received a far larger share of letters than I can ever have deserved, and have had invaluable guidance on all sorts of questions.

Père Vincent was a man of great charm, courtesy and kindliness. We who were students at S. Étienne were accustomed to unstinted kindness from all the members of the staff, but certainly nobody could have been more encouraging to a young student, or less likely to adopt any air of superior learning, than the dear and delightful Père Vincent. From the start I was charmed by his remarkable frankness and directness, and by his gift for describing a scholar or a situation in one or two memorable sentences. When he was dealing with faulty or pretentious scholarship, or with any sort of *mystification* he could be extremely severe. One of many examples of his polemical manner is the article 'Garden Tomb. Histoire d'un mythe' in the *Revue Biblique* for 1925. There can be no doubt that he became milder with increasing age, but, when he was still in middle life, it was a Presbyterian archaeologist, the late Professor R. A. S. Macalister, who told a friend of mine that Vincent's character was, in his opinion, as closely modelled as any he had known upon that of our Divine Master.

I was privileged to visit him at S. Étienne at various times since the war, and found him, as always, full of enthusiasm for the many subjects he had so ardently studied, and the kindest and most loyal of friends. On my last visit in October 1959, his health was obviously failing very rapidly, and sight, hearing and the power of walking were all gravely affected. He could no longer offer the Holy Sacrifice, and was dependent upon the many kind visits of his Dominican brethren for news of the world of scholarship. One of his greatest achievements, his life of his master Père Lagrange, though written in its entirety, still remains unpublished. It is very much to be hoped that one of Vincent's many disciples may be privileged to give this volume to the world.

Lux perpetua luceat ei.

JOHN M. T. BARTON

GOD'S CHOICE: ITS NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES

'One religion is as good as another' and 'After all, we are all going the same way' are favourite expressions of many religiously-minded people today. This mentality is based on the idea that the true definition of what religion is is 'man's search for God,' that man must make God in his own image and likeness. But the opposite is the truth :

religion is God's search for man and it is man who is in God's image and likeness. It is the Creator who dictates to the creature, not the creature who dictates to the Creator. I am not saying that Hindu and Parsee cannot find a way to God, with God's grace of course, which is not the Christian way, but I *am* saying that the divinely appointed way is the way man must take once he knows of it. God's choice must be respected, and if one appears on earth who is the Chosen One, *he* is the way ; and if that Chosen One presents himself as the fine point, the single ideal realisation of a previous choice, that previous choice, too, demands our attention. In other words, New Testament and Old are witnesses to God's will for man. God has revealed Himself and outside that revelation (I speak objectively here) it is much more true to say that 'One religion is as bad as another.' Whatever spiritual good one may secure by reading Hindu or Persian religious writings—and the possibility is not denied—the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are God's appointed way, the way He has chosen for us.

God is isolated for He is holy, and yet He communicates Himself to man for He reveals Himself in creation and in history. In truth this is not contradiction but mystery. Yet at least the apparent paradox teaches us that when God steps out of His isolation it will be always on His own initiative and His ways will not be our ways. Thus St Paul says of Him in his own downright fashion : 'Is not the potter master of his clay to make from the same lump a vessel for special occasions and a vessel for everyday use ?' 'Why did God choose the Jews ?' is therefore not a very useful question. We might reply that Jewry was geographically protected, that she was—and still is—psychologically a race apart ; that therefore Judaism was well chosen to preserve monotheism from contamination in a world of idolatry ; we might argue further that equidistance from far East and far West was suitable for the beginnings of a religion that was to become universal. But all these are human conjectures. Israel was chosen because God willed to choose her. And this is God's own answer ; indeed it is even suggested that Israel was chosen because she was, from all human points of view, the least suitable of all. The book of Deuteronomy says expressly : 'If the Lord chose you, it was not because you are the most numerous of peoples, rather you are the least. It was because of His love for you.' That is to say, simply because He willed it. We might go further and say (and there is a profound religious truth in this) that here was the first example of God's steady policy to choose the weakest so that His own power might be shown the better, just as St Paul pointed out when another divine choice had been made, this time of the poor and ignorant of Corinth : 'God has chosen

what is weak in this world so that no man may boast in the face of God.'

