

liturgical and sacramental obligations of being a church for so long as God requires it of us, pending a really valid alternative of authentic Christian unity.

Every denomination in a divided and broken Christendom is an *ecclesiola in via*, but Methodists have a peculiar heritage that might make the transitive character of our ecclesiastical existence not only tolerable but positively proleptic. On our pilgrimage toward the actualization of the unity in Christ that God has given us and still wills for us to have, we can take both courage and zest from the fact that what we really have to contribute to any emergent Christian community is not our apparatus but our mission. Meanwhile, however, we must ourselves beware lest, in this business of having to be a church while "waiting" for the Church that is to be, we should deceive ourselves by falling further into the fatuity that this business of "being a church" is really our *chief* business!

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The Biblical Doctrine of the People of God

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The writings comprised in the Canon of Scripture, extremely various as they are, differing in standpoint and outlook, and spread over a period of several centuries, are bound in unity by their consistent reference to the history of a community, self-identical through many changes. Hebrew clans, Israelite kingdoms, Jewish dispersion, catholic church—all these are successive embodiments of the one People of God. This interest in the experience of an actual concrete community, rather than in abstract philosophical doctrines, is a part of the character of Christianity as a historical revelation. Its theology is essentially an interpretation of what happened in history, with corollaries drawn from it.

The community came into existence at a definite point of history through an act of God. So its members always believed. Traditionally, a body of serfs of the Egyptian crown won their freedom and migrated by way of Sinai to Palestine, and these, with perhaps other kindred clans, formed a religious bond through which in

the end they became a nation. These events were understood by those who experienced them in terms of divine election, call, and covenant. There is no reason to suppose that these ideas were imposed upon the memories of the events at a later period. No doubt they meet us in the Bible in developed and enriched forms which we owe largely to the prophets, but the experience of being chosen by God, called by him, in covenant with him, was intrinsic to the events themselves, without which they would not have been what they were. It seems to be a firm element in the tradition and, so far as we can judge, a historical fact, that Yahweh *became* the God of Israel. He was not, like Chemosh of Moab, the virtual personification of the spirit of the tribe, nor, like the *baalim* of Canaan, a virtual personification of the natural powers resident in the land. That he was often conceived as an ordinary tribal god or as one of the *baalim* is clear enough, but always under protest from those who stood for the permanent and dominant tradition. Yahweh *need* never have been the God of Israel at all; Israel was not necessary to him; he was not inseparably bound up with its fortunes. This was a matter of great significance for the riper development of the religion of Israel, since it kept open the possibility that Yahweh might have purposes and designs transcending the national interests, whereas Chemosh (for example) could in the nature of things have no interests beyond those of his people Moab. If, then, Yahweh was not *ab initio* the God of Israel why did he become such? The only answer was that it was by his free and unconditioned choice. There was no more to be said than that Yahweh willed it so. "Yahweh thy God hath chosen thee to be a people for his own possession above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any other people"—nor, we may fairly add, because they were more intelligent or more virtuous or because they had (as it has been put) a "natural genius for religion"—"but because Yahweh loveth you." The idea of a chosen people can, of course, be perverted, and has been perverted, in the service of horrible doctrines of racial and national domination. In itself,

however, it is integral to the idea of a historical revelation, since anything that happens in history happens *now* and not then, *here* and not there, to *this* person or group and not to that. This is what has been described as "the scandal of particularity." If in any given case we ask why this and not that, I do not see what account can be given of it except that the Ruler of the universe willed it so. He chose *this* time, *this* land, *this* people for the revelation of himself, and what it means is that no one must ever suppose that he belongs to the people of God through any achievement or merit of his own. Membership of God's people is *sola gratia*, and was never on any other terms.

We have, however, to add that the divine election enters history through a "call" delivered to the chosen people—normally delivered through a chosen individual who can speak with authority in God's name (such as Moses or another prophet), and it is in the response to that call that election becomes effective. This lies behind the idea of the "covenant" which God made with Israel. Our use of the term needs to be guarded, for the English word might be understood to mean an agreement arrived at by bargaining between equal partners. This is in Greek *συνθήκη*, but the Hebrew *berith*, when it is used of God's "covenant" with Israel, is rendered *διαθήκη*, a term which carries in it the idea of "ordinance," or "disposition." This emphasizes the divine initiative and supremacy in the whole transaction. Of his own free will God entered into a binding obligation toward Israel and called upon them to accept the reciprocal obligation on his terms, not theirs. "I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a god." The response of men to the call of God is taken up into the total act of divine election, and thus a permanent relation is established.

