THE LAST ADAM

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THE christian message of salvation acquired its character as 'good news' from the experience of the risen Christ, which the 'original eyewitnesses'[1] were privileged to enjoy. This experience, to which the first disciples responded by the commitment of christian faith, resulted in the acquisition of a totally new knowledge of Jesus Christ, the significance of his earthly life, and above all, of his death. To interpret and articulate their new found belief, the apostolic college under the guidance of Peter had recourse to the scriptures, the sacred literature of Israel, finding there certain images and themes, through which God's gracious, saving acts performed for the chosen people had been expressed.

Accordingly, in the summaries of the primitive preaching recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we find various historical figures from Israel's past, and certain key events in her experience of God's activity on her behalf, employed by the earlier christian evangelists in order to set forth the significance of Jesus' redemptive work. He is depicted as the answer to the divine promise made of old to Abraham.[2] His exaltation at God's right hand is proclaimed as the accomplishment of the dynastic oracle, given by Nathan the prophet in God's name to David,[3] that a son of his royal line should inherit his throne forever. In his speech before the Sanhedrin, Stephen the proto-martyr interprets Old Testament history in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ, and thereby discovers a series of famous israelites, who may serve as types of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. In addition to Abraham, there is Joseph, Moses, and especially the prophets.[4]

One of the themes most prominent in the christology of the apostolic age was that of the suffering and glorified Servant of God, of whom the second Isaiah had sung so poignantly and mysteriously. The kerygma of the Jerusalem community had first applied this motif to Jesus as the Servant glorified[5] by the God of the patriarchs[6] through his resurrection and ascension.[7] Jesus was regarded as the Servant against whom Herod and Pilate had, with the collaboration

[1] Lk 1, 2. [2] Acts 3, 25–26. [3] Acts 2, 30–31; 13, 23.
[4] Acts 7, 2–8, 9–16, 17–40, 52. [5] Isai 52, 13. [6] Acts 3, 13. [7] Acts 3, 26.

of jews and romans, conspired and contrived to execute.[1] The earliest inspired authors of the gospels, in their turn, expressed Jesus' predictions of his sufferings and death in terms of the isaian suffering Servant.[2]

Paul and the themes of creation

When we turn to the writings of Paul, whose initial experience of the risen Christ differed notably from that of the twelve, who had been favoured with a particularly close association with Jesus during his public ministry, we soon discover that his approach to the christian mystery is unique. Paul's conversion by the Damascus road had brought him face to face with the exalted Lord, who stood revealed to him as Son of God.[3] It was only in response to his query of amazement, 'Who are you, Lord?', that Paul learned to identify this celestial, divine person with the humble, despised rabbi Jesus of Nazareth.[4] From his reminiscences of this extraordinary event, we see Paul attempting to describe its wholly unprecedented character by comparing it with God's creation of light:[5] 'because the God who said, Let light shine out of darkness (is he) who caused light to shine in our innermost self to impart the illuminating knowledge of the divine glory in the face of Christ'.[6]

Indeed, Paul appears to have been the first christian theologian to make use of the early chapters of Genesis to body forth his very personal insight into the mystery of Christ. The teaching of our Lord himself, reported in the gospels, provides little precedent for the use of these images and motifs. Jesus' unequivocal prohibition of divorce[7] constitutes his single recorded reference to the opening chapters of Genesis. Only rarely too do the prophetic writings of the Old Testament allude to the creation in presenting Israel's hopes of the eschatological salvation. The final conversion of God's people was thought of as demanding a creative act of God.[8] The second Isaiah depicted the hoped-for return from the babylonian exile as a new creation.[9] The third Isaiah at a later date poetically described God's definitive saving action as the creation of a new sky and a new earth.[10] It is only in late judaism that the figure of Adam is used as a vehicle of theological teaching by certain of the sapiential writers.[11]

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[1] Acts 4, 27–28. [2] Cf Mk 8, 31; 9, 31; 10, 33–34. [3] Gal 1, 16.
[4] Acts 9, 5. [5] Gen 1, 3. [6] 2 Cor 4, 6. [7] Mk 10, 6–7; Mt 19, 4–5.
[8] Jer 31, 22. [9] Isai 43, 17–18. [10] Isai 65, 17; 66, 22–23.
[11] Sir 17, 1 ff; 49, 16; Wis 2, 23–24; 9, 2–3; 10, 1.

