

'Do This in Remembrance of Me'

I Corinthians 11 : 24^b

K. C. MATHEW

Someone has said that the besetting sin of theologians is to decide in advance what a word, phrase or sentence ought to mean and then force facts into their preconceived moulds. The above command of our Lord is a favourite text of those who approach the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper with a preconceived view that it is nothing more than a remembrance of the death of Christ. Until recently it has been a common belief that Zwinglie viewed the Lord's Supper as a symbol or memorial of Christ's death and nothing more. But more recent historical research has shown that 'Zwinglie himself was in this respect much less "Zwinglian" than some of his followers; and that for Zwinglie Christ was really, and not merely memorially, present at the Supper'.¹ But a section of the Church in India is at present menaced by the revival of 'Zwinglianism'. As the above command is the rallying point of 'Zwinglianism', we feel that an examination of its real meaning and purpose is *à propos*.

This command is conspicuously absent in all the Gospels except Luke. Many New Testament scholars believe that the Lukan text (22 : 19^b-20) is a later insertion based on 1 Corinthians.² Why does Paul alone quote this? The answer is that his polemical purpose in this section demands it. At Corinth the Lord's Supper had degenerated into a mere meal to satisfy hunger and thirst. The Corinthians were indifferent to the spiritual meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. It is to this gross indifference that he refers when he says, 'Whoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.' For the fruitful participation in the Supper the communicant's attitude should accord with the sacred elements of the Sacrament. It is this attitude that our Lord is emphasizing in this command, 'Do this in remembrance of me.'

¹ Shaw, Macintosh, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 303.

² *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. X, p. 137. *The International Critical Commentary*, 1 Corinthians, p. 245.

Paul is appealing to the Corinthian Christians on the authority of Christ that the right way to participate in the Lord's Supper is in remembrance of Him. As this command has reference primarily to the subjective condition of the communicant and not to the objective presence of the Lord in the Supper, it is unwarranted to deny the presence of Christ in the Eucharist on the basis of this command.

The above position can be further strengthened by a study of the exact meaning of the Greek preposition *eis* in this command. A. T. Robertson says that its original meaning is precisely the same as *en*. In itself *eis* means only *en* but it made constant inroads on *en* until in modern Greek *eis* has displaced *en*. Hence in the New Testament no hard and fast distinction can be drawn between *eis* and *en*.³ Often *eis* is used where the accusative alone would be clear. Hence Robertson thinks that the theological bearing of this preposition can come only from the context.⁴ For example, the Greek phrase '*εις ἀφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν*' in Acts 2:38b emphasizes the condition of the one who receives Baptism with reference to his sins. The usual translation of it as 'for the forgiveness of your sins' lends itself to the teaching of baptismal regeneration. Forgiveness is an immediate result of repentance. Hence a better rendering of this phrase would be 'in the condition or status of your sins forgiven.' Again, the Greek phrase '*εις ὄνομα προφήτου*' in Matthew 10:41b emphasizes the mood or spirit with which a prophet should be received. The familiar translation of it as 'in the name of a prophet' is inadequate to express what the Greek phrase really means. A better rendering of it would be 'in the spirit or attitude due to a prophet.' If *eis* in the command, 'Do this in remembrance of me',⁵ is interpreted along this line, the whole command could be translated as follows: 'Do this in the spirit or attitude of remembering me'. The context makes it abundantly clear that remembrance is only the subjective condition of the communicant for the fruitful reception of the holy elements and not the purpose of the whole sacrament.

In the Lord's Supper two parties are involved, Christ and His disciples. 'Do this in remembrance of me' is a command of Christ to His disciples concerning the attitude with which they should participate in this Sacrament. No stretching of imagination is needed to see that this command has to do with something within the disciples' power and not with His presence which is

³ Robertson, A. T., *A Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 120.

⁴ Robertson and Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the New Testament*, pp. 255-256.

