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JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST

Christianity today is commonly regarded as nothing more than a nominal title: on this view a man is or is not a Christian by the accident of birth according to which he may or may not be born in a Christian country or of Christian parents. Alternatively it is regarded as a system of ethics or morals about which there are two opinions: some wish it were universally recognized and practised so that the Kingdom of God might be established, while others regard it as having been tried by application to the practical affairs of everyday life and found wanting so that it should now be discarded in favour of some other system. In fact Christianity is none of these things. It is essentially belief in and allegiance to the person from whom the name Christianity is derived, who lived and taught in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago, was crucified under Pontius Pilate at the instigation of his own people and was, according to the tradition commonly believed among his followers, raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead and to set up the Kingdom of God on earth.

Thus to be a Christian is not just to accept a particular body of ideas. It is that, of course, but the ideas all centre round the person, so that the distinctive characteristic of his followers is belief in and allegiance to him. The New Testament records make this abundantly clear. Two episodes recorded in the gospels demonstrate how the faith of the disciples was first and foremost faith in Jesus Christ the person. No doubt they were impelled to follow him because of his teaching and his works but, in the end, it was something more than these which held them: it was the man himself. So, when he had uttered a saying particularly hard to be understood and consequently many had ceased to follow him, Jesus asked the disciples whether they too were going to leave him (John 6 v 60-69). It was Simon Peter, as so often, who was the spokesman for them all on this occasion, when he replied, "[Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.](#)" It was Peter too who made the same affirmation at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16 v 16) when Jesus had asked the disciples who men were saying that he was and had then confronted them with the question, "[But whom say ye that I am?](#)" Peter answered, "[Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God](#)", and Jesus

commended him for his answer, saying that this truth had been revealed to him by the Father in heaven. Words like these reveal the personal faith that held the disciples to their Master.

In the teaching of the apostles, both in their speeches as recorded in the Acts and also in their letters, there is the same emphasis. They believed on and preached Jesus Christ. Peter began his speech to the Jews at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2 v 22) by proclaiming to them, "[Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know ...](#)" In similar vein all the preaching recorded in the Acts of the Apostles centres round Jesus Christ. So Paul writes, "[For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.](#)" (2 Cor 4 v 5). For Paul the gospel, the gospel of Christ, and the Word, are all one and the same and to preach them is, quite simply, to preach Christ. Failure to appreciate this equation in the apostle's mind has caused unnecessary difficulty in interpreting some of his thoughts.

The attitude of the early believers is also shown dearly by their recognition of the Lordship of Jesus. They called him "Lord" and that involved that they should surrender themselves to him as servants or slaves. Paul, writing to the Romans (Rom 1 v 1), calls himself a servant or bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1 v 2 R.V.), referring to the whole body of those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ, he says that he is "[their Lord and ours](#)". The words with which Christians close their prayers, "through Jesus Christ our Lord", are therefore no empty formula. They are the acknowledgment that, as with the Christians of the first century, so with those of the twentieth, allegiance to Christ is the dominating influence in their lives. If it is not, they claim the title Christian in vain.

A dominating influence, however, does not spring from a mere sentimental attachment or from vague and unformed conceptions. Christians must recognize and accept the authority by which Christ can lay claim to the title "Lord". The early church very quickly found that it had to explain the Lordship of Jesus, both to satisfy the curiosity and sometimes rebut the animosity of the many philosophies and superstitions without and also to allay doubts and disputations within provoked by those who could not "[endure sound doctrine](#)". The prevailing shortcoming today is not that of curiosity or animosity but of indifference: a little curiosity or even animosity might well be of benefit in stimulating Christians to clarify their own minds, to grasp essentials and to discard non-essentials.

In the hope of clarifying some of the essential teaching of the New Testament concerning the person of Jesus Christ it is proposed to re-examine the picture of him which we have in the synoptic gospels, in the writings of John and Paul and in the remainder of the New Testament. In this way allegiance to him may perhaps be strengthened, for let it be clear from the outset that this is not just an intellectual exercise. As the knowledge of God should bring men and women to worship Him and so shape their lives after the pattern of His holiness, so the knowledge of Christ should kindle within each disciple the flame of personal allegiance and devotion which will mean the fashioning of life after the image of him who himself is "the express image of God's person". There is a solemn warning in the epistle of Peter (2 Pet 1 v 8) when he makes it clear that it is possible for men and women to be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is no greater tragedy than that

