

# St. Paul's Expression 'Man in Christ' and the Vedantist's Understanding of *Jeevanmukta*

P. David

It is my purpose in this paper to seek to show, on the basis of certain texts from the Pauline epistles, the meaning of the expression, 'in Christ', which Paul himself coined, and that this phrase means a life of intimate union with Christ which makes the Christian life an eternal life lived in the midst of time. Perhaps no other writer in the New Testament brought out the conceptual meaning and depth of the phrase, 'man in Christ', as St. Paul did. The more he dwelt upon the meaning of the phrase, the more he discovered the profound meaning of it, that it is Christ's life in him; that he is living, but yet it is also his life which he lives in the flesh. And this life of an ordinary human being is lived in faith—'faith in Him'. The amazing thing is that, as St. Paul argues, even for the life in the age to come the 'I' will not simply be obliterated. What is to perish is the self which is centred in itself, in order to make the self centred in Christ.

Can St. Paul's idea of mystic union with Christ comprehensively and conclusively explain to us the deep significance of the phrase, 'man in Christ'? Plotinus, the illustrious mystic of the East, defined mysticism in terms of the rising of a soul to the heights of its original state with the divine being; and his dictum is 'the flight of the alone to the Alone'. Can this dictum of Plotinus come nearer to St. Paul's idea of 'man in Christ' than the Hindu idea of mysticism which means that an individual soul is caught up in the rapture of bliss which is guaranteed in mystical experience and the intimate union with the divine being? It will be noticed that the statements of St. Paul connected with the phrase, 'man in Christ', do not necessarily and primarily convey the nuances in which the mysticism of the East is interpreted, nor does the phrase of St. Paul convey the idea of suspension of active participation of an individual who is in Christ in the process of actualization of the divine purposes on this plane of human history. Prof. C. H. Dodd rightly points out that St. Paul's Christ-mysticism is saved from the introverted individualism of

many forms of mysticism by his insistence that communion with Christ is also communion with all who are Christ's.<sup>1</sup>

We are now to consider the meaning of St. Paul's phrase, 'man in Christ', under three heads: Firstly, 'man in Christ' is a new creature whose nature is to be conformed to the true image of God; secondly, 'man in Christ' may mean that man under faith is actively engaged in and concerned with the founding of God's Kingdom upon earth; and, thirdly, 'man in Christ' may mean that the believer in Christ is still in possession of his own identity as a person here on earth and in life hereafter. Along these lines of explaining the meaning of the phrase, 'man in Christ', we would attempt to discover whether there are any points of convergence and whether there is a catholicity of outlook between a Vedantist's term, *Jeevanmukta*, and St. Paul's expression, 'man in Christ'.

## I

Our first point is that 'man in Christ' is a new creature possessing the true image of God. The meaning of the statement of St. Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me . . .' (Gal. 2:20), can be that the guilty self is dead and done with. To effect this the power and love of God have been manifestly revealed in Christ and His righteous act. But the whole life of 'man in Christ' hinges upon his 'faith'. He in his earthly life is apparently open to his neighbour's harsh judgement, curse and despal; but in his inward being he is a changed man through and through by his act of self-committal, self-abandonment to God.<sup>2</sup> It is in this state of self centred in Christ that the insidious haunting presence of sin is banished, new powers invade the soul. It is God who is at work in us, both in act and in will (Phil. 2:13; cf. 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:15; Col. 1:29; Eph. 1:19-20, 3:20-21). Moreover, the deep level of the being of a 'man in Christ' is perpetually nourished into greatness by inward communion with God in Christ.<sup>2</sup> The moral powers of eternal life will be his possession. A believer's life can be described as a transformation from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). As the Christ lives by the power of God so we live in Him by the same power of God.

Further, the believers have come to fullness of life in Him (Col. 2:10). In the Christian understanding of a *Jeevanmukta*, the new creation, the Christian life is the work of God's grace. Men of faith enjoy the liberty of the sons of God; the Christian *Jeevanmukta* further enjoys the tranquillity and peace which passeth all understanding. To Christ's peace we were called (Col. 3:15). According to Śaṅkara, *Jeevanmukti* is the very nature of the self; it is not something new that is attained. All that is needed is to remove *avidyā* or ignorance to realize what

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Meaning of St. Paul for Today* (New York, Living Age Books, 1957), pp. 139-146.

