

"The New Life" in Colossians 3:1-17

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The strange thing about the new life claimed by Christians is that they have it and have it not: they have yet to become what, as they claim, they already are. Not surprisingly, this causes tension within and criticism without. Critics outside will say that Christians use the language of idealism but that their lives sometimes do not measure up even to the lives of those who make no religious claims: they speak of the new life, but they do not seem to have gotten as far as the best of the old. Christians themselves, correspondingly, find that the hymns and prayers they use and the sermons they listen to express a level of experience far above their actual feelings or attitudes or experiences; so that, if they are conscientious and sensitive, they are in danger of suffering from a chronic sense of guilt for falling below their own professions.

One may argue that the sense of guilt is wrong; but that a tension should exist is inevitable. It is due to nothing less than the incarnation. Those who believe that, in Jesus of Nazareth, God's "Word"—his self-expression, his utterance—became flesh in a unique way, must expect to feel with exceptional keenness the dilemma of a kind of amphibian, belonging in two realms at once. The Christian claim, if taken seriously, means perplexity for the historian, disturbance for the ethicist, and pain for the believer. He has been delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13); and yet, because he has a physical body and feelings, he remains vulnerable to what, in Galatians, is called "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). So he is torn in two directions. The preacher tells him that what he could not do for himself has already been done for him by God; and that he has only to accept with gratitude the finished work of Christ. And yet, the same preacher is always exhorting him to do better, and telling him that his performance does not match up to his calling. In a nutshell, the Christian command is a perplexing one: "Become what you are!"

It is illogical. It is paradoxical. It is tension-causing. Yet, it is inescapable if the incarnation is a reality, and if history and transhistory are really interlocked as the incarnation reveals them to be. The horns of this dilemma—the dilemma of an ethic which is through and through religious—are a permanent part of Christian existence in this life. Indeed, if the growing-pains are never felt, it is doubtful whether the new life has begun.

Strangely, too, it is a creative tension, and, in its most characteristic

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forms, a peaceful tension, as all who know it will bear witness. Christian existence is a strangely relaxed kind of strenuousness, precisely because the Christian gospel is what it is. Before ever any demand is made, the gift is offered: the announcement of good news precedes the challenge. The indicative precedes the imperative as surely as the rope is made fast round a firm piece of rock for the climber's security before he has to apply himself to the struggle. Moreover (if the parable may be extended one clause further), the climber must attach himself to the rope before starting his effort. So the gospel not only begins with the indicative statement of what God has done, before it goes on to the imperative: even the imperative is first a command to attach oneself (be baptized! become incorporate!), before it becomes a command to struggle. The striving does come: strenuousness is indispensable for the

Christian climber—but only in dependence on all that has first been given by God and then appropriated through the means of grace. And the attachment to Christ, which is what causes the tension and makes us “amphibian,” is also precisely what gives us our confidence and our grounds for hope, as it is also the source of forgiveness and renewed strength when we fail.

So there is the paradox of the new life. Christians do, all too often, fail to match up to what is offered. But the paradox, once understood and accepted, is fruitful and productive; and the Christian, sweating and straining every nerve in the hard toil of the climb, knows a certain inward peace. Is it arrogant to claim that to this kind of peace an upright but non-religious person is, perhaps, a stranger? There is an inward-turned anxiety in trying to do oneself justice and to hold oneself to one's ideals. Of course it would be quite false not to take seriously the traditions of our Lord's “agony” in the Garden of Gethsemane—that is, his terrible wrestling and struggle, with the sweating of blood. And it would be ridiculous to pretend that, even in their incomparably lesser struggles, Christians are always conscious of the peace. But Jesus himself, in the end, won through, not to mere resignation but to the peace of affirmation: “thy will be done!” And the basic pattern of Christian life is fairly described as a relaxed and confident strenuousness.

