

BODY: CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY AND PARTICIPATION IN PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF REDEMPTION (Continuation)

*"The Lord is for the body."
1 Corinthians 6: 13*

THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

First Phase: Incarnation

The first act in the drama of Redemption is the Redeemer's complete identification in the body of his flesh with the whole mass of sin and death. For J. A. T. Robinson, this is the meaning of the enigmatic expression Paul uses in 1 Corinthians: "The Lord is for the body" (6:13). For into the body of the old world of sin and death, the Lord of life enters, himself garbed in a body of flesh, for the purpose of redeeming it and giving it new life.

The key idea that runs through Paul's Christology and binds it to his soteriology is that of solidarity. The Redeemer became one with humanity in order to put an end to the sinful human being in order that the new humanity might come into being.

The picture of the human condition is one of triple enslavement – to death, to sin and to the law. The strategy of reversal is not by way of an attack from the outside but from the inside, by way of solidarity with humanity's plight under this condition.

- 1) Death – for the Hebrews, it is never a purely natural phenomenon. Although the human being is *sarx*, he/she is created to live a unique relationship with the Creator. Death for the human being is not a natural fact like the mortality of the *sarx*. It is a punishment for sin. The 'body of death' is an absurd contradiction, for the human being, as *sōma*, is not made to belong to death. As humanity's destiny, death 'came from a man'; it entered into the world... through sin'; it passed unto all human beings, because all sinned' (Rom 5:12). Death is an intruder in God's universe.
- 2) *Sin* the accomplice of death and the agent which gives it entry into the human situation (Rom 5:12). It is the 'sting of death', sin as it were, stabbing for itself an opening into the human nature. Thus the human state is one of slavery to sin. Sin, like death, is an alien power dwelling in human beings, denying them mastery of their own actions: "It is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me' (Rom 7:17,20).
- 3) *Law* is related to sin as its instrument, just as sin is related to death as its accomplice: "As death comes through sin (Rom 5:12), so sin comes through the law (Rom 7:5). The law can induce sin because of its effect on the *sarx*, which being weak, is beguiled with the least provocation. Thus, the human being is 'under the law' (Rom 6:14; Gal 4:21) just as he/she is 'under sin'.

It is not this interrelated complex of bondage and frustration that the Redeemer enters in solidarity with humanity at the Incarnation. Paul shows this solidarity in the *sarx- sōma* through the following passages:

- 1) Rom 8:3 – "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh..."
"In the likeness of sinful flesh" is Paul's way of expressing the Redeemer's complete identity with the flesh of sin, with humanity in its fallenness. So far as Paul was concerned, the Redeemer had to share fallen humanity, sinful flesh; otherwise he could not deal with sin in the flesh.
- 2) Gal 4:4-5 – "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." The phrase, "born of a woman" is a typically Jewish way of describing the human being (Job 14:1: 15:14; 25:4; Mt 11:11). "Born under the law" likewise denotes the human condition, specifically that of the Jew (1 Cor 9:20: Gal 4:21). It was only by virtue of the Redeemer's solidarity with humanity in its condition of enslavement that he could 'redeem those under the law'.

3) Phil 2:7-8 – “... he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness; and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death...” The so called kenotic hymn patterns the portrayal of Christ on a well-established strand of Jewish reflection on Adam and his fall, but so as to show how Christ rectifies that pattern. Adam, created in the image of God, aspired to equality with God and became ‘man’ as he has been from that moment onward, enslaved to corruption (cf. Rom 8:18-21) and the elemental spirits (cf. Gal:4:3), subject to death on account of his disobedience (cf. Rom 5:15-19). Instead Christ, similarly in the form of God, but freely embraced the lot of humanity, becoming just what human beings are, accepting the condition of enslavement, and submitting himself to death as an act of obedience rather than the consequence of disobedience.

Complete solidarity with “sinful flesh” is the necessary prelude to the stripping off of his body of flesh on the Cross, in the name of an obedience perfect unto death. This second act in the drama of Redemption is that by which the forces of evil are deprived of assault and exposed to ridicule.

From the book by Bernardita Dianzon, FSP: Glimpses of Paul and His Message