<sup>2</sup> Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

has always been one's own innate nature. One of the series of means to reach the stage of self-realization is *nididhyāsana* which is meant to overcome unconscious reassertion of old habits of thought. Once this obstacle is removed there emerges the identity between the individual self and the Absolute. By the continual pursuit of *nididhyāsana* the identity becomes immediate by means of intuitive knowledge. By intuitive knowledge we mean the divine realization given in experience, the suprasensible experience. This is not, however, the *Brahma-jijñāsā* which leads us to be dissatisfied with this world. Prof. M. Hiriyanna points out that it is in the state of immediate identity that the experience of *Jeevanmukta* becomes real and in this living experience he becomes conscious of the fact that he is the Absolute, Brahman himself—*Aham Brahma asmi*.<sup>3</sup>

It is startling to note that the Hindu Scriptures contain the idea that a person who is to become a *Jeevanmukta* must belong to one or another of the three higher castes of Hindu society, for it is only such who are qualified to receive instruction in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Rāmānuja, however, recognizes along with it another pathway to God. It is described as flinging oneself on God's compassion. Absolute self-surrender and a resolve to follow God's will, not to cross His purposes are prerequisites for making an individual to attain the experience of a *Jeevanmukta*.<sup>4</sup> Rāmānuja also holds the view that a *Jeevanmukta* is like God, and not identical with God. He further points out that 'the liberated soul having pure consciousness, free from any imperfection, becomes in this respect similar to God, i.e. *Brahmaprakāra*'.<sup>5</sup> In this context, it will be pointed out to a Vedantist that St. Paul's understanding of a Christian *Jeevanmukta* is that he is made one with Christ through his act of faith and thereby enters at once into the benefits of emancipation from sin and enters into the liberty of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:21). And this liberty of the Spirit, in turn, reveals to the individual the secrets of God (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

## II

We are now to consider the second heading, i.e. 'men in Christ', as actively engaged in founding God's Kingdom. St. Paul maintains that Christ died for all, so that those who live with Him should no longer live for themselves (2 Cor. 5:14-15). 'Men in Christ' will be motivated to live for the good of all in proportion to their acceptance of the implications of the representative work of redemption accomplished by Christ. The believer places himself at God's disposal to obey Him (Rom. 6:16) and

<sup>3</sup> M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), pp. 378-382.

<sup>4</sup> Hiriyanna, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

<sup>5</sup> S. Chatterjee and D. Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta University Publication, 1954), p. 434.

his members as 'instruments of righteousness' (Rom. 6:12 f.). Further, the believer is set apart for holy purposes and he recognizes himself as the property of God or of the Lord and lives for him: 'Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's' (Rom. 14:7). Along these lines of thinking of St. Paul about the task of a 'man in Christ' it is our duty to set forth the various concepts of the function of a *Jeevanmukta* according to a Vedantist. The Vedantist explains that a *Jeevanmukta* is an enlightened soul whose love is equal for all. In continuance of his life in this world *Jeevanmukta* is not deluded by this transient world since he has once for all realized its metaphysical falsity. The Vedantist points out that a *Jeevanmukta* experiences pain and pleasure, but neither really matters to him. He does not necessarily give up all activity but rather sets other men forward in desiring the same good; and his acts issue in the order of life wherein the ideal individual and the perfect community arise together. This is how Prof. S. Radhakrishnan understood the experiences of the *Jeevanmukta*.

Śaṅkara goes to the extent of saying that 'the common laws of social morality and ritual which are significant only in reference to one that is striving for perfection are meaningless for him'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a Vedantist holds the view that a *Jeevanmukta* is inspired by divine knowledge and moved by the divine will. It is in this sense that there is perhaps a catholicity of outlook in regard to the type of task with which a *Jeevanmukta* (according to a Vedantist) and a Christian *Jeevanmukta* (according to St. Paul) are concerned. However, it cannot be gainsaid that a Christian *Jeevanmukta* is exhorted to live out the purposes of his Lord, and he has to radiate in his life on earth something of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Prof. C. H. Dodd rightly maintains that Christ's mind is also 'revealed to him who lets Christ's mind dominate him day by day, and then sees things as they appear to that mind'.<sup>7</sup>

### III

'Man in Christ' as still in possession of his own identity as person here on earth and in life hereafter is the final section of the theme of this paper. The most important concept of a *Jeevanmukta's* life, according to a Vedantist, is that he turns inward and loses himself in Brahman. The *Jeevanmukta* is never reborn but remains as Brahman when he leaves this physical life. That is *videha-mukti*. Rāmānuja explains that a *Jeevanmukta* is destined to enjoy in the presence of God the highest bliss. He further points out that the 'imperfect *prākṛtik* or empirical body of the *Jeevanmukta* is replaced by a perfect and glorious one'.<sup>8</sup> This idea runs parallel to that of St. Paul's idea of the resurrection

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Śaṅkara on V.S.*, 11, 111.48.

