

Christologies Ancient and Modern.

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THE late Professor A. B. Davidson is credited with the remark, *à propos* of Dr. Sanday's well-known article 'Jesus Christ,' in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, that 'the thing could not be better done.' Since that time we have all been pleasurably aware that Dr. Sanday was invited, and has agreed, to undertake the *Life of Christ* for the 'International Theological Library.' No one could have been found better qualified for the great task. His preparations have been made slowly; this is the third preliminary volume issued within the last five years, all of them being composed of lectures delivered originally to students of theology, and preserving even in book form much of the informal charm of direct speech. He tells us now that of these introductory studies this is, as he hopes, the last; in his own words, 'It is necessary that I should make clear, as much to myself as to others, the broad lines of the conception which I have formed of the most central portion of my subject—that portion round which everything else really revolves.' Hence in a survey of Christologies ancient and modern, followed by the sketch of an original hypothesis, he seeks to bring out leading principles, unhampered by details, and to state these principles in terms intelligible to the wide general public. In the preface Dr. Sanday affirms anew his belief in the fundamental decisions of the ancient Church, as having been arrived at under the providential influence of God: 'it is to me incredible,' he writes, 'that He should intend the course of modern development to issue in direct opposition to them.' To this general acquiescence the argument of the book is faithful, but it is an acquiescence, as we shall see, which is conceived as quite in harmony with frank criticism of the older phrases, and it goes along with a firm resolve not to 'play fast and loose with criticism.' Dr. Sanday holds that criticism and tradition really meet, though not perhaps within the range of our present instruments of vision. On neither side must there be anything like coercion.

My purpose now is first of all to give a brief

running commentary on Dr. Sanday's more important results in historical Christology, and thereafter to devote special attention to his 'new and unexplored' theory that we may find the key to our Lord's higher being in the modern psychological idea of the Subliminal Consciousness. It will be seen that this theory, if sound, will involve some considerable alteration in our thoughts of Christ, and that it cannot be accepted or declined without close scrutiny.

Good people are now and then perturbed by Dr. Sanday's almost clairvoyant appreciation of other points of view, and his plea in the first chapter for the naturalness even of Docetism is a notable instance of that sympathy which makes him one of the most alert and hospitable conservatives. 'Docetism was not all folly. Rather we may regard it as one primitive form of the assertion of that mystical element which has never been wanting to Christianity, from the first days until now' (p. 9). The gospel came from the Orient, and if it is now to be attractively reintroduced to the Oriental mind, and to satisfy its immemorial native forms of thought, its latent mysticism must be allowed for. Docetism and pantheism are both ethically impossible, but on the other hand a Christianity without mysticism is religiously impossible. A docetic view of Christ treats history as moonshine; yet Christ must be so conceived that we may dwell in Him, and He in us. And the Docetics were groping after this. The success of Ignatius' reply to them was owing to his faith in the indwelling Christ as the source of life for all believers.

At more than one point, in this first section, Dr. Sanday comes into friendly collision with men like Harnack and Loofs. They, I imagine, would disown his approving remark that 'the essential principle which underlies the doctrine of the Trinity finds its first expression in a Valentinian writer,' and in his brief estimate of the Apologists he crosses their path intentionally. If Loofs complains that the Apologists by their doctrine of the Logos tended to lower Christology instead of heightening it, Dr. Sanday's reply is that

'sooner or later, it was inevitable that Christianity should be brought into relation with the contemporary philosophy. And, if that was to be done at all, was there any grander idea, already coined and current, than that of the Logos, that could be used for the purpose? Was there any idea with anything like the same sweep and range?' It is well that this should be said, and for a final judgment we no doubt have to consider the further point also that 'the Apologists certainly did not conceive of the activity of the Logos as purely intellectual.' At the same time, Loofs appears to be so far right that St. John and the Apologists come to the Logos-idea from appreciably different points of view. To the one it is a useful philosophic symbol; the pre-existent One normally thought of as *Son*. (this is clear, I think, if we take the Prologue and chap. 17¹⁻⁵ together), may for a special didactic purpose be designated as Logos; to the Apologists, on the other hand, the Logos is the influential and paramount idea, distinctively metaphysical, and with at best a neutral relation to concrete history. They interpret Jesus Christ by the Logos; St. John interprets the Logos by Jesus Christ. The chasm is not quite impassable, but for all that it is there.

