for them to see. The word rendered "observation" in the King James version has in all contexts the meaning of an intense, expectant watch, a spying out (*parateresis*)—much stronger than mere observation; so Christ tells the Pharisees that no matter how hard they look (*paratereteo* always means to look very hard) they will not see the kingdom, which in fact (*idou gar*) is already among them. The word "within" (*entos*) can only be rendered so when used with a singular noun; here it is used with the plural and must of course be read "among," or (literally) "in the midst of." This has often been pointed out by scholars ever since the Renaissance. But the more philosophical and sentimental, if less accurate, King James version is usually preferred as avoiding embarrassing questions of doctrine.

¹⁸³II Timothy 6:20

¹⁸⁴First the Apostles themselves should depart ("God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death . . ."), and then would come the wolves, against whom the flock is denied immunity (I Cor. 4:9ff; Acts 20:29-31). God himself sending "a strong delusion" (II Thess. 2:11, the "falling away" of verse 3 shows that this applies to the church), since they would not endure sound doctrine. (II Tim. 4:3-4.)

¹⁸⁵I Corinthians 13:8; the King James version correctly preserves the future indicative; the independent "whether" (*eitei*) implies, "to whatever degree they exist," i.e., it is indefinite; but there is nothing indefinite about the result clause: whatever their present status these three are to be taken away.

¹⁸⁶Ibid. verses 9-13. The King James "and now abideth" is very weak in comparison with the Greek *nani de menei*, etc.; "but for now these three remain. . . ." "These" is the proper subject of the

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In his younger days St. Augustine

... dared promise not only paradise but also the kingdom of the heavens to unbaptized children, since he could find no other escape from being forced to say that God damns innocent spirits to eternal death. . . . But when he realized that he had spoken ill in saying that the spirits of children would be redeemed without the grace of Christ into eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, and that they could be delivered from the original sin without the baptism of Christ by which comes remission of sins—realizing into what a deep and tumultuous shipwreck he had thrown himself . . . he saw that there was no other escape than to repent of what he had said.¹²⁷

The saint was in a trap, with escape blocked at both ends—a terrible dilemma, the only refuge from a cruel God leading straight to a weak law, which is no escape at all, but "shipwreck." Only baptism for the dead can avoid these catastrophic extremes, but that is out. The Pelagians tried to dodge the issue by putting a soft seat, *quasi medium locum*, between the horns, positing a colorless limbo which satisfied no one and which Augustine brushes aside with the declaration that there is no middle region, and that the baptized will go to hell and nowhere else.¹²⁸ Only this does not satisfy Augustine either; he characteristically tries to eat his cake and have it with the declaration that unbaptized children must be damned, completely damned, and be with the devil in hell, only, he explains, they will be damned "most gently" (*mitissime*)!¹²⁹ In such a liberal spirit, Bottom, the weaver, in order not to frighten the ladies while playing the role of a most terrible lion, promised to "roar you as gently as any sucking dove." (Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I, Sc. 2.) A "gentle" damnation, indeed!

It is interesting that Augustine can still report that there actually are

... a few who believe that that custom was part of the gospel according to which the work of substitutes for the dead was effective, and the members of the dead were laved with the waters of baptism,¹³⁰

thus confusing baptism for the dead (use of substitutes) with baptism of the dead. The universal opinion after Augustine is that there is no

¹²⁷Numbers, continued from last month, refer to bibliography at end of article.

dead. Typical is the statement of his famous contemporary, St. Ambrose, that to die without baptism is to go to eternal misery,¹³¹ while another contemporary, St. Basil, says simply, "It is damnation to die without baptism,"¹³² and yet another, Gregory of Nyssen, draws the shocking but logical conclusion that:

It is better to be found among the number of the wicked who have reverted to sin after baptism than to end one's life without having received baptism.¹³³

This immoral doctrine that places ritual conformity before good works is simply one of the unavoidable consequences of denying baptism for the dead. "We cannot believe that any catechumen, even though he dies in the midst of his good works, will have eternal life," wrote Gennadius, to whom the catechumen's ardent desire for baptism counts for nothing.¹³⁴ Compare this to the teaching of the *Shepherd of Hermas* who concludes the passage referred to above with the words:

They died in righteous and great purity, and this seal was the only thing they lacked.

Gennadius and his church would damn them for that, but not so the early church. The *Shepherd* explains:

For this reason they [the Apostles] went down living with them into the water . . . and gave them life . . . and came up out again with them, and were gathered up together with them,

that all might share eternal life.¹³⁵ The contrast is instructive.

AND how about "the gates of hell"?