The Christian paradox is further illuminated by the meaning of “new” in the phrase “the new life.” Professor Roy A. Harrisville, in a classic essay,¹ points out that, despite what earlier writers had said, the two Greek words mainly used in the New Testament for “new” (*kainos* and *neos*) are essentially synonymous. Some writers had asserted that, while *kainos* denoted innovation and carried a qualitative meaning (“flesh,” etc.), *neos* meant simply “young” or “new” and was related to time, not quality. Harrisville produces evidence against this, and holds that all that is happening is that one word is beginning to prevail over the other in frequency of use. But the important thing for the present purpose is that he goes on to show that, in the context of the New Testament, newness (whichever word is used) carries a special sense because of the new situation brought by the incarnation to which

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it refers. Thus, the situation is indeed novel and fresh in contrast to the old: the teaching of Jesus was “new” and surprising (Mark 1: 27); the new wine was too explosive for the old wine skins (Mark 2:22). And yet, the new is continuous with the old—as in God's system of covenants, in which the new covenant, though novel, final, and decisive, does also stand in the same sequence as all God's previous covenants (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:9). Further, it is a dynamic newness, for by it God actually creates new situations; and its finality constitutes a challenge to decision. Thus, the new life is a *fait accompli* because of Christ: it is a free gift from God; but it carries in it a challenge. If we accept that challenge, we begin to belong to the final event, to God's ultimate purpose: we have entered into the new covenant. (That is why the Christian documents collectively go under the title “the New Testament” or “the New Covenant.”) But the process of fully becoming detached from the old and fully belonging to the new remains to be painfully and laboriously completed.

All this has been said because the passage to be studied is an example of the subtle interaction of the indicative and imperative of the Christian way. Another classic document for the inseparability of religion and ethics in the Christian way is First John: “We love, because he

¹ “The Concept of Newness in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 74: 69ff.; June, 1955.

first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19); "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn. 4:11). Colossians, in a quite different idiom, bears witness to the same ethic.

Whether the reason why this passage in Colossians shows the interaction so clearly lies in the special situation to which it is addressed, is a matter of guesswork. It is a popular theory that the error against which this epistle is directed was some kind of Hellenistic-Jewish dualism with an emphasis on ascetic ritualism and a tendency to the cult of angels; and it could be that the stress in Colossians on the givenness of salvation in Christ, together with a call to respond with moral effort, was designed specially to correct this. Yet, the warnings against immorality and lovelessness suggest that the dangers were license and the giving way to selfishness rather than a legalistic asceticism—unless, indeed, the two do, paradoxically, belong together. Colossians 2:23 says (if this is the correct interpretation) that the ascetic practices "are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh." Perhaps, then, the Colossian Christians needed rescue both from the tyranny of religious legalism and also from the very vices which it was intended, but had failed, to hold in check.

If we turn, now, to Colossians 3:1-17, the second word in the chapter at once bears witness to the way in which religion and ethics are interwoven. The "then" (or "therefore") in verses 1 and 5 is to be taken seriously, and not regarded as a merely resumptive particle (as though it meant no more than "well, then"); for it is a familiar fact that, in the Pauline epistles, the ethical instructions mainly follow the doctrinal section, and that this sequence reflects the logic of the Christian position. In John the dependence of ethic on belief is made explicit: "Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn. 5: 5 and *passim*).

There is, however, as we have seen, a further important feature of New Testament ethics, namely, that they are sacramentally, as well as doctrinally, involved. When the listeners on the day of Pentecost were cut to the heart and

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cried, "Brethren, what shall we do?," Peter's answer was not "Try harder to be good," but "Repent, and be baptized..." (Acts 2:37f.). The Christian gospel is, in any case, statement before it is exhortation: but also its exhortation is a sacramental one before it becomes an ethical one—logically, if not always chronologically. Not only does guidance for Christian conduct spring out of belief in Jesus as God's Son; the will-power to implement it springs from organic union with God through Jesus Christ.

What, then, is the doctrinal conviction that forms the presupposition of this ethical section? It is, of course, the Christian gospel in its entirety; but, more immediately, it is that Christians have died with Christ and have been raised to life with him (2: 20, 3: 1, 3). It is this sharing in the death and life of Christ that, at one and the same time, frees Christians from the tyranny of mere ritual rules (2: 20-23) and yet also enables them to be bound so firmly to Christ that they do not succumb to the moral evils of laxity and indiscipline against which those ritual rules were supposed to protect them. "Religion" (like "obligation," from the same root) means literally "binding"; but it is possible to be bound by love, as well as by convention. This is characteristic, once again, of Christian ethics. They do not depend on a rigid code of rules; yet neither are they "antinomian," that is, libertine and without regard to morals. St. Paul goes so far as to say that, the moment anyone uses a set of rules ("law") as a means to establishing his good standing before God, he is committing Adam's basic sin; he is trying to establish a

