
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Modern Christological Problems.

By the Rev. F. R. MONTGOMERY HITCHCOCK, D.D.,
Formerly Donnellan Lecturer, Trinity College, Dublin.

IN his recent work, "Christologies Ancient and Modern," Canon Sanday contrasts two types of Christianity which he designates respectively the "fuller" and the "reduced." The latter, he says, has one immense advantage: "It aims at being, and I believe that it is, strictly scientific" (p. 98). It is the predominant Continental type as contrasted with the English, the modernist as contrasted with the traditional. He suggests Dr. Denney's phrase, "I believe in God through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord and Saviour," as a possible meeting-ground between the two Christologies, and the Ritschlian watchword, "God in Christ," as the irreducible minimum of what Christianity means for us. Canon Sanday's subjective method lacks decision, but its very subjectivity is illuminative, and throws light not merely on the various currents of opinion on the subject of Christ, but also on the possible mingling of the waters.

In the doctrines of divine immanence and of the divinity of man, already commonplaces of religious thought, we have analogies which may help to explain certain difficulties of the Incarnation. The Christological problem is, however, essentially a problem of personality. The relation of the subconscious to the conscious ego, of the subliminal to the supraliminal self, may serve as an analogy to explain the commingling of the Divine and the human, the *commixtio et communio dei et hominis*, as Irenæus styled it, in Christ. But even assuming with Canon Sanday, that "the proper seat or *locus* of all Divine indwelling or Divine action upon the human soul is the subliminal consciousness" (p. 159), it does not follow that "the same or the corresponding subliminal consciousness is the proper seat or *locus* of the Deity of the incarnate Christ," that is, if that Deity is something more than an intensified degree of such a

Divine *indwelling in man.* Sir Oliver Lodge, in his contribution to "Jesus or Christ?", seeking the solution of the problem in the unconscious or subconscious world, "the larger and dominant entity belonging to us in some sense, or rather to which we belong," appears to find that Deity nothing more than a larger share of the Divine endowment of man.

He writes: "Each of us is greater than we know. We have our roots in an infinite past, not only in the bodies of our ancestors, but in the region of mind or spirit as well; we claim a transcendental existence, some part of which began to assume a temporary and local habitation at conception, and so gradually entered more and more fully into relation with matter, as the organism developed into fitness for it and harmony with it. . . . This is the experience through which every son of man must pass. Christianity tells us that a Divine Spirit—that the Deity Himself, indeed—went through the process in order to make Himself known to man, and also in order fully to realize the conditions and limitations of the free beings, which through evolution had gradually been permitted to exist. It teaches us that among all the lofty spirits which ever became incarnate on the earth, one supremely Divine Spirit entered our flesh and walked on the planet for a time, was born, loved, suffered, and died, even as one of us."

This is a noble tribute, and seems to express the irreducible minimum of what Christianity means for us. The writer, if he does not use the language of the Nicene Creed, appears to meet in some degree at least its requirements. The relation of the human to the Divine in the life and personality of Christ does not, however, seem to admit of scientific explanation, at all events in our present knowledge of psychological science. Philosophically, it has a better foundation in the metaphysics of thought, but its true foundation is in the domain of spiritual life. It appears, therefore, to be more accurate to speak of the Divine consciousness as the background—quiescent, but still there, and ready to be called forth whenever needed—of the thoughts of Christ, than to say with Canon Sanday that "the consciousness

of our Lord is a genuinely human consciousness" (p. 174), a statement which receives considerable modification in another passage in the same book, where he writes: "It is true that the *surface* of our Lord's life is entirely human. Even the Deity in Him, on its way to expression, had to pass through, and is in this respect (*i.e.*, in the forms of its expression) limited by the human medium" (p. 213). The practical suppression of this Divine consciousness, whether made once for all before the Incarnation, or made continually during the incarnate life, is one of the mysteries of the faith. It may be explained by what takes place after the passage from one environment to another, one existence to another—such as death, in which the soul passes forth into new surroundings, where it will manifestly not need, and therefore not exert, many of its present mental activities, but where it is equally probable that it will put forth others. The deliberate kenosis or self-emptying of His Divine powers and attributes may thus have been the *conditio sine qua non* of the Incarnation.