They seem to be "prevailing" in fine style. Augustine ". . . would that God had saved from hell" those good and great schoolmen of ancient times who from their chairs proclaimed the divine unity, but stern reason forbids it.¹³⁶ Not long after him Ennodius

In his *Libellus* in defence of Pope Symmachus . . . pictures the Imperial City lamenting the fate of her famous and mighty sons . . . who, unredeemed by the Church, were doomed to hell, because they had lived before the coming of Christ.¹³⁷

A famous poem of the Middle Ages tells how the Apostle Paul was led to the grave of the poet Virgil, who had died just too soon to hear the gospel preached; the saint stands beside the tomb shedding tears of bitter frustration, the picture of helplessness: "What I could have made of you, O greatest of poets," he cries, "had I only found you alive!"¹³⁸ As it is, there is nothing the

The Jordan River meanders like a tideless stream through the flood plain

8-5

BAPTISM FOR THE

By Hugh Nibley, Ph.D.

church can do about it, and poor Virgil is forever damned. If you doubt it, behold him in the fourth canto of the *Inferno*, conducting the dejected Dante into an horrible region ". . . of infinite woes . . . deep darkness and mist . . . a blind world," at the sight of which Virgil himself turns pale. "You ask what spirits these are that you see?" he asks the younger poet:

They are not here because of sin, and if they lack a sufficient boon of mercy, it is for not having been baptized. . . . Having lived before the days of Christianity they did not duly worship God; and I am one of them—we are lost for that one failing and not for any sin; for that offence alone we live in hopeless longing!¹³⁹

He then tells indeed of Christ's visit to that world, and of the release of the great patriarchs of the Old Testament, but adds, "Aside from them not another human spirit was saved!"¹⁴⁰ One cannot resist



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saying with Peter in the Clementine account:

A good and great god indeed, who . . . damns the good . . . simply because they do not know him!

So much for those unfortunates "who lived before his coming." As for those who came after, a writing to Peter the Deacon states that

. . . from that time when our Savior said, "Except a man be born of water," etc., no one lacking the sacrament of baptism can

an earnest . . . able and immoral. Even the stern St. Bernard when faced with the cruel logic that would damn " . . . good persons, who meant to be baptized but were prohibited by death," balks at it, "God forgive me!" he cries, but he cannot admit they are damned, though his church offers him no alternative.²⁰³

SOME divines have maintained that the human race was brought into existence for the express purpose of filling the void left in heaven by the fall of the angels, a doctrine impressively set forth by the preacher in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*; yet we are to believe that the overwhelming majority of human spirits were condemned even before their creation never to see heaven at all, but to spend eternity in those nether regions which, so far from having any vacancies to fill, are, to follow the same enlightened guide, indescribably overcrowded! And they defend their inhuman doctrines in the name of "reason"!

When Christ "went down and

on the person who receives it. To be sure, and is there anything wrong with receiving it by proxy? Is it not a far more extravagant arrangement to have an infant at baptism accept the gospel by proxy, as most churches do? Those offering the child for baptism, we are told, answer for it,²⁰⁷ and the little one believes "through another" (*in altero*) "because he sinned through another."²⁰⁸ Not only is the purely spiritual act of believing (instead of the physical act of immersion) done by proxy, but the baptism itself is administered vicariously. How is it possible, St. Augustine asks, that Jesus baptizes and yet does not baptize?²⁰⁹ The explanation is that "it is not the minister but Christ himself who baptizes,"²¹⁰ for

The authority [*potestas*] of baptism the Lord always keeps to himself, but the ministry of it he transfers to anyone, good or bad.²¹¹

In a like manner the vicarious principle runs through the whole economy of the church: through Christ's vicarious sacrifice every member is thought to have paid the penalty for sin and satisfied the demands of justice, while the Lord's own work is carried out by his earthly delegates. If it is possible for the Father and Son to be presently represented through the ministrations of men in the flesh, is it outrageous presumption for men to stand proxy for their own kin in the spirit world? Do not Christian churches today require that every candidate for baptism be "according to most ancient usage" accompanied by a vicarious parent?²¹² All that men can do for themselves they must do, the gospel preaches, but whatever they cannot possibly do for themselves must be done for them; hence the great atonement.

