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In The Study

IN our time much theological debate is bedevilled by concealed divergent assumptions with regard to the nature of our redemption. We arrive at different and irreconcilable conclusions on all sorts of doctrinal issues because of these more basic cleavages; yet only too often it is the deep problems that go almost unnoticed. It is the special contribution of a new volume¹ in the Library of History and Doctrine that it uncovers a controlling centre of Christian belief, discusses, explores, and expounds it. Not all will be convinced at the end. But no one surely will lay down this book without having seen with clearer vision some of the really significant questions of modern theology and the profound implications of the possible answer to them.

The importance for the New Testament of the phrase "in Christ" may perhaps by now be taken for granted. It is the meaning and scope of it that continue to agitate the scholars. Professor Reid subjects it to careful examination and concludes convincingly that an objective interpretation of the Pauline formula must be upheld, that it points to and speaks of the basis upon which there rests that relationship which issues in the new being and the new life. From this truth important implications must be drawn.

How are we to understand man against this background? He is made in the image of God; but is this to be thought of in a substantial or a relational manner? The relational conception, which claims that the key to man's nature is to be found in his relation to God, is indeed biblical; but it seems to leave the human situation strangely precarious when the disruption of that relation is taken seriously. The substantial conception, which constitutes man in terms of something that he himself is allowed to possess, provides a helpful continuing stability; yet in so doing seems inevitably to contradict basic biblical emphases by setting man as an independent centre of activity who shares being with God, depersonalising grace, and opposing nature and grace, creation and redemption. The way forward is to be found by adding to the relational view the further recognition that it is the Fall that brings in the element of substantiality, of false independence. In this improper manner, man continues to exist. And this is because of the God-Man, because the Creator sees man "in Christ."

Then how are we to understand Christ and his work? The history of New Testament criticism reveals the continuing error of the separation between fact and interpretation. The quest for a Jesus of history is illusory. But the *historical* Christ is a reality, and a necessary one if justice is to be done to the biblical *en Christo*. The

¹ J. K. S. Reid: *Our Life in Christ*. S.C.M. 21s. 1963.

true and enduring humanity of Christ is pivotal for man's salvation. And this salvation is from first to last a divine accomplishment wrought out in the flesh of Jesus. The existentialist anthropological stress on human choice is erroneous and misleading. The work of Christ is not something wholly outside of us. It includes the ensuring that we are sharers in what he is and has done. If we ask how *pro nobis* becomes *in nobis*, then the answer must be given in terms not of obedience to his teaching or of imitation of his life, but of participation—and that not in the benefits he has won for us but in Him, his very life. To be in Christ—this is what salvation is and means. It is an ecclesiological reality. We are one body in Christ. But to argue about the primacy of the individual or the communal, to dispute as to the ontological or metaphorical significance of the *soma Christou*, may be to frame the issues falsely. The being of the Christian is essentially and inescapably communal because it must be seen in terms of witness and of calling. In this way the Church must be understood. The work of Christ embraces all men. The knowledge of it and the proclamation of it is at once the task of the Church and the key to its definition.

Is there then a part for man to play? The New Testament puts divine and human action together without embarrassment yet in seemingly paradoxical fashion. God does all; man's part is real; faith itself is the gift of God. Traditional theology from Tertullian onward, when arguing concerning the human factor, substituted "man cannot" for the biblical "man does not." Yet later theological reactions and restatements must on the whole be adjudged unsatisfactory. Pelagianism was unscriptural. Synergism achieved its attractive balance only by correlating things that do not belong to the same class. Rather must we understand the whole problem in the light of the divine determination, know that predestination is wholly in Christ, see Him as both author and subject of that predestination, recognize in Him the coincidence of divine and human action, and hold fast to the abiding truth that because we are chosen in Him from all eternity His situation is also ours.

It is thus "in Christ" that our life must from first to last be understood. It has its past grounded in His death, its present in His resurrection, its consummation in His exaltation. In terms of the solidarity of humanity we discern that we participate in his death and the deliverance and forgiveness there won, and are vindicated against our past. We participate too in His risen life; but here our identity with Him must be implemented—not made effective, but put into effect—and it is the Holy Spirit who aids us in sanctification to become what we are. As with the beginning, and the journey, so with the goal. Because we are in Christ we shall be with Him.

Does this mean universalism? The emphasis upon the complete-

ness of Christ's work does not carry this implication. The choice is not: either we accept Christ and become what we are not, or we reject Him and remain what we are. It is rather: "either we be what we are or . . . we become what we are not." Because the ultimate issue for man has already been decided in Christ, the way in which it is still undecided for any individual must be carefully understood. The possibility of final loss is the unthinkable, inexplicable, irrational "persistence in the No which God utters at the cross instead of the Yes of the resurrection which succeeds and supersedes the cross." God's predetermination is sure. But it is not determinism. It is the limiting personal gracious context within which human responsibility is created.

