

The Christ of Faith¹

By Prof. C. A. Beckwith²

The aim of this paper is purely religious, to present some relations of the Christ of faith to existing conditions of Christian life.

Who, then, is the Christ of faith? We have the Christ of prophecy, the Christ of the Gospels, the Christ of history, the Oriental Christ, and the Christ of dogma; who is the Christ of faith? In a word, he is the one with whom the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of the New Testament are concerned. He lived a few eventful years in Palestine, where he went about doing good, where he died for our sins, and was buried, and rose from the dead; he ascended, and now, dwelling in the world of light, glorified, he is the Mediator of heavenly grace. In him is revealed all that we know of the nature of God as love; through him the Father is reconciling the world to himself; "whom, not having seen, ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory." We attempt no exhaustive definition of him who is both Saviour and Lord. To those who have trusted in him, none is needful. We all unite in addressing him:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove.

I. First, the Christ of faith exists apart from the Christ of dogma—that is, the Christ of theology. Theology is the philosophy of the contents of faith, and dogma is such philosophizing with the added element of authority. But, since the Christ of faith is not the product of man's reason, therefore he is not dependent on any special ideas of his person. Speculative questions concerning him may not have been raised, or, being raised, may receive one answer or different answers; still he in whom we believe remains undisturbed, the supreme object of childlike trust.

He has been the Redeemer to those who have adopted contradictory theories with reference to him. For example, he has been worshiped as well by those who could not accept his personal pre-existence before his human birth, or even his divine Sonship previous to his baptism, as by those who held that, as Son, he was eternally with the Father. He has been recognized as the absolutely authoritative teacher both by those who regarded him as omniscient during the whole period of his earthly life, and by those who confessed to a limitation of his knowledge to the essential purpose of his mission. He draws near with the grace of sympathy to the man who maintains that he was insusceptible of temptation, and to him who believes that he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. One speculative inquirer regards the human nature of Christ as personal and the divine nature as impersonal; another adopts a contrary view; yet both equally see in him the God-man. One class of theologians conceive that the incarnation was complete at birth, only differing among themselves concerning the relation of the divine to the human nature during the earthly life, some, for instance, affirming the possession but not the use of the divine attributes, others asserting the voluntary abandonment of so much of the divine attributes as allowed him to assume the conditions of human life, still others declaring that the divine element became quiescent until the resurrection; while another class hold to a gradual communication from the divine to the human side of his personality throughout his life on earth; yet both of these classes reverently confess the mystery of godliness in that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. As to Christ's work in behalf of men there is similar divergence of opinion, yet still, under whatever shade of differing theory, he is, for all alike, the Saviour who died for our sins.

What, therefore, the nature of the case requires, history confirms, that the Christ of faith depends, not upon the

Christ of dogma, but upon the Gospels; that the Christ of faith is more essential than the Christ of theology; and that in the presence of him who is both Saviour and Lord, the ignorant and the learned, the aged Christian and the little child, are on exactly equal ground.

The statement that the Christ of faith is independent of the Christ of speculation must not be misunderstood. If the Christ whom faith receives were incapable of rational vindication, or if his actual existence were accepted without adequate historical or prophetic testimony, then, of necessity, this conception must give place to the reality, however bitter the alternative.

Nor does it mean that restatements of the doctrine of Christ are not demanded in the interest of faith. No doubt faith is sometimes momentarily imperiled by such restatements. Only then, however, is faith in the gravest danger when it commits itself to a being who is no longer defensible.

There are those who tell us that the less firmly speculative thought or historical criticism holds to Christ, the more eagerly must faith cling to him. This is true, if it means that faith may thus cling while reason is unsure or is on its way to light. But if it means that faith on the one hand and reason and scholarship on the other may be permanently divorced, with wholly independent and contradictory interests, then no saying could be more pernicious. Since all Christian facts have both a religious and a rational value, therefore faith may grasp the facts while reason may miss their true explanation.

If we were asked why we receive the Christ of faith, we should have to reply: Not because the Scriptures command it, and not on account of the authority of the Church, but because, as deep answers to deep, so Christ answers to the cry of our hearts. Sinful, we find in him forgiveness; restless, he gives us peace; longing for life, he fills us with the fullness of God.