The hostility shown to this dogma by those who hold humanitarian views tends to confirm those who hold it in their convictions. It may be an "artificial theory" (Sir Oliver Lodge), a "metaphysical figment" (Professor Percy Gardner), "mythology" (Ritschl), "a process which conveys no intelligible meaning" (R. Roberts); but it seems to be St. Paul's view of the manner in which the Divine adapted itself to human conditions by a deliberate and conscious self-sacrifice and self-limitation. The life of Deity, to our finite minds, involves continual self-limitation and self-sacrifice on an infinite scale. Personality, will, thought, action in the case of man, and according to the greatness of his manhood, involve a certain degree of self-restraint or limitation, as they do of self-expression. And in the case of the Perfect Life and Thought and Personality, such self-expression and self-limitation might be expected to be found manifested in a perfect manner, as in the creation of the Universe, the Incarnation of the Divine, the Atonement of God and man. Regarded in this manner, the

theory of kenosis does not reduce either the Godhead or the personal identity of Christ to a myth, while in its less extreme form it serves to explain the limitations of Jesus and many phenomena in His human life. It does not necessarily imply two centres of activity or a dual consciousness in Christ, but regards the Logos as imposing conditions upon His human manifestations. In his "Life of Christ in Modern Research," Canon Sanday speaks of the time of our Lord's ministry as "a period of occultation in which the full display of His Divine power was deliberately restrained and held back." The question is not whether self-emptying (St. Paul), or "abandonment," or "surrender" (Bishop Gore), or "occultation" (Sanday), be the more accurate theological term, but which of them expresses more fully and forcibly the self-sacrifice and self-limitation of the Incarnate Word. The humiliation of Himself was His assumption of "our body of humiliation," subject to suffering, and the temporary cessation through His voluntary self-sacrifice —call it what one will—of the working of His power of subduing all things unto Himself (Phil. iii. 21). The more complete His humiliation, the more Divine His self-sacrifice.

It has also to be decided how far a doctrine of Incarnation is compatible with the apocalyptic view of Jesus, which has recently been put forward by Schweitzer in his book "From Reimarus to Wrede." Some elements of our Lord's teaching rejected by Rationalism may be restored to their true position by this theory ; but its thoroughgoing application of eschatology to the teaching, attitude, and Sacraments of our Lord, is not only opposed by Rationalism in the person of Wellhausen, who affirms that the manner of Christ's life "had not such an eschatological cast as that of His disciples, who renounced the world in order to prepare themselves for His advent," but also by the Church which clings to her faith in the Word become Flesh. It is not a purely apocalyptic Jesus who says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour," "I *am* with you all the days," "I *am* the Way, the Truth, and the Life," "I *am* the Door," "I *am* the Good Shepherd," and "The kingdom of heaven is

within you" (Luke xvii. 21). Christian thought cannot regard with approval such a view of its Lord—even if, as is alleged, it confirms the historical trustworthiness of the Gospel—which presents Him as a beaten, baffled hero, a moral Samson rather than a Divine Saviour, Who lays hold "of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it turns and crushes Him. . . . The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, Who was strong enough to think of Himself as the Spiritual Ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging on still."[1] This is not the New Testament view, though it may be the New German view of our Lord. Can such be the Saviour, Whose kingdom is universal and eternal, Whose Gospel has a living message for every age, and Who redeems man from sin to the service of the Father, and regenerates society by His indwelling Spirit? Such an apocalyptic Jesus, Whose predictions were proved false by the course of history, is neither an acceptable nor a logical personage.