All this demands exceptionally careful attention. It pinpoints one of the great theological divides of our time. Most of it is basic Barth; but Professor Reid has presented it and worked it through to powerful effect. This is right. This is the Gospel. Only we are left with an ambiguity, which may yet ruin all. For the realities begin to get blurred at the point at which we start to distinguish between the church and the world. God's self-revelation indeed embraces both: His work in Christ accords a new humanity. But the knowledge and proclamation of God's word and deed is a matter for the Christian community; by acknowledgment of the gift and task we are incorporated into the body of Christ. Here Barth and Reid are at one, and we must surely concur with them. The difference between them is simply this that while Barth is led logically and notoriously to question infant baptism, Reid is driven mysteriously and cryptically to add by way of footnote concerning this acknowledgment of Christ's work: "normally in baptism, in which, in the case of infants, the acknowledgment is not to be individualistically understood."

This divergence brings us to the crux of the problem. It is from this point onwards that Professor Reid's exposition seems to falter. When he speaks of the life of the man in Christ it is difficult to be sure whether he is speaking of the church or of all mankind, or alternatively, whether he attaches the entering into the death of Christ to all humanity, whilst reserving the reduplication of the rising and exaltation of Christ to the Christian community. As he moves from the past to the present, from the death to the rising, from the factual identity to the ideal, he slides imperceptibly from speaking about "the man in Christ" to speaking of the "Christian." Does he mean exactly the same thing? For on the other hand, he can state categorically: "if those for whom he died are thereby assumed into the status of being in Christ, then unbelievers and atheists have also been thus assumed."

Inevitably baptism becomes the index of this confusion and ambiguity. The distinction between the reduplication of the death

of Christ and the reduplication of his rising is not entirely satisfactory. It might indeed seem to solve the baptismal problem if Professor Reid was prepared to tie baptism strictly to the death of Christ and go on to expound it as the sacrament of the assumption into the status of being in Christ of unbelievers and atheists. This would give him infant baptism; but this he is not prepared to do. For he clearly associates baptism with that acknowledgment of the gift and acceptance of the task which means incorporation into the body of Christ. What then is left? At least the possibility of understanding baptism as really paradigmatic of the whole Gospel wherein the divine and the human are coincident "in Christ." And then the paedobaptist controversy might be shifted from the context of Pelagian-Augustinian wrangles and argument over false ideas of faith and salvation and seen and answered in terms of one basic question. Is baptism the effective sacrament of incorporation into the "acknowledging" community, the body of Christ, or is it the eloquent sign of that new humanity which on the basis of the finished work of Christ belongs to all mankind?

It has long been realised that within the pages of Scripture and especially of the Old Testament "memory" has an extremely significant place. From this fact theological conclusions have been drawn, and necessarily so; but the checks and balances provided only by an exact and thorough examination of usage have hitherto been lacking. It is the basic merit of a recent monograph² in the series of Studies in Biblical Theology that it goes a considerable way towards meeting the need.

Dr. Childs subjects the use of the Hebrew root *zkr* to analysis, exposes its complexity, and distinguishes its various meanings. Recognizing how much we all depend upon the broad treatment of Pedersen at this point, he attempts a reassessment of the theory of memory that Pedersen promulgated, and concludes that many of the semantic broadsides hurled by James Barr of recent days have indeed found and penetrated their methodological targets. It remains indisputable that the Old Testament *zkr* includes a much wider range of actions than is comprehended by the English word "remember." But from this sure platform we must not jump too fast and too far. Examination of context of usage, of setting within the life of Israel, is demanded.

So by means of a form-critical investigation the scope of "remembering" whether that of God or that of Israel can be plotted; and it quickly becomes apparent that while the phrase "God remembers" belongs to a continuing cultic context, the phrase "Israel remembers" has a wider and more fluid background. Indeed, there is revealed marked theological development

² Brevard S. Childs: *Memory and Tradition in Israel*. S.C.M. 8s. 6d. 1962.

especially in the Psalter and the work of the Deuteronomist. Memory links the past with the present; it actualises the tradition; it involves participation.

But from such a review of the evidence there emerge the problems of the precise relationship of memory to the cult on the one hand and to history on the other. To the discussion of such questions the closing pages of this study are devoted. It is argued that periods of crisis for the cultic life of Israel involving reinterpretation and renewal carried with them a new emphasis upon and a new understanding of memory. It is further suggested that the actualisation of Israel's past is to be understood in terms neither of the dramatic repetition of historical events in cultic action nor of transportation back to the historic past through cultic recital. Rather is it that through remembrance the great determinative events of the tradition find constant reinterpretation and living relevance to the contemporary situation. All this has significant implications for the great issues of biblical understanding. For that reason among others this essay of Dr. Childs has an importance beyond its slender size.