claim, in his own right, upon God—the creature trying to control the Creator! (See Romans and Galatians.) But Paul argues equally strenuously that the alternative is not license (see, e.g., Rom. 6: 1ff.). On the contrary, the Christian has died with Christ: so far as his own lusts go, he should be as detached as if he were dead. And the new man that, in Christ, he becomes, cannot have any more to do with licentiousness. If the Christian condition means freedom from “law” (when “law” means self-regarding efforts to hold oneself up to an ideal), it is also freedom from sin because it is “bondage” to “law” (when “law” means a revelation of God’s will): it is bondage to Christ (Rom. 6:18).

Here, in this passage, the Christian is spoken of as not only dead with Christ, but also as already raised with him (3:1). This, which is even more complexly expressed in Ephesians (Eph. 2:5f.), is unparalleled in those epistles which are universally agreed to be authentically Pauline. In them, whereas the “death” of Christians is a *fait accompli*, their resurrection and life with Christ are still future (Rom. 6:6, 8; 1 Cor. 15:52ff.). But it is arguable that both viewpoints could belong to the same author in different circumstances. In the Corinthian correspondence Paul was perhaps in combat against some who assumed that they had already somehow become denizens of a new world-order and that they could there and then ignore the physical side of things. On them he had to urge that they had yet to undergo the final transformation and could not yet claim such immunities (1 Cor. 15). Possibly there may have been a need for the same caution in Romans 6. But it is not impossible that the same writer, faced with a different type of error, in which a prominent ingredient was a misconceived bodily asceticism, might have found himself stressing the opposite lesson—that a Christian who, in principle at

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least, shares Christ’s new life should not live as though he had never come beyond the age of “law.” If so, however, we have to recognize, as has already been said, that the other danger was never far off, and the Colossians have to be warned against licentiousness, when ascetical practices failed or were abandoned. However that may be, in the present passage the writer concentrates upon the transcendental. As raised with Christ already, the Christian must find his concerns and interests on the level of Christ’s existence: “that which is above, where Christ is, seated at God’s right hand” is contrasted with “that which is on earth.” We are often told that Jewish eschatology was time-conditioned and thought in terms of successive ages, whereas it was Greek thought, rather, that used place-metaphors and spoke in terms of “above” and “below.” But it is easy to find local metaphors even in the Old Testament, let alone in later Judaism: “...thus says the high and lofty One... ‘I dwell in the high and holy place...’” (Isa. 57: 15); and it is difficult to imagine any pictorial religious thought in any stream of culture that would not employ both metaphors of time and space together. The metaphor of above and below is a further way of describing the new life: without being literally detached from this world in time and place, and without mistakenly imagining that the final stage has been reached, the Christian is already wrapped up in Christ’s values and concerns, involved in Christ’s realm of existence. For similar metaphorical uses of the word “above” (*anō*), see John 8:23, Galatians 4:26, Philippians 3:14; for “from above” (*anōthen*), see John 3:3, 7, 31, 19:11, James 1:17, 3:15, 17; and for “going up,” “ascending” (*anabainein*), see John 3:13, 6:62, 20:17; Acts 2:34, 10:4, Romans 10:6, Ephesians 4:8-10, Revelation 11:12.

But it is still a hidden sort of transcendence that the Christian shares: “you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” It is only “when Christ, who is our life appears” that “you

also will appear with him in glory." The Christian's new life already exists, for he participates in the absolute life that Christ exhibited, beyond the cross: sharing Christ's sufferings, he already shares that life which God created, in Christ, out of that death. But the processes of subjecting all life to Christ are still only inaugurated, not completed; the "glory" is still future; and the language of hope has to use the future tense to describe the revealing of a reality which, at present, is hidden. Elsewhere in the Pauline epistles, the phrase "with (*sun*) Christ" (using the preposition by itself; it is otherwise with verbs compounded with *sun*) occurs only of future existence (1 Th. 4:17 (cf. 4:14), Phil. 1:23); and the phrase "in God" is very rare in the Pauline epistles (only 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1). Here, then, are three unusual turns of phrase: the past tense in speaking of the Christian's resurrection, "with Christ" otherwise than of a future state, and "in God." But it may be that all three were called into use by the circumstances.

