

What Think Ye of Christ?

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We hear on every side today that we are living in a time of extreme crisis. It is accepted as an axiom, and peoples everywhere are apprehensive of the future. Rarely, however, is it recognized that the crisis of our times is essentially of the Spirit - a struggle for the immortal soul of man.

Since Christ came to rescue the human soul we must not be surprised if the crisis rapidly defines itself into a conflict between those who accept Christ, and those who reject Him; between thorough loyalty to the living Christ, and utter denial of all religion; between infallible faith and pagan doubt; between the God Who became Man, and the man who would become God; between Brotherhood in Christ and comradeship in Antichrist.

And hence the vital question, What think you of Christ?

For 1900 years and more this momentous question, addressed by our Divine Master Himself to His Apostles, has agitated the intellect of the world and impassioned the soul of adoring Christendom: Around this question have centred the keenest conflicts of the ages. It has challenged the orders of thought and conduct, and its answer has transformed the history of human life. For Christ's coming inaugurated a change of thought and action which has marked the greatest epoch in the history of the world. Hence is this question ever vital - What think ye of Christ? Scoffers have examined it and wagged their heads with derisive jeer; saints have pondered it and gone their solitary way; martyrs have answered and carried their bloodstained mantle to a violent death. Confession of Christ's Divinity has given, through the centuries, the hallowed ideal of Christian life and imposed on the alluring, but ever-decaying principles of paganism, the vital concepts of morality and order; and today in a welter of moral and social confusion this same confession is basically the defence of all that is best in our civilization.

Let us examine anew this question and re-state its traditional answer. It is our purpose to evaluate the claims of Christ Himself and substantiate on the evidence, the grand profession of the Prince of the Apostles and the undying faith of countless millions who reply in unison, "You are Christ the Son of the Living God."

"Son of the Living God"

Did Christ Himself claim to be Divine and did He substantiate that claim? Does the record of history portray in Him a Being Who was at once human and more than human, or can the startling assertions of the Gospels and the facts which they relate be all explained in the terms of some favourite philosopher on the premises of a purely natural evolution? In other words, is there a

purely human solution of the words and works of Jesus Christ as portrayed for us in the records of antiquity?

The attitudes to Christ in current controversy are easily told. To some Christ is merely a myth excogitated in fertile brains long since gathered to the dust; to others He is indeed a figure of the past, but He is a figure idealized in the hero worship of credulous zealots; to others again He is a clever weaver of sublime phrases inculcating a morality hitherto unknown and of course long since out of date; but there are others and they are hundreds of millions strong who fall upon their knees and proclaim with blessed Peter "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God."

The problem of Christ in all its complexity confronts above all the critics who admit on the one hand that Christ was morally perfect, and on the other hand acknowledge that He claimed to be Divine. This claim they will not admit. Their antecedent philosophic presuppositions preclude the truth of this claim, and hence the complexity of their problem. All efforts of such criticism are stultified in advance by the fetish of naturalism. Scholarly exposure, one by one, of the fallacies of such criticism pursued in the name of rationalism, and the most irrefragable defence of the sources dealing with Christ and Christian enterprise, make little impact on the prefabricated prejudice of this modern thought. For the welter of confusion known as modern thought is earthbound; it is impatient of the things unseen; it sneers at faith; it denounces what the uncontaminated human soul holds sacred; it smiles at old vices and gives them new and alluring names. But its only record is a scrap heap strewn with dead hopes and dead illusions. Indeed, what moderns are wont to call the milestones of progressive thought are in truth the tombstones of discarded theories cherished in their day and long since out of date.

Since the records dealing with Christ are proved on the grounds of historical research to be the most objective history ever penned, what are we to think of Him? He moves through the vibrant pages of the Gospel dispensing with nature's laws in His own Name and by exercise of a power native to Himself. He makes extraordinary, and to human ears extravagant, demands on men of all times, claiming that they should love Him more than their homes and country, yea, even more than life. He imposed His doctrines imperatively. He taught certain things as true, meaning them to be held for ever as true, and held precisely in the sense in which He taught them. And all of this He did on the grounds that He was the sole guarantor of their truth. He claimed to be the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, and with increasing clarity defends His claim. He claimed a natural identity with the Father Whose works are numerically identical with His own. Consequent on this identity He arrogates to Himself the right to judge the living and the dead. He everywhere assumes as by native right the unique prerogatives of Divinity, and He rewards those whose faith and love and adoration acknowledge His repeated claim.

