

on this brief but great news. Jesus' "glad tidings" (*euangelion*) are the same as those proclaimed in Isaiah: "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52:7), but whereas in Isaiah it is a matter of hope and prophecy, now, with Jesus, it is a matter of fact.

### 3. The gospel, or kerygma, in the apostolic Church

With the death and resurrection of Jesus something occurs to modify the formulation, though not the substance, of these glad tidings. But let us examine the situation in the apostolic Church, so as to accommodate this new fact. All the New Testament writers assume the existence, and the knowledge on the part of their readers, of a common tradition (*paradosis*) going back to the earthly Jesus. This tradition presents two components: "preaching," or proclamation (*kerygma*) of what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth; and "teaching" (*didache*) which presents, in contrast, ethical standards for right behavior on the part of believers. Various Pauline letters reflect this division, in that they contain a first, kerygmatic part on which depends a second part of a hortatory, or practical, character.

The preaching, or *kerygma*, is called the "gospel" (cf. Mark 1:1; Rom 15:19; Gal 1:7, etc.); the teaching, or *didache*, on the other hand is called the "law," or the commandment, of Christ, which is generally summed up in love (cf. Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 7:25; John 15:12; 1 John 4:21). Of these two, the first — the *kerygma* or gospel — is what gives the Church her origin; the second — the law or love — which flows from the first, traces an ideal of moral life for the Church, "forms" the faith of the Church. In this sense, the Apostle draws a distinction between his work as "father" in the faith, with respect to the Corinthians, and that of the "guides" or "tutors" who have come after him, where he says, "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15).<sup>2</sup>

The faith as such therefore flows only in the presence of the *kerygma* or proclamation. The same apostle establishes this succession in the genesis of the new life and of the Church in general: first is the sending by Christ, then the proclamation; from this is born faith, and from faith, "calling on the name of the Lord," which is the beginning of the new life. And he concludes by stressing proclamation's unique importance, and quoting the

words of Isaiah: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!" (cf. Rom 10:14-15).

But, once again, what exactly is the content of this good news? We have already said that it is God's work in Jesus of Nazareth. But this definition is not enough: there is something more restricted, the germinative nucleus of all which, compared with everything else, is as the plowshare to the plow: that sword of sorts that cleaves the clod, to let the plow trace the furrow and turn the tilth. This word — for everything can in effect be reduced to one word — is actually what the New Testament calls "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6:17), that is to say a "word of God, living and effective, penetrating even between soul and spirit" (Heb 4:12). It is the instrument the Spirit uses to work the miracle of someone's conversion to the faith, to make someone be "born from above" (cf. John 3:3). I do not want to be the one to say this word; I leave it for Paul to say: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith that we preach [*kerygma*], for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:8-9). That word is therefore the exclamation, "Jesus is Lord," uttered and accepted in the wonder of a faith *statu nascenti*, in its nascent state. The mystery of this word is such that it cannot be said "except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). "As the wake of a fine vessel," as Charles Péguy would say, "becomes wider and wider until it vanishes and is lost, but starts at one point which point is the vessel herself,"<sup>3</sup> so the Church's preaching becomes wider and wider until an immense doctrinal edifice has been built, but begins at one point, and this point is the *kerygma*: "Jesus is Lord!" What the exclamation, "The kingdom of God has come!" was in Jesus' preaching, is now the exclamation, "Jesus is Lord!" in the preaching of the apostles. Nevertheless, between the two gospels — the one preached by Jesus and the one preached by the apostles — there is no conflict but only perfect continuity, for to say "Jesus is Lord!" is like saying that in Jesus crucified and risen the kingdom and sovereignty of God over the world has finally come to pass. The primitive Church expressed this conviction by adapting a verse of Psalm 96 and saying, "Regnavit a ligno Deus": God has begun to reign from the cross.

But we should take care not to fall into an unreal reconstruction of the way the apostles preached. After Pentecost, the apostles

did not go about the world repeating the same words over and over again: "Jesus is Lord!" What they did do, when they found themselves having to preach the faith for the first time in a given environment was, rather, to go straight to the heart of the gospel by proclaiming the two facts *Jesus died* and *Jesus has risen*, and the "for why" (or, more accurately, the "for me") of these two facts: he died "for our sins"; he has risen "for our justification" (cf. 1 Cor 15:4; Rom 4:25).