We obtain a hint from the résumés of Paul's preaching to pagans in Acts, which may partly explain his highly original preference for these themes of creation. When Paul preached to jewish audiences, he was accustomed to introduce his version of the gospel with a review of Israel's history.[1] In addressing gentiles, however, he had to begin with the doctrine of the one true God. Thus at Lystra Paul asserts that the God of Israel is the sole source of all creation, the one 'who made sky and earth and sea and everything in them'. He alone regulates, by his loving providence over mankind, the natural cycle of the seasons, as he also directs human history in accordance with his own designs.[2] At Athens Paul repeats the truth that Yahweh is 'the God who made the earth and everything in it', 'the one who gives to all life and breath and everything', who 'made from a single common origin the whole race of mankind . . .'[3] The latter part of this citation probably contains an allusion to Adam, who as common parent gave to the human race its basic unity.

The antithesis Adam-Christ

The first appearance of what has come to be regarded as Paul's characteristic presentation of Christ's redemptive work appears in 1 Corinthians, a letter from the middle years of his literary activity. Of the several pastoral problems to which Paul addresses himself here, the most important undoubtedly was the hesitation, on the part of certain members of the corinthian community, in accepting the crucial doctrine of the eschatological resurrection of the just. This doubt the corinthians appeared to have combined, inconsistently enough, with an orthodox faith in the resurrection of Christ himself; and Paul was quick to point out that a denial of the resurrection of those 'who have died in Christ' was tantamount to a denial of one of the central events announced by the traditional christian gospel.[4] What these wavering corinthian converts did not grasp, it appears, was the social character of our Lord's death and resurrection. Jesus did not die as an isolated individual: he involved mankind in his death; or rather, he created the possibility of our involvement in his death. As Paul would later write to Corinth, 'One died for all; therefore all have died'.[5]

To counter the doubts in the corinthian christians concerning their personal involvement in Christ's resurrection, Paul first

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[1] Acts 13, 16–25. [2] Acts 14, 15–17. [3] Acts 17, 24–26.
[4] 1 Cor 15, 3–4. [5] 2 Cor 5, 14.

declares that 'Christ has been raised from death as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep'.[1] His reference is to the ancient ceremonial dedication of the first fruits prescribed in the mosaic law.[2] This act constituted a solemn obligation for Israel, since it was an acknowledgement of God's exclusive ownership of the land and its produce. At the same time, this oblation of the first fruits was in effect the consecration of the whole harvest to Yahweh. Paul was aware that this significant ritual had been carried out in the Temple on the very day when Jesus rose from death. The risen Lord is rightly called 'first fruits of those who have fallen asleep', not merely because he has initiated the universal resurrection of the just, but also because his own glorified humanity will one day effectively realize in us this final object of christian faith and hope.

At this stage of his argument Paul introduces Adam for the first time in his letters. 'For since through a man (came) death, so also through a man (will come) resurrection of the dead. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be brought to life'.[3]

To appreciate the scope of the antithesis which Paul here sets up between Adam, the sinful parent of the human race, and Jesus Christ, 'who was handed over for our sins and raised for our justification',[4] we must recall the comprehensive or global character of the biblical concept of death. When, as here, Paul speaks of death in the context of sin, the term does not connote merely physical death. It includes also what we seek to express by the phrases spiritual death (grave sin), and eschatological death (eternal punishment). The total reality of death for the Old Testament writers comprised in fact complete and final separation from the living God of Israel. Such indeed was the destructive effect of Adam's sin upon the entire human family, as Paul will declare in a later letter.[5] The purpose of Christ's resurrection then was to undo the baleful influence of Adam upon mankind. The life which he wills to bestow upon all, who are to be united with him by their own glorious resurrection, is life in its fullest sense. It is eternal life, indeed, and its communication will affect the christian even on the material side of his person. To assert in its fulness the christian belief in the efficacy of Jesus' redemptive resurrection, Paul says equivalently, it is not sufficient merely to accept the greek philosophical argument for the soul's immortality.

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[1] 1 Cor 15, 20. [2] Lev 23, 10–14. [3] 1 Cor 15, 21–22.
[4] Rom 4, 25. [5] Rom 5, 12 ff.

Paul returns to the contrast between Adam and Christ somewhat later in this same chapter, in order to expand upon this truth. 'Thus scripture also states, 'the first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit'.[1] Paul cites the second creation-account given in Genesis,[2] in order to recall the origins of Adam from the earth, and to remind the corinthians that Adam's origins have left their mark upon all his children. 'The first man was from the soil of the earth . . . those made from the earth are of the same nature as the earthly man . . .'.[3] Paul is leading up to his final point: 'I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'.[4] The human nature which we have all received from Adam is powerless to attain the fulness of that divine life which communion with God demands. Human nature must somehow be empowered to transcend its earthly limitations no less than its sinfulness.

