

THE CORPORATE CHRIST (*Continuation*)

A Christian is not in Christ as a lone and isolated believer. Being in Christ is a communal conception. It is a life shared with those who have responded to Christ. The communal life in Christ is essentially what Paul's "Corporate Christ" is all about

2. THE LAST ADAM

The Adam-Christ parallel comes to clear expression in two passages of the Pauline Letters, Rom 5:12-21 and 1Cor 15:20-22, 44-49.

The context of the first passage is the new life of the Christians: "For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." The idea of the one man's obedience being valid for the many is hard not to place in the same corporate realm as the "in Christ" formula, especially when the parallel is an inclusive figure such as Adam.

The comparison with Adam suggests that the unity of human beings with Christ is similar to their unity with Adam. The latter unity is most easily explained as dependent on the conception of racial solidarity, Adam being the head of the race and his actions affecting all its members. Paul could think of Christ in the same way as he thought of Adam, as the inclusive personality of the whole race, which is "solid" with him: his actions affect them; he passes on righteousness and life to them. Adam and Christ are alike in this, that their actions were representative and inclusive.

Paul goes beyond Israel to the scope of all humanity. Those "in Adam" share in the tensions of a fractured creation; those in "Christ" will share in the fulfilment and completion of God's purpose for creation as a whole. Paul finds in Christ not only true Israel but renewed humankind. Christ provides an alternative template for humanity. The idea of Christ as a "corporate" person is part and parcel of Adam Christology.

The passage from 1 Corinthians (15:22) follows the same line of thinking: "...for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." Christ and Adam are heads of humanity, not just as first terms in sequences, but as the places in which humanity is summed up. Each is a head, not as a ruler of humanity, but rather as the spring is the head of the river which flows into it. This brings us back to a conception of the racial solidarity of human beings for the "corporate personality" of humankind, and a new "corporate personality" is created in Christ.

All that Christ did and suffered, he did and suffered as the "inclusive Representative" of the new humanity which emerges in Him."

3. "BODY" TERMINOLOGY

J.A.T. Robinson suggests that when Paul uses "body" terminology and applies it to Christians' participation in the resurrection body of the Lord, the term is not just to be understood as *corporate*, in the sense of a group of people or a society, as it would be understood today, but *corporal*, in the sense of an *organism*.

"The body that St. Paul has in mind is as concrete and as singular as the body of the Incarnation. His underlying concept is not of a supra-personal collective, but of a specific personal organism."

Robinson's idea finds support in this argument of K. Barth: "Believers... are therefore, in their full-grown and no way attenuated individuality, *one body, one individual* in Christ. They are not a mass of individuals, not even a corporation, a personified society, or a 'totality', but The Individual, The One, The New Man.' Christians are in liberal fact the risen organism of Christ's person in all its concrete reality.

Although some scholars favour the metaphorical interpretation of Paul's "body" terminology, other like Robinson argue that Paul had in mind a concrete reality: "It is almost impossible to exaggerate the materialism and crudity of Paul's doctrine of the Church as literally now the resurrection body of Christ." Paul's vision of the Church as "body" does not only point to its being a society with a common life and governor. More than that, Paul sees that its unity is that of a single physical entity.

L. S. Thornton holds the same view: "We are members of that body which was nailed to the Cross, laid in

the tomb and raised to life on the third day. There is only one organism of a new creation; we are members of that one organism which is Christ.”

4. BAPTISM AND THE METAPHOR OF “PUTTING ON”

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the death by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3-4)

Believers are incorporated into Christ when they participate in his death by baptism in the Spirit. “To be baptised” most likely has its primitive sense of immersion in water, and the prepositions “into” carries a local and realistic meaning. To be baptised into Christ means, therefore, to enter into the state of “being in Christ,” with all the implications of the phrase “in Christ” as discussed above. Baptism into Christ is said to imply baptism into his death, and therefore the believer’s death with Christ and his/her resurrection with Christ in the new life of the corporate personality of Christ. Water baptism by immersion effectively depicts and symbolizes this reality.

Incorporated into Christ, believers form a corporate unity with him, and Paul’s designation of the church as the “body of Christ” basically implies this unity. As believers form a corporate unity with Christ, they also form a unity with one another.

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:27-28)

The “putting on” of Christ in Gal 3:27 apparently allude to the clean garments assumed by the baptised after emerging from the water. It would appear that – especially in communities where baptism was administered chiefly to adult converts and by immersion – the shedding off of clothing before baptism and the re-clothing afterwards was considered as a vividly pictorial symbol of the break with the whole realm of the past, and the inclusion of the baptised – the veritable wrapping of him/her – in a new environment. And that environment was Christ himself, the ultimate Adam, the “inclusive personality” who now informs the members with His character. *(To be continued)*

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