

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

MEETING POINTS BETWEEN THE CORPORATE CHRIST AND THE COLLECTIVE SON OF MAN

T. W. Manson posits that the Son of Man in the Gospels is "an ideal figure and stands for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth in a people wholly devoted to their heavenly king." The mission of Jesus was to create the Son of Man, the Kingdom of the saints of the Most High (cf. Dan 7:13f, 21f, 27), to realise in Israel the ideal contained in the term. Such ideal involved mainly service and sacrifice. When Jesus spoke of the sufferings of the Son of Man, he must have meant something in which he and his followers should share. That he did in fact suffer alone was due to the failure of his disciples to rise to the ideal of the Son of Man.

Paul does not employ the term "Son of Man" in his letters, but the idea is not totally lost to him. Manson noted that in 1Cor 15:45-49, "it seem certain that the second man who is from heaven is the Son of Man of Dan 7:13. In all probability Paul is here thinking of Jesus as the head of the new humanity in contrast to Adam as the head of the old."

In Eph 2:13-18, "Jesus is the creator or founder of 'one new man', that is a new humanity. He has united Jew and Gentile 'in one body'. This is the body of Christ which suffers and is to be glorified." The corporate sufferings tend towards a glorious consummation.

We have here, as an integral part of Paul's thought, the conception of the Church as a living organism, a corporate entity embodied par excellence in Jesus himself in such a way that his followers, who together with him constitute the Son of Man as a group, are thought of as extensions of his personality, or as limbs of his body. And this living organism reproduces and continues in its own life the suffering and exaltation of its head.

C. H. Dodd follows the same line of interpretation. He observes that,

"In the book of Daniel the ideal Israel appears as 'the people of the saints of the Most High' identified as the 'Son of Man' in Daniel's vision, to whom the kingdom is given (13-14, 22-27)... For Paul, with his strongly eschatological background of thought, the belief that the Church was the 'people of the saints of the Most High', now revealed in the last days, carried with it the corollary that all that prophecy and apocalypse had asserted of the supernatural Messianic community was fulfilled in the Church."

What are distinctive in Paul are those passages that we may read as his response to the demands of Jesus on his disciples, such as the following:

1. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. (2 Cor: 1:5)
2. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death (Phil 3:10)
3. ...and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also glorified with him. (Rom 8:17)
4. From now on, let no one make trouble for me: for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. (Gal 6:17)
5. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well. (Phil 1:29)

The foregoing passages may be looked upon as Paul's ways of saying that, "he is drinking Christ's cup and being baptised with his baptism." The teaching of Paul seems to indicate that the Son of Man ideal, which Jesus, by force of circumstances, had to fulfil alone by his historical death and rising, is now being carried to further and fuller realization by a process of inclusion. If we interpret Paul correctly, we will discover in his thoughts an ever-increasing fellowship in the suffering of Christ. Thus, the collective Son of Man, as interpreted by Manson and other proponents of this view, finds perfect resonance with the Corporate Christ of Paul.

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