

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE III.

THE LOST CHRIST.

BY E. S. BUCHANAN, M.A., B.SC.,
OXFORD, ENGLAND.

IN the July number of the *Quarterly Review*, in an article on "Patriotism" by the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, I lighted on these words: "Among the great men who were certainly (or probably) Germans were Agamemnon, Julius Cæsar, the Founder of Christianity, Dante, and Shakespeare."

The Dean of St. Paul's sets Jesus Christ between two warriors and two poets, and thinks the greatness of these five "great men" is to be traced to their ancestry and their Aryan blood. Such a theory causes to-day no stir in English ecclesiastical circles. The New Theology and its advocate at the London City Temple, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, who is now entering the same fold as the Dean of St. Paul's, have familiarized England and America with speculations even more novel. American visitors to London, after viewing St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, make it a matter of conscience to hear the pastor of the City Temple. I have been asked to direct them thither, and have seen them emerging from the doors of the sacred edifice after receiving the illumination without which their visit to London would have been incomplete. It was preachers like Charles Spurgeon and Dr. Parker who were once sought out by the eager tourist. But these men have gone, and their

preaching of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world has largely gone with them.

I remember Bishop Wordsworth preaching a sermon in Salisbury Cathedral and teaching us concerning the Virgin birth of Christ. But that was nearly twenty years ago. In the last twenty years theology has traveled far; and we see the Dean of Durham on Christmas Day (1911) telling his listeners that the Gospel story of the Virgin birth is pure poetry and not history. This sermon was printed next day in the *London Times*. No one raised a protest; the event passed without any notice whatever from the Church papers. The attitude of these journals seemed to be, "Tell us, Mr. Dean, something that we have not heard before."

A Church of England vicar in London just before the War said in my hearing that the Incarnation and Life of Jesus were meant to teach us not how God became man, but how man could become God. And some devout ladies of the congregation said to me afterwards, "What a beautiful sermon Mr. Thompson preached!" The late Canon Barnett, of Toynbee Hall, I once heard define Christ as the ideal of goodness that shaped itself in every young man's mind. Christ, he said, was subjective, not objective; an ideal, not a living Person.

Without further instances from England, the present position of Christian teachers in America illustrates much the same tendency. "Jesus" is the only appellation that many of them use when speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Christianity advocated by Professor Bacon, of Yale University, is but a sample of the theology that is now in vogue and that claims to have the support of all who call themselves scholars.

This theology is a Christless theology, and therefore a the-

ology powerless to raise men's minds above themselves. It can be traced not only to Germany and German Universities, but also (alas!) to England and English Universities. This theology deals in ethics and moral excellences, and makes much use of grammar and rhetoric. Man is its highest conception. By it "Jesus" is arraigned. He is good for His ethical teaching; but His historical and theological statements are unreliable. He had only the knowledge of His time, and *nous avons changé tout cela*. His knowledge is to be compared with that of the astrologers; while we with our scientific achievement are as accurate as the astronomers. The Prophet of Nazareth, we are told, was possessed with a strange fanaticism that invalidates many of His sayings. He expected the end of the world at any moment; therefore said He, "Lay not up for yourselves treasure on the earth." If He had known what we know now, His teaching on this subject would have been very different.

It is impossible to read these solemn utterances of the New Christianity without an inward feeling of something akin to sorrow for the blindness of their writers. Professing themselves to be wise, they become, the Apostle tells us, foolish. For what word except foolishness can describe the presenting to us of a fanatical and fallible human creature as the supreme object for our veneration and adoration? No mere creature — no matter how admirable — can prompt our worship; and no mere creature has the right to *claim* our worship. If Christ is merely created man as we are, He is powerless to save from sin and from death. Nay, He is the greatest illusion that the world has ever known. Millions have believed in Him, and died calling on Him to save. These millions — from St. Stephen to General Gordon who perished at Khartoum — were all victims of hallucination. There is no Christ

seated at the right hand of God to receive them to Himself. And we in these days — to Whom can we go? With death so insistent, with death shadowing us and ours — to Whom shall we look? To the “God of Jesus” we are told by the critics we should address our prayers.

But how are we sure that this God loves us and our race? Jesus Christ we know; but where can we find the Omnipotent, Invisible God? If Christ is not God; then God is still hidden from human view, and we have no proof that God loves the whole world. We are no nearer to God than Plato was, and God is no nearer to us. The cross of a merely human Christ can draw men’s gaze; but it is powerless to save. It is the Christ Who is the King of Glory That alone can meet the needs of men and women in their struggle against sin and Satan — the Christ of Whom St. Paul said, “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

It is a favorite argument with the learned that Jesus has been deified by the orthodox Christians of the first three centuries. I was taught that in these first centuries ecclesiastical learning and piety combined to make Jesus the Son of God by altering the early MSS., and by adding to the teaching of His disciples. I was taught to suspect, as an addition made in the interest of orthodoxy, the words “the Son of God” in the opening verse of St. Mark’s Gospel, which words the Codex Sinaiticus alone among ancient MSS. omitted, and thereby, according to the dictum of the critics, showed its extreme value, and its freedom from revision.

