

# In Remembrance of Me

K. V. MATHEW

Since the beginning of this century Biblical scholars have been showing great interest in bringing out the theological meaning of the Old Testament terms with a view to throwing more light on the New Testament terms. Several books have been published as a result of these scholarly efforts. The inspiration to write this article comes from such publications. In this article an attempt is made to bring out the Hebrew meaning of the word 'Remembrance' in the Eucharistic context. It is hoped that the reader will patiently bear with the writer in his endeavour to explain the complex, intricate and obscure nature of the term.

The verb 'remember' is possibly a derivative from 'remember' which literally means 'again mindful'.<sup>1</sup> In the Eucharistic phrase the noun 'Remembrance' which is the rendering for 'anamnesis' also expresses a similar meaning. More accurately the verb 'anamimnesko' means 'to bring back again to the mind'. We have to remember that the Hellenic mind developed this meaning as a result of their special psychological history. The term 'Remembrance' is psychologically viewed as an act of an individual human mind.<sup>2</sup> When the mind reflects back on an event with a motive to recapitulate the past event, and bring it before the mind as a present reality, then the mind performs the act of remembrance. In this process one may see a lacuna of time in between the actual past event and the mind's realization of it in memory. According to the Greek concept the events in time are regarded as isolated and mutually exclusive events. They do not conceive any co-relation or mutual inclusiveness between these isolated events in time. The reason for this mode of thinking, one may suppose, is the absence of a monotheistic faith in which time is reckoned as the 'kairos' of God and constitutes the succession of the acts of God. On the latter view, events in time are not isolated events; they are co-related and exist as the single continuous act of the all-pervasive God. In the absence of this view the Hellenic mind finds no significance in the events which occur at random. They re-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Richardson, *Theological Word Book*, p. 142.

member events and past happenings. In the act of remembrance they enjoy only the memory and not the reality ; only the shadow not the substance as a present experience.

The Eucharistic phrase was originally used by our Lord who was a Hebrew by race and who understood and shared the Hebrew view of time and history. Our Lord's profound knowledge of the nature of God the Father was so unique that the Eucharistic phrase 'Remembrance' certainly must have had a deeper meaning as He uttered it in the original Hebrew context. Therefore, now we may turn to discover the Hebrew meaning of the root word 'ZKR' from its usage in the Old Testament and its Semitic background.

The root meaning of the word 'ZKR' reflects 'the communal emphasis and is closely related to the idea of "Name"'. One makes a name alive by remembering it ; the name immediately calls for the soul it designates ; therefore there is a deep significance in the mention of a name . . . The man wants to be remembered, thus his name is made to live. The substance of his soul must be so strong that it does not perish, but works through the generations. If he has no sons then he may seek compensation in setting up a memorial, into which his name has been laid so as to be preserved'.<sup>3</sup> The preserver of the 'Name' has also been signified by the term 'Zakar' with the meaning 'male'.<sup>4</sup> The male is responsible for perpetuating the memory (*Zeker*) of the father. Cognate languages of the Semitic family also emphasize this communal and collective character of 'ZKR'.

In the Old Testament the verb 'Zakar' is used with two subjects: man and God. When it is conjoined with 'man', it means the act of remembering of a past event or recalling other persons to mind (cf. 2 Kings 9:25 ; Gen. 40:14). When the term is associated with 'God', it means God's remembrance of the covenant-love and His people (cf. Gen. 30:22 ; 9:15). Here one should note that God's remembrance is different from man's remembrance. When God remembers He manifests Himself with the object which He remembered. The act of remembrance and the act of divine manifestation take place simultaneously.

Sometimes the noun '*Zeker*' stands in place of the Divine Name. The mention of '*Zeker*' brings with it the sense of God's active presence and reality in an existential life-situation. 'This is my Name for ever, and this is my memorial for ever' (Exod. 3:15). In this context '*Zeker*' expresses the timeless character of the Divine Name. '*Zeker*' transcends the chronological limitations of man and embraces the 'times' which constitute the acts of the one who acts—YHWH. Not only is '*Zeker*' eternal in

---

<sup>3</sup> See Pedersen, *Israel*, Vol. 1—11, pp. 256-257.

<sup>4</sup> See Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

character but also immanent and immediate in reality. 'Sing praise unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks to his holy Name' (Ps. 30:4; 30:5, M.T.). 'Be glad in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks to his holy Name' (Ps. 97:12). These two verses clearly state the reality of the Lord's presence in the midst of his people. The word 'Zeker' is employed in these contexts signifying the Divine Name. The term expresses its eternal and immanent character when it is used to signify the Divine Name. It also carries the same meaning when it is associated with the Divine Name. As 'Zakar' (male) preserves the continuous character of the name of the human progenitor, 'Zeker' preserves and manifests the eternal character of God, transcending all human concepts of time and space. 'Zeker' reveals to us the continuous acts of God which, in all reality, are co-eternal with the actor himself.

Here one might raise the question whether St. Paul included the Semitic concept of 'ZKR' when he used '*anamnesis*' in I Cor. 11:24. Perhaps he had the intention to convey the Semitic concept. But unfortunately the later usage and interpretation of '*anamnesis*' do not convince us that the word conveys the Semitic meaning. In time past the Church interpreted '*anamnesis*' as mere 'Remembrance or memorial'. The usage of 'ZKR' and its association with the name of our Lord have not been given sufficient attention for its right interpretation. In confidence one might surely say that both St. Paul and our Lord must have had the Hebrew concept as they originally used the term in its Eucharistic contexts.