In the second place, the position of the Incarnate Saviour in the Ritschlian school of theology is precarious for all its alleged centrality. He is described as possessing the religious value of a God for mankind, as the perfect revelation of the Father, as exhibiting a "solidaric unity with God," as possessing a supremacy over the world, but Who, as pre-existent, is hidden from our ken, and Who, as exalted, is withdrawn from our communion, "for there can be no mention of communion with the exalted Christ," Who may be conceived as present, but is not really present, and Who is, consequently, not a Being to be prayed to, but, aloof from us, is reduced to His temporal existence and His life-work upon earth and His activity as man. Such may be a fact *for* faith, but it is not a fact *of* faith; and is an instance of the facility with which those who approach the Christological problem with a prejudice against its theology and

[1] English translation, p. 369, Schweitzer's work.

its mysticism drift into humanitarian views and have recourse to self-contradictory explanations. We cannot conceive the historic Christ apart from His personal existence and our present fellowship with Him; nor can we appreciate the distinction between one Who has the value of God to faith, and yet is not God really. The Lord of the community, Who is not a Saviour to Whom we may have personal access, is not the Saviour of our souls. The witness of the Infant Church, especially that of St. Paul, to the personal influence of the exalted Lord may not be overlooked without injustice to the earliest conception of the Christ. The more we emphasize the power of the historical Christ, the more it recedes into supra-historical background. "To-day," writes Professor Schmiedel, "there is hardly a single member of that school (the Ritschlian) who does not admit a revelation of a God of love outside the person of Jesus, or who speaks of His Godhead."[1] This is but the logical result of an illogical position.

In the third place, with regard to the sinlessness of Jesus, we find Rev. R. J. Campbell writing: "To speak of Him as morally perfect is absurd; to call Him sinless is worse, for it introduces an entirely false emphasis into the relations of God and man."[2] Professor Schmiedel, who has laid in his nine[3] "pillar" texts—which he considers genuine because the self-limitation they imply could not have been invented, for they seem to disprove His sinlessness, divinity, omniscience, and power—the ground-plan for a genuinely scientific Life of Jesus, arrives at an affirmative answer to the question: "Was He at least the bringer of the perfect religion?"[4] "In the essential matter of genuine piety what has come down to us from the religion of Jesus has proved itself to be of infinite value," he writes, and he admits that "as far as Jesus is concerned, it is certain that all the writers of the New Testament assumed his sinlessness," although he considers their attitude determined by their veneration. But Sir Oliver Lodge

[1] "Jesus or Christ?" p. 77.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 192.
[3] Mark iii. 21, 31 35, xiii. 32, x. 18; Matt. xii. 32; Mark xv. 34, viii. 12, vi. 5; Matt. xi. 5, xvi. 5 and 12.
[4] "Jesus or Christ?" p. 75.

affirms: "The glory of that lofty Spirit shone through the fleshly covering and preserved it from the load of sins which follows from inadequate knowledge, imperfect insight, animal ancestry, and an alien will."[1]

This is more satisfactory to us, and it is the result of his belief in a God; "not immanent only, but actually incarnate, incarnate in it (the universe), and revealed in the Incarnation." The fact that he treats the doctrine of Incarnation as an intensification of the doctrine of immanence does not put him out of line with Christian apologetics, in which the doctrine of the immanent Logos, the Mediator of the Creation, which was consummated in His Incarnation, has played so great a part. That the self-revealing, self-imparting Logos expressed the relation of God to humanity and creation in a human life, as unifying thought and love, vitalizing spirit and energy, is the philosophy of our faith. It was, however, the consciousness of His Mission, His self-consciousness that He was the Saviour, a vicarious consciousness which is very prominent in the Fourth Gospel, rather than the consciousness that in Him "dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9), that found expression in those self-assertive sayings of the Fourth Gospel which criticism would expunge from the records of the faith—not that Christ's great discovery was not Himself, but Himself in His relation to the work His Father had given Him to do, in His relation to God and man.