In some fresh pages on Irenæus and Tertullian I may single out a few particularly well-timed words on the conception of an economic Trinity. No doubt for a real synthesis we are compelled to probe deeper, unless forbidden by a purely relativistic theory of knowledge; we cannot rest content with a Triune Life that is merely provisional or on the surface. But we do well, nevertheless, to note that 'it was right and proper, because it was natural, that the conception should begin in this form.' It not only began in this form historically; it must always begin thus, if it is not to be separated from its basis in history and experience. Nothing we discover afterwards as to the value of the Trinitarian idea for speculation can touch the fact that 'the first impulse to it was given by the belief in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; and then as a further step came the necessity to co-ordinate with this that world-wide movement which all Christians described as the work of the Holy Spirit' (p. 27). So that advocates of what are usually described as 'economic' and 'ontological' views of the Trinity may travel at least part of the way in each other's company.

But Dr. Sanday makes no apology for Trinitarian doctrine, nor need we. 'Why should there not be in that abyss which we call "God" some differentiation of being or function which does not amount to division?' As the background to what we know of Christ, of God in Christ, something of this kind is an essential postulate; and if it be said that the description of such distinctions within the Godhead is negative merely, not affirmative, the objection may be conceded, but with the query whether it is one which the Christian theologian has any right to put. Most Christian theologians lay it down that God is *causa sui*, yet when we look into our own minds is that phrase more than negative, however indispensable? It cannot be positively defined, yet we are obliged to grant its truth. There is point in the celebrated Moses Stuart of Andover's reply to Channing, 'When you will give me an affirmative description of underived existence, I may safely engage to furnish you with one of *person* in the Trinity.' Dr. Sanday will carry most of us with him in his severe allusions to Tritheistic forms of doctrine. Had there been less Tritheism, we might have wanted Unitarianism. Strictly we use the word 'person' merely because of the poverty of language; to designate our belief in a real distinction in God, that is, not to affirm independent conscious beings, possessing separate 'essences'; and 'we must never cease to be grateful to St. Augustine for that phrase—*non ut illud diceretur, sed ne taceretur.*'

It was the Christian instinct that vanquished Arianism; but has Dr. Sanday any real ground for saying that this instinct operated unconsciously? His exact words are: 'Such instinctive tendencies are really of no slight moment; they show the working of forces that do not take shape in tangible argument, but are none the less part of that constructive whole to which the unconscious processes of the human mind contribute as much or more than the conscious' (p. 43). The passage is worth noting as indicating a slight bias, more definite in other places, towards what I may perhaps call the glorification of the 'unconscious.' Some of these passages will come up later. Here it is only necessary to urge that naïve and unreflective states of mind need not be at all unconscious. Men do not take sides in controversy except as the result of *some* quite conscious reasonings, however defective such

reasonings may be, and indeed usually are, in a formal point of view.

As regards the definition of Chalcedon, Dr. Sanday pleads in mitigation of the modern hostile tone. He says truly that it was no slight thing to save the integrity and reality of Christ's manhood, even though it were done at some expense of logic. When he says, however, that it is not for us to blame Pope Leo and Pope Martin 'before we have got a coherent and consistent theory of our own that we can substitute for theirs,' he appears to me to suggest a principle which, if taken seriously, would put an end to all criticism of the past. Happily the principle occurs only in an *obiter dictum*, and is freely transgressed by its author in case of need. Two Natures, Two Energies, Two Wills in Christ—such categories 'are no longer as living as they were.' Who can help criticising them, whether he will or not? Among reasonable men, I suppose, there is little more difference here than may be represented by the varied order of words in a sentence. One says: 'The older language scarcely contents us now, but we should consider that at the time no other solution was possible. Another says: No other solution was possible, doubtless, but the older language must now be modernized. And into either form we may really put as much sympathy and historic sense, I feel, as we are capable of.

Students of nineteenth-century Christology ought to ponder some of the implications of the following passage in the third lecture; Dr. Sanday is at his best in such brief *aperçus*. 'There are in German three related terms which may be used in this connexion, and I think that they may be taken as each marking a distinct step above the other. The terms are Christus-Idee, Christus-Prinzip, and Christus-Person. I would venture to distinguish between them thus. The *idea* is the expression of a general truth; in this case the general truth of the intimate mutual relation of God and man, of Deity and Humanity. It is implied, but not directly expressed, that this idea embodies itself, or works itself out, in history. The term *principle*, as compared with *idea*, lays more stress on this active working out or realization; it brings to the forefront the fact that the idea is not a mere abstraction of the mind, but a working creative force in history. Both these terms are less heard of than they were. In their place we hear more now of the Christus-Person. I take it that this

