

The Meaning of Christ

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The central object and support of faith in Christianity is Christ Himself, His person and His life, in time and beyond time, and not only any scheme of doctrine which He delivered.

Scripture: Matthew 11:27, John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15, 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 1:3

Topics: "Christology", "Revelation Of God"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the profound significance of Christ as the ultimate revelation of God, emphasizing that Christianity centers around the unique Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. The core message of Christianity is the revelation of God through Christ, who is portrayed as the image of the invisible God and the complete manifestation of God's love, grace, and righteousness. The essence of Christianity lies in Christ's personal revelation of God, offering humanity the opportunity for union and communion with God, fulfilling man's deepest need for God's presence and love.

Transcript

Facts can never be properly appreciated until an endeavor is made to penetrate behind them to their meaning. We have now reached the point when an attempt must be made to discover the meaning of all this emphasis on Christ. We have considered His character as perfect and sinless, His claim to Divine authority over mankind, His death as an atonement for sin, His resurrection as the demonstration of His Divine life, His Gospels as faithful records of His earthly manifestations, His Church as the perpetual testimony to His saving power, His grace as witnessed to by His devoted followers, His influence as acknowledged by some of His greatest foes.

But what does it all mean? Why do we lay such stress on the Fact, the Person, and the Work of Christ? The answer is, because Christ is before everything else a revelation of God. This, and nothing short of it, is the one and complete explanation of Christ. The idea of God is the dominating idea in all religions, and the idea of Christ as the Revealer of God is the dominating idea in Christianity. The supreme message of Christianity is, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, himself man, Jesus"; one God, and one unique Mediator as the personal Revealer of God to man.

No one can doubt that this is the meaning of the place given to Christ in the New Testament. The Name of Christ is found everywhere therein, and always in connection with His personal revelation of God. It meets our gaze at all points, and proclaims with no uncertain sound that to us men God has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus, that for us, for religion, for Christianity, for salvation, for life, Christ is God. The disciple's

question addressed to Christ, "Show us the Father," is at once an admission of his own need and a confession of his belief that Christ could supply it; and the relation of Jesus Christ to God is set forth in the New Testament with no uncertain sound.

"All things are delivered to me of my Father" (Matt. 11:27). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 16:9). He is the image of the invisible God, the effulgence of His glory (Heb. 1:3). Jesus Christ, divine and human, is for all time and for all men the final, complete and sufficient manifestation of God. The unchangeable sum of Christianity is the message: The Word was God, and the Word became flesh. This being so, it is clear that Christianity is not essentially a law for the regulation of our conduct; not a philosophy for the harmonious coordination of the facts of experience under our present forms of thought; not a system of worship by which men can approach their Maker in reverent devotion.

It offers all these as the natural fruit of the Truth which it proclaims in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. But Christ Himself, His person and His life, in time and beyond time, and not only any scheme of doctrine which He delivered, is the central object and support of faith. [Westcott, *The Gospel of Life*, p. 100.] This, and this alone, constitutes essential Christianity. Whatever men may find and emphasize in Christ, His Sonship, His Messiahship, His Teaching, His Manhood - while these are all included in the essence of Christianity, they do not exhaust it.

Christianity as Christ conceived of it transcends all these different aspects of embracing them in the one supreme and dominant truth of His personal revelation of God. The essential fact is that He brings God to man in order that He may bring men to God. Man's greatest, deepest need is God, and union and communion with Him. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." Personality can only be satisfied with personality, and man's personality can never be satisfied with any personality short of God's.

Now this fellowship with God, Christ came to reveal and mediate, and it is the bare truth to say that He reveals and mediates it as none else does or ever has done. We may argue, first, directly from the fact of Christ Himself - His life, His teaching, and especially His consciousness - as the greatest and most significant fact in the world, and so our best proof of the existence of God in the full Christian sense. This seems to me, even from the side of pure argument, the most decisive proof.

The argument goes upon the simple assumption that, if we are ever to discern the real nature of the ultimate world-ground, our best light must come from the greatest and most significant facts. For myself, I have no doubt that Christ is the most significant of all facts known to us, and, therefore, the best basis for direct and decisive inference to the nature of the world-ground. The argument does not at all go, it should be noticed, upon any assumption of the arbitrary authority of Jesus, but simply upon the significance of what He is.

Any authority subsequently given Him must be based wholly upon what He is in fact found to be. I count the fact of Christ, the greatest of all proofs of a completely satisfying God - the proof most powerful to produce conviction in the mind of a man who has himself come to full moral self-consciousness. [King, *The Seeming Unreality of the Spiritual Life*, p. 202.] In Christ we see what God is, both in His personal character and also in His relation to us. He is that Love, Wisdom, Righteousness, Grace for which we crave, while in Him we are enabled to understand and experience what God wills us to be. The doctrine meets our deepest needs as nothing else can.

"The very God! Think, Abib; dost thou think?"

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too -

So, through the thunder comes a human voice,

Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!

... ..

And thou must love Me who hast died for thee."

This is the Gospel, the good news. He was God manifest in the flesh, and came to this earth "that He might bring us to God." It is this that makes Christ central and dominant in every life that receives Him, winning trust, redeeming from sin, eliciting devotion, and inspiring hope. It is because He is God manifest, God entering into human life, God meeting human need. The most important thing for the man who is to submit himself to God is surely that he should be absolutely certain of the reality of God, and Jesus does establish in us, through the fact of His personal life, a certainty of God which covers every doubt.