God, being God, can in no way be bound by man : 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,' he says to Moses, 'I will show mercy to whom I will to show mercy.' Nevertheless, His choice is not capricious ; precisely because the opposite of choice, that is rejection, is always earned in some way by man. Thus Esau before his rejection had made light of his birthright and the Pharaoh whose heart God hardened had already hardened his own heart before—sin adds to sin just as grace adds to grace. Nor must we be misled by phrases like 'love' and 'hate'—'I have loved Jacob but hated Esau.' The Hebrew mentality does not favour shades of meaning, and these verbs in particular, when opposed, signify little more than preference. We should say 'I have preferred Jacob to Esau.' But if we are still uneasy, let us above all retain that the choice we are speaking of is the choice for a divinely given task, not a declaration of personal sanctity ; it is what the theologian would call a *gratia gratis data*, not a *gratia gratum faciens*, like the priesthood for example—there are many laymen holier than the priest but they have not been chosen for this particular vocation. We must go further, also, and note that the choice under consideration is not even of individuals but of peoples. When we speak of a chosen race we do not mean that each individual of that race, precisely as an individual, is the recipient of God's particular favour. It would be enough to note what terrible punishments God metes out to Israel to defeat that idea. The individual of the chosen group will no doubt be more aware than those outside it of the truths of religion and the demands of morality, but it remains to be seen what use he makes of them. God's purpose works through the group as a whole, but the individual still has to acquit himself personally before God. From this point of view we know nothing directly of what we should call Jacob's ultimate salvation or Esau's—we are simply told that God has chosen to work out His plan through the Jacobites (or Israelites as they are more usually called) and not through the Edomites (the descendants of Esau).

Now although it is not helpful to ask why God chose Israel in the sense of why it was Israel He chose, it *is* necessary to ask the question in the sense of what function He had in mind for Israel when He chose her. It is important to answer this question not for historical interest only but because it is the answer to the question why He chose *us*. Theologically we know that God Himself must be the goal of all His action, and the biblical doctrine of election says the same thing. The object of God's choice of Israel is the glory, that is to say the public proclamation, of God's name or of God's person, to use our own idiom.

Thus Ezechiel preaches : 'I shall sanctify my great name and that nations shall know when through you I show my sanctity that I am the Lord.' Israel by its own separateness from the other nations will be a witness to God's own unassailable isolation—that is to His sanctity. In this sense the Israelite, like the Christian, is to be in the world, visible to the world, an example to the world, but not of it. Not that the Israelite, or the Christian, works of his own motive-power ; he is God's instrument. In particular the marvellous exodus from Egypt will declare God's 'sanctity' which is what we should call His transcendence, His majesty beyond the reach of human hostility. 'At the expense of Pharaoh and his army,' says the divine voice in the book of Exodus, 'I shall cover myself with glory, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.' That, then, is the purpose of God's choice —the making known of God's glory—and it is this that our Lord bids us pray for when he tells us to say 'Hallowed be thy name.' God's purpose throughout Old Testament and New is consistent and that is why, as St Paul says, all these things are written for our correction.