is a clear gain. We come back at last to the real Christ—historic or (as we should say) supernatural.' As an expository clue to the last hundred years, this could hardly be improved. It not only helps memory but promotes insight. I cannot dwell on the fine feeling of the pages which bring back T. H. Green to us, pages for which Dr. Sanday will be thanked by many. No part of the book is written so plainly *con amore*; and nothing was better worth doing just now, when Green's figure tends to grow dim a little in the dust-clouds of modern philosophic strife. One feels that the treatment of Dorner and the Kenotic theologians is somewhat slight, not to say unfriendly, which is the more surprising that many people would be inclined to put Dr. Sanday himself rather close up to the Kenoticists in ultimate affinity. As a guide to the English literature of the subject, however, these pages (71-78) have much value. It is perhaps time that we should now disengage the principle of Kenosis from the details of its application in the familiar historic theories. When Dr. Sanday remarks that 'the formal theory of Kenosis rests upon an altogether insufficient basis, both biblical and historical,' he appears to be thinking of Thomasius and Gess or of some other detailed hypothesis which almost invites the fatal charge of theosophy, because it professes to explain such things as—even if real—never could be really known to any one. So far as I can see, however, we are brought back irresistibly to the idea of a real Kenosis—not merely Kenosis 'in a sense'—by motives which at bottom are genuinely religious. Somehow we must get into our theory the wonder of Christ's self-abnegation; the fact that in love He gave up qualities or conditions of a former being, gave them up besides by a real surrender, which was incompatible with His yet retaining them at a different centre of consciousness. And if we be asked what these qualities were, only the historic record of His life, I think, can tell us. He gave up whatever was necessary to His becoming *that*. At various points in his argument Dr. Sanday implies approval of the modern view that the life of Jesus was veritably human, and that—it is really a second aspect of the same thing—there were in Him not two consciousnesses or two wills, but a fundamental unity of experience; that, to quote Bishop Weston, 'the importance of arriving at a conception of a single consciousness of the Christ cannot

be overestimated.' But how to think these two data together—the true manhood and the single consciousness—without the postulate of an actual Kenosis, involving much more than 'the external circumstances of majesty and glory,' I confess to finding it always more difficult to understand.

The estimate of Ritschlianism is very much done from the inside. How sympathetic it is the following sentences prove. 'The formula on which [the Ritschlian] insists, and will insist as much as we please, is contained in those words of St. Paul's, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Co 5¹⁹). His assent to this is whole-hearted. . . . To find Christ or be found of Christ, is to find God or be found of God; to be in touch with Christ is to be in touch with God, and to feel His presence in the soul. That is the religious nucleus of Ritschlianism, in regard to which, as I said just now, it is quite whole-hearted. And I confess that to me this profession of faith, brief and guarded as it is, is of immense value. I am not sure that it is not really the essence of everything' (pp. 104-105). This is surely as far as sincere mediation and compromise could go; and the difference which after all does remain is rather theological than religious. But the question we have still the right to put, is just whether the Ritschlian gets as much truth out of this absolute religious conviction as it actually holds. If faith is in touch with ultimate reality, and if for faith Jesus and God are one, the right inference would appear to be that the dualism introduced between Christ and God by the logical understanding is only provisional and temporary—one more consequence indeed of the fact that life, by its very idea, is the perpetual despair of thought, which comes halting slowly in the rear of vital experience. Jesus and God *are* one, alike for simple faith and for the ideal Dogmatic that shall transcend the oppositions of discursive thinking. *À propos* of Ritschl, by the way, is it quite correct to say (p. 83) that there is nothing distinctive in his treatment of the categories of Prophet, Priest, and King? It has usually been regarded as a happy originality in him to take the Kingship as the superior conception, with Prophethood and Priesthood as joint aspects or subdivisions; Christ being Priest in so far as He dealt with God for us, Prophet in so far as He dealt with us for God, and the title in each case covering the *whole* of what He was and did. This

is a great advance on anything that had been tried previously.