Can there be any serious objection then to a vicarious baptism which makes it possible to satisfy all the demands of the law, enjoy the mercy of God without qualification, and retain the ordinance in its purity, intact and unaltered? It should be remembered that in the very matter of baptism the Christian churches will waive all their careful rules in an emergency, and allow anyone to baptize anyone else at any time or place and in almost any manner, lest some poor soul in

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DEAD in Ancient Times

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND
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either enter the kingdom of heaven or receive eternal life.²⁰¹

"O grave where is thy victory, O death where is thy sting?" Where indeed! By a conservative estimate, the unbaptized should represent at the very least ninety percent of the human family—a substantial victory for the grave and a most effective stinging of God's children. Says Fulgentius:

You are to believe with the utmost firmness that all . . . who end this present life outside the Catholic Church are to go to the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.²⁰²

It is cold comfort for any church to claim that the gates of hell do not prevail against its small minority, but only against those who do not belong to it; that is the very doctrine which, as we saw at the outset of this study, the Christians of

preached . . . overcoming death by death,"²⁰⁴ he delivered those who were in bondage because they had never completely fulfilled the law of obedience, including baptism in particular. Yet that is the very class of dead whom the later Christian churches regard as beyond saving. When the Roman Church, to the loud dismay of Paul, Ennodius, Dante, St. Augustine, etc., is absolutely helpless to open the gates of hell—and hence of heaven—to her beloved Virgil she fails to fill in the most important qualification of the Church of Jesus Christ; and that very verse of scripture upon which she rests the full weight of her vast pretensions, letting the world think against all knowledge that "the gates of hell" is but a poetic generalization, that verse condemns her utterly.²⁰⁵

At present the justification of the Christian churches for denying baptism for the dead may be found in the statement that " . . . the church

(Concluded from page 213)

extremis be eternally damned." Thus the churches are willing to distort the rite of baptism beyond recognition for the laudable purpose of making it as universal as possible; but as the price of being universal it ceases to be a baptism at all. And so the dilemma remains, with only one escape: baptism for the dead.

IN summing up the data at hand, we note three aspects of the documentary remains: their adequacy, their paucity, and their distribution. The three support and explain each other and lead to certain obvious conclusions.

In the first place, the evidence is more than sufficient to establish the presence and prominence in the early church of belief in the salvation of the dead through ministrations that included preaching and baptism. The actual practice of vicarious baptism for the dead in the ancient church is equally certain, even the hostile commentators, with their seventeen different interpretations, agreeing on that one thing alone.

Yet if they are clear and specific, references to baptism for the dead are nonetheless few. How is that to be explained in view of the extreme importance of the subject and the obvious popularity of the doctrine with the saints? For one thing the apostolic literature is not extensive; one volume could easily contain it all. Yet it is in these fragments of the earliest church writings that virtually all our references are to be found: the earlier a work is, the more it has to say about baptism for the dead. After the third century no one wants to touch the subject, all commentators confining themselves to repeating the same arguments against baptism for the dead and supplying the same far-fetched and hair-splitting explanations of what Paul really meant. After the second century the vast barns of the *Patrologia* are virtually empty, and the fathers who love nothing so much as spinning out their long commentaries on every syllable of scripture pass by those passages of hope for the dead in a familiar silence. As Lanfranc put it, how can one presume to cope with a problem which has baffled the greatest minds of the church? It

was the early church that preached and practised work for the dead, that no one denies; the later church, condemning the work, confesses at the same time that she does not understand it.

It has not been the purpose of this discussion to treat of baptism for the dead as practised by the Latter-day Saints. No one having any acquaintance with that system, however, can fail to notice the essential identity of the ancient with the modern usage and doctrine. This close resemblance poses a problem. Where did Joseph Smith get his knowledge? Few if any of the sources cited in this discussion were available to him; the best of these have been discovered only in recent years, while the citations from the others are only to be found scattered at wide intervals through works so voluminous that even had they been available to the Prophet he would, lacking modern aids, have had to spend a lifetime running them down. And even had he found such passages, how could they have meant more to him than they did to the most celebrated divines of a thousand years, who could make nothing of them?

This is a region in which great theologians are lost and bemused; to have established a rational and satisfying doctrine and practice on grounds so dubious is indeed a tremendous achievement. Yet we are asked to believe that Joseph Smith produced out of a shallow and scheming head the whole great structure of work for the dead that for over a century has engaged thousands of quite sane people in an activity which has been the chief joy of their lives. To design such a work would more than tax the powers of the greatest religious leaders of the past, but to have made it conform at the same time to the patterns of the primitive church (not brought to light until the last seventy years) is asking far too much of genius and luck. Compared with such an accomplishment the massive and repetitious productions of the ecclesiastical mind from St. Augustine to the present are but the mechanized output of the schools, requiring little more than "patience and a body."

Work for the dead is an all-important phase of Mormonism about

which the world knows virtually nothing. Not even the most zealous anti-Mormon has even begun to offer an explanation for its discovery, which in its way is quite as remarkable as the Book of Mormon. The critics will have to go far to explain this one.

