

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 9 October 1978

## The Presence of Jesus in the Christian According to St. Paul

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Let us look at what Paul tells us about this point, on the presence of Jesus in the apostles, in Christians and in all people.

Instead of using the expression "Christ in the believer", Paul writes, "to be in Christ", which is the same thing really, it's an immanence... And this phrase can be found one hundred and sixty-four times in his letters, which means that Christianity is well.... With these words he is telling us that the believer is incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, through baptism.

This reality of unity, the aspect of community which is highlighted by "being in Christ", is also expressed with the words "Christ in," Christ in our neighbour, Christ in. For example it is said, "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew,... slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11).

What is emphasized here is that since we are made members of his body by Christ, who is present in each of us, it follows we are put in unity by him, unity which is Christ, and so we are all brothers and sisters, above any previous division of race, social condition or nationality.

This "being in Christ" also simultaneously effects a personal unity between the Christian and Christ. If I am in Christ there is a personal unity between Christ and I, such a deep union that it creates in the Christian a new "I". For Paul, in fact, the presence of Jesus in the believer is a presence of mystical identification: the believer becomes one being with Christ. Identification here means a very deep union, (which is not analogous to the natural human level) a union, however, in which the distinction between the persons is preserved.

When Paul affirms, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20) and it seems to be the apex of his spiritual life, he is not only speaking of a mystical experience he has had, but of that identification of the believer with Christ which is the novelty of Christian existence, and which makes him a new person. This is the new person.

As I said, these are all known things.

Certainly, the in-dwelling of Christ in the believers – if Christ lives in the believers – it brings a marvellous result. The believers need no longer worry about fulfilling themselves or planning their future. Their concern is to adhere to Christ who lives in them, and who will gradually show them the plan which he has designed for them, and Christ will lead them on a great unknown adventure, which is great because it is divine. This is Christianity.

This is the path which all the members of the Movement have taken, once they have discovered its special charism, which also under this aspect, of our neighbour, is nothing other than a new understanding of Christianity - it is new because it is enlivened by the Spirit.

The identification of the Christian with Jesus is definitely not an absorption, as I said, there is a distinction. It implies a communion of life, and therefore it is dialogue, growth, something dynamic, "until", as Paul says, "Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19).

You'll see the beauty of Christianity and of this aspect of the presence of Jesus in the Christian, comparing it a bit with the little I'll tell you on the other religions.

In order to express this mysterious participation in the life of Jesus, Paul uses also the expression "to be with Christ". In fact, he coins new verbs with the Greek prefix *syn* (= with, together) in order to make clear that the Christian life is in conformity with the life of Christ: an experience of death and resurrection.

"You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him..." (Col 2:12).  
Together.

"...Our old self was crucified with him..." (Rom 6:6).

"If we have died with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Tim 2:11).

"... We have been united with him in a death like his ..." (Rom 6:5).

"...God made us live together with Christ ..." (Eph 2:4-5).

Under this aspect too, we have seen how the life of the members of the whole Movement follows in the footsteps of Jesus in joy and in suffering, in conquest and in abandonment, and in the glory which is compatible with life on earth.

There are many other phrases used by Paul about the presence of Jesus in the believer, which we could quote.

Here there is something that could be interesting.

I would now like to emphasize the link which often appears in Paul's writings (see Rom 8:2; 1 Thess. 4:9) between the reality brought by Jesus and the great promise of the presence of the Spirit in people's hearts, which we find in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as a characteristic of the New Covenant.

It is written, "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them," this is what will happen, "I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour ... for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord" (Jer 31:33-34). This was Jeremiah.

Then Ezekiel identifies the law written in their hearts, which Jeremiah speaks of, with the very Spirit of Yahweh: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezek 36:27).

Because of this indwelling of God in him, the Christian no longer obeys or disobeys a commandment, even if it is given by God, but directly submits himself to or opposes "an activity of God operating in the very heart of the Christian through the gift God gives him of his Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore even if a bishop tells you, "Do this," the Spirit is within you and helps you to adhere, or there is your old nature that helps you to suppress what you think.

Paul sees all this lived out in the Christian community, he says: "But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9).

The presence of Christ through the Spirit in the heart of the believer therefore realizes the definitive, eschatological presence of God in the human being, in the Church.

Here there may be something that is also interesting. What is the difference between Christ in us and the Holy Spirit in us?

We may now ask what relationship or what difference there is between the presence of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in a Christian.

The presence of the Spirit and the presence of Jesus are realities which are inseparably linked, logically: to have the Spirit – if the Spirit is within us - means belonging to Christ. Christ himself gives himself to the believer in the Spirit.

The theologian Durrwell shows the difference between these two presences very well:

"Christ is present in the faithful; the Apostle also states that, 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts' (Gal 4:6). But each of these two guests, Christ and the Spirit, is established in us in his own way.... Whereas the Spirit is given to us, effused in us and is received ... we are the body of Christ. ... Whereas our bodies are the temple of the Spirit, they are the members of Christ (1 Cor 6:15-19). ...

<sup>1</sup> Stanislas Lyonnet, S.J., "The Presence of Christ and His Spirit in Man" in *Concilium* 50, 1969, p. 101.

The Spirit dwells in Christ and in us who are the body of Christ. The guest is not confused with the house in which he dwells. Though filling all things, the Spirit does not identify the faithful with himself.”<sup>2</sup> But Christ does. This is the difference.

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<sup>2</sup> F. X. Durrwell, *La résurrection de Jésus, Mystère de salut*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., Paris 1976, pp. 169-170. Cf. English translation by Rosemary Sheed of the 2<sup>nd</sup> French edit. *The Resurrection: A Biblical Study*, New York, 1960, pp. 216-217.