The People of God, then, is a chosen people, an "elect" people. Elected—to what? Not to privilege, prosperity, or dominance. This stubbornly held misconception the prophets had most assiduously to combat. Israel is elected to *responsibility* before God. They have been chosen for the high but perilous destiny of "hearing the word of the Lord," and by covenant they are under obligation to obey

his law. Disobedience is disastrous just *because* they are a chosen people. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; *therefore* will I visit upon you all your iniquities." Thus the word of God becomes a word of judgment upon his chosen people. But it is also a word of mercy, for God himself is bound by his own covenant with the people he has chosen. "He will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them." The word of the Lord as a word both of judgment and of mercy is a theme that runs all through the Old Testament. The tension between its two aspects is perhaps never fully resolved there. The prophets having in their minds the pattern of the true people of God, entirely obedient to his law, and having at the same time the spectacle of a disobedient people before their eyes, sometimes felt compelled to draw the logical conclusion: Israel must perish. Yet Israel cannot perish because God is their God. Ezekiel made a picture of it: Israel was dead. Its bones lay scattered over the valley, and "behold they were very dry." But the dry bones came to life at the blast of the wind which was the breath of God. Thus the theme of death and resurrection entered organically into the idea of the People of God.

So far it might seem that the end to which the whole process was directed—election, call, and covenant—was conceived wholly in terms of the destiny of Israel itself. Disciplined, chastened, punished, even destroyed, by the fearful calamities which were the judgments of the Almighty upon their sins, Israel would yet be restored, purged, made into a righteous nation, and finally glorified; in glorifying his chosen people God would be glorified, and thus his purpose would be fulfilled. There is indeed much in the Old Testament which would seem to justify such a view—and even more, perhaps, in noncanonical Jewish writings. But this is not all there is. As we have seen, the fact that Yahweh became the God of Israel by his own free choice left open the possibility, at least, that he had purposes of his own reaching out far beyond the destinies of Israel. This is never altogether forgotten, even when it is concealed by the distasteful chauvinism of some parts of the Old Testa-

ment. The prophets were well aware that Yahweh's first concern is for righteousness, and Israel's calling was, in the last resort, instrumental to this end. They became increasingly aware that righteousness is not a national but an ecumenical interest. Israel, in fact, was chosen to be the instrument of a purpose which transcends Israel. There are hints of such a conception of Israel's calling in many passages of the Old Testament. It comes to clearest expression in the Second Isaiah, where Israel, as the Servant of Yahweh appointed to suffering for his sake, is to be "a light to the nations." With this the idea of election receives its necessary completion, and the "scandal of particularity" is removed.

This cursory survey of the teaching of the Old Testament—invariably, even absurdly, defective, but I hope not misleading—enables us to envisage what we may call the "marks" of the People of God. We now observe that in the New Testament these "marks" are consistently attributed to the Church—a people elect and called; within God's covenant; the recipient of his Word, now made flesh; bound to obey him; the object of his judgment and mercy—it is unnecessary to catalogue in detail the whole body of attributes transferred directly from the Old Testament to this emergent community which calls itself, in fact, "the Israel of God," *sans phrase*. It asserts without qualification its continuity with the historic Israel of the past and claims all that past as its own heritage. Yet it asserts with equal conviction and fervor its discontinuity with all that has gone before. Its members live in a "new creation": τὰ ἀρχαία παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινὰ (which, by the way, does not mean—as the K.J.V. has it—"all things [*scil.*, the same old things] are become new," but "new things have come into being"). "The old order has gone, and a new order has already begun" as the N.E.B. reads. The covenant by which it is bound is a καινὴ διαθήκη. The law which it must obey is "a new commandment." And if we have regard to the historical situation it does indeed appear that there was an emphatic, indeed a tragic, breach of continuity at the crucial point. Then is the claim to the heritage

of ancient Israel no more than a kind of legal fiction? If not, where are we to find the link of continuity?