So we come to the opening of the main ethical section. This, in turn, leads (v. 18) into specific directions about relationship within the community, the so-called *Haustafel* or table of household regulations: but that belongs to the next article. The opening verses 5-17 of the part that now concerns us is in more general terms; and it begins (if one translates literally) in an extraordinary way—"Put to death therefore the 'limbs that are on the earth.'"

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(The RSV renders, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.") This is extraordinary in at least two respects. First, "put to death," "mortify," suggests, at first sight, precisely the repressive attitude that has just been repudiated in the preceding verses. It looks like bringing back again the tyranny of man-made rules for self-mortification from which it has just been said (2:20ff.) that Christians are free. Incidentally, too, it is, in any case, an ethical imperative; and, if what was said earlier in this article is true, this is not the first sort of imperative that logically follows the indicative of the gospel. Logically, it should be a sacramental imperative—a command to become incorporated—as in Acts 2:38 already quoted. The second extraordinary thing is the phrase "the limbs that are on the earth." Where else would one's limbs be? And, anyway, why use "limbs" when what is meant seems to be vices—"immorality, impurity," etc.? To the use of "limbs" in this peculiar way there is no exact parallel in the New Testament. Richard Reitzenstein claimed² to have found a parallel from Iranian religion; but there seems to be no evidence that what he quotes (from a Chinese document which alludes to Jesus!) represents anything current in pre-Christian times. So our phrase remains without any known obvious parallel in its own contemporary world. Professor Robert C. Tannehill³ takes these "limbs" to be the limbs of the old humanity, the life that has been discarded; but if the two humanities—the old and the new—are collectives, then their "limbs" would logically be the individual persons of whom they are composed, rather than characteristics of those persons' lives. One can only guess that the vivid, concrete word is used because it is through the limbs or organs of the physical body that the vices are implemented (cf. Rom. 6:13). As for the "mortifying," it is possible to use this verb in other ways than to describe what was attacked in 2:20ff. The Christian who has been freed from merely legalistic practices is, as has already been said, not free from the obligation to "kill" everything in himself that is contrary to God's will. It is not literally the limbs and organs that are meant, but the vices that are indulged through them, those, indeed, do have to be relentlessly attacked. In much the same way, in Romans 8:13, Paul speaks of putting to death

² *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber, 1921), pp. 152ff.; *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* (Leipzig/ Berlin: Teubner, 1927), pp. 265ff.

³ *Dying and Rising with Christ: a Study in Pauline Theology* ("Beiheft 32 zur ZNTW," 1966), pp. 50f.

(a different verb, but virtually synonymous) by the Spirit the deeds of the body; and in Second Corinthians 4:10 he speaks of carrying about in one's body the dying (*nekrosis*, the noun of the verb of Col. 3:5) of Jesus. So, it is war to the death on all that stands between the Christian and God's will; and, even though the initial imperative seems, at first sight, to be a direct appeal to a person's unaided effort, the language that follows makes it clear enough in fact that the "mortification" is something (like that in Romans 8:13, "by the Spirit") that does not take place except by the divinely-worked renewal of mankind in Christ.

But, first, what are the vices that have to be put to death? Three times

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over in the next nine or ten verses there are sets of five qualities, good or bad (vv. 5, 8, 12). Reitzenstein, in the books cited above, is able to show that this fivefold scheme is adopted in Iranian religions; and, whether or not his material is of such a period as to be relevant to the period of Colossians, it is certainly possible that there is a measure of stylization in these ethical exhortations. It may be that the moralist tended to let his exhortations fall into conventional moulds. If so, it may be a mistake to press the quest for relevance, in detail, to 'the Colossians' own situation. It is enough that they needed admonition about their morals; and it seems to indicate that, if they needed to be released from a misdirected asceticism, they needed no less to be guided to ways of effective control and direction of their lusts and appetites.