of the man who is quite at home amid all the intricate philosophical arguments concerning the person of Christ or who is armed with a battery of scriptural texts but whose way of life bears no shadow of resemblance to that of Christ himself.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Every student of the New Testament is alive to the differences between the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Some of these are apparent only to scholars scrutinizing the writings in the original language, while others are obvious to any careful reader of the English Authorized Version. An example of the latter is the emphasis which Matthew and Luke, as compared with Mark, give to the teaching of Jesus. But all have one object in common, to show that Jesus is the Son of God. So Matthew and Luke both begin their gospels with an account of the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus (Matt 1 v 18 – 2 v 12; Luke 1 v 26-38; 2 v 1-20).² Mark does not give this account but he entitles his gospel, "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1 v 1). All three writers record that twice, at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3 v 13-17; Mark 1 v 9-11; Luke 3 v 21-22) and at his transfiguration, a voice from heaven proclaimed his divine sonship: "Thou art my beloved Son; in whom I am well pleased" and "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him" (Matt 17 v 1-8; Mark 9 v 2-8; Luke 9 v 28-36). Matthew and Luke both record Jesus' temptation as the temptation of the Son of God, thus: "If thou be the Son of God. . ." (Matt 4 v 1-7; Luke 4 v 1-12), Matthew, Mark and Luke all record an instance of tormented minds recognizing Jesus as the Son of God: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" (Matt 8 v 28-34; Mark 5 v 1-21; Luke 8 v 26-40). Finally, Matthew and Mark report the centurion's confession, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." (Matt 27 v 54; Mark 15 v 39).

None of the gospel writers, however, is content to record these claims and leave the matter there. Their whole picture of the life of Jesus is so framed as to show that the claims were implemented by his words and works. So they record his miracles: miracles of control over the powers of nature as in the stilling of the storm (Luke 8 v 22-25); miracles of physical healing as in the cleansing of the lepers (Luke 17 v 11-14); and miracles of spiritual healing such as the forgiveness of sins (Luke 5 v 17-26). These were not the conventional actions of a mere wonder-worker. The people suggested that, and Jesus refuted it by asserting that his power was of God and that his miracles were the evidence of the activity of God (John 5 v 36). So, when John asks whether Jesus is "He that should come", his messengers are bidden to tell John "what they saw and heard" (Luke 7 v 19-22). Similarly, a cleansed leper is sent to show himself to the priests "as a testimony to them" (Matt 8 v 2-4),² and Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth claims that, in the words of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4 v 16-21). Few indeed could watch his miracles without seeing in them a manifestation of the powers of the age to come of which the prophets had spoken, or see the storm stilled on the lake without recalling the words of the Psalmist concerning the Almighty who "stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves and the tumult of the people" (Psa 65 v 7). But the significance of the miracles went deeper. Physical and spiritual evil are interwoven and Jesus, who can overcome the one, can overcome the other and so "has power on earth to forgive sin" (Luke 5 v 17-26) and to free men from sin's bondage. In the works of Jesus the gospel writers saw a manifestation of the power of God and experienced a foretaste of the kingdom of God when that power will be supreme. When it was suggested that Jesus cast out devils because of authority derived from the prince of the

devils, he denied it by pointing to the divine source of his power: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." (Matt 12 v 22-28)

Again, the words of Jesus are words of power. Matthew and Luke record that he taught the people as one having authority when compared with his contemporaries (Matt 7 v 29; Mark 1 v 22). He himself claims to expound the mysteries of the kingdom of God and sets them before his disciples in parables (Matt 13 v 10-11; Mark 4 v 10-12; Luke 8 v 9-10). He claims for his teaching the authority of the ancient Law: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time but I say unto you" (Matt 5, 21ff). He claims to pronounce the final judgment on the lives of men. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matt 7 v 22-23). He displays penetrating insight into the hearts and minds of men when he denounces the scribes and Pharisees because their righteousness is an outward appearance only, concealing all manner of vice within (Matt 23). Conscious of his mission and steadfast in his determination to fulfil it, he prefixes his declaration with the purposeful words "I am come to. . ." or "I came not to. . ." and, when his disciples seek to deter him, he rebukes them (Mark 8 v 31-33). Throughout he displays unity of mind and purpose with God: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work" (John 4 v 34). In short, the Jesus of the gospels in all that he does and says and is, testifies to the truth of the claim that he was the Son of God.