In discussing this question, Paul drew attention to the prophetic doctrine of the "remnant"; i.e., the doctrine that when the nation as a whole was disloyal to Yahweh and in breach of covenant with him a minority which remained faithful was vested with the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant, becoming in fact the true Israel within an apostate nation—an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—and that in and through this faithful remnant, however small, the purposes of God for Israel are carried forward to fulfillment. Such a doctrine might well provide for the emergence of a new Israel which, being affiliated to the old through a tiny remnant of the faithful, has a legitimate right to the inheritance. Did the Church, in fact, arise in this way?

We have to observe that in practice the "remnant" idea worked out in a process of exclusion. It began with the harsh intolerance of Ezra and Nehemiah, who formed the repatriated exiles into a compact little group devoted afresh to the God of Israel, excluding from the reconstituted community all who did not measure up to their own interpretation of the Law. By successive purges they sought to preserve their own purity and so to be worthy of divine favor. Again the exclusive principle manifested itself in the intense devotion and the jealous separatism of Chasidim and Pharisees, with their contemptuous rejection of the *am ha-arez*. Recently we have become aware of a hitherto little known example of an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—the monastic community of Qumran, fanatically devoted to the idea of a purified Israel, sure of themselves as the men of the covenant and fiercely exclusive of all others. Attempts to affiliate the early Church to Qumran—or to any similar group—are idle. The note of all such movements was exclusiveness, membership of the People of God being restricted to an ever-diminishing minority who could claim to be "righteous." The logic of the "remnant" idea is crystallized into merciless dogma in the apocalypse of Ezra: "Those who perish are more than those who shall be saved . . . almost all are marching to perdition and their

teeming multitudes are bound for extermination" (*plures sunt qui pereunt quam qui salvabuntur . . . pene omnes in perditionem ambulant et in exterminium fit multitudo eorum*) (IV Ezra, ix. 15, x. 10). But the Founder of the Church expressly addressed his call to the excluded: "I came not to call the righteous but sinners." In his lifetime he was known as the "friend of publicans and sinners," and in his death he was identified with criminals, dying, as Paul put it, under the curse of the law. The foundation members of the new "Israel of God" were not conspicuously "righteous" persons. They did not look in the least like a "faithful remnant"; they were men who had broken faith with their Master and deserted him at the crisis of his fate. They owed their new standing solely to his forgiveness, and well they knew it. They were members of the People of God *sola gratia*. As we have seen, the original election of Israel is conceived as an act of God's sovereign and unconditioned grace and can only be so conceived, but this principle is now exhibited in the most vivid and concrete manner possible in the election of the Church. The very circumstances of its emergence as a community stamp the Church with a character it can never lose; it is a community of forgiven sinners.

We have not yet found the link of continuity between the old Israel and the new. Let us return to the idea of the "remnant." If the working out of that idea in practice may be schematized as a process of progressive exclusion, producing an ever-shrinking minority of the faithful in whom alone the true marks of the People of God are to be found, then there is a sense in which the logical culmination of the whole process comes when a single individual embodies the true Israel in his own person and stands alone. This is the picture which the New Testament presents. To Christ are attributed the titles which designate Israel as the People of God. "Israel is my son, my firstborn" we read in Exodus. Christ is the Son of God, "the firstborn among many brethren." Israel is the Servant of the Lord, called to suffer for his sake, and through his suffering to save many. Christ is the "righteous Servant," who "came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for

many." The "people of the saints of the Most High" appear in prophetic vision as "one like a son of man," and in the Gospels the mysterious title "Son of Man" is the chosen designation of Christ, an individual designation now yet never shedding its corporate implications. The title "Messiah" itself is in the Old Testament sometimes given to Israel as a people, as well as to its ideal priest and king, and in its New Testament acceptance "Messiah" means one who is in himself the inclusive representative of the People of God as well as their Lord. They are "in Christ," as all mankind are "in Adam." Thus Christ sums up in himself the whole history of Israel's past and takes upon himself the burden of its sinfulness as well as its promise of life from the dead. In life he identified himself with the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and in his death with sinful humanity. As Paul put it, "Christ was innocent of sin and yet for our sake God made him one with the sinfulness of men, so that in him we might be made one with the goodness of God himself" (τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ). Thus the cross of Christ is interpreted as the voluntary acceptance, representatively, of God's judgment upon the unfaithfulness of his people. "In him" Israel met the death which the prophets had declared to be the issue of its rejection of God. In dying thus Christ affirmed that which gives meaning to the whole idea of a people elect and called to be the Servant of the Lord; he alone offers total obedience: "Lo, I am come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God."