Israel, therefore, was chosen 'as God's point of attack on the world,' and the attack was at its height in the Exodus so that the book of Deuteronomy, looking back on this event which convinced Israel that the hand of God was with her, exclaims : 'Is there any god who has ever set out to seek a nation from all others by prodigies and victories and signs—all those things you have seen with your own eyes, things that the Lord performed in Egypt ?' Insistence on this theme is typical of the book of Deuteronomy where we find the classical formulation of the choice : 'You are a people consecrated to the Lord your God. It is you whom the Lord has chosen to be his own people among all the nations that are on the earth.' In the same way, the inspired author in the book of Genesis is equally convinced that the Exodus showed clearly that God had chosen His people ; he therefore seeks back into the twilight of history for signs of this choice. His method is one of convergence, of a narrowing down of perspective, to demonstrate the sure selective process. It is evident that our author wants us to see how God's promise of hope after the Fall lies within a certain group of mankind. Of the sons of Adam he names only three ; Abel is murdered and Cain wanders out of the narrative, leaving us only with Seth from whom all the antediluvian patriarchs descend until we come to Noah. With Noah comes the Deluge and the rest of mankind are, as it were, washed out of the story. At this stage a new divine promise is made : the rainbow Noah sees is a symbol that God has laid aside his avenging bow ; a sign of peace between God and what remains of mankind. But again the perspective is narrowed. Of Cham, Japhet and Sem, the three sons of Noah, the author makes

it clear that God's blessing is to go not with Cham, ancestor of the peoples of Asia Minor, nor with Japhet, representing the people of the south—of Egypt and Ethiopia—but with Sem, father of the Semitic peoples of whom were the Israelites and of whom, in particular, was Abraham. To Abraham the great promise was made, or renewed, and obedient to God's call he migrated from Lower Mesopotamia to the land promised him. But the author has not yet sufficiently localised the group in whom the divine favour lies. He therefore goes on to show how among Abraham's sons it was not Ismael, father of the Arabs, but Isaac who was chosen ; and of the sons of Isaac not Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, but Jacob whose later name was Israel. And when Israel's descendants after a time of prosperity in Egypt came to be persecuted Moses was the chosen deliverer. With him the promise was signed and sealed by covenant and Israel was formally consecrated to God : ' Henceforth if you obey the terms of my covenant, I shall count you as my own special possession amongst all the nations and as a kingdom of priests, a nation consecrated.'

At this point we should notice the dangers attending a people who quite rightly believed that they were the object of God's special choice, dangers to which the Pharisees were to succumb many years later. I mean the confusion between divine choice and divine approval. The peril is considerable when the stress is laid upon the nation rather than on the individual. This emphasis is to be observed in the book of Judges, for example, where the fortunes of the nation wavered with the moral conduct of the nation as a whole. The same emphasis explains a sentence that might perturb the reader of the Old Testament : ' I am the Lord thy God . . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.' For it was true then, as it is now, that a nation as a whole suffers for defying the law of God—the guilty with the innocent. The prophets, too, aimed their attack against a sinful nation as one collectively guilty thing. The idea of individual sin is of course latent in all this, but it remains without emphasis. God was first using the simple and obvious appeal of national consciousness so that in the course of time He might bring His people to a concern for individual conscience. But the prophet Jeremias saw the danger in the sixth century. ' In those days,' he said, ' they shall no longer say : The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the teeth of the children are set on edge. Everyone shall die for his own iniquity.' Yet we have to await Ezechiel some forty years later to take up this plaintive proverb, examine it, question it, dilate upon it as his custom is and bring to full awareness the principle of individual responsibility, thus making it clear exactly what divine choice did and did not imply.

Now from this time forward we find in the inspired books a growing interest in the conduct of the individual. With this growing sense there should have been among the people a weakening of national consciousness. God intended that there should be : the way was being prepared for a wider outlook, for the internationalism or catholicism towards which revelation was driving. By this means God's election, God's choice, was being shown to have possibilities beyond national boundaries. There is little doubt that the ordinary Israelite was very slow to perceive this, but the inspired prophets were not. Already in the eighth century Isaias was speaking of a future temple to which the Gentiles would come ; a century or two later Jeremias foretold a new covenant tied to no national Law. But the revelation had still some distance to cover. Even Isaias spoke in terms of Mount Sion, and Jeremias in terms of a Levitical priesthood. Moreover, neither was concerned with practical politics—and it was just on this plane that the tension between nationalism and internationalism was truly felt. We find it in the little community back from exile at the end of the sixth century and after. Thus Esdras insisted that foreigners be expelled, yet he admitted alien proselytes into the community. Malachy, an equally bitter opponent of mixed marriage, nevertheless foretold a sacrifice offered from east to west in an age when God's name would be great among the Gentiles.