At the same time it cannot escape notice that Jesus does not call himself Son of God. There is no ostentatious parading of this title. Rather with quietness, and even modesty, Jesus seeks to impress his authority upon those who hear: "I say unto you", with now and then a reference to the Father and the Son or my Father and I. The title which Jesus takes for himself when he does not speak to his audience in the first person singular is that of Son of Man, with which he associates particularly two thoughts, that of his suffering and death and that of his coming again in glory. The episode at Caesarea Philippi when Peter made his confession of the divine sonship was a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Mark records that "he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8 v 31-33). Similarly at the last supper (Mark 14 v 17-21) and in the garden afterwards (Mark 14 v 41-42) Jesus speaks of the betrayal of the Son of Man. Later before the high priest, faced with the challenge "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus replies, "I am; and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14 v 62). Earlier on the Mount of Olives he had spoken in similar language to his disciples of the days when men should "see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13 v 26).

Much has been written about the origin and background of the title Son of Man. Be that as it may, its association with his suffering is a reminder that Jesus is presented in the gospels as one who, while he was Son of God, was yet made as we are, struggling against the same difficulties and temptations as we do. The gospel writers never forget this, and they picture him wrestling in the wilderness with temptation (Matt 4 v 1-11; Mark 1 v 12-13; Luke 4 v 1-13), weary and asleep (Mark 4 v 38; John 4 v 6), hungry (Mark 11 v 12), moved by compassion towards the sick and the unshepherded multitudes (Matt 9 v 36, 14 v 14; Mark

1 v 41, 6 v 34; Luke 7 v 13) angry with his critics (Mark 3 v 5), showing tender love to Martha and Mary (John 11 v 5), weeping at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11 v 35), sharing the common joys and sorrows of mankind. Never does Jesus appear as a demi-god, an angel or a being of some other race; always he is a man among men, the master among his disciples. So the Son of God is also a son of man. This is the mystery of the "word made flesh" and the source of much contention and bitterness in later ages.

JOHN'S GOSPEL AND EPISTLES

If a study of the synoptic gospels left any doubts as to the divine sonship of Jesus Christ, John's gospel must sweep them away. The theme of his message is indicated at the outset, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Word of God incarnate: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1 v 1,14 R.V.). No statement in the whole of the Bible has been discussed more than this. It has been suggested in the past that it represents an accommodation of the Christian faith with Greek philosophy, but recent scholarship has emphasized that, while the style in which John writes may be that of the Greek philosophers, the basic ideas which he is expounding are rooted in the thought of the Old Testament. The opening phrase "In the beginning was the word" goes right back to the opening words of the Bible "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen 1 v 1). The beginning was something more than a beginning in time, it was a beginning also in principle, the fundamental reason underlying all things. In that beginning it is recorded that "God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen 1 v 3). The Psalmist echoes these words when he writes:

"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made;
And all the host of them by the breath of his mouth...
For he spake, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast." (Psa 33 v 6,9)

The word of God went forth in the beginning with creative power. It expressed the mind and purpose of God, as words express the mind and purpose of those who utter them. All through the Old Testament there is the record, of the word of God going forth to men with its revelation of what God is like. Adam, hearing the Word, recognized the obligation of God's moral law and, when that law had been broken; -he heard the word of judgment promulgated (Gen 2 v 16; 3 v 17-19). Abram, hearing the Word, left his country and kindred and sought a land which God would show him (Gen 12 v 1). Through the Word Moses received the divine commandments in Sinai and the people, hearing the voice of the Lord afar off, trembled and besought Moses to receive the law for them (Exod 20 v 18, 19; Deut 5 v 27). The prophets, in later years, heard the Word of God and pronounced it to the people with a "Thus saith the Lord" (Isa 1 v 24 and passim).

Thus God at sundry times and in divers manners spoke to the fathers, teaching them that He was holy and righteous and that He demanded these same qualities of them. But the finite mind of man is limited in its comprehension of abstract qualities; holiness and righteousness mean much more when they are demonstrated and lived out in the life of a person than they do as mere words or ideas. So the fulness of God's revelation comes not in the spoken or written word but in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom the divine qualities are lived out

in a human life: "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1 v 14); "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him" (John 1 v 18). Thus, though Jesus in his words and works displays the truth about God, his mission lies deeper than that because he himself in all that he is, in his whole way of life, manifests the Father to men. He is, therefore, able to say not merely "What I tell you about God is true", but "I am the Truth" (John 14 v 6). When Philip asks Jesus to show the Father to the disciples, there is a note of rebuke in Jesus' reply: "Have I been so long with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14 v 9) That is the supreme claim which Jesus made.