When once He has attracted us by beauty of His Person, and made us bow before Him by its exalted character, then even amid our deepest doubts, that Person of Jesus will remain present with us as a thing incomparable, the most precious fact in history, the most precious fact our life contains. [Herrmann, *Communion with God*, p. 97.] But, it is said, the Person of Christ is a mystery - the union of God and Man in one Person is beyond our comprehension. True, but is this a reason for setting it aside altogether?

Beyond comprehension is not necessarily beyond apprehension, and apprehension is a reality and provides a sufficiency which covers most of the essential things of life. Wherever deity and humanity meet there is - there must be - mystery, and we cannot therefore be surprised that since they meet in Jesus Christ as they do nowhere else, the element of mystery has always been realized. The Person of Christ is exactly the point in the Christian religion where the intellect feels overwhelmed by mysteries it cannot resolve, yet where Christian experience finds the factors of its most characteristic qualities, and the Church the truth it has lived by and is bound to live for. [Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 5.]

The solution of the problem has been attempted in almost every age, but without success. It is easy to cut the gordian knot by denying one or other of the conditions of the problem - by rejecting either the Deity or the Humanity. This at once resolves the mystery, but it also leaves the facts concerning Christ a greater problem than ever. These facts have to be explained, and cannot be set aside simply because they are mysteries. When all allowance has been made, there remains an irreducible minimum of fact about the historic Christ which calls for attention and explanation.

We cannot get rid of facts by describing them as inexplicable. The true humanity of Jesus Christ is a patent fact of the New Testament record, and yet the way in which His life transcended humanity is equally patent. The supreme idea that runs through the Gospel story is the consciousness that Jesus Christ is more than man. Whether we read of the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, the Character, the Death, or the Resurrection, it cannot be doubted that the writers intend us to obtain the impression that Jesus Christ was a unique manifestation of God.

Dr. Denney points out this in referring to the Virgin Birth - It provides a way of expressing the assurance that the line of Christ is throughout Divine. If He was Son of God at all, He did not begin to be so at any given age. ... He never was anything else. This is the truth guarded by the Virgin Birth. [Denney, article,

"Jesus Christ." Hastings' Bible Dictionary. One Volume Edition.] It is impossible to reconstruct the life of Jesus on a purely natural historic and non-mysterious basis.

Those who attempt to do so have confessedly no new historical facts to deal with, no new contemporary documents to put against our Gospels. The supernatural element in Christ and Christianity remains, and demands attention. I start from the fact, which appears to me to be as certain as anything in history, that extraordinary phenomena happened in connection with the life of Christ and the ministry of His Apostles, and happened on a large scale. The most decisive witness on this head is St.

Paul, who speaks not only from his own experience, but from that of his immediate contemporaries and associates. ... These forces of which the Apostle is conscious had their rise, as he knows and the whole Church knows, in the life and work of Christ, which set the train in motion ... The inference backwards that we draw from the writings of St. Paul is abundantly confirmed by every document that criticism can distinguish bearing upon the life of Christ. We cannot help seeing that not only St.

Paul and the authors of these documents, named or unnamed, but the whole body of Christian opinion at the time, agreed in assuming, not merely that extraordinary things happened in connection with the Person of Jesus, but that His Person was itself extraordinary and transcendent, something beyond the measures of common humanity. [Sanday, Expository Times, vol. xx., p. 157.] So that when we read the Gospels and the testimony of the Apostles we are face to face with the belief not only and merely of the particular writers, but with that of the whole Christian community of which they were the exponents and for which they wrote. [Warfield.

The Lord of Glory. pp. 133, 144.] But beyond this and arising out of it is the supernatural element in the Christianity of the centuries. After destructive criticism has done all its work on the Gospels, the problem still remains. The Church, as we have already seen, has to be accounted for, the community of all races drawn and held together through the ages by the love of Christ's Name. This, too, is a supernatural fact, which is characterized by mystery and needs an explanation.

Whether, then, we think of Christ or of the Church, we are in the presence of the supernatural, and therefore of mystery, and we maintain the utter impossibility of resolving the mystery on natural grounds. If we are to reject Christ because He is mysterious, we shall inevitably find ourselves face to face with other facts for which there is no explanation. The history of nineteen centuries becomes an insoluble enigma, and man is left absolutely alone without God, and without the satisfaction of those needs which are as clamant today as they have ever been.

The only possible explanation of Christ and Christianity is that He was God revealed in human form. His uniqueness in relation to God makes the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation the only adequate explanation of His personality and work. It is utterly impossible to hold to a merely human Christ. The Christ who proclaims God, who forgives sin, who unites men to God, who is and has ever been honored and worshiped in the Church, is the only satisfying solution of the problem of how God and man may be brought together, and man's life find its full realization and satisfaction.

Grant that Jesus was really God, in a word, and everything falls orderly into its place. Deny it, and you have a Jesus and a Christianity on your hands both equally unaccountable: and that is as much as to say that the ultimate proof of the deity of Christ is just - Jesus and Christianity. If Christ were not God, we should have a very different Jesus and a very different Christianity. And that is the reason that modern unbelief bends all its energies in a vain effort to abolish the historical Jesus and to destroy historical

Christianity.

Its instinct is right, but its task is hopeless. We need the Jesus of history to account for the Christianity of history. And we need both the Jesus of history and the Christianity of history to account for the history of the world. The history of the world is the product of that precise Christianity which has actually existed, and this Christianity is the product of the precise Jesus which actually was. To be rid of this Jesus we must be rid of this Christianity, and to be rid of this Christianity we must be rid of the world history which has grown out of it.

We must have the Christianity of history and the Jesus of history, or we leave the world that exists, and as it exists, unaccounted for. But so long as we have either the Jesus of history or the Christianity of history we shall have a divine Jesus. [Warfield, *The Lord of Glory*, p. 278.]

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