It was at this crisis of Israel's thought that the remarkable book of Jonas intervened, one of the tiniest books of the Bible but an atom-bomb. It ridiculed the idea that the God of Israel could have no concern for the pagan nations, that God's choice of Israel implied that He despaired of everyone else. In effect the satirical author was doing no more than draw the conclusion from Israel's age-old revealed doctrine of a universal and merciful God, but his pointed and almost defiant tale of God's favour to Nineveh at the expense of an Israelitic prophet throws his weight decidedly on the side of the universalists.

Unhappily it was a losing cause. The dispersal of Israel throughout the world four or three hundred years before Christ and onwards produced, as we might expect, a defensive spirit, a closing in for protection, a renewed national self-consciousness, a stiffening in its confidence of choice. Israel hugged the idea of election to her breast. The persistence and intensification of this mood into Christian times was a great misfortune. That it did persist and increase is witnessed by the treatment of St Paul when he announced that God had called him to the Gentiles : ' Away with such a man from the earth,' they cried, ' for it is not fit that he should live ! ' Though the book of Jonas had braced Israel for the shock, the notion that the divine choice might eventually embrace all nations proved too much for Israel. We

see now, perhaps, why it was that our Lord himself, so thoughtful for human failings, said that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and why he appears never to have gone really beyond the borders where a considerable Jewish population was to be found. Yet he made it clear that he had a place in his heart for the hated Samaritans, that he could and did threaten Israel herself with rejection, that many would come from east and west whereas the sons of the Kingdom, the Israelites themselves, might be cast out. Like his forerunner, the Baptist, our Lord knew that God could choose to raise up children to Abraham, children of the election, from the very stones.

But faced with this situation we might begin to ask : What has become of the Choice ? After all, choice implies a selection of one at the expense of others, and if a privilege becomes universal, as now it seems to be, it is no longer a choice. Has Israel lost its privilege ? Or, in St Paul's words, ' Has God cast away His people ? ' The apostle answers his own question with a firm ' No.' It is a surprising answer from the apostle of the Gentiles, but he proves it by appealing to the ancient biblical doctrine of the Remnant, the Chosen Few, a doctrine deeply rooted in the earliest traditions of Israel and recurrent in the prophets. These prophets were not starry-eyed optimists ; they were convinced, of course, that God had chosen Israel, but they were only too familiar with the unworthiness of their compatriots. Of these two very different parents, the glorious theological certainty and the sad human fact of experience, was born the notion of the Remnant, the *she'ar* or *pelêṭah* of Israel. The word basically means that section of the nation which survives after disaster, but since Israel's disasters were various and many, the word takes on varying shades of colour in the course of history ; it also narrows down numerically and we find ourselves in the presence of the similar phenomenon of contracting perspective that we have already noticed in the book of Genesis —it is indeed a continuation of that process. Before the Babylonian exile in the sixth century the word Remnant is used of those left in Palestine by the conquerors, the hope and the choice of Israel naturally remained in and upon them. During the Exile the word indicates those who will return to form the nucleus of a restored nation. After the Exile the small community under the spiritual leadership of Esdras is conscious that it constitutes this guaranteed Remnant. But at the same time—and here is a momentous development—it becomes clear that membership is not automatic, it is a moral issue : the Remnant is spared because it has been converted, it inherits the choice because it is holy. This idea was not new. Two hundred years earlier the prophet Isaias had said the same : ' The remnant of Sion and what is left in Jerusalem shall be called holy.' But what has happened is that

the idea has penetrated to the people; those who returned were largely those who had profited spiritually from the sad experience of Exile, holding on to their conviction of God's choice throughout, a conviction that drove them to return to the hard conditions of the deserted Holy Land when others had stayed behind in Babylon with the comfort they had won for themselves.