Whatever imperfection can be found in the method and the manner of Christ is accordingly due to the fact that such a Personality was compelled to adapt Himself, His message and His self-revelations, to the forms of thought employed by His age, which were all too small and meagre for the purpose. As Dr. Estlin Carpenter—who is not a believer—writes in "The Three First Gospels" (p. 349): "His principles far transcended the moulds which the time provided. The proofs of His greatness lie in history, for His conceptions have again and again prompted and guided vast movements of religious thought

[1] "Jesus or Christ?" p. 119.

and life, and they are even now rising into fresh power." "His fundamental principles have actually permeated the world like leaven, and are permeating it more and more," asserts Professor Schmiedel.[1] Had the world been forced to accept the disciple-made Christ of the Rationalist in place of the self-assertive Personality in the Gospels, that Divine effluence had long since passed away from the earth, just as the glorious form of one long dead, when the sunlight and air enter his tomb, falls away into a handful of dust and ashes.

But the dilemma—the terrible alternative used with such ability by Liddon, "Aut Deus aut homo non bonus"—has since lost much of its force. The choice does not really lie between "the hypothesis of conscious and culpable insincerity and the belief that Jesus speaks literal truth and must be taken at His word," for few doubt the sincerity of the man Jesus, though many profess to doubt His sanity. It is not the integrity of the Christ of the Gospels, but the integrity of the Gospels of Christ that is impugned. It is between the Christ of German idealism and the Christ of the Christian religion that we have to choose. The Christ-idea in the Hegelian philosophy represented the synthesis of the opposites, Deity and Humanity, the Finite and the Infinite. This was a philosophical explanation of the influence and personality of Christ. Strauss at one time held that what was ascribed to Christ by the Church was true of humanity as a whole, in which God becomes man; which is the child of the visible mother and the invisible Father, Nature and Spirit; which is a worker of miracles in so far as the Spirit becomes more completely master of Nature; which is sinless inasmuch as defilement attaches to the individual, but is outgrown in the history of the race; which dies and rises again, and ascends to heaven, in so far as out of the negation of its natural self there proceeds higher spiritual life. But how little the personality of Christ as conceived by the Church owes to this idealizing process and the mythopœic bent of the human mind is evident from a consideration of the fact that men are

[1] "Jesus or Christ?" p. 75.

never found to die for an idea unless it has some reality for them in the present, as well as a possible realization in the future. Patriotism is an idea, but it touches the home-life and the heart, and men die "for their altars and hearths," or for the idea of patriotism in a concrete form. But for a Christ Who owes His Divinity and Deity to the imagination of His followers or to the speculations of philosophers, no matter how He illuminates and explains the progress of life and thought, will men indeed be found to die? The answer is obvious. And therefore our deduction is that it is because the idea of a Divine Christ has a present reality for men, and also promises a fuller realization in the future, that men are ready to die for His Name. Otherwise, such an idea would have no formative power over the human character. And if our Christology is to be fresh and vigorous, applicable to the problems of life, and capable of being expressed in modern forms of thought and life, it must find its centre, not merely in the world of thought and philosophy, but in the sphere of spirit and life. The Christ of to-day is not a metaphysical dogma, but a living, loving Personality, the Chief Minister of the Father, Who sends forth His brethren to minister to the needs of men; not the Christ of the Church Councils of Nicæa and Chalcedon, so precisely defined as to substance and nature, so much as the Christ

> "Who wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds;
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought."

He is not the Christ of feudalism, remote, aristocratic, and to be approached by mediators, but the human-hearted Son of Man, Who takes up His abode in the midst of the toiling masses; nor is He the Christ of medieval speculation, the logic of Whose Atonement overshadowed the Incarnation of His life; but He is the strong Son of God, Who became the Son of man to make the sons of men sons of God. It is not subtle distinctions between the humanity and divinity of our Lord that lead men to the "one far-off Divine event," but the moral distinctions between

what He called good and what He called evil that help us onward to the city of God. It is not metaphysical differences between God and man that lighten our darkness, but the conception of a human God, a God immanent and incarnate in human life that leads to the glory of God. For if man is to be the expression or image of God, God must be the truth or reality of man.