It is precisely as risen that Christ possesses this power to enable man to qualify for the kingdom of God. He has, through his own resurrection, achieved the definitive status to which all men are destined. Hence, he is 'the last Adam', the eschatological man, in whom the total effect of his own redemptive work is forever incarnated. Paul denominates the glorified Lord as 'life-giving Spirit', in contrast with Adam, who at his creation from the earth 'became a living being'. In so describing Christ, Paul does not intend to imply that this transformation of his humanity has made it immaterial. By calling Christ 'life-giving Spirit', Paul asserts that the Lord is, in his risen state, the source of the Spirit, whose operations in us are henceforth identified with his own.[5] There is a very real sense in which 'the Lord is the Spirit'. In the Nicene Creed, the Church means to underscore this same truth when she applies the two characteristically pauline epithets for the risen Christ, 'the Lord and the life-giver', to the Holy Spirit.

Christ's function as 'life-giving Spirit' is defined by Paul in the passage we have been considering with the help of another idea, which he took from the first account of creation in Genesis: man's fashioning in the image and likeness of God. 'Just as surely as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so too we shall bear the image of the heavenly man'.[6] The risen Christ, who has assumed the office of the creative Spirit of God,[7] will work the transforma-

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[1] 1 Cor 15, 45. [2] Gen 2, 7. [3] 1 Cor 15, 47–49. [4] *Ibid* 15, 50.
[5] 2 Cor 3, 17–18. [6] 1 Cor 15, 49. [7] Gen 1, 2.

tion of the christian in his own image by effecting the resurrection of the just, through which the ultimate state of man's glory is to be realized even in man's bodily parts.

Paul continues to fill out the details of this picture of Christ as the 'last Adam' in the celebrated section of Romans, where he treats the problem of the origins of human sinfulness.[1] He institutes the contrast between the first parent of mankind and the risen Lord by calling Adam 'the type of him who was to come'.[2] Adam's personal act of disobedience led, in some mysterious way which Paul himself does not make altogether clear, to the sinfulness found in his descendants.[3] This evil inflicted upon humanity by the transgression of Adam was to be remedied by the saving obedience of Jesus Christ.[4] This life-giving obedience was actualized in Paul's view (although he does not expressly say so here) by Jesus' acceptance in all their concrete circumstances of the two greatest events in his earthly career, his death and resurrection, through which he has been constituted 'the last Adam'.

The pauline view of the redemption

We may at this point present a synthesis of the principal features of Paul's personal thought concerning man's redemption. He fixes his attention almost exclusively upon the two-faceted event, which forms the heart of the gospel: Christ's death and resurrection. Paul does not include the incarnation, as John was to do in the fourth gospel, as a positive part of the redemptive event. For Paul, the coming of God's Son into the world is considered simply as his entry, so far as that was possible for one who was sinless, into the sinful family of the first Adam. It was a necessary presupposition to his labour of redemption. He had to associate himself intimately with sinful mankind, if he were to give the Father what rebellious man was incapable of rendering to him: one act of filial, obediential love. Hence for Paul, the Son of God came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh';[5] he was 'born of a woman, born under the Law'.[6]

By accepting his death in all its concrete reality from the hand of his Father, Jesus Christ destroyed forever the sinful solidarity which had bound humanity to the first Adam. For he freely 'became obedient even to death, yes, death upon the cross',[7] as the one effective, redeeming representative of the whole race. By his

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[1] Rom 5, 12 ff. Rom 8, 3. [2] Rom 5, 14. [3] Rom 5, 12–15. [4] Rom 5, 19.
[6] Gal 4, 4. [7] Phil 2, 8.

resurrection, Christ created a new, supernatural solidarity of grace, thereby creating the possibility of an entirely new relationship for man towards God as his Father, through his union with the unique Son of God. 'And he died for all, in order that the living might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them'.[1]

Yet in order that man personally might attain this salvation, he must pass through the ultimate redemptive experience, christian death, the 'new creation' that became a reality in Jesus' own death. The possibility of attaining this crucially necessary experience, Paul teaches, is initially opened to the individual human being through baptism, the sacramental participation in Jesus' redeeming death.[2] Yet another experience, participation in Jesus' resurrection, which his baptism also makes possible, is also needed for the completion of man's salvation: and it is to occur at the parousia.[3]

Thus the emphasis in Paul's thought is not upon the vicarious nature of Jesus' redemptive work, although that element is not absent, but rather upon the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection in involving man in a totally new human experience. For this he is prepared here below by the christian sacraments, principally by baptism and the eucharist. Ultimately, however, he is saved by being totally conformed through death in Christ and resurrection to Christ, who exhibits in himself the definitive form of redeemed human nature as 'the last Adam'.