The most interesting feature of the first list of five, in verse 5, is that four sins of sheer sensuality are followed by avarice or covetousness—the desire to get and get—and that this is, strikingly, described as tantamount to idolatry, as it is also in Ephesians 5:5. Of course the sins of gross sensuality are themselves sins of covetousness. Of course, too, those sins of gross sensuality are a form of idolatry. Indeed, by the converse metaphor, unfaithfulness to God in the form of idolatry is often described in the Old Testament as itself harlotry (see, e.g., Ex. 34:15f.; Deut. 31:16; Ezek. 16:15ff., 23:30, etc.). But covetousness—the lust for more—includes plenty of the "more respectable" forms of acquisitiveness as well as the grosser ones; and it particularly deserves to be identified as idolatry, since, by definition, it means transferring one's concerns and desires from God to gain, and with it come all the sins of selfishness, whether crass or sophisticated. E. Lohse's commentary⁴ (*in loco*) quotes two good parallels. In the Jewish pseudepigraphical writing called *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, in *The Testament of Judah* 19:1, comes the sentence: "love of money leads to idols"; and in *The Letter to the Philippians of Polycarp*, 11:1 (c. A.D. 150), "anyone who does not abstain from avarice will be contaminated by idolatry." A modern meditation⁵ runs:

O God, with thee I take refuge from doubt
and idolatry and discord and hypocrisy and evil,
from wrong seeing and from the
perversion that is worship of worldly things,
wealth, family and offspring.

⁴ *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Eng. trans. from the German¹⁴ of 1968 by William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris, ed. Helmut Koester, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

⁵ Kenneth Cragg (comp.), *Alive to God: Muslim and Christian Prayer* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 101.

In verse 6 comes the terrible warning that "on account of these sins the wrath of God is coming." It is important to distinguish between dire *consequences* following sin, and an angry, punitive *attitude* on God's part.

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"Wrath" is only an old word for "anger," and anger normally connotes hostile feelings and an intention to punish. And hostile feelings against the sinner, and a vindictive or punitive attitude towards him, do not seem to be compatible with the God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16), and who "shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). It has, consequently, been maintained by some that though the word *orge* undoubtedly normally means anger, and does so in many other parts of the New Testament itself, one is bound, in the context of Paul's gospel of free grace, to interpret it in an impersonal way, as the terrible results or effects of sin, rather than in a personal way, as an emotion of hostility on the part of God himself (in Latin it would thus be an *effectus*, rather than an *affectus*). But it is probably a mistake to imagine that, in the Pauline epistles, the word can be thus detached from God and turned into, so to speak, a merely mechanical consequence of the laws of cause and effect. Whatever *orge* means, it seems to belong to God. But it is certainly right to refuse to associate it, in such contexts, with "anger" in the common sense; and it is, perhaps, right to dissociate it from all ideas of *punitive* intention too. *Orge*, in such contexts as we are considering, is the disaster that, precisely because God himself gives human persons free will and trusts them with responsibility, is bound to follow the abuse of personality and the refusal to respond to his approaches. Certainly the elimination of the punitive meaning in no way reduces the gravity or severity of the warning. Indeed, it deepens it, for it is infinitely more terrible to flout love than to defy anger.

Verse 7 is a reminder (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11) of the sheer alienation from which the Christians at Colossae had been rescued. Formerly, they had themselves been involved in just such vice. But now (v. 8) they must "put them all away," or take them all off. The phrase "them all" would naturally be a reference back to the set of five vices of verse 5, were it not that it is immediately expanded into a new set of five, this time comprising sins of attitude towards other persons: "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk." Perhaps the logic of the wording must not be pressed. Perhaps both sets of five vices were common-places in current ethical instruction, which this writer is simply working into his admonitions, and the second set may be rather loosely attached to the context. Incidentally, here we do get two words for "anger" in an entirely human context and in a wholly bad sense; and this time the one translated "anger" is the word *orge* which we have just been discussing under the translation "wrath" (of God). What is here rendered "wrath" is *thumos*. Whether there is much distinction between the two is doubtful. Commentators are able to quote Stoic and other writers for the view that *orge* tends to mean a settled feeling of hatred, whereas *thumos* means, rather, an outburst of passion. But here, at least it looks more like an attempt at cumulative effect than at fine distinctions. But even if the list is in some measure conventional and repetitive, this is not to say that both sets of five vices may not have been entirely relevant to the concrete situation addressed. Another sign of a certain looseness in the writing is that it is difficult to know how to construe "from your mouth," at the end of the verse. Does it go with "put away," and are we to suppose that all the four vices which precede "foul talk" are conceived of as

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verbally expressed? Or does it go (albeit rather redundantly) only with "foul talk," and mean "foul talk such as is apt to issue from your mouth?" Perhaps the latter is the more probable; and, if so, this allows us to give to the verb "put away" the more pictorial meaning of "take off," like a garment.