Again, the Ritschlians perhaps too much figure in Dr. Sanday's pages as a single homogeneous group. There are really very considerable differences; Haering and Julius Kaftan, for example, would say a good deal as to the pre-existence of Christ which Harnack and J. Weiss would incline strongly to disown. Apart from this, however, Dr. Sanday looks upon the Ritschlian point of view as illustrating one of the two main types of contemporary Christian thought. Of these he writes: 'I will call the one "full Christianity," and the other "reduced Christianity"; and each of these, as it seems to me, has a Christology of its own.' Roughly it may be said that the reduced Christianity confines itself to the Synoptics; the fuller type takes in all the rest of the New Testament, and particularly writers like St. Paul and St. John. Both parties might conceivably meet on the ground of the brief creed suggested by Dr. Denney from the 'fuller' side; but the distinction of the one reading from the other is by no means to be minimized. It would be fairly correct to say that the radical group are unanimous in discarding the mysticism of the New Testament; the apostolic emphasis on 'something *inclusive* in the life and mission of our Lord,' and even our Lord's own consciousness of His own universal and representative character, are scarcely permitted to have weight. Dr. Sanday quotes from Moberly and Du Bose memorable passages which bear out his own strongly mystical interpretation of all such Biblical data, adding that 'there was a time when I should have very much hesitated to give any kind of endorsement to this teaching myself.' Now it seems to him to be after all nothing more than a Christian application of the idea of Divine Immanence. Not only so; it furnishes 'an analogy which may go some way to explain other difficulties of the Incarnation.' What follows is important. 'The presence of this divine element, whatever it is—the Christian would say, the working of the Holy Spirit even in its highest degree—is seen to be no wise incompatible with the fullest humanity. . . . The full recognition of this fact will determine the shape of that constructive attempt at a modern Christology that I hope to offer' (pp. 132-133). Already we can see that the two predominant ideas in Dr. Sanday's new reading of our Lord's Person are

going to be those of the Mystic Union and the Subliminal Self, if indeed he would concede that they are two ideas, and not rather one. But the exposition of this theory in more detail, with whatever criticism may offer, must be deferred.

Looking backward, we can see that we have been under the leadership of a singularly and congenially appreciative mind. 'I am perhaps conscious of a certain call to offer to mediate,' are the writer's own words. This sympathy and knowledge are manifest throughout, and they enable him to be always courteously conciliatory without being complaisant. No wonder he is so widely trusted. True sympathy and a feeling for the delicacies of spiritual thought are, if not rare, at any rate never too abundant. Though much less common than before, the *hard* type of divine is still with us; sagacious, shrewd, circumstantial, business-like, sceptical of everything

that cannot be set down instantly in plain words. Paley, as a fond admirer once happily expressed it, 'had the credit of putting Christianity into a form which could be written out at examinations.' Now of all this Dr. Sanday is the antipodes: he has no dry, stony confidence in arguing with other men, never treats ideas as if they formed a fixed, dead skeleton, refuses to ignore the delicate organic laws of growth and change. At least I have noted but one exception to this rule of sympathy. That exception is Luther. He is mentioned only once, a little unkindly; and of his contributions to the interpretation of Christ there is not a word. And yet it is not too much to say that with the Reformation, and particularly with Luther, there came into the world a richer and more profound, because a more religious, understanding of our Lord's Person than had been known since the Apostles.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

REVELATION XXII. 17.

'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.'

There are two kinds of 'coming' in this verse. There is the coming of the Saviour, and there is coming to the Saviour. First there is the invitation to the Lord Jesus Christ to come. The invitation is addressed to Him by the Spirit and the bride, and every one that hears is invited to join in it. And then there is the invitation to come to the Lord, or, as the expression is, to 'take the water of life freely,' an invitation which is addressed first to 'him that is athirst,' and next to 'whosoever will.' So we have—

- I. The Invitation to Christ to come.
 1. From the Spirit.
 2. From the Bride.
 3. From the Hearer.
- II. The Invitation to the Sinner to come to Christ.
 1. To the Thirsty One.
 2. To every one that is willing.

I.

THE INVITATION TO CHRIST TO COME.

The invitation is given (1) by the Spirit, (2) by the bride, and (3) by the hearer. The Spirit and the bride are not identical, as if the Spirit simply spoke through the bride, that is, the Church. And yet the writer of the Apocalypse does not mean that the Spirit, as the third Person in the Trinity, gives the invitation directly to the second Person to hasten His coming. By the Spirit, St. John means those who are specially endowed with the spirit of wisdom and of utterance. There was in the early Church a distinct order or school of 'prophets' to whom the word of the Lord came, as it came to the prophets of the old dispensation. But it did not come from without. The word was in their heart. It was the Spirit within them; it was the Spirit of God expressing itself by them. People, says Dr. W. M. Macgregor, had the wisdom and the courage in those days to believe that in their lowly gatherings the voice of God was sometimes heard. When plain men spoke above themselves, in words all depth and fire and essential insight, speaking so as to catch their