

PREFACE

“What do ye think of the Son of Man?” This is the religious question of the age. We rejoice in it, and thank the infidel biographers of Jesus for having urged it upon the attention of the world. The result of the renewed struggle cannot be doubtful: in all theological controversies, truth is the gainer in the end. Though nailed to the cross, and buried in the tomb, it rises again triumphant over error, taking captivity captive, and changing at times even a bitter foe, like Saul of Tarsus, into a devoted friend. Göthe says: “The conflict of faith and unbelief remains the proper, the only, the deepest theme of the history of the world and mankind, to which all others are subordinated.” This very conflict centers in the Christological problem.

The question of Christ is the question of Christianity, which is the manifestation of his life in the world; it is the question of the Church, which rests upon him as the immovable rock; it is the question of history, which revolves around him as the central sun of the moral universe; it is the question of every man, who instinctively yearns after him as the object of his noblest and purest aspirations; it is a question of personal salvation, which can only be obtained in the blessed name of Jesus. The whole fabric of Christianity stands or falls with its divine-human Founder; and if it can never perish, it is because Christ lives, the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

The object of this book is simply to show, in a popular style, that the Person of Christ is the great central miracle of history, and the strongest evidence of Christianity. The very perfection of his humanity is a proof of his divinity. The indwelling of God in him is the only satisfactory explanation of his amazing character.

From his miraculous Person, his miraculous works follow as an inevitable consequence. Being a miracle himself, he must perform miracles with the same ease with which ordinary men do their ordinary works. The contrary would be unnatural. The character

of the tree determines the nature of the fruit. “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; *or else* believe me for the very works’ sake” (John 14:11; cf. 10:38). We believe in Christ, and *therefore* we believe his works, and the Bible, which bear witness to him.

Standing on this rock, we may feel safe against the attacks of infidelity. The person of Christ is to me the surest as well as the most sacred of all facts; as certain as my own personal existence; yea, even more so: for Christ lives in me, and he is the only valuable part of my existence. I am nothing without my Saviour; I am all with him, and would not exchange him for the whole world. To give up faith in Christ is to give up faith in humanity. Such skepticism legitimately ends at last in the nihilism of despair. To believe in him is to believe in the redemption and final glorification of men; and this faith is the best inspiration to a holy and useful life for the good of our race and the glory of God.

This modest little book has been before the public for twenty years in several editions and in six or seven languages. Even a Japanese translation appeared in 1881, and was kindly sent to me by an American missionary (Rev. James L. Amerman). As it is still in demand, the author has given it a final revision, and brought it up to the present state of the christological problem, which is of perennial interest, and calls for ever-progressing inquiry and solution.

Infidels are seldom convinced by argument; for the springs of unbelief are in the heart rather than in the head. But honest inquirers and earnest skeptics, like Nathanael and Thomas, who love the truth, and wish only for tangible support of their weak faith, will never refuse, when the evidence is laid before them, to embrace it with grateful joy, and to worship the incarnate God.

Blessed are they that seek the truth; for they shall find it.

– P. S.

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1 *Editor’s Note*—The entire book, including this preface, is a combination of the author’s 1865 edition published by Bible House, and his last edition, published in 1882 by the American Tract Society.

INTRODUCTION

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he was commanded to put off his shoes from his feet; for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. With what reverence and awe, then, should we approach the contemplation of the great reality—God manifest in the flesh—of which the vision of Moses was but a significant type and shadow!¹

The life and character of Jesus Christ is truly the holy of holies in the history of the world. Eighteen hundred years have passed away since he appeared, in the fullness of time, on this earth to redeem a fallen race from sin and death, and to open a never-ceasing fountain of righteousness and life. The ages before him anxiously awaited his coming, as the fulfillment of the desire of all nations; the ages after him proclaim his glory, and ever extend his dominion. The noblest and best of men under every clime hold him not only in the purest affection and the profoundest gratitude, but in divine adoration and worship. His name is above every name that may be named in heaven or on earth, and the only one whereby the sinner can be saved. He is the Author of the new creation; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Prophet, Priest, and King of regenerate humanity. He is Immanuel, God with us; the Eternal Word

¹ The painter-monk Fra Beato Angelico da Fiesole (born in Fiesole, near Florence, in 1387, died in Rome in 1455), one of the purest characters in the whole history of art, who from the seraphic beauty of his angels and glorified saints was called “the blessed” and “the angelic,” painted the head of Christ and of the holy Virgin always in a praying frame of mind and on his knees. “It would be well for criticism,” says Ernest Renan [in his *Studies of Religious History and Criticism*, trans. O. B. Frothingham (New York, 1864), 168], “to imitate his example, and, only after having adored them, to face the radiance of certain figures before which the ages have bent low.” Unfortunately, the French philosopher understands this in the sense of pantheistic hero-worship. We regard only one man as worthy of divine honor and worship—the God-Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

become flesh; very God and very man in one undivided person, the Saviour of the world.