<sup>7</sup> Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> Hiriyanna, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

of the body (1 Cor. 15:47-50; Phil. 3:21). A *Jeevanmukta* joys in the ideal world—the Highlands of the blest—in the language of Rāmānuja. Into this place of absolute peace and perfection is a *Jeevanmukta* received by God as His very own. It is precisely in this sense that Rāmānuja differs greatly from Śaṅkara's Monism which emphasizes a total oneness into the sea of which an individual is lost or absorbed.

Furthermore, it is only in his *videha-mukti*, according to Rāmānuja, that *Jeevanmukta* enjoys the eternal bliss; and I venture to say that this is perhaps a remote possibility, whereas the Christian conception of a *Jeevanmukta* is that of a present reality here and now on the basis of truthful surrender to him who is the author and giver of eternal life.

In regard to his own identity as a person in his *videha-mukti* of a Christian *Jeevanmukta* I like to put forth the main lines of Martin Buber's personalism which are well brought out in the paper on 'Cosmic Christ: Some Recent Interpretations', by the Rev. Fr. A. Bruggeman, S.J.<sup>9</sup> Fr. Bruggeman explains Buber's idea of man as person in his relation to God. Martin Buber contends that the personal I-Thou relation is by its very nature, communion; and in this communion there is reciprocity since the 'Thou' stands over against the 'I' as the other. Buber further explains that 'however intense the reciprocity is in the communion, the communion as such can never result in a total oneness'.<sup>10</sup> It is precisely here that St. Paul's understanding of 'man in Christ' differs radically from the Vedantist's understanding of a *Jeevanmukta* who in his *videha-mukti* is almost absorbed into Brahman. One of the chief tenets of Monism is to emphasize the aspect of total oneness; and in its insistence upon a total oneness, the all-inclusive, all-embracing Brahman it oversimplifies or destroys the 'I'-Thou relation. Fr. A. Bruggeman, S.J., rightly comments that 'the "I"-Thou relation is understood first of all in terms of believers having communion with Christ, the Son, and in Him with the Father'.<sup>11</sup> It is perhaps in this sense that 'man in Christ' experiences intimate communion with his Lord in life hereafter because even in his state of *videha-mukti* he is still a person in his restored and glorious status (Phil. 3:21); and not absorbed or lost into the Godhead with no trace of dimension of person.

Moreover, it is exactly at this point that the Vedantist joins issue with St. Paul concerning the experience in *videha-mukti* of a *Jeevanmukta*. Dr. Raymond Panikkar maintains that 'men in Christ', the freed souls, find their place in the whole of Christ, and they become fully what they are, through being one with their Lord. And he rightly says that 'the ontological growth of all things in time is nothing but a fuller realization of their being

<sup>9</sup> Published in *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XV, no. 3, 1966.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XV, no. 3, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XV, no. 3, p. 141.

in Christ'.<sup>12</sup> The sequel, and the corollary of growing to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, is what might be called the consummation of all things, things in heaven, and things on earth in Christ, the Son, who Himself, when all things are subjected to Him, will also be subjected to God that He may be all in all (Eph. 4:13, 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:28).

---

<sup>12</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), p. 131.

---

## CONTRIBUTORS

*The Rev. Dr. J. A. Bergquist* is Professor of New Testament at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras.

*The Rev. Fr. Vande Walle, S.J.*, is Professor of Old Testament at the Papal Seminary, Poona.

*The Rev. Gnana Robinson* is Professor of Old Testament at the Tamilnad Theological Seminary, Arasaradi, Madras State.

*The Rev. Dr. S. P. Athyal* is Professor of Old Testament at the Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal.

*The Rev. Dr. J. N. M. Wijngaards* is Professor of Biblical Studies at the St. John's Regional Seminary, Hyderabad, A.P.

*The Rev. Peddi Victor Prema Sagar* is Lecturer in Old Testament on the staff of the Andhra Christian Theological College, Rajahmundry, A.P.

*The Rev. K. David* is Lecturer in New Testament on the staff of the Andhra Christian Theological College, Rajahmundry, A.P.

*The Rev. Dr. E. C. John* is Professor of Old Testament at the United Theological College, Bangalore.