Dramatizing the message, as Peter does in his speeches in the Acts, they proclaimed to the world: "You killed Jesus of Nazareth; God has raised him up, making him both Lord and Messiah" (cf. Acts 2:22-36; 3:14-19; 10:39-42). The proclamation "Jesus is Lord!" (or its equivalent in other contexts, "Jesus is the Son of God!") is nothing other than the conclusion, now implicit, now explicit, of this brief story, told in ever living, ever new form, even though substantially ever the same; and at the same time it is the sentence in which the story is summed up and made immediate for the listener. We see a perfect example of this in Philippians 2:6-11: "Christ Jesus . . . emptied himself . . . becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God exalted him . . . so that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The proclamation "Jesus is Lord!" on its own does not therefore constitute the entire preaching; however, it is the soul of this preaching and, one might say, the sun that lights it up. It establishes a kind of communion with the story of Christ by means of the "particle" of the word, conjuring up the analogy of the communion effected with the Body of Christ by means of the particle of bread. In the *kerygma* "Jesus is Lord!" a mysterious transition takes place from history to "today" and to "for me." For it proclaims that the events narrated are not facts in the past, shut up in themselves, but realities still active in the present: Jesus crucified and risen is Lord here and now; he lives by the Spirit and rules over all! Coming to the faith is the sudden, astonished opening of one's eyes to this light. Recalling the moment of his conversion, Tertullian describes it as being like coming out of the huge, dark womb of ignorance and being terrified by the light of Truth.<sup>4</sup> It is the famous "being born again of the Spirit" or the passing "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9; Col 1:12f.). Here the first anointing takes place, "the anointing through faith" of which the Fathers of the Church often speak.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is bound up with this moment: he it is who makes Jesus present and alive in the heart of anyone who welcomes the *kerygma*; he it is who, in baptism, infuses a new life through repentance and the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 2:38).

#### 4. A glance at the evolution of the *kerygma*

To recapitulate briefly: at the very origins of the Church there existed a basic proclamation or central nucleus of the faith which, unlike the rest of what was handed down, had rousing and not formative value, as regards the faith itself; it was occasional, not systematic; assertive and not discursive. This central nucleus concerns Christ, it is a Christological creed; it does not so much stress the teachings of Jesus Christ as the events in his life and the paschal events in particular. There are two characteristics here that I feel I ought to emphasize, since it has been evolution in connection with these that has led to the situation as it is now. This central proclamation of the faith (Jesus died, Jesus has risen and is Lord) has an assertive, authoritative character, not a discursive, dialectical one. It has no need to justify itself by philosophical arguments: and accepts it or not, and that's all there is to it. However, great things depend on whether or not one accepts it: salvation, in a word. The *kerygma* is not something that can be re-arranged, since it is what re-arranges all; it cannot be established by human beings, for God himself establishes it and it is then what forms the basis of existence, since we "exist in Christ Jesus" who died and rose again for us (cf. 1 Cor 1:30). In other words, this is something different from human wisdom (*sophia*). On this topic, we need only listen to St. Paul as he develops his memorable argument with the Corinthians in defense of this characteristic of the *kerygma*: "It was the will of God through the foolishness of the *kerygma* to save those who have faith. For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:21-24).

What is implied by the phrase "the Greeks look for wisdom," we know very well from subsequent debates between Christians and pagans. The pagan Celsus shows us what, in the view of un-

believers, the stumbling-block and foolishness of the *kerygma* is. For he writes indignantly: "Christians behave as do people who believe without reasoning. Some of them even refuse to give or accept reasons for what they believe, but use expressions such as 'Don't ask questions; just believe; your faith will save you . . .'. The wisdom of this world is an evil, and foolishness a good thing.'" Celsus (who here seems extraordinarily akin to so many cultured people of modern times) would basically like Christians to present their faith in dialectical form, submitting it in every respect to research and discussion, so that it can fit into the general framework, philosophically acceptable, of an effort of self-comprehension of human nature and the world (H. Schlier); it should not exact obedience, as St. Paul says, from its adherents (cf. Rom 1:5), but something more acceptable to human reason.

Naturally the Christians' refusal to offer proofs and enter into debates did not apply to the whole itinerary of the faith, but only its inception: they did not run away, even in the apostolic age, from controversy and from "giving a reason for their hope" even to the Greeks (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). However, they held that faith itself could not be generated by such controversy but had to precede it as the work of the Spirit and not of the reason, however well the latter might prepare one for it.