II. The Christ of faith is a principle of growth in all who receive him. Just as there was progress in the unfolding of his personal consciousness from infancy to the scene in the Temple, and from that hour to the baptism, and from baptism to his death, so there will be progress in the believer and in the Church. St. John, son of thunder, once longed to sit in the chief seat of power in Christ's kingdom, yet afterward, under the training of his glorified Master's spirit, he came to behold in sympathetic and suffering love the secret of supremacy. The spiritual development of St. Paul is witnessed to by his simple Letters to the Thessalonians, later by his four great doctrinal and practical Letters, and, finally, by his Letters to the Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians, richest of all human literature in rational insight into the glorious person of the Son of God and of his mediatorial redemptive agency through the Church in the world. No sooner is Christ thus received by faith than his influence begins to expand every spiritual capacity. Bigotry is rebuked, sympathy broadened, familiar truth lights up with new meanings, and, for the first time, the real progress of the soul commences.

The secret of this lies in the fact that the Christ of faith is not locked up in a dogmatic formula whose logical dimensions are exactly and forever fixed, nor presented in an ethical ideal looking down from some inaccessible height, but is a living person, with all the attributes of life, apprehended in part, yet with mysterious reserves of power, manifested in infinite variety of ways, able to transform those in whom he dwells into his own God-loving and man-loving likeness.

Accordingly, in the Christ of faith are the promise and potency of the culmination of the kingdom of God. In him as the divine Son is revealed the Fatherhood of God, the shaping power of all worship and of all moral life. In him as the Son of man is seen the brotherhood of man, the correlative principle of progress. In him man, by nature a child of God, yet lost to his filial relation through sin, is restored to fellowship with the Father, and thus led to realize in ethical attainment that to which he was destined by birth. And where else do we find the spirit by which all the fragmentary forces inspired by his grace among men are conserved and wrought into unity and

¹ An address delivered at the General Conference of the Congregational Churches of Maine at Bangor, January 21, 1894.

² Professor of Christian Theology in Bangor Theological Seminary.

given place in the coming of the kingdom of God? The Christ of faith hath "ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things."

III. Still, to many earnest Christians the question recurs whether, in the changing and increasingly complicated intellectual conditions of the world, the Christ of faith will endure. This is indeed a serious question. If, in the revolutions necessitated by advancing knowledge, he who is our Saviour were to be no longer adapted to our children's trust, we might well hesitate to continue our confidence. The matter is not to be dismissed as simply an appeal to baseless fear. There is unquestionably an increasing want of belief in the unseen. The scientific spirit is commended as the universal solvent. The position of this world among the worlds, its insignificance as compared with the number and magnitude of other worlds, renders it, so we are assured, to the last degree improbable that God has chosen this planet as the one spot where rational life is found, the sole and supreme object of his loving regard. In an age teeming with speculation, Christ may be, as he was in the first century, one of the possible solutions of history, yet by no means the only one, and even he may be reduced to a philosophical abstraction. More threatening than all else, a theory is proposed in explanation of the immeasurably long evolution of this world according to which every event, including the Incarnation, is declared to have been an outcome of natural causes, so that the whole question of the supernatural, that is, of faith, is relegated to the sphere of the irrational, or of that which is beyond the individual reason.

Suppose we admit the gravity of assumptions such as these, still we do not lose heart. For, first of all, it was necessary, by the very nature of the claims of Christ, that he be subjected to competition with every known form of belief, in order that his superiority to all other objects of faith might be completely demonstrated. We are also to remember that Christ has been held, too, in unfaltering trust, under conditions quite as trying as any which perplex this age. Then, too, side by side with ever more cogent arguments alleged for surrendering Christ is an increasing vindication of the grounds on which faith rests. A strong testimony to the enduring vitality of the Christ of faith is the double fact that he inspires and outlasts the most diverse speculations as to his person and work, and that he continually provokes the Church to a revision of its imperfect conception in order that this may ever approximate toward the truth of him whom by faith it worships and serves. But, more than all, our Lord offers himself to personal trust; and, so long as man is rational, and has need of forgiveness and eternal life and God, the Gospels will offer him the One to whom his heart is sure to respond in faith.

