

The Fact of Christ

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christ in Christianity, highlighting the unique relationship between Christ and the Christian faith.

Scripture: Matthew 16:15, John 1:1, John 14:6, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 1:15

Topics: "Christology", "Christian Identity"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes that Christianity uniquely rests on the Person of Jesus Christ, unlike other religions where followers can adhere to teachings without focusing on the founder. The close connection between Christianity and Christ is inseparable, with Christianity defined as adherence to the Person of Jesus Christ. The central and fundamental idea of Christianity is the Person of Christ, posing the crucial question 'What think ye of Christ?' which tests one's relationship to Christianity. The focus on the historic Personality of Jesus has intensified in recent years, with the Person of Christ being the ultimate issue that influences beliefs, actions, and attitudes towards Christianity.

Transcript

Christianity is the only religion in the world which rests on the Person of its Founder. A man can be a faithful Mohammedan without in the least concerning himself with the person of Mohammed. So also a man can be a true and faithful Buddhist without knowing anything whatever about Buddha. It is quite different with Christianity. Christianity is so inextricably bound up with Christ that our view of the Person of Christ involves and determines our view of Christianity. The relation of Jesus Christ to Christianity differs entirely from that of all other founders towards the religions of philosophies which bear their names.

Platonism, for example, may be defined as a method of philosophic thought from Plato; Mohammedanism as the belief in the revelation vouchsafed to Mohammed; Buddhism as the following of principles enunciated by Buddha. But Christianity is in essence adherence to the Person of Jesus Christ. [F. J. Foakes-Jackson, in Cambridge Theological Essays. p. 474.] It has also been pointed out that Christianity alone of the great religions of the world calls itself by the name of its Founder, and that while we call other religions by the names of their founders, the adherents of these religions do not call themselves by these names. [R.

E. Speer, The Deity of Christ, p. 1.] This fact is full of very deep meaning. Does it not inevitably suggest that the connection between Christianity and Christ is so close as to be inseparable? Christianity is nothing less and can be nothing more than relationship to Christ. The fundamental and ultimate idea and

fact of Christianity is the Person of Christ. "What think ye of Christ?" is the crucial problem today, as it has been all through the centuries. It is a test of Christianity and of man's relation to Christianity.

For nearly nineteen centuries attention has been concentrated on the Person of Christ both by His friends and by His foes. With a sure instinct both followers and opponents have realized the supreme importance of the Person of the Founder of Christianity. On the one hand, Jesus Christ has been the center of opposition in almost every age; on the other hand, He has been the Object of worship and of the heart's devotion of all Christians. We cannot get away from this central fact: it influences our thinking; it controls our action; and it tests our entire attitude to the religion of Christ.

This question of the Person of Christ is predominant at the present time. For the last sixty years special and ever-increasing attention has been given to Jesus Christ. The various "Lives of Christ" written in Germany, France and England bear their unmistakable testimony to the perennial interest of the subject. The concentration of criticism on the Gospels today with an acuteness never before paralleled is proof that men of all schools realize the central and fundamental nature of the problem.

History is being studied in order to discover what it has to say about Jesus Christ. The records of the primitive Church are being reexamined with minute care for their testimony to Him, and the comparison of what history and the Church have to say about Christ is once again being made with a view of discovering whether the two agree, or, if not, whether they can be properly related. The historic Personality of Jesus has risen upon the consciousness of the Church with the force almost of a new revelation, the ultimate results of which still lie far in the future.

It is literally true that this century is face to face with that Great Figure as no century has been since the first. [D. S. Cairns, *Christianity in the Modern World*, p. 14.] It is thus no mere question of belief in this or that doctrine of the faith; nor simply an inquiry into the authenticity of this or that book of the Bible. It is the fundamental issue; is Jesus Christ God? Christians believe and are convinced that there is no real alternative between the acceptance of this view and the removal of Jesus Christ from the supreme place which He has occupied in the Christian Church through the centuries.

Either He has been given a place to which He is entitled, or else He has been so entirely overrated that His spiritual value cannot be regarded as anything more than that of an example. Jesus Christ must either be the Object of men's faith, or else merely its Model. The Christian Church has held firmly to the former belief, and is convinced that it is the only tenable position. It is not too much to say that at this point Christianity, as it has been known through the ages, stands or falls.

Carlyle recognized this when he said, "Had this doctrine of the Divinity of Christ been lost, Christianity would have vanished like a dream." So also Lecky truly remarks, "Christianity is not a system of morals; it is the worship of a Person." A special reason for giving prominence to this subject at the present time arises through the study of comparative religion. Christianity is now being compared with other religions in ways that were not possible even a few years ago, and this comparison inevitably leads up to the question of the Person of Christ.

Men are asking some very pointed questions. Wherein lies the uniqueness of Christianity? What was new in it? What did Christianity bring into the world that had not appeared before? The Christian answer is Christ, the Person of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ and His work. The controversy is therefore about facts. Christianity is a historical religion, and as it claims to rest on Christ, it necessarily follows that consideration of Christ is vital to the reality and continuance of Christianity as a historical religion.

For the same reason it is impossible for it to avoid criticism and comparison with other faiths, nor are Christians in the least degree afraid of any such examination. The Person and Work of Christ can and must be tried at the bar of Reason and of History, and no Christian can do other than welcome the fullest, and most searching examination of the Person of the Founder of our religion. A word seems necessary about the method to be adopted in the present inquiry. There are two ways of approaching the subject.

We can commence with an examination of the credibility of the Gospels as sources of our knowledge of Christ, or we can start by giving attention to the picture of Christ as enshrined in the Gospels, and then proceed to draw our conclusions as the result of the impressions thereby formed. The latter of these methods has been chosen. We deliberately avoid attempting to establish the credibility of the Gospels before studying the portrait of Christ contained in them. We prefer to reverse the process, because we wish to appeal first of all to those who are unwilling and perhaps unable to enter upon the intricacies of historical criticism.

At the same time place will be found for the consideration of the criticism of the Gospels (ch. 8) and the problems raised at the present day. But the method now deliberately adopted is to call attention to the picture of Christ, to obtain a definite impression of it as it stands, and then to draw conclusions as to the record in which it is found. We therefore take the Gospels as they are, and, assuming nothing as to their inspiration, we simply regard them as documents which are accepted today all over the world as the primary sources of our knowledge of Christ, and which have been so regarded by all men since at least A.D. 200.

We thus start with the fewest possible presuppositions and assumptions, and endeavor to derive our doctrine of Christ from the record of the Gospels. To the consideration, then, of the Person of Christ we address ourselves. That it is the most prominent feature of the Gospels is obvious to the most casual reader; that it was the substance of Christ's own teaching, the main theme of the Apostolic preaching and teaching, and the very life of all Church history, will be admitted by all, whatever may be their own view of Christ.

We must endeavor to find out the reason of all this concentration of attention on Christ, and to see whether the Christian Church has been justified in giving this undoubted prominence and unique position to the Person of its Founder.

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