Ideally, the force of the attack, the *scandalum* with regard to the wisdom of the world, would have always been maintained intact. But this was not to be. The difference between *kerygma* and *sophia* (in practice, between *kerygma* and theology) gradually was smoothed away. We still find, especially in the polemics against the Gnostics, the occasional Pauline jolt: acceptance in full of the foolishness of the *kerygma*. Tertullian writes: "The Son of God was crucified; I am not ashamed to proclaim it just because there is something to be ashamed of. The Son of God died; the thing is to be believed just because it is foolishness. The Son of God was buried and rose again; the fact is certain because it is impossible."<sup>6</sup> But the general tendency is to affirm rather that Christianity too, in its entirety, is a wisdom, the true wisdom and the true philosophy ("our philosophy," Justin would say). People argue more and more often along these other lines: the Greeks seek wisdom; right, that's what we'll give them!

This second path was not, in itself, contrary to Paul's; the Apostle had written on the same occasion: "We do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age"

(1 Cor 2:6). The ambiguity arose from not sufficiently taking account of the fact that here he was talking of a wisdom "of God" (1 Cor 1:24) and not one "of this age," and therefore one not on the same footing as the systems of Plato and the other philosophers. The consequence was that, little by little, in Christian preaching we witness the disappearance of signs of the existence of a *kerygma* in the ordinary sense of proclamation "in the Spirit and power" of Christ's death and resurrection and of his present sovereignty, without other supporting argument than the existence of witnesses ("Nos testes sumus!").

The first negative development thus consists in this: that the sense of the "otherness" of the apostolic *kerygma* from every other form of exposition of the faith is diminished. The second negative development concerns another of the *kerygma*'s characteristics. Originally it was distinct from the teaching (*didaché*), as also from catechesis; these latter tend to form the faith, or to preserve its purity, while the *kerygma* tends to arouse it. The latter has, one might say, an explosive or germinative character; it is more like the seed from which the tree grows than the mature fruit ripening on the tree top, which in Christianity is constituted rather by love. The *kerygma* cannot be absolutely obtained by concentration or recapitulation, as though it were the marrow of Tradition, but stands apart from or, better, at the start of everything.

Here too the development consists in the loss of this absoluteness and otherness. Little by little, the *kerygma* begins to form part of catechesis and comes to be regarded as a kind of synthesis, or essential part, of it. The affirmations about Jesus dead and risen and now Lord, which on their own constituted the primitive creed, are now included as the second article in the Trinitarian creed, which recapitulates everything that a candidate for baptism ought to believe and profess. The original *kerygma* melts into catechesis.

All this reflects the general state of the Church after Constantine the Great. Living as they did in a Christian environment, in which everyone around was Christian or claimed to be so, the importance of the initial choice by which one "becomes" Christian is diminished all the more so that baptism is now usually administered to babies who are in no position to make such a choice for themselves. We can also say that, in a certain sense, the proclamation of faith is subjected to the phenomenon of institutional-

zation: less stress is placed on the initial moment, the miracle of coming to the faith, and more on the completeness and orthodoxy of the content of the faith itself. The *fides quae* (the things to be believed) tend to carry the day against the *fides qua* (the act of faith).

##### 5. *A return to the kerygma*

The observations I have been making on the development of the *kerygma* from its origins to the present day do not have an historical and theoretic purpose (to know how things were at the beginning), but an immediate and practical one. Paul VI, speaking in *Evangelii nuntiandi* of the Holy Spirit's role in evangelization (of which he calls Him the "principal agent") expressed the wish that pastors, theologians, and laity would pay more careful attention to the nature and method of the work of the Holy Spirit in present-day evangelization. These reflections of mine are intended as a small response to this wish.

The Spirit of the Lord was on Jesus of Nazareth primarily so that he could preach the glad tidings that the kingdom of God had arrived. Today the Holy Spirit is on the Church (and on those whom the Church commissions to be evangelists) to the same end: to proclaim the glad tidings that Jesus, crucified and risen, is Lord. This, as we have said, is the real "sword of the Spirit." I have tried to bring this back to light, not for the fun of doing some archaeology but so that the sword may once more be of use to us. We can no longer do without it, for it alone can pierce the thick pall of disbelief that has settled on the world and on the heart of many a Christian. And since I have been using the imagery of the sword, I wish to make another application of it: using a sword, or a knife, or any other kind of blade with the flat rather than with the cutting edge or the point will not wound anyone. The Church's preaching is like this: if we say a thousand things, one of which is "Jesus is Lord," no one will be "cut to the heart," as we read happened when Peter proclaimed after Pentecost, "You killed Jesus of Nazareth; God has raised him up. Repent!" (cf. Acts 2:37).