At any rate, this metaphor does explicitly occur in the next verse, and it is at this point that language reminiscent of baptism begins to enter the scene "Put away" (v. 8) may or may not be a metaphor from the use of clothing; but "put off" (v. 9) and "put on" (vv. 10, 12) certainly are; and these, together with the terms "the old nature" (v. 9), "the new nature" (v. 10), fit well with the dramatized theology of adult baptism in which the baptizand's taking off of his clothes before baptism and being clothed with new, clean clothes after it must have suggested the complete break with unregenerate humanity which conversion involved, and the entry into the renewed humanity.

Admittedly, this is a description of something even deeper than the sacrament itself. The metaphor of divesting is used in Second Corinthians 5:4 of the process of death, and, in this very epistle, of the death of Christ himself (2:15, where RSV's "disarmed" translates a verb of stripping) and of the sharing in that death by Christians (2: 11). Similarly, the metaphor of putting on clothes is applied, in Romans 13:12, 14, to putting on the Christian's armor—indeed, putting on Christ himself—and, in First Corinthians 15:53ff., and Second Corinthians 5:2-4, to putting on that which is beyond mortality. Further, it has been claimed⁶ that there is a striking analogy to the (admittedly curious) metaphorical use of "man" as the object of the verb "take off," in an anecdote preserved by Eusebius (*H. E.* xiv. 18.26) about the philosopher Pyrrho. (The same anecdote comes also in Diogenes Laertius, IX.66.) Pyrrho taught that, reality being beyond the perception of the senses, men ought to rise superior to these senses; yet he lost no time in escaping up a tree when attacked by a dog. When mocked for inconsistency with his own principles, he excused himself by saying that it was difficult to "take off the man" (*ton anthropon ekdunai*)—meaning, apparently, to doff what is human in us. It is possible, however, that the verb in this context meant not "take off" but "escape from" (even when the object is in the accusative—see Liddell and Scott, s.v. III. 2); and the corresponding noun *ekdusis*, in the context of the Diogenes Laertius version (IX. 65) does evidently mean "escape."

But, whether or not there are non-baptismal parallels to the metaphor, in Colossians 2:12 the "divesting" of verse 11 is explicitly linked with baptism; and clothing metaphors certainly gain in force if baptism is in mind. In any case, what matters most is that the renewal is clearly something given by God, not acquired by human effort; the new nature is "being renewed" in the passive. So in Second Corinthians 4:16, "our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day." Our old nature has already been done to death with Christ (Rom. 6:6). Thus, the renewal has to be seen rather as the progressive appropriation of something already given by God in Christ

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than as something created by human effort: "what we are" logically precedes, "what we become."

⁶ P. W. van der Horst, "Observations on a Pauline Expression," *New Testament Studies*, 19:181 ff.; January 1973.

If so, the call in verse 5 to "mortification" to be (like Peter's call in Acts 2:31f.) a call to implement what is already a reality, and to be incorporated in, to put on like a garment, that humanity which, in Christ, is already in existence and within which the individual may look to be divinely renewed. The exhortations and statements are subtly intertwined: the "being" enables the "becoming"; the "becoming" is a response to the already existing "being." E. Lohse⁷ paraphrases verse 5 as "let the old man, who has already died in baptism, be dead."

The phrase in verse 10 which amplifies the process of renewal is obscure. Quite literally, it runs: "...which is being renewed into knowledge in accordance with the likeness (image) of the one who created him (or it, i.e., the new humanity?)." What does "renewing into knowledge" mean? The RSV's "renewed in knowledge" conveys the impression that the renewal itself consists in an improvement or recovery of knowledge. But the phrasing of the Greek suggests, rather, that the renewal is moral renewal, corresponding to and contrasting with the immorality of the rejected "old humanity," and that the knowledge is not part of the process so much as one of its results: F. F. Bruce's paraphrase,⁸ "constantly being renewed until it attains fulness of knowledge," seems correct. Knowledge, then, of what? And to what does the "image" (or "likeness") refer? In Genesis 1:27, God created man in his own image; but in Second Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, Christ himself is God's image or likeness. Are we to assume that uppermost in the writer's mind is a renewal that conforms us to (so paraphrasing the preposition *kata*, "according to") Christ (who is the image of God who created man)? (Chrysostom and some other patristic writers took "the one who created" to be not God but Christ; but this seems difficult to accept.) Or is it, rather, simply the re-enactment of the original creation of Adam that is uppermost in his mind (as is suggested by the RSV's "after the image of its creator")? Obviously, for a Christian the two are identical. To be conformed to Christ is to be part of the ultimate Adam. But it does make some difference in emphasis if one rather than the other is the primary thought. (It is to be noted, incidentally, that, whereas man is thought of as "made *in* (or *according to*) God's image," Christ is spoken of not as "in" God's image but as being himself God's image (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15): man, in other words, is at a further remove from the original than Christ is.) In any case, the new humanity is both created by God and is Christ-centered; and, as such, it includes, without discrimination, black and white, educated and uneducated, rich and poor. There is no question of "Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all." "Barbarian," for anyone proud of Greek culture, meant anyone outside that charmed circle. "Scythian" apparently stood for the most barbaric of