Thus he stands out to the faith of the entire Christian Church—Greek, Latin, and Evangelical—in every civilized country on the globe. Much as the various confessions and denominations differ in doctrines and usages, they are agreed in their love and adoration of Jesus. They lay down their arms when they approach the manger of Bethlehem or the cross of Calvary, where he was born and died for our sins that we might live for ever in heaven. He is the divine harmony of all human sects and creeds, the common life-center of all true Christians; where their hearts meet with their affections, prayers, and hopes, in spite of the discord of their heads in views and theories. The doctrines and institutions, the worship and customs, the sciences and arts, of all Christendom, bear witness to the indelible impression he made upon the world; countless churches and cathedrals are as many monuments of gratitude to his holy name; and thousands of hymns and prayers are daily and hourly ascending to his praise from public and private sanctuaries in all parts of the globe. His power is now greater, his kingdom larger, than ever; and it will continue to spread, until all nations shall bow before him, and kiss his scepter of righteousness and peace.

Blessed is he who from the heart can believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and the fountain of salvation. True faith is indeed no work of nature, but an act of God wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost, who reveals Christ to us in his true character, as Christ has revealed the Father. Faith, with its justifying, sanctifying, and saving power, is independent of science and learning, and may be kindled even in the heart of a little child and an illiterate slave. It is the peculiar glory of the Redeemer and his religion to be co-extensive with humanity itself, without distinction of sex, age, nation, and race. His saving grace flows and overflows to all and for all, on the simple condition of repentance and faith.

This fact, however, does not supersede the necessity of thought and argument. Revelation, although above nature and above reason, is not against nature or against reason. On the contrary, nature

and the supernatural, as has been well said by a distinguished New-England divine, “constitute together the one system of God.”¹ Christianity satisfies the deepest intellectual as well as moral and religious wants of man, who is created in the image and for the glory of God. It is the revelation of truth as well as of life. Faith and knowledge, *pistis* and *gnosis*, are not antagonistic, but complementary forces; not enemies, but inseparable twin-sisters. Faith precedes knowledge, but just as necessarily it leads to knowledge; while true knowledge, on the other hand, is always rooted and grounded in faith, and tends to confirm and to strengthen it. Thus we find the two combined in the famous confession of Peter, when he says, in the name of all the other apostles, “We believe and we know that thou art Christ.”² So intimately are both connected, that we may also reverse the famous maxim of Augustine, Anselm, and Schleiermacher: “Faith precedes knowledge,”³ and say: “Knowledge precedes faith.”⁴ For how can we believe in any object without at least some general historical knowledge of its existence and character? Faith even in its first form, as a submission to the authority of God and an assent to the truth of his revelation, is an exercise of the mind and reason as well as of the heart and the will. Hence faith has been defined as implying three things—knowledge, assent, and trust or confidence. An idiot or a madman cannot believe. Our

1 See Dr. Horace Bushnell's able work, *Nature and the Supernatural*, 2nd ed. (1864). The same idea is expressed by Dr. John W. Nevin, in his book, *The Mystical Presence* (Philadelphia, 1846), 199, in these words: “Nature and revelation, the world and Christianity, as springing from the same divine Mind, are not two different systems joined together in a merely outward way. They form a single whole, harmonious with itself in all its parts. The sense of the one, then, is necessarily included and comprehended in the sense of the other. The mystery of the new creation must involve, in the end, the mystery of the old; and the key that serves to unlock the meaning of the first must serve to unlock the inmost secret of the last.”

2 John 6:69: “We have believed and know” (ἡμεῖς πεπιστεύκαμεν καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν, *credidimus et cognovimus*). The reverse order we have in John 10:38, “That ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him,” and in 1 John 5:13.

3 *Fides praecedit intellectum*. Or more fully, in the language of Anselm of Canterbury, adopted by Schleiermacher as the motto of his Dogmatics: “*Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam sed credo ut intelligam. Nam qui non crediderit, non experietur, et qui expertus non fuerit, non intelliget.*”

4 *Intellectus praecedit fidem*. This was Abelard's maxim, which, without the restriction of the opposite maxim, must lead to rationalism and skepticism.

religion demands not a blind, but a rational, intelligent faith; and this just in proportion to its strength and fervor, aims at an ever-deepening insight into its own sacred contents and object.

As living faith in Christ is the soul and center of all sound practical Christianity and piety, so the true doctrine of Christ is the soul and center of all sound Christian theology. St. John makes the denial of the incarnation of the Son of God the criterion of Antichrist, and consequently the belief in this truth the test of Christianity. The incarnation of the eternal Logos, and the divine glory shining through the veil of Christ's humanity, is the grand theme of his Gospel, which he wrote with the pen of an angel from the very heart of Christ, as his favorite disciple and bosom-friend. The Apostles' Creed, starting as it does from the confession of Peter, makes the article on Christ most prominent, and assigns to it the central position between the preceding article on God the Father, and the succeeding article on the Holy Ghost. The development of ancient Catholic theology commenced and culminated with the triumphant defense of the true divinity, and true humanity of Christ, against the opposite heresies of Judaizing Ebionism, which denied the former, and paganizing Gnosticism, which resolved the latter into a shadowy phantom. Evangelical theology is essentially Christological, or controlled throughout by the proper idea of Christ as the God-Man and Saviour. This is emphatically the article of the standing or falling Church. In this, the two most prominent ideas of the Reformation—the doctrine of the supremacy of the Scriptures, and the doctrine of justification by grace through faith—meet, and are vitally united. Christ's word, the only unerring and efficient guide of truth; Christ's work, the only un failing and sufficient source of peace; Christ all in all—this is the principle of genuine Protestantism.