In the following references "PG" stands for the Greek *Patrologia* and "PL" for the Latin. Roman numerals designate volumes and Arabic numerals columns.

¹²⁷*De Anima*, c. ix (PL xlv, 480-1)

¹²⁸*Op. cit.*, 503; 519; 520; 188-9

¹²⁹*Op. cit.*, 140; 120; 188-9

¹³⁰*Contra Julianum*, vi (PL xlv, 1596-7)

¹³¹Anihrose, cited in PL iv, (235)

¹³²Basilus, *Lib. de Spiritu Sancto* X, 26 (PG xxxii, 113)

¹³³Greg. Nyssen, *De Baptismo* (PG xlv, 424)

¹³⁴Gennadius, *De Eccl. dogmat.*, c. 74 (PL lviii, 997). This doctrine precludes any belief in the "baptism of desire," a vague device by which modern Catholics attempt to provide baptism for the unbaptized. No one could be more eligible for such a baptism than the pure and desirous catechumen, whom Gennadius describes as lost.

¹³⁵*Ihermae Pastor*, Simil. ix, 16, 6-7

¹³⁶Augustine, *Epist.* No. 164 (PL xxxiii, 708-718). Augustine finds it "absurd" to believe that one who lacked faith in life can "believe on Christ in hell" (714). As to those who were disobedient in the time of Noah (1 Peter 3:20), the scripture does not say that they ever lived in the flesh (713.) By such violent rationalizations, Augustine upholds a doctrine which he describes as "hard" (*durum*).

¹³⁷Raby, *Christian Latin Poetry*, p. 117

¹³⁸*Ad Maronis mausoleum ductus fudit super cum pia reorem lacrimae*
Quem te, dixit, rededissem
si te vivum invenissem,
poetarum maxime!

¹³⁹*Inferno*, Canto iv, 7-12, 19-45. The poet says (43-45) that "great sorrow seized his heart" at the sight, for he knew many of the sufferers to be "people of great worth."

¹⁴⁰*Inferno*, iv, 52-63

¹⁴¹*De Fide ad Petrum Diaconum* c. iii, fol. 159 (Cit. PL lviii, 1043)

¹⁴²Fulgentius, *De Fide* c. 38 (reg. no. 35) (PL lxv, 704)

¹⁴³Cited by Elmenhorst, in PL lviii, 1043.

¹⁴⁴A common formula, Hippolytus, *De Antichr.*, c. 26

¹⁴⁵Prof. Sidney B. Sperry brings to my attention the Coptic rendering of "gates of hell," as "the gates of Amente" (Oxford translation). This is the well-known Egyptian word meaning "the West" and hence "the realm of the dead." (K. Sethe, in *Agypt. Ztschr.* xlvii (1910), 311; it retains both meanings also in Coptic (W. H. Spiegelberg, *Koptisches Handwörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1921), pp. 5, 25; also in *Jnl. of Egyptian Archaeology* xli (1926), 35), where it has nothing to do with Satan or the devil. It is a fact of decisive importance that the earliest translators of the New Testament, and those nearest to the primitive church in time and in knowledge, chose this word instead of those expressions (such as *TE* or *NOIN*) which mean "hell" in the bad, tyrannical sense. "Amente" is simply the land of the dead, and regularly a word of good omen.

¹⁴⁶Cabrol & Leclercq, *Dict.* II, 1, 331

¹⁴⁷Augustine, *De Baptismo* iv, 24 (PL xlviii, 175)

¹⁴⁸Augustine, *Serm.* 294, 11 & 18 (PL xxxviii, 1342, 1346)

¹⁴⁹In PL xxxv, 1511

¹⁵⁰*Non minister sed ipse Christus qui baptizat*, PL xxxiii, 311

¹⁵¹Augustine, in PL xxxv, 1419, 1428, 1437; xliii, 348-9, 371-2

¹⁵²*Codex Juris Canonici* (1918), Can. 793

¹⁵³*Jd.* Can. 742, 746, 747, 758, 762; these rules allow for two types of baptism, which differ widely in their manner of being carried out.

¹⁵⁴As an example which we failed to include in the preceding article, a belated citation from the ninth century Bishop Aimon (Haymon) of Halberstadt, may be allowed at this point. Speaking of the primitive church he says: "If one of their loved ones (friend or relative: *propinquus*) happened to depart this life without the grace of baptism, some living person would be baptized in his name; and they believed that the baptism of the living would profit the dead." The Bishop must deny, of course, that Paul approved the practice, and has the usual difficulty explaining why the Apostle chose an improper practice to illustrate and support (ut *suaudet et ostendat*) his doctrine. (*Expositio in Ep. I Ad Cor.*, PL cxviii, 598.)