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such outsiders. (Bengel,⁹ as well as mentioning this, suggests that "Greek, Jew, barbarian, Scythian" are meant to indicate west, east, south, and north respectively!)

But we are still asking, What is the "knowledge" which seems to be the goal of the renewal? Knowledge, presumably, of God. This (baptismal?) renewal leads to a knowledge of God; and to "know" him in the profound, biblical sense of responding with will as well as mind is to grow like him—to be changed into his likeness (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The word "knowledge" is used like this, without further qualification, in Philippians 1:9 also.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁸ *An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1965), p. 255.

⁹ *Gnomon* (1855), p. 793, cited by O. Michel, "Skythes," *TWNT*, VII: 450, n. 11.

True to the alternation between indicative and imperative, the writer now (v. 12) returns to his imperative. He has just said, as a statement,¹⁰ that the Christians have already put on the new nature (v. 10). He now says "Put on...!" It is, once again, the motif of "become what you are!"

In this exhortation to put on a garment, the Christian community are addressed as God's Israel, in terms familiar from the Old Testament: "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved." The terms do not necessarily connote qualities already attained. They are 'terms emphasizing, rather, God's purpose: it is he who calls, sets apart, and loves his people. And the Christian gospel has made it clear enough, too, that, if such terms suggest, at first hearing, arbitrary, unfair, discriminatory treatment, they turn out, in fact, to be the basis of a commission to minister to all men alike. To be called out is really to be sent in.

This time, the garment to be put on consists of qualities which concern personal relationship. They start as a new sequence of five, balancing and counteracting the five vices of personal relationship in verse 8. They are virtues that reduce or eliminate friction. But, just as verse 8 is followed by a slight further expansion ("Do not lie"), so verse 12 is expanded into a description of mutual forbearance and forgiveness, with an express appeal to the fact of the Lord's (i.e., Christ's) forgiveness. (For the appeal to Christ's example, cf. Rom. 15:3.) And, to crown all, love (*agape*) must be put on—love which is described (v. 14) as that "which binds everything together in perfect harmony." The Greek, literally, is "a bond of completeness." Is the metaphor that of a strap or band that holds the bundle of virtues together and completes it? Or does it mean that *agape* is that which produces perfection or completeness because it makes the other virtues cohere? Or does it mean that *agape* produces perfection by making not the virtues but the persons in question into a unity? Various commentators express various views, quoting parallels from extra-biblical writers for metaphorical uses of "bond"; but it is difficult to find a conclusive guide to a decision.

The metaphor in verse 15 is also difficult to interpret with certainty. The RSV has, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts....," which conveys the

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impression that Christ's peace is to "reign supreme." But the verb is more picturesque than simply "rule: "it means cc umpire," "settle disputes." Does the verse, then, mean that Christians are to reach that inward, Christ-given peace which comes from listening to Christ's guidance—his "ruling" in that sense? If so, it would be an expression of that relaxed strenuousness that has already been mentioned. It involves the difficult and strenuous process of surmounting the stage when our own desires are clamoring to be heard, and so listening to the Umpire and accepting his decisions.