In the Eucharistic context the speaker is our Lord. What does 'ZKR' represent in this verse? Is it the element or the act of the Eucharist? If it is the element, then it should be regarded as a memorial because the element does the act of compensation to keep the memory of the past event (cf. Joshua 4:7; Exod. 28:12, etc.). If it is the Eucharistic act, then the emphasis is not on the particular element but on the whole act. The Eucharistic act cannot remind the congregation of the past sacrificial act of Christ apart from the mental act of the worshippers. If we accept, in this sense, 'ZKR' as the mental act of the worshippers, then it becomes a memory or remembrance of the human mind. Therefore we have to eliminate the holy element and the Eucharistic act as truly representing 'ZKR' in the context of the Holy Qurbana.

In I Cor. 11:24 'Remembrance' is associated with the name of our Lord. 'Remembrance of me' means 'My remembrance'. It belongs to the Lord. The disciples are called upon to observe the Eucharist in order to realize the ever-present nature of our Lord with all His New Covenant-love and saving character. We have already stated elsewhere that, in the Old Testament, whenever the term is associated with the Divine Name it expressed the Covenant-love and the saving acts of God which he had

wrought on behalf of his people. In the New Testament our Lord reflected in His life His unique oneness with His Father. The early church and St. Paul could read on His face the very character of God Himself. As with His Father in the Old Testament so with our Lord in the New Testament the term 'ZKR' is associated with the sacred name, especially in the Eucharistic context. Therefore, one may legitimately interpret 'Remembrance of me' in the light of the Old Testament meaning. When our Lord said 'Do this in remembrance of me', he was assuredly not planning merely to keep before his disciples' minds that which they could anyhow never forget; it was to be a concrete remembering, a bringing back out of the past into the present—of what? 'Not of sins, for by his sacrifice they are taken away. But of the sacrifice itself, or rather of "him" crucified, risen from the dead, victorious through death.'<sup>5</sup> The subject and object of adoration in the Eucharist is our Lord Himself whose 'Zeker' is realized in its celebration. The act of remembering by the worshippers is not by itself capable of creating the 'Zeker' of the Lord. The elements also cannot wholly represent the 'Zeker' of the Lord. Thus it is neither the act nor the element of the Eucharist that brings before us the reality of the presence of our Lord, but the promise of the One who manifests Himself when 'Zeker' belongs to Him.

The Greek rendering '*anamnesis*' has led many to wrong interpretations. An undue emphasis on the element as the 'Zeker' led to the doctrines of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, localization and symbolization. Probably the adoption of '*Zikaron*' (memorial) by the Hebrew translators of the New Testament is also due to the wrong emphasis on the element. Those who share the Greek view of time and history separate the actual event of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross from the Eucharistic celebration and regard it as a mere memorial service. In such a memorial service the elements become symbols, the Eucharistic acts turn into symbolic actions, as if the whole function is a drama. The significance of 'Zeker' as the eternal immanent and existential reality of our Lord is destroyed as a result of this false understanding of Eucharistic presence.

The term '*anamnesis*' suggests the repetitive act of the mind while 'ZKR' does not mean this especially when it is used with the Divine Name. It is a concrete term which conveys the meaning instrumentally, that is it brings with it the concrete objective reality which acts and exists simultaneously with the act. For example, we should realize that the 'Zeker' of the Eucharist is the reality which was revealed in Christ and existed simultaneously with the act when he instituted the first Eucharist so long ago. At every communion the Lord is present and at every act he is the doer. His remembrance is his presence. So the

---

<sup>5</sup> See article by A. G. Hebert in A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

Eucharist is not the repetition of the past event but is the realization of the eternal presence of our Lord. Eucharist, then, is the perpetual act of Christ's redemptive love expressed through the New Covenant. The 'Zeker' we experience in the Holy Qurbana is without dimensional bounds and often seems to be beyond the apprehension of the worshippers who are bound by dimensional limitations. Our Lord becomes contemporaneous and existential with us in the observance of the Eucharist through his 'Zeker'.

'Anamnesis' does not give us the concept of the contemporaneity of our Lord. It also ignores the simultaneous presence of our Lord with the Eucharist. It transforms the Eucharist into the replica of a past event. Such a concept denies the eternal presence of the Lord with us and also rejects the belief in the resurrection of our Lord. One wonders how this view is different from that of the idol worshippers who regard the images as symbols of realities. To them the idols are the replica of the real.

The Subjectivists accept 'Zeker' as the psychological act of the human mind. Their view of the Eucharist eliminates all ideas of the divine activity and presence with the Eucharist. To them, one may say, the Eucharist is nothing but a human act to remember a past event.

In this short study, no attempt has been made to bring the Eucharist under any of the traditional doctrines. What is intended here is to bring out the Old Testament meaning of 'Zeker' from its Semitic background. The Christian Church has to rethink the meaning of the Eucharist in the light of the Old Testament meaning of the word 'remembrance'. 'One lives oneself so into another series of events, that one becomes contemporary with it and joins in experiencing it' (S. Kierkegaard). According to the true sense of the term 'Zeker', the Lord becomes contemporary to us in every Eucharist. Moreover, the 'Zeker' of our Lord and his actions become simultaneous and as a result the simultaneity and contemporaneity of the Eucharist make it existential in our situation. Thus Holy Qurbana ceases to be a drama or a symbol or a mere act of remembrance. The 'totality type of the Hebrew thought' helps us to arrive at such a conclusion with regard to the relevance of the Eucharist to our generation.<sup>6</sup> In the light of our study we may say that the emphasis of the Eucharist is not in pointing to Christ who gave his life to reconcile man with God and with one another and who lived in the past, but in emphasizing the contemporaneous presence of the Lord with us in our individual human situation. At every celebration of the Eucharist the word of salvation is to be proclaimed as 'Now is the day of salvation'.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, p. 13.