But eighteen years’ study of MSS. has shown me that exactly the opposite is the truth. The clear statements of the original writings were eliminated or darkened. Utterances such as “My teaching is not man’s, but His that sent Me”

were altered into "My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me"; "In Him was the life of God," into "In Him was life." St. Paul's rejoicing that he has "preached unto the nations the gospel of the glory of the Son of God" was altered into a rejoicing that he has "made the gospel without charge," and all mention of the Son of God was eliminated. Many other like instances might be given, where in every case the ancient reading that testifies to the deity of Christ underlies the revised reading that leaves us with no definite statement of His deity. As in geology so in MSS., the lowest strata are the primitive strata, while the superposed strata are later in formation. My researches have shown me a hundred cases where the deity of Christ is pared away from in the alterations I have seen in MSS., and not one single case where the opposite has taken place.

The fact is written plain in ecclesiastical history from the very beginning that the claim of Christ's Apostles that He was seated at the right hand of God met with fierce opposition from both Jews and Greeks. The Jews were committed to monotheism, which seemed to be challenged by the Christian confession that Jesus Christ was Lord and God. The Greek philosophers were willing enough to add another name to their already long list of deities; but they resented as preposterous His claim to rule the world and to be the Judge of all men. As long as Jesus Christ was merely a speculative Person, the philosophers were tolerant of the gospel; but when St. Paul preached repentance and active obedience to Christ's teaching, they were up in arms. Cerinthus in St. John's lifetime mocked at the deity of Christ as taught in St. John's Gospel. Marcion followed and rejected St. John's Gospel altogether, and accepted only the Gospel of St. Luke. Arius and Valentinus, with a host of followers, although

they were presbyters of the Church, taught that Jesus was created by the Almighty. The first four centuries show a continuous effort on the part of pagan philosophy to pervert the gospel of Christ. And one of the means employed by the enemies of Christ was the falsification of the New Testament MSS. It is not too much to say that all the great heretical movements of the early centuries have left their marks on the text of the New Testament Scriptures that we commonly use. Heretical teaching in the past has prepared the way for us to lose Christ to-day.

But another — apparently pro-Christian, but in reality anti-Christian — influence was also at work on the text of the New Testament in the first centuries — the influence of ecclesiasticism. Early texts witnessing to the godhead of Christ were doctored, or made to disappear. The personality and work of the Holy Spirit received short shrift from the ecclesiastical keepers of Holy Writ. The great declarations of God's personal dealing with man's soul through the Holy Spirit, which we find in early Irish and Spanish texts, have disappeared in the Vulgate and in the extant Greek MSS. How deep-seated — in the interests of the hierarchy and its claims — were the revisions of Scripture, that they instituted and carried out successfully, we can only now guess. They were careful to cover up all tracks behind them. The undoctored texts that we have recovered are probably only a fraction of those yet to be recovered. The first edition of the Gospels is missing: it is purposely missing; it has been made to disappear, and all the faithful copies of it have been made to disappear likewise. It is doubtful if in a thousand years of research we shall be able to undo the mischief that has been done. The search for the original untampered-with text will perhaps never be finished. The miracles of the Gospels

have undergone no rehandling: they stand as they were written in the beginning. The rehandling appears in verses that treat of (1) the deity of Christ; (2) the Person of the Holy Spirit; (3) the future of the wicked; (4) the office of the Church; (5) the everlasting mercy of God.

In the primitive Spanish texts of the Gospels the word *ecclesia*, or church, did not occur; nor is there mention in the oldest Gospel MSS. of any institution of the Eucharist. Christ is all in all, said the Apostle of the Gentiles. To-day the Christ of St. Paul is lost. The Church and Sacraments of the Church supersede His spiritual presence. The Church of Rome has located Christ on the cross or on the altar; whereas in reality He is at the right hand of God. To the Virgin Mary—to whom has been decreed an immaculate conception—is given the love and worship due from all men to God's only Son. The Christ—the Omnipotent Christ—has been lost.

Men go to church, but find no Christ; or if they find Christ, it is a dead Christ. Philanthropy is preached, and an amiable form of religion that begins and ends in personal comfort. "My congregation want soothing—not rousing," said a London vicar to me, "for they are all God's elect." The British and Foreign Bible Society's special preachers are wont to teach that the Bible itself can save the world without any human exponent. A Tibetan bought a Bible from a colporteur, read it, and was saved. A Chinaman picked up a New Testament in Chinese, read it, and became a missionary. No human intervention took place. It was all the work of the Bible and the Spirit of God. The logical deduction from these sermons is that all we have to do is to send a check for more Bibles to the Bible Society, and the world will be automatically saved.