Such an inward peace produces also peace in the community, because it enables people to be effectively united in a single body. The RSV, translating "in the one body," makes this a reference to the Body of Christ, which is entirely in harmony with the theme of something already in existence, given by God. But there is no "the" in the Greek: it is simply "in one body"; and the reference may be to the local community of Christians becoming a united body. The body metaphor is variously used in the New Testament. In Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:23, for instance, the Church as a whole is called Christ's body; but in Romans 12:5 ("we... are one body in Christ") it is not expressly called Christ's body. Rather, it stands

¹⁰ Unless, with E. Lohse, *op. cit.*, p. 141, we regard the aorist participles in vv. 9f. as mere extensions of the imperatives (cf. Eph. 4:21ff.).

for the organic unity achieved by a group of persons through being “in Christ.” Thus, its range seems to lie between the two poles of a more or less secular analogy, emphasizing simply the harmony and cooperation between members of a single human society, and an explicitly Christological figure standing for the divine personality to which Christians find themselves organically united as limbs to a body. The same ambiguity attaches to the phrase in First Corinthians 12:13: “...we were all baptized into one body!” Does that mean “baptized into membership in one Body, namely Christ’s” or “baptized so as to form one body?”

Verse 15 ends with a further command: “be thankful!” And then follows, in verses 16 and 17, a remarkable mixture of religious and ethical counsel. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” presumably means, Christ must be allowed to speak to the full among you—that is, you must let his voice be heard, both through reciting the traditions that were preserved in the Christian communities—the “story” of Christ, the sort of material that ultimately formed the Gospels—and through listening to the remembered sayings of Jesus and also the inspired utterances of Christian prophets and preachers: all these are the “utterances” of Christ. The verb “dwell in” is perhaps intended to mean that this voice of Christ must be constantly at home among them—never allowed to leave them. “In all wisdom” seems best construed not with “the word of Christ” but (as RSV) with “as you teach and admonish one another.” And all this must be done not prosaically and pedestrianly, but with the music of thankfulness. “Singing... in your hearts” (for so the Greek runs) might mean singing inaudibly, to yourselves and inwardly: the Christian’s heart is full of silent song. Or it might mean singing not only with your lips but also in your hearts; and the specifying of the three categories, psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes, is so circumstantial as to make private, metaphorical singing the less likely. In Ephesians 5:19 what is intended is evidently audible, for there they “speak” to one another (RSV has “addressing one another”) in these modes.

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Finally (v. 17) every word and deed must be in the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, for his sake, with his sanction, under his ownership, and must be accompanied by giving thanks through him to God as Father. Two, if not three times in three verses thankfulness is stressed: verse 15, “be thankful”; verse 16, “with thankfulness”;¹¹ verse 17, “giving thanks.” We may end with a touching parallel from a non-Christian voice—that of the former slave Epictetus, himself originally from Hierapolis close to Colossae, and a near contemporary of St. Paul’s. “Ought we not,” he says, “as we dig and plough and eat, to sing the hymn of praise to God? ‘Great is God, that He hath furnished us these instruments wherewith we shall till the earth. Great is God, that He hath given us hands, and power to swallow, and a belly, and power to grow unconsciously, and to breathe while asleep.’ This is what we ought to sing on every occasion, and above all to sing the greatest and divinest hymn, that God has given us the faculty to comprehend these things and to follow the path of reason. What then? Since most of you have become blind, ought there not to be someone to fulfil this office for you, and in behalf of all sing the hymn of praise to God? Why, what else can I, a lame old man, do but sing hymns to God? If, indeed, I were a nightingale, I should be singing as a nightingale; if a swan, as a swan. But as it is, I am a rational being, therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God. This is my task; I do it, and will not desert this post, as long as it may be given

¹¹ But if the reading with the definite article (*en te(i) chariti*) is correct, then it is possible to translate “as controlled by the grace” (i.e., the gracious event which is Christ). See G. Dellings, “Hymnos,” TWNT, VIII: 501, n. 65. But even with the definite article, the phrase might still mean “with thankfulness.”

me to fill it; and I exhort you to join me in the same song.”¹² Again: “For I came into the world when it so pleased Him, and I leave it again at His pleasure, and while I live (sic) this was my function—to sing hymns of praise to God, to myself and to others, be it to one or to many.”¹³ The Christian has even more specific grounds for his songs and hymns and spiritual odes.

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Prepared for the Web in October 2007 by Robert I Bradshaw.

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¹² Epictetus, *Discourses*, I. 16, 16-21; trans. W. A. Oldfather, “Loeb Classical Library” (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960-67), I: 113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, III. 26. 29b, 30; LCL, II:237.