The image motif in pauline soteriology

Closely connected with the theme of the last Adam is another motif, which has a significant role in the soteriological thought of Paul. It too comes from the creation stories of Genesis, where man is described as being created in the image and likeness of God, inasmuch as he is destined to 'have dominion . . . over . . . all living things'.[4] God, supreme Lord of creation, graciously bestows upon man a share in his universal dominion of his creatures; and hence man can be said to be made in the divine image. That Paul is indebted to this passage of Genesis for his theological theme of the image is clear from its first appearance in his writings,[5] where the context contains several allusions to God's creation of man. Here the christian is denominated 'the image and glory of God', a conception

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[1] 2 Cor 5, 15. [2] Rom 6, 3–4. [3] 1 Cor 15, 23 ff.
[4] Gen 1, 26–28. [5] 1 Cor 11, 7–8.

whose potentialities will continue to be exploited by Paul in subsequent letters.

The risen Christ, the last Adam, is proclaimed in Paul's gospel as the image of God,[1] for Paul views the christian existence in this world as a continuous process of transformation into this aspect of Christ. 'All of us, while with unveiled face we reflect, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image with ever-increasing glory, as by the Lord (who is) Spirit'.[2] Later, in writing to Rome, Paul sets forth God's plan for man's salvation in terms of this same theme. 'Those whom he (God) had known from the beginning, he also predestined to be shaped in the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers'.[3] To attain salvation, for Paul, is to enjoy 'the glory of the freedom of the children of God',[4] which involves 'the redemption of our bodies'.[5] Man is saved by being moulded 'in the image of his Son', who as risen is himself 'the image of the invisible God'.[6] It is only through being raised from death to glory in his total personality, with and through Christ, that man arrives at the goal for which he was created: true sonship with the Father. Thus, by means of this image theme, Paul is enabled to present the redemption, not as an impersonal or magical process, but as a progressive growing into a very real interpersonal relationship, that of son to father, with God in Christ.

In Paul's later letters from his roman captivity, Christ appears as the new man, a phrase synonymous with that of the last Adam; and here again the image motif recurs in combination with this conception. Through his baptismal experience and by the baptismal grace, the christian 'has put off the old man with his conduct, and has put on the new Man, who is continually being renewed in the image of his Creator in order to know him fully'.[7] It is, as we have just seen, only by knowing God as his Father that this fulness of knowledge is arrived at. Thus Paul exhorts the ephesians to strive for 'the knowledge of the Son of God', which for him is 'mature manhood, that full measure of development found in Christ'.[8] Christian spirituality is simply the unfolding of an ever-increasing consciousness of our relationship as sons and daughters to the Father. And the pattern which must be followed is that of the risen Christ as the last Adam, as Paul adds a few lines further on in this same letter: 'You must put aside your old way of living, the old

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1 2 Cor 4, 4. 2 2 Cor 3, 18. 3 Rom 8, 29. 4 Rom 8, 21.
5 Rom 8, 23. 6 Col 1, 13. 7 Col 3, 9–10. 8 Eph 4, 15.

man, who is constantly being corrupted by deceptive desires . . . and put on the new Man, created by God in justice and holiness and truth'.[1]

Conclusion

It is an unwritten axiom of the biblical view of sacred history that 'the end must correspond to the beginning'. We see this viewpoint functioning in the attempts by so many New Testament writers to return to the origins of Israel's history. They do not however go back beyond Abraham or Moses. It is the religious genius of Paul which exhibits an unprecedented originality of thought, by returning to the very beginnings of the cosmos to seek inspiration in the creation stories of the opening chapters of Genesis. His presentation of Christ as the last Adam epitomizes his view of christian eschatology. In the exalted Christ, our human nature has, for Paul, attained its definitive perfection; and it is through the power unleashed in history by God's raising of Jesus that our own future redemption is to be accomplished at the parousia. Yet the process is not a mechanical one: it involves the christian in a most personal experience, his individual participation in the 'new creation', which is christian death. This death in Christ becomes in pauline spirituality the most crucial event of our earthly existence. It is by saying Amen to the Father as our Father that our final access to God is opened up for us. This union will be completed ultimately only with one further act of filial obedience, our bodily resurrection, by which we are made eternally conformable to the last Adam, Christ our brother, 'the image of the invisible God'. 'The Son of God, Christ Jesus, whom we have announced among you, you did not find wavering between Yes and No . . . for to all God's promises he supplies the Yes which confirms them. That is why we voice the Amen through him, when we give glory to God'.[2]

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[1] Eph 4, 22–24.

[2] 2 Cor 1, 19–20.