But Christ is learned only from living souls that know Him. *Omne vivum ex vivo*, and flame is caught from flame. The Apostles of Christ did not found copying houses, but took the Word with them in their hearts, and lived it in their lives among their brethren. When the flame of love to Christ begins to burn, then and not till then are men's eyes able to read aright the oracles of God and draw water from the wells of salvation. The Ethiopian was perplexed until he met St. Philip; but after that he went on his way rejoicing. What he needed was the vision of Christ from one who had it himself, and knew Christ's love and power experimentally. Philanthropy and social service do not bring men to Christ. Though I give all my goods to feed the poor *and have not love*, it profiteth me nothing, is the spiritual fact announced by St. Paul. Yea, though a man have all knowledge, and yet lack love's divine illumination, it still profiteth him nothing. Only love, the love given by Christ, can enable a man to bear all things, to hope all things, to endure all things, and to get the victory over himself. And this love is not puffed up, vaunteth not herself, dealeth not dishonestly, doth not seek her own ends.

In the present war we are face to face with an appalling catastrophe. Our past church systems have had their day. Our Christianity has been proved no Christianity. The torrent of dark passions that has been liberated shows how far the world still is from knowing, or even seeing, Christ. One good result of the cataclysm is to reveal to us the truth concerning ourselves. We have sought for gain instead of godliness, and for personal comfort instead of for Christ. Our Universities have silenced our theologians, and turned them into philosophers. Man has been extolled — man's virtue, man's might, man's science, man's godlikeness. And lo! the

whole edifice has fallen about our ears, and we ask amid the ruins, "Where are the upholders of man's divinity now?" We are conscious that man is powerless to roll back the tide of calamity that grows day by day in volume. And the only language we can bring our hearts to use to-day is this:—

"O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come;
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home."

And our eyes look to the Son of God, for by Him only have we assurance of the love of the Father.

Out of the dark there comes a light of promise and a ray of hope for a *real* unity in the future. God has shown us the futility of our past preaching. God has shown us how deeply the world had sunk into materialism, and by actions which speak louder than words had despised truth and love. Religion had lost Christ and had substituted national selfishness. Divisions were manifold; hatred, detraction, jealousy, were rife, and this in churches that professed themselves Christian; whereas Christ had said, By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another. Church discipline and ritual law were exalted above charity, and self-interest supplanted love. We see now how wrong we have been, and what inevitable results have accrued from our rejection of the law of Christ and setting up a law of our own. And our future — if God spares us — shall be different. We shall acknowledge that God is true, and that His judgment on us for our selfishness and sin is righteous.

We desire the healing touch of Christ to-day as never before. We know no other Saviour and we desire no other. The Christ of philosophy will not save us. The fallible and fanatical Jesus of the University professors will not save us.

The sacramental Christ of the Church will not save us. The human-born Jesus of Dr. Harnack and Dr. Sanday will not save us. Our salvation has been laid on One That is mighty, on One That is the eternal God, on One Who loves us and gave Himself for us and is now seated at the right hand of God. Such a One by sharing our humanity calls forth our love; and by redeeming our humanity calls forth our adoration. Without Him our religion becomes either a system of thought, or a round of ceremonies, or a philanthropic aspiration. With Him as the object and inspirer of our worship, our life has a center of immutable Truth and unchangeable Love.

Humanity needs humanity to love and be loved by, that so it may approach God. Our merely human guides fail us in the great crises of life; but Christ, Who to our humanity joins omnipotency, is thereby able to save us to the uttermost. For our sakes He took our weakness for a season; but now is risen and death hath no more dominion over Him. The Christ St. Paul was loved by and loved is the true Christ; and we need more than we need anything else to recover the vision of His glory. In Him, and only in Him, does our life find any satisfying explanation; in Him, and only in Him, are we saved from sinning and its consequent misery; in Him, and only in Him, have we love and the forgiveness of sin; in Him, and only in Him, have we true fellowship and brotherhood; for in Him there is neither Jew nor Gentile, German nor Englishman, man nor woman, employer nor employed. In Christ we are all children of God, and our abiding Fatherland is not on earth but in heaven.

Though we have lost Christ, yet He has not lost any one of us. Having loved once, He loves forever. The Sun of righteousness may be unseen by those who inhabit dens and caves of the earth, but He has not fallen from the heavens.

The vision is not irrecoverable, and our need demands the vision to-day as never before in the world's history. Christ was lost to those who walked with Him on the way to Emmaus; but in the inn — at the twilight hour — He revealed Himself to them to their unspeakable joy. Their national hopes were shattered, their dreams of individual triumph under an earthly potentate were at an end. Instead of these, they received from Him the vision of an eternal city of men of all nations and kindreds and tongues to be united under one King, Whose brow was once crowned with thorns, but was now forever crowned with glory.

Human systems and human modes of thought wax old and vanish away, and we lose even the memory of them. But of Christ's Kingship there is to be no end. He may be lost to some of us — to our own unhappiness; but He remains ever to be found by those who seek Him — *Jesus Christ, the Same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*