⁵ The rendering of this command into some of the Indian languages is rather unfortunate. For example, if the Malayalam version of it were translated into English, it would read as follows: 'Do this for the sake of remembering me.' The *padhya* movement in the Mar Thoma Church is probably unduly influenced by it.

beyond their power. Their responsibility is to come to the table with the right preparation and attitude and the command is aimed at this. The limited scope of the command should prevent from reducing the purpose of the whole Sacrament to a mere remembrance. As it is an act of two parties, the purpose can be realized only when both parties act.

If Christ were not different from any other historical person, it would be possible to think of the Lord's Supper as a one party act and responsibility. But He is different from other historical persons in that He rose from the dead and lives today. As He lives today, how can we reduce this Sacrament to a mere one party act of commemoration? In other words, how can we have a memorial of One who is still our life, still present with us and acting in us?⁶ The Lord's Supper is not an act which stops with just remembrance, because 'in the language of the Bible "remember" never concerns the dead past but always the past as breaking into the present.'⁷ The remembrance of all that He has done for us and that He is for us drives us on our knees in repentance and impels us to fall prostrate at His feet in complete surrender. The remembrance leads to the climax of the Sacramental act of our offering ourselves to Him as a 'living sacrifice' in utter gratitude. The very giving of ourselves to Him is a receiving of Him, and the very receiving of Him is already a giving of ourselves. 'Both of these are happening in every single process, in every moment when we are worshipping God; and the supreme instrument and medium of that double movement, all in one, is the Sacrament which we call the Eucharist, or the Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper.'⁸ His giving Himself before our offering ourselves to Him is the 'prevenient' or 'pre-venting' grace. His giving Himself after our offering ourselves to Him is the 'Sacramental grace'. Here grace does not mean, as the Roman Catholics hold, a quasi-material substance that could be infused into the soul through the Sacraments, but simply His personal influence upon us.⁹ The instrumental means of His presence for the 'Sacramental grace' are the bread and wine which are the 'signs' of the body and blood of Christ. We have

⁶ Forsyth, P. T., *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 229.

⁷ Ward, Marcus, *The Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 184.

⁸ Baillie, D. M., *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 122.

⁹ In this connection an understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is helpful. Peter, John and other disciples were influenced by His incarnate life which did not go on for ever, but came to an end. How are the 'Peters' and 'Johns' of this century influenced by Christ? The answer is 'by the Holy Spirit'. Christ is present with us 'through the Holy Spirit working in the Church by Word and Sacrament.' (Baillie, *op. cit.*, p. 67.) The Holy Spirit has been making Christ's influence relevant and contemporary for all men in every time and place. He uses as instrumental means of Christ's influence 'symbols'. In preaching He uses words (symbols) which appeal to the sense of hearing. In this Sacrament He uses bread and wine (symbols) which appeal to the sense of sight, touch, etc.

not chosen these 'signs', but they were chosen for us by Christ Himself. Therefore, the question, why these 'signs' alone and not something else, is unwarranted.

We have seen how a 'Sacramental backward look' breaks into a rich spiritual experience of the present. But this Sacrament consists of a forward look also. The Lord's Supper is also a foretaste of a fuller and deeper fellowship with Christ in His consummated Kingdom.

Therefore, 'remembrance' in the Lord's Supper is a 'Sacramental remembrance' in which past, present, and future are inseparably united, because the One remembered is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is an act pregnant with all the meanings and results given above. Any attempt to reduce it to 'mere remembrance' will rob such a rich act of worship of its intended meanings and will be a disservice to Christ and His Church.

THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

It is hoped that a conference called 'The Indian Theological Conference' will be held in September, 1960. Those who are interested should write to Dr. P. David, Gurukul, Madras 10. The theme of the Conference has not finally been decided. In previous conferences the theme was Christology. It is suggested that the Christian Doctrine of Man may be the theme of the coming Conference. Further details will be given shortly.