As the death of Christ is representative and inclusive, so is his resurrection. When the writers of the New Testament applied to the resurrection of Christ scriptural passages which originally referred to the emergence of Israel from what seemed final disaster, they were not merely indulging in arbitrary or fanciful *peshet*. They saw the destiny of Israel as divined by the prophets made concrete and actual in history on Good Friday and Easter Day. The line of continuity from the old Israel to the new runs through death and resurrection. Paul found language for it when he spoke of the

Church as dying with Christ and rising with him into newness of life, which new life is life "in Christ."

The People of God is thus reconstituted solely by relation to Christ. This is perpetually attested and sealed in the two sacraments of the gospel. Baptism recapitulates in each individual member that process of dying and rising again in Christ, through which the new Israel came into being. The Eucharist, the sacrament of the new covenant, is the communion of his body, in which his people are made partakers of his real and historic humanity—his "flesh and blood," as John put it, taking up the familiar Hebrew expression for human nature in its concrete actuality, *basar w'dam*. In both sacraments the Church is brought back to its historical beginnings. Showing forth the Lord's death in remembrance of him, its members in every age stand at the center from which the People of God is re-created, *sola gratia*.

Two corollaries may be drawn: First, the Church is necessarily *one*. The fact of its unity is largely concealed by the manifold divisions which the course of its history, as well as the sinfulness of its members, has imposed upon it. We now speak of "churches" and hope for their "reunion." We are prone to think in terms of adding the several churches together until they coalesce into a single whole. The unity of the Church is not a unity of aggregation, however; it is a personal unity: *ἡμεῖς εἷς ἐστὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ—εἷς, not ἓν*—"one *person* in Christ." Christ, said Paul, "is like a single body, with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body." Divided we are, but in the moment when in the sacrament of communion we turn back to the place where the new life of God's people began, the essential unity is ever and again renewed and reaffirmed. At that moment we *are* one, not merely in sentiment, not merely in aspiration, but sacramentally, for we have been made partakers of the body of Christ, and Christ is one. We leave the table of the Lord and are at once involved in things that divide us—even before we are out of church—but we know that in spite of them we are one. It is from this

center that the empirical unity of the Church must in the end be restored—how, we do not yet know.

Secondly, since the Church is constituted solely by the relation of its members to Christ—their relation simply as men, to him who is the Man, the Adam of a new humanity—the possibility is given of a genuine universality such as was contemplated but could not be realized while the People of God was one nation among others. In terms of the old Israel the limits of God's people might be defined, either exclusively, by a progressively narrowing definition of the qualifications of the faithful "remnant," or comprehensively, by the addition of increasing numbers of proselytes to the Jewish community. There are signs that both of these principles—the exclusive and the comprehensive—were in the minds of members of the early Church, but neither proved workable. Paul swept both aside with his maxim: "In making all mankind prisoners to disobedience, God's purpose was to show mercy to all mankind." It is possible to fix the center about which the new People of God is constituted, but not to draw its circumference. No attempt to define the limits of the Church, either exclusively or comprehensively, proves workable—as we have so often discovered in our discussions about reunion—and in fact no such definition can hold good which stops short of the totality of the human race. The unity of the Church is the unity of mankind. God has purposed, we read, "to sum up all things in Christ." This is the transcendent purpose to which the Church is dedicated. In serving that purpose, and not in seeking any lesser ends of its own, it finds the ultimate meaning of its calling and election as the People of God.

3

The Ministry in the New Testament

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One who approaches this subject after such scholars as—to name only a few—T. W. Manson,¹ Eduard Schweitzer,² and Hans von Campenhausen,³ cannot hope to find much to glean in a field that has already been efficiently and comprehensively reaped. I hope, however, in the following pages to collect some of the most important data and to indicate some of the principles by which they are related to one another.

It has often been pointed out that it is a mistake to consider the ministry in isolation. It ought to be viewed in connection with and, indeed, as an aspect of the Church. This is true. It is, however, possible and desirable to go further than this. Neither ministry nor

¹ *The Church's Ministry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1948); *Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours* (London: Epworth Press, 1958).

² *Church Order in the New Testament* (English translation; Studies in Biblical Theology No. 32; London, 1961).

³ *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 14; Tübingen, 1953).