We have reached the stage, then, when it is clear that Israelites must win their privilege of belonging to the Remnant; each individual is responsible; there must be a whole-hearted surrender to God's choice. This surrender at its most complete is portrayed in the post-Exilic picture of the ideal Servant of God in the second half of the book of Isaias: 'My servant, my chosen one' who sanctifies God's name among the nations and through suffering and even death reconciles the world to the God of Israel. With this portrait we have come to what Fr Dalton rightly calls the 'highwater mark of all the religious thought of the Old Testament.'[1] We have come also to the last point of the narrowing down of the chosen Remnant in this chosen One. It is possible, of course, that the inspired poet is thinking of the Remnant itself at its ideal best, but the ideal is so high and the individual note so loud that one is tempted to believe that the poet himself realises that such a response to divine choice would be rare and even singular. And in fact it was. Only one Israelite of all the Remnant accepted the office of this Servant of God. To speak purely abstractly (if this is not waste of time) it might have been otherwise. The Twelve Apostles at least might have died with him and not deserted him. He might have been crucified not between two thieves but between James and John who had said they could drink of his chalice. But he died alone, the Remnant of the Remnant, the Chosen *One* of God. Perhaps this is why St Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians uses that curious Rabbinic argument: 'The promise was made to Abraham and his seed. Scripture does not say "and to his seeds" as if speaking of several; it indicates only one, "and to his seed," that is to say Christ.' The promise and the choice, disappointed elsewhere, now dwell in him alone.

And yet not alone. Before he died our Lord said: 'Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it brings forth much fruit.' And so it did. Within three days the spirit of the Apostles had rallied again, the first harvest of the seed, the new Remnant of Israel; and within fifty days at the feast of the wheat harvest which we call Pentecost, at least three thousand Jews had acknowledged Jesus as Messiah. St Paul eagerly accepts this as

[1] cf. W. G. Dalton, 'The Fourth Song of the Servant of Yahweh,' *Scripture*, 1958, pp. 1ff.

evidence that God's choice has not gone astray ; God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew, he says. Even now there is a remnant chosen by grace. Israel failed to obtain what it sought but the chosen ones have obtained it. But he cannot believe that these few thousand are sufficient vindication of the promise, and so he makes a prophecy. He tells his readers that Israel's loss has been the Gentiles' gain but warns the Gentiles that there is more to come : that when their time, that is to say our time, is full and grace has reached its measure, then another age will dawn—the age of Israel returned : ' As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake ; but as regards the election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they now have been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy.' And as his mind dwells on the wonder of this great vision of sacred history—of a divine choice accepted by a nation, later rejected by all but a few, but persisting in spite of this rejection, and finally laying hold of the whole race once more—he bursts into the cry of amazed joy with which we are all so familiar : ' O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are His judgements ! '

In conclusion, the symbolic figure we should now have before our mind's eye is that of a great letter ' X.' This figure represents the progress of the divine choice. At the topmost, widest point we have the promise made after the Fall that through the seed of the woman the Fall will be reversed. The narrowing of the top half of the X symbolises the progress from mankind in general to Seth, Noah, Sem, Abraham, Jacob (or Israel) and the reduced Remnant of Israel. The lower half of our symbol figures the widening out of the choice to the Twelve chosen apostles, to the few thousand Jews of Pentecost and after, then to the millions of Gentiles and finally to these augmented by the return of Israel herself. But the point of intersection where the Choice threatened to go into extinction, that point is Christ, second Adam, son of Man, head of the body which is the Church. From his time onwards who said ' Go and take disciples of all nations ' and ' take up your cross and follow me,' many have come and will come to share in his sufferings, ' supplying what is lacking ' in them, not because they are defective but because this Chosen One, this Chosen Remnant, must ultimately be identified in many.

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