The series of Ecumenical Studies in Worship has in general maintained a high standard and has made available to us several significant essays in the broad liturgical field. The two most recent contributions³ do, however, make strange bed-fellows in so far as they are of quite unequal value. Professor Hahn seeks to plot the implications of a true theology of worship for the ordering of the weekly service and for the building up of congregational life. Worship is and must be the centre of the Church's life; by its adequacy the range and depth of congregational growth and witness is likely to be determined. The theme is worked out in terms of God's service to us and the responsive service we render back to God. Many things are helpfully and validly said. Some questionable statements are advanced. I should want to query the assertion that when the Words of Institution are recited "the congregation hears Christ Himself speak and is made contemporary with the act of institution itself." This seems to me to involve a theological misconception of the first order. I should further wish to query the affirmation that "Christian worship has to be directed to both believers and unbelievers, for it has a message for both." This seems to me a half-truth in which error predominates. But the real ground of dissatisfaction lies much deeper. This essay presents in a Lutheran context and in a somewhat discursive manner a good deal of commonplace material. The effect on the milieu for which it was intended must surely have been salutary. But what the purpose of translating it for this series was I cannot imagine.

³ Wilhelm Hahn: *Worship and Congregation*. Lutterworth. 9s. 6d. 1963.
J. G. Davies, *Holy Week: A Short History*. Lutterworth. 9s. 6d. 1963.

On the other hand, the study provided by Professor Davies is surely a model of what we urgently need. His method is to take soundings, in the pre-Nicene age to discover the origin and purpose of Holy Week, in the fourth century to reveal some revolutionary departures, in the Middle Ages to discern great advances manifested by close examination of the Use of Sarum, in the twentieth century to note reform and plot its implications. The historical investigation and presentation is clearly and relevantly done. The broad picture is familiar enough; but it is filled out and illumined by much valuable material that does not lie easily to hand. The whole essay is concluded with suggestions for a revised observance of Holy Week within the Church of England.

A wholly Anglican concern? By no means. It is being increasingly recognised on all hands that what the Church of England purposes in this sort of sphere must concern the Free Churches. Beyond this, it is clear that there is a movement within the Free Churches themselves to attempt some liturgical provision for the days that immediately precede the Easter Festival. It is therefore to be hoped that what Professor Davies has written will prompt some pertinent questions among us. It should certainly provide a good deal of the material in the light of which the answers must be given.

The detailed proposals about Anglican observance are matters for domestic reaction. But the general approach must be carefully weighed by a tradition that has its own insights and is usually in danger of forgetting them. Professor Davies has no place for a Three Hours' meditative observance on Good Friday; and perhaps that will encourage those among us who hanker after the introduction of this particular aberration to think again. But more important is the fundamental issue that underlies the observance of the Christian Year. We all applaud the "sanctification of time." We talk much about it. Are we equally alive to its pitfalls, equally clear as to the true significance of the attempt to sweep the board clean and enthroned the recurring Lord's Day in splendid isolation?

Professor Davies comprehends the larger part of the problem in his brief references to the unitive and historical aspects of the festival and the necessity to distinguish and yet to combine. The pre-Nicene period saw the annual observance of the Christian Passover as the proclamation of Cross and Resurrection in indissoluble unity. To maintain this unified theological understanding is indispensable for the health of the People of God. But can this really be done once the separate commemoration of historical incident takes place? It is an easy step to a Friday of mourning followed by an uneasy lurch to a Sunday of joy—a step that Free Churches are not slow to take. And then they move with seemingly inexorable logic to special Maundy Thursday eucharists, and another buttress is

erected behind the sturdy misunderstanding of the Holy Communion as the repetition of the Last Supper.

But our classic tradition stakes everything upon a weekly festival that shows forth the whole Gospel. And here, whether we realise it or not is enshrined and defended the crucial insight that there is no single moment of Christian worship at which we can live pre-Easter. Everything must be seen from the other side of the Empty Tomb. Everything must be understood from this perspective. This is the way the Gospels were written. Perhaps it is in their unique blending of the theological and the historical that the clue to the resolution of this problem is to be found. To most of this Professor Davies is not blind—though I think he is still somewhat a prisoner of his own tradition in not quite seeing it with the forceful clarity which should be the native inheritance of the Free Churchman. Certainly the detailed suggestions and in particular the lectionary provisions appended to this study go a long way towards combating the dangers. It may well be that we should take the road here outlined, or at least some similar path. We cannot put the clock back in the name of primitive Christianity. We might lose more than we gained if we tried so to do. But we have a distressing record of struggling into ill-fitting, shoddy Anglican clothes which are just going out of fashion or which the owners are in process of thankfully discarding. We shall be wise to do some far more rigorous thinking than most of us have undertaken before we swallow Holy Week whole

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