IV. The sign that many in the churches are reasserting for the Christ of faith his rightful place in the Christian life is the new study and the new methods of study of the Gospels, and, indeed, of the Scriptures as a whole. No doubt there is a vast intellectual curiosity directed to the religion of Israel in the sphere of history and criticism and growth of institutions and the theistic idea. No doubt, too, intense interest centers in the origins of Christianity, the organization and institutions of the early Church, the formation of the New Testament canon, and the beginnings of dogma. The end of such inquiries is, however, not in these things, but in their bearing on Jesus Christ with reference to faith. If at one time the Church was content to find in the Scriptures little more than a religion of nature, and if our fathers sought in the words of St. Paul the adequate presentation of Christianity, we to-day, without disparaging the rest of the sacred books, go first to the Gospels for the knowledge of the Christ whom we trust. As a result of this new study, a new Christ is emerging from the pages of this fourfold story. The historical Jesus is becoming a more natural, a more human person. Witness the recent lives of Christ and monographs like that of Bernard's, "The Mental Characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ." In these works the Master appears as really and substantially a person as Julius Cæsar or St. Paul. The single glimpse of him in the Temple reveals a

perfectly natural child with a consciousness awakening in response to his Father. His temptations, his trust in his Father, his love of nature and of little children, his regard for the outcast classes, his longing for sympathy, his patience, his reminiscences of prenatal glory, his power over sickness, his offers of eternal life, his claim to be universal Lord and final Judge—these are only various aspects of a unique but at the same time congruous life. Faith, as it lays hold of him, is not distracted by the effort to refer one class of acts to the human and another class of acts to the divine side of his being, but accepts both the human and the divine as manifestations of the undivided oneness of his person.

In harmony with this, while the Christ of faith may be no less perplexing as a problem for metaphysics, he is more and more an ethical and spiritual reality for the heart's trust. Whether we can solve the mystery or not is a secondary question; enough that what the Gospels make first is first also for faith. Here Christ is the pure expression of God's love—his sole office to mediate to men the Father's forgiving and renewing grace. And, taught by the Evangelists, we confess that not any philosophy of his person, but he himself, is the object of our trust.

This return to Christ is destined to work out a mighty revolution. It will give us back Christianity, so far forth as it had become obscured, with the living Christ in his proper place. It will rescue theology from an undue scholastic emphasis, and from a dogmatism which is only a more dangerous rationalism, since it will make Christ the constitutive principle of interpretation. It will render preaching real, evangelistic, ethically Christlike, and in the best sense life-giving. It may shorten the creeds which we propose for testimony or for subscription, but it will broaden and deepen their spiritual content. Finally, the inner life will be unspeakably enriched; for in this way alone is the Christian enabled to say: "I live; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."



The Vitality of the Ancient Mummy-Wheat of Egypt

By Robert Patrick Ryan

Only a grain of wheat, and yet what a dust of controversy it has created in regard to its own vitality!

From time to time it has been alleged that the wheat of ancient Egypt is capable of preserving the germs of life for an indefinite period, and so being able to sprout when sown immediately after removal from the mummy-cases of antiquity.

Several writers have asserted that the growth of mummy-wheat in England is an established fact; others, that, although the evidence on the point is not conclusive, yet it is not improbable that wheat, under certain conditions, is capable of germination after the lapse of thousands of years.

Others, again, contend that the vitality of wheat is destroyed after a brief period, and that there is no authentic record of mummy-wheat germination. The opinions expressed are thus conflicting, and require careful analysis, and we propose here to endeavor—if we may be permitted to employ a world-worn metaphor—to sift the wheat from the chaff.

In an attempt to arrive at even a portion of the truth in this matter, it is absolutely essential to inquire into the character of the natives of the country whence the mummy-cases come. All those who have traveled through Egypt and dwelt in picturesque Cairo know only too well how capable the Arabs are of deceit. It is an ascertained fact that, when in search of coins, they are in the habit of unrolling the mummies, and this would at once give them the requisite opportunity for introducing grains of modern wheat into the mummy-cases; and, as it would be to their advantage to invest the mummies with as much mystery and interest as possible, it may reasonably be inferred that