The Humanity of Christ

And yet while the records of antiquity emphasize His claim and tell of the miraculous events which prove it, they tell as well of human qualities which stamp the records as the most objective in all of human history. He loved the things men love - His home, His family, His friends, His cause. He was so human and so kin to us that at times He was wounded by ingratitude. He did not move about scornfully independent of the world. Men and women, failure and success, thanks and abuse played upon His great soul as they play on all of us. He spoke, as an Israelite would speak, in the dramatic style of the Orient, with frequent reference to the great personages of human history - Moses and David, Isaac and Jonah, Abraham and Solomon. He illustrates by examples from His immediate

surroundings - the sower went out to sow; the cockle and the wheat; the grain of mustard seed; the lily and the thorns; the Pharisee and the publican; the little children playing in the street; the pearls, the salt, the lamps, the oil. These apparently haphazard examples selected for the vehicle of His teaching stand out against the horizon of thought like landmarks of eternity, and throughout the vicissitudes and intellectual vagaries of the centuries these great lessons of this great Master remain in their unapproachable grandeur before men's minds for ever.

These aspects of the character of Christ prove in so many ways that He was kin to us. Yet all the while there are attributes which place Him immeasurably above us. He claimed to be a Man and repeatedly referred to Himself as Man; He acknowledged a human mother and prophesied His own violent death. Yet He was, and He claimed to be, morally perfect. His words and His actions were an open book, but not one of His enemies could, when challenged, point to a single defect in His character. Traps were laid for Him but in vain. In His replies, even when He knows that the questions are prompted by malevolence, He never takes an unfair advantage; He is never captious or abusive, and He teaches only the most sublime morality. This perfect poise and balance, this unswerving rectitude of judgement and of conduct under the prolonged strain of hostile questioning is Christ's unique prerogative. Contrary qualities seem to blend in Him to form a full and flawless character. All other men, however great, give evidence of defects. We excuse faults out of consideration for accompanying greatness, and dryly regret the alloy in all human virtue. But there is no room in the character of Christ as portrayed for us in the Gospel for the patronage of our excuses. He never errs.

And in every humiliation there is startling triumph; in every apparent weakness there is evidence of unique power; in every simple episode there is always something to make simplicity profound.

Record of His Life

How simple in a sense is the record of that life. It tells of a brief existence of three and thirty years, beginning with a helpless Babe in the Manger, ending with a still more helpless Victim on a Cross. Yet He entered this life by one miracle and He left it by another. There is a sorrowful exile, again initiated and ended by a miracle. There is penance in the desert and temptation by the devil, yet angels from the court of heaven are ministering to His wants. His nights are spent in loneliness and prayer; His days wandering for sheep that are lost. Yet all the while the Gospels without trace of interpolation or forcing of the narrative recall a wondrous element in His life. Thus He is born of a woman, but that woman is a virgin. He is laid in a manger where animals found shelter, but angels hover round Him as the Saviour of the world. Like other human beings of His time, He is subjected to the law of circumcision, but the heavens give Him a Name which is above every Name. Human-like He grows in wisdom and in age, but at the age of twelve there is a flash of that Mind Divine which staggers the very doctors of the law. He wills like others to be baptized by John, but at that moment the heavens open and a voice proclaims Him the eternal Son of God.

In His journeyings through Palestine He is often weary, hungry and in need; but by His own authority He remedies the ills of others and multiplies the loaves to give them bread. To the sightless He gives back the sunlight; to the deaf He gives the music of articulate sound; to the sorrowful He gives effective sympathy. He compassionates with human tenderness, but He heals with power Divine. He stands beside the tomb of Lazarus, His friend, and human-like He weeps, but by His word He gives to that fetid corpse the breath of life anew. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when His sacred face in blood and tears is pressed to the earth in agony, His apostles slept

forgetful; but an angel keeps his ward and vigil by His side. His enemies, led by Judas, come in force to take Him, but again there is a flash of that light eternal which belongs to Him as God. They surround Him with clubs and swords and threats, and, unarmed and helpless though He seemed, at a word from His sacred lips they fall trembling and prostrate to the ground. And finally when justice was polluted at its highest human source, when friends proved faithless, when all seemed lost, and when He died like the weakest of men, all nature was convulsed and the very rocks beneath opened their mouths in dumb protest at the Crucifixion of creation's God.

Thus the Figure that lived and moved and suffered is human indeed, but He is also and forever God. By a human voice He spoke; His human heart loved and agonized, His human hand was raised to bless, but because of the divinity of His person those human hands and heart and voice - pierced, broken, and silenced as they were, were the hands and heart and the voice of God. He Who agonized beneath the weight of fear and sadness, He Whose lacerated shoulders were laden with a gibbet; He Who dies the death of shame and ignominy with robbers and with thieves, He is man but He is also God. This profession and this alone explains everything in that wondrous life. It explains the wisdom which none can confound; the power which astonishes and enraptures the multitude; that ardent zeal for justice, that unalterable patience under insult, that generous self-sacrificing love, that heart full of kindness, those hands full of miracles, that life full of contrasts, that death full of shame.

