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Did Theology Create Christ?

BY THE REV. JOHN WRIGHT BUCKHAM, D.D., PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, PACIFIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA.

It is a striking and significant fact that the most recent and radical school of New Testament criticism has ceased to recognize that discord and discrepancy among the New Testament writings which not long since were heralded as their chief defect, and has discovered, instead, a harmony even more fatal to the generally accepted view of the Church.

Instead of a Synoptic *versus* a Johannine Christology, a Petrine *versus* a Pauline doctrine, we are pointed to the disconcerting fact that a single suspicious doctrine dominates and harmonizes the entire New Testament literature. It is no less than the speculative doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Synoptic Gospels, formerly regarded as artless and innocent narratives, are, we are told, now perceived as wolves in sheep's clothing, theological treatises in the guise of history. A single purpose pervades all—to set forth the human Jesus as the divine Son of God.

The harmony which radical criticism has thus at length discovered in the New Testament, is that which conservative criticism has, from the very first, recognized and built upon. Only, a vast and irreconcilable difference exists between the two as to the cause and explanation of the harmony. The newer radical criticism assumes that it lies in an extraneous, unwarranted doctrinal theory attached to the life and person of the man Jesus as an apologetic. The more conservative criticism, in union with the theology of the Church, holds that this harmony of testimony to the divinity of Christ rises from the irresistible compulsion of His personality, leading the Church from the first, as a unit, to regard Him as divine.

The case of radical criticism would be far stronger were there agreement as to how this doctrine arose and who was responsible for it. Professor Wernle and others are convinced and emphatic in making Paul the inventor of it, and thus the real founder of apostolic and orthodox Christianity. 'The theology of the New Testament is Catholicized Paulinism. Paul is everywhere the starting-point. It is his gospel that now speaks to us out of the words of Jesus and the original

apostles.' The Fourth Gospel is but an echo of the Pauline theology. 'John and Paul are not two theological factors, but one. Were we to accept that St. John formed his conception of Christianity either originally or directly from Jesus' teaching, we should have to refuse St. Paul all originality, for we should leave him scarcely a single independent thought. But it is St. Paul that is original; St. John is not' (*Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. ii. p. 294).

With this judgment of the relation of the author of the Fourth Gospel to Paul, Pfeiderer (who takes the same general position as Wernle with reference to the apologetic character of the New Testament) is quite out of accord. 'In this ethical mysticism [of the Fourth Gospel] the Pauline opposition of faith and works,' he says, 'is resolved in a higher unity; the Christ mysticism of Paul is reconciled with the practical Christianity of Peter, and an ideal of religion formulated, which allies the mystic union of the individual soul to God and the moral union of man in a brotherhood of love, in a manner scarcely equalled in all religious literature.'¹ In his *Seat of Authority in Religion*, Martineau declared, in comparing Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel, that 'to carry the same key to both is only to make sure of opening neither.' Thus widely do scholarly judgments vary. Nowhere in literature—it seems to most New Testament readers—is there a more striking illustration of the agreement of two profound, original, constructive minds, of temper and method, than in the consenting Christology of the Pauline and Johannine types. There may be evidences of acquaintanceship; evidence of dependence there is none. Inevitably the question arises: why did these two profoundly reflective minds, neither of them far from the actual historic Jesus, reach virtually the same conclusion as to his divine Sonship, though conceived and expressed so diversely?

Nor is the evidence that this is a free and unintentional harmony, confined to these two writings alone. The Synoptic tradition presents

¹ *Christian Origins*, p. 275.

a germinal Christology moulded by the same independent conviction. The Epistle to the Hebrews discloses a like result—by no means a servile reflexion. The Epistle of Peter concurs. Indeed, the entire apostolic and post-apostolic literature is one symphony of free, harmonious, consenting testimony to this great truth. Strange, if all this is the echo of one man, Paul. Strange, if it is all a delusion, with no warrant in the consciousness of Christ. Stranger still, if the maturing Christian consciousness of twenty centuries, building a Spiritual Kingdom upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, has mistaken an obscure Jewish prophet—teaching again with clearer insight but with no unique consciousness of relation to the Father, and no sense of a mission beyond his own nation and generation, the familiar truths of righteousness and trust—for the Eternal Son of the Father, the central Revelation of God in

human history. The man Jesus, with His limitations and frailties, we can but recognize as wholly one of ourselves, but the Spirit, the Logos, which dwelt within Him lifting Him into moral perfection and the clear light of undimmed communion with the Father—this is the Eternal Son whom we recognize and worship in Jesus Christ. You say, and well, that this Logos, this Eternal Spirit of goodness, dwells in every human soul. But how obscure, inert, bound and fettered by our evil will and nature! We are but broken lights of that Eternal Logos who shone full-orbed in Jesus Christ.

Inevitably, and rightfully, will the insistence upon the full recognition of the humanity of Jesus appear and reappear in Criticism and in Philosophy. But inevitably also, and victoriously, will there arise anew, just as it first arose in the apostolic age, the consciousness that in the Man of Nazareth, the Eternal Father revealed Himself to humanity through the Eternal Son.

In the Study.

The Country Home.

The Country Home is the title of a new magazine published by Messrs. Archibald Constable & Co. (6d. net).

The Cambridge University Press.

All the books of the Cambridge University Press appeal to the readers of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES. We may therefore record as an item of interest that everything that is published by the Cambridge University Press may now be seen and examined in Edinburgh at 100 Princes Street, the offices of Messrs. Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier.

The Moral Education Congress.

The First International Moral Education Congress will be held in London in September 1908. It opens on the 25th and closes on the 29th. The Prospectus may be obtained from the General Secretary, Mr. Gustav Spiller, 13 Buckingham Street, Strand.

The Book of Ecclesiastes.

Another volume has been published of the 'International Critical Commentary.' It is *The*

Book of Ecclesiastes. The editor is Dr. G. A. Barton, Professor of Biblical Literature and Semitic Languages, in Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. A year or two ago Professor Barton suddenly made a name for himself, and a great name, by his book on *Semitic Origins*. It was that book, no doubt, that suggested his name to the editors of the 'International Critical Commentary.' But since then he has written some very fine Old Testament articles for the forthcoming single-volume *Dictionary of the Bible*.

The Congress of Religions in Oxford.

The Prospectus of Lectures has now been issued. It is magnificent. The Congress at Oxford in 1908 is to be a landmark in the history of Religion. Our readers should write at once for a copy of the Prospectus to Professor Estlin Carpenter, 109 Banbury Road, Oxford, or to Dr. Farnell, 191 Woodstock Road, Oxford.

The Orient in London.

The newspaper has just brought the report of the opening of 'The Orient in London.' Among other attractions, among attractions to other people,