



New Year : New Covenant

...or to be more precise, not a New Covenant but the renewal of THE Covenant. When Jesus shared wine at the Last Supper he spoke of the new covenant being established in his blood. For the Old Testament community, of course, the business of Covenant renewal was a very solemn and important business indeed; it happened every year and was accompanied by sacrifices and rejoicing and, at the heart of it, the very serious matter of recommitting the community to the way of the Lord for another year.

The Old Testament contains a number of Covenants between God and the people. They are all based on particular individuals; Abraham, Moses, David; but all are essentially the same and they are summed up in the phrase "You will be my people and I will be your God." To be God's people implied living his way and the continuation of the Covenant was conditional on the people doing their bit. Jesus instituted a new type of Covenant. The New Covenant is not about what we shall do for God or what he will do for us; it's about God giving himself totally and unreservedly for us and calling on us to give of ourselves to him and to each other in the same way. We give because God first gave to us; we love because he first loved us. God inaugurated the New Covenant by giving himself to us unconditionally. If we don't respond there is no Covenant relationship, but that's the risk he has taken. He has done his bit, but he will not force or coerce a response that is up to us.

In human terms, we can see a powerful image of a Covenant relationship in Marriage. Marriage is not a contract in which two people agree to do certain things for each other. In Marriage two people simply commit themselves; their souls and bodies to the other person with no guarantee of a matching response.

Our Methodist brothers and sisters provide another image for us. They begin each New Year with a Covenant service in which, both as individuals and as a community, they recommit themselves to the Covenant for the coming year. That's a powerful reminder to all of us of the importance of regular renewal of our relationship with God and regular recommitment. The decision to respond to God's initiative is not a once for all thing, we need to reconvert ourselves to God and reinvigorate our devotion to him frequently. For me, the Eucharist is supremely the time to do that and my prayer on receiving the Blood of Christ from the Chalice is simply "Your will, not mine be done." It reminds me of Jesus' own prayer in Gethsemane and of his description of the Chalice as the New Covenant in his blood. Many Christians like to receive Communion each day in order to express that new commitment every single day of their lives.

Let us pray especially for the Methodists as they make their Covenant renewal and let us each make our own personal renewal a conscious intention the first time we receive Communion in 2006.

**Happy New Year
Michael Camp**

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In this edition Michael Camp writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC