

A Further Note on Philippians

2:5

MICHAEL HOLLIS

I think that Dr. Hanson* is entirely right in his rejection both of the Moffatt version of this passage and of the interpretation in the Moffatt Commentary. I am not certain what the translators of the R.S.V. meant. But is the R.V. translation, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus', possible? It is not enough to say, as is said in one commentary, that it would be more usual if we had 'Which Christ Jesus also thought in himself'. That is not what the text says. It is the meaning suggested by those MSS and versions which have a passive verb in the third person in the first clause, but it is clear that this cannot be the original reading.

Suppose that we render the passage: 'Think this in yourselves, which also (you think) in Christ Jesus', can we give it any intelligible meaning? I think that it is the simplest rendering of the Greek and that it is more Pauline than the ordinary translation. That calls upon the Philippians to imitate their Lord. In verses 1-4 St. Paul has demanded that they reach a standard of self-abnegation and unity which is, humanly speaking, impossible. Verse 5 can only be rightly understood if it is taken in the closest connection with what precedes it. He has to convince these Christians at Philippi that he is entirely serious in what he asks for. It is not impossible and he sets out to show why. On the ordinary interpretation he does this by appealing to the example of Jesus. That is not a usual pattern of thought for St. Paul. He does not argue that Christians can do something because Jesus has done it, in the sense that what man has done man can do. He does, again and again, insist that the Christian has, by what Christ has suffered and done, been so radically altered, so re-made, that what was before impossible has become possible. The Christian really, not merely ideally, is a new man in Christ.

But no one knew better than St. Paul that Christians do in fact behave as if all this had never happened; as if they were still just what they had been. His answer is always the same; Remember what God has done in Christ Jesus. In other words, Be

* See *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Volume Seven, Number Two, p. 73.

what you are. Is it not exactly this that he is saying here? This humanly impossible unity is possible because they are in Christ. But they must beware of trying to live sometimes as if they were 'in themselves' and sometimes 'in Christ Jesus'. The whole life of the Christian, every moment of it, is 'in Christ Jesus'.

There is no exact parallel to this expression, but there are others not wholly unlike it. In writing to Philemon (v. 16) he refers to Onesimus as now 'a brother beloved . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord'. There is the same line of thought in Colossians in the third chapter: 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God'. The whole massive argument of Ephesians 2:11ff. is the same. The truth about themselves being what it is, God having made this difference in Christ, Christians must not behave as if it had never happened.

That, I believe, is the true meaning of this verse in Philip-pians. They are 'in Christ Jesus'. They themselves recognize this to be true and, at times, expect from themselves thought and conduct 'in Christ Jesus'. But too easily over large areas of their lives they assume that they can live much like everyone else, as if they were men and nothing more, as if the new creation had never taken place (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). St. Paul will have none of it. God has 'quicken'd us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:5f). For this reason, and for this reason only, the demands of the first four verses of this second chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians are not, as by all human standards they must appear, fantastically impracticable, but the only standards for Christians, at every time and in every place. But they are much more than standards. They are 'in Christ Jesus' possible.

★

In Buddhism 'death' is a final category. It is the certain experience of man, the one dependable reality which is independent of man. The Kammic situation, therefore, is seen as a circle and a cycle revolving round and round the fact of death, man's true freedom being achieved when he has escaped from this situation.

In Christianity, on the other hand, the final category is life and not death, with the result that the human situation is not seen as a circle or cycle but rather as an ascending spiral, man achieving his destiny as he is able to co-operate freely in God's progressive purpose for his world. The Buddhist talks of Sansara, life's meaningless round; the Christian speaks of the Kingdom of God, life's meaningful ascent.