It is written that "In the beginning was the *kerygma*" (M. Dibelius): in other words, the Church was born from the *kerygma* (not the *kerygma* from the Church, as Bultmann would have it!).

If it is true that our modern state is closer to that of the origins (when Christianity was at work in a pagan world, alien and hostile to it) than to the post-Constantinian situation, the call that comes to us from the experience of the primitive Church is to bring the apostolic *kerygma* back into use; for this proclaimed the faith to a pagan world, and served as nucleus for that earliest community. We must make a distinction between it and everything else, even catechesis. This basic proclamation must be presented at least once, clearly and tersely, not only to catechumens but to all Christians, given that the majority of today's faithful have never passed through the catechumenate. The proclamation of Jesus as Lord ought to have a place of honor at all the important moments of Christian life: in the baptism of adults, in Eucharistic worship, in the renewal of baptismal promises, in individual conversions, at the start of religious instruction classes, Bible-study groups and prayer meetings, in retreats, in missions to the people, and also at funerals. God seems to be raising up anew a hunger and thirst for this proclamation, which constitutes the most radical alternative to the false idols and false wisdom of the world. To those who proclaim his gospel in every city, Christ says what he said to St. Paul when the latter arrived at Corinth: "Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silent . . . for I have many people in this city" (cf. Acts 18:9f.): many people, though still hidden, who are waiting to escape from the great womb of ignorance and jump with shock at the light of Truth!

The really serious question, however, is this: how many of us are ready to proclaim this message "in the Holy Spirit," that is to say as true believers, running the risk if need be of cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the defenders of pure reason and those whose main objective is to respond to the world's expectations; how many are ready to repeat with St. Paul: My word and my message are not to be judged by my use of persuasive philosophic discourse, but by the manifestation of the Spirit and his power (cf. 1 Cor 2:4)? We cannot say "Jesus is Lord!" unless "under the action of the Holy Spirit," that is, unless we ourselves truly acknowledge this. If we say it, not "under the action of the Holy Spirit" but in sin, or disbelief, or out of habit, it remains a human saying which will not infect anyone: infection comes from contact with someone who *has* the illness, not with someone who *talks* about it. I myself have had direct experience of the spontaneously generated force that surges from the proclamation of Jesus as

Lord: on uttering these words, I have seen eyes light up, ears prick up, and something like a shiver run through my listeners — a sign of the mysterious power that these words contain and the Holy Spirit makes effective.

As at the beginning of the Church, so today what can shake the world from the torpor of unbelief and convert it to the gospel is not apologies, theological or political treatises, or endless debates, but the proclamation — simple, yes, but strong with the very strength of God — that “Jesus is Lord.”

#### NOTES

1. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 17.9 (PG 33, 980).
2. Cf. Ch. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel*, London 1964, chap. 2.
3. Cf. Ch. Péguy, *Le Mystère des SS. Innocents*, in *Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes*, Paris 1975, p. 697.
4. Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 39, 9 (CCL 1, p. 151).
5. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.9 (SCh 132, p. 98).
6. Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 5.4 (CCL 2, p. 881).
7. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 75.

#### Chapter Four

## Priestly Anointing

*The Spirit urges Jesus and the Church on — to pray*

In the gospel there are, in a manner of speaking, two Jesuses: the “public” Jesus who casts out demons, preaches the kingdom, works miracles, and carries on controversies, and a “private” Jesus who is almost hidden between the lines of the gospel. This latter is the praying Jesus. I say hidden between the lines, for the brush-strokes that present him to us are often short sentences, even scraps of sentences: tiny chinks that open and instantly close again. It is all too easy to overlook these scraps, and thus not be aware of this “other” Jesus: Jesus at prayer. Let us cast a glance through some of these chinks, confining ourselves to the Gospel of Luke, since he takes most pains to pinpoint the Jesus absorbed in prayer.

#### 1. *Jesus at prayer*

Let us make a start with Jesus’ baptism. Luke writes: “After Jesus too had been baptized and was praying [*proseuchomenou*, a participle], heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him” (Luke 3:21-22). Luke appears to hold the view that it was Jesus’ prayer that rent the heavens apart and caused the Holy Spirit to come down. At its very roots, the mystery of the anointing is bound up with prayer.

Let us continue our search. In chapter 5 we find: “Great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray” (Luke 5:15-16). That adversative “but” is very eloquent; it creates a remarkable contrast between the crowds thronging around and Jesus’ determination not to let himself be overwhelmed by them and so have to give up his dialogue with the Father.