In the construction of the true doctrine of Christ's person, we may, with St. John in the prologue to his Gospel, begin from above with his eternal Godhead, and proceed, through the creation and the preparatory revelation of the Old Testament economy, till we reach the incarnation and his truly human life for the redemption

of the race. Or, with the other evangelists, we may begin from below with his birth from the Virgin Mary, and rise, through the successive stages of his earthly life, his discourses and miracles, to his assumption into that divine glory which he had before the foundation of the world. The result reached in both cases is the same; namely, that Christ unites in his person the whole fullness of the Godhead, and the whole fullness of sinless manhood.

The older theologians, both Catholic and Evangelical, proved the divinity of the Saviour in a direct way from the *miracles* performed by him; from the *prophecies* and *types* fulfilled in him; from the divine *names* which he bears; from the divine *attributes* which are predicated of him; from the divine *works* which he performed; and from the divine *honors* which he claims, and which are fully accorded to him by his apostles and the whole Christian Church to this day.

But the divinity of Christ may also be proved by the opposite process—the contemplation of the singular perfection of Christ’s humanity; which rises by almost universal consent, even of unbelievers, so far above every human greatness known before or since, that it can only be rationally explained on the ground of such an essential union with the Godhead as he claimed himself, and as his inspired apostles ascribed to him. The more deeply we penetrate the veil of his flesh, the more clearly we behold the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father shining, through the same flesh, full of grace and of truth.¹

¹ Dr. Ullmann, *Die Sündlosigkeit Jesu*, 6th ed., 215: “So führt schon das Vollendet-Menschliche in Jesu, wenn wir es mit allem Uebrigen, was die Menschheit darbietet, vergleichen, zur Anerkennung des Göttlichen in ihm.” Dorner, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Lehre von der Person Christi*, 2d ed., 2:1211: “Jesu Heiligkeit und Weisheit, durch die er unter den sündigen, viel-irrenden Menschen einzig dasteht, weiset . . . auf einen übernatürlichen Ursprung seiner Person. Diese muss, um inmitten der Sünderwelt be-greiflich zu sein, aus einer eigenthümlichen und wunderbar schöpferischen That Gottes abgeleitet, ja es muss in Christus . . . von Gott aus betrachtet, eine Incarnation göttlicher Liebe, also göttlichen Wesens gesehen werden, was ihn als den Punkt erscheinen lässt, wo Gott und die Menschheit einzig und innigst geeinigt sind.” Compare also Ebrard, *Christliche Dogmatik* (1852) 2:24-31 and W. Nast, “General Introduction,” *Commentary on Matthew and Mark* (Cincinnati, 1864), 120.

Modern theology owes this new homage to the Saviour. The powerful and subtle attacks of the latest phases of infidelity upon the credibility of the gospel history call for a more vigorous defense than was ever made before, and have already led, by way of reaction, to new triumphs of the old faith of the Church in her divine Head.

Our humanitarian, philanthropic, and yet skeptical age is more open to this argument, which proceeds from the humanity to the divinity, than to the old dogmatic method of demonstration which follows the opposite process. With Thomas, the representative of honest and earnest skepticism among the apostles, many noble and inquiring minds refuse to believe in the divinity of the Lord, unless supported by the testimony of their senses, or the convincing arguments of reason: they desire to put the finger into the print of his nails, and to thrust the hand into his side before they exclaim, in humble adoration: "My Lord and my God!" They cannot easily be brought to believe in miracles on abstract reasoning or on historical evidence. But, if they once could see the great moral miracle of Christ's person and character, they would have no difficulty with his miraculous works. For a superhuman being must of necessity do superhuman deeds; a miraculous person must perform miraculous works. The contrary would be unnatural, and the greatest miracle. The character of the tree accounts for the character of the fruit. We believe in the miracles of Christ because we believe in his person as the divine Man, and the central miracle of the moral universe.

It is from this point of view that we shall endeavor, in as popular and concise a manner as the difficulty and dignity of the subject permit, to analyze and exhibit the *human character* of Christ. We propose to take up the man, Jesus of Nazareth, as he appears on the simple, unsophisticated record of the plain and honest fishermen of Galilee, and as he lives in the faith of Christendom; and we shall find him in all the stages of his life, both as a private individual and as a public character, so far elevated above the reach of successful rivalry, and so singularly perfect, that this very perfection, in the midst of an imperfect and sinful world, constitutes an irresistible proof of his divinity.

A full discussion of the subject would require us to consider Christ in his official as well as personal character; and to describe him as a teacher, a reformer, a worker of miracles, and the founder of a spiritual kingdom universal in extent and perpetual in time. From every point of view, we should be irresistibly driven to the same result. But our present purpose confines us to the consideration of his personal character; and this alone, we think, is sufficient for the conclusion.