Sign to be Contradicted

Looking in general at the controversy which rages around the name of Christ one is instantly reminded of, the aged Simeon: "This Child is set for a sign that shall be contradicted." For Christ is ever the rock of controversy, the rock on which philosophers and modern thought constantly split. In the presence of His vital reality Hegelianism and Kantianism and modern rationalism are all manifestly insufficient no matter how sincere their protagonists may be; and through the mists and fogs, through the chaotic confusion of ideas which modern thought has cluttered around the name of Christ, the Catholic doctrine arises unsullied, uncompromising and clear: "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God."

And yet with all the greatness of that Life, with all the labour of Love which It contained, with all the sublime tenderness it so constantly exposed, Christ's masterpiece of Mercy and of Love was the giving of Himself to be the food of men.

."With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer." Thus did Our Divine Master introduce the glorious happenings of the Last Supper. Already doomed to die, He loved His own and loved them to the end. The great tragedy of Calvary, written on the screen of eternity in the blood of the Man-God, is linked for ever with Holy Thursday in its recital. On His way to death and in the turmoil of the last fateful hours Christ assembled His Apostles in the supper chamber, making it, despite the impending doom, a place of peace, of light, of hope. He spoke to them in sacrificial terms as He made oblation of Himself.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice

The Eucharist was given through the sublime office of a sacrifice. A Priest anointed from His Incarnation and a Priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech, Christ here fulfils the prophecies and exercises the office of His priesthood.

The words of power were spoken, the most Divine Act was accomplished when Christ commanded the apostles and their successors in the priesthood to make the same oblation in memory of Him until the end of time.

"Do this in commemoration of Me." What I have done tonight you and your successors shall do for ever; what I have given to you tonight you and your successors, My own anointed priesthood, will give to the faithful until the end. In the Clean Oblation of the Mass we have the same Eternal Priest and the same Divine Victim offering Himself to the same God for the selfsame struggling human soul.

"Do this in commemoration of Me." This Divine command has filled the centuries with Eucharistic sacrifice. It ensures the selfsame sacrifice in centuries yet unborn, for it perpetuates the Memorial of the Passion, the Christian Mass, the Mystery of Faith.

Mystery of faith! This is the faith which we profess; it is the faith which the Apostles died to save; it is the faith of the Christians in the catacombs; it is the faith of millions of potential martyrs today stricken bloodstained, but unfaltering, to their knees; it is the faith inspiring these glorious days in Sydney; it is the faith of a living Church, living by the Will of her Founder and His abiding presence in our midst.

In humble humpy that passes for a church; in grand basilica adorned with fresco; in solemn temple with gothic grace aspiring to the skies - wherever there is a priest, an altar stone and a Mass there is Calvary and there is Christ offered anew in Adoration, in Propitiation, and in Thanks. Per ipsum, cum ipso et in ipso - by Him, with Him, and in Him, all honour and glory is given. By Him, with Him and in Him we are assured of life eternal. By and Through Him, With Him, and In Him! He is the author and finisher of our faith; He is the foundation and end of our hope; He is the source and term of our love.

Conclusion

Wonder not therefore at the Church's zeal to multiply altars and extend the Mass. She sends her Missionaries to tramp the earth that every place may have the life-giving Presence of the Eucharistic Christ. Surely all that is great and heroic in her great and heroic history is associated with the Mass - the ardour of her Apostles, the fortitude of her martyrs, the purity of her virgins, the zeal of her Missionaries and the indomitable faith of her people. False teachers deny her doctrines. She triumphs over falsehood; human passion may rebel against her law, she triumphs over human passion. Even when the blood-red wave of persecution sweeps over her prostrate frame, and when some tyrant pauses to survey his triumph and to contemplate his work, behold! the Church of the Eucharist still stands before him, ever renewing her youth, ever true to her Founder, ever safeguarding her sacred trust. Because she holds a Divine promise and a Divine Presence no power on earth can destroy her. She cannot even destroy herself. She proclaims in every age and in every circumstance the source and secret of her power: Christus vincit; Christus regnat; Christus imperat; Christus triumphat - Christ conquers; Christ reigns; Christ commands; Christ triumphs, for Jesus Christ risen from the dead, present on our altars and immortalized in glory dies now no more.