The fulness of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ cannot be over-emphasized, for it is the foundation of the Christian faith. The special value of John's writings is their insistence upon this fact. At the same time John never emphasizes the divinity of Christ to the exclusion of his humanity; he never thinks of the glory of the Word alone but always of the glory of the Word made flesh. Quite early in the history of the Christian church there arose a school of thought which asserted that Jesus had not come in the flesh, but was a spirit whose sufferings were only apparent and not real. This may well have been the background against which John wrote his gospel. Certainly it was partly to refute this assertion that he wrote his first and second epistles in which he emphasizes that Jesus had indeed come in the flesh. He sets the tenor of his argument by his opening words: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled.., that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." (1 John 1 v 1,3). The sufferings of Jesus, then, were real and, just because they were real and not merely apparent, they demonstrate the depths of God's love for man and bring the divine revelation in Christ to its perfection in the assurance that "God is love" (1 John 4 v 8). The suffering of the Son of Man is as much a part of that revelation as is the glory of the Son of God. Concentration upon the divine qualities in Christ must never blind us to that nor must it cause us to forget that Jesus, in manifesting the divine character in the flesh, has given us the example of perfect manhood, so that in him we see not only what God is like but also what man is called upon to be like.

Moreover John never represents Jesus as God but always as the Son of God. The whole purpose of his writing, he declares, is "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20 v 31). The separation of the Father and the Son is always observed and the Son always appears as subordinate to the Father: it is, for example, the Father who sent the Son into the world (John 3 v 17; 6 v 57; 7 v 29). Again, Jesus never proclaims himself as God but deliberately emphasizes his dependence upon God in all things. He can do nothing, he says, of himself, and he does not speak of himself but as he has been commanded by the Father (John 8 v 28); when he claims to reveal that Father to men, it is as the son of God (John 5 v 18-23); and, when he affirms his unity with God, it is a unity which can be enjoyed also by those who become his disciples (John 17 v 20-23). The only possible exception to this is language occasionally used by Jesus which may suggest some sort of pre-existence. Thus, addressing the Jews, Jesus claims "Before Abram was, I am" (John 8 v 58); immediately after he has spoken of himself as the true bread which came down from heaven, he speaks of ascending where he was before (John 6 v 48-50,62); he prays to God to glorify him with the

glory which he had with the Father before the world began (John 17 v 5); he speaks of the love which the Father bore to him before the foundation of the world (John 17 v 24).

Let it be admitted at once that passages such as these put a strain on our finite human minds which are limited by conceptions of time and space. Nevertheless clearly we have to make some effort to understand them if only by transferring ourselves from the sphere of the literal to that of the symbolic. When Jesus says that he is bread, we understand the saying figuratively not literally: the bread is not a loaf but a symbol. Similarly when he says "Before Abram was, I am", we realize that, if his purpose had merely been to date himself before Abram in a simple time sequence, he would have said "Before Abram was I was". As it is the phrase "I am", whatever its full implications, lifts us out of the sphere of time in the same way as the symbol of the bread takes us out of the sphere of the material. Earlier in the same dialogue Jesus had said to the Jews "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8 v 23). Here we recognize that Jesus was confronting the Jews not with two different physical spheres, one up and one down, but with two contrasts of quality: his way of life was not theirs. Centuries before Isaiah had made the same sort of comparison:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55 v 8,9)

John's gospel is full of such qualitative contrasts sharply drawn in terms of the antithesis between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, spirit and flesh, life and death, heaven and earth. In this context the difference between heaven and earth is not like the difference between the roof tops and the ground; it is a qualitative difference in which the terms up and down become words of contrast between two different spheres, the divine and the human. When therefore Jesus says that he came down from heaven, the thought is not of a life lived for so long on one physical plane and then coming down to another for a sojourn of thirty years. Phrases such as this and "I came from God" assert the difference in quality between the life of Jesus and the lives of those to whom he came, between a life lived to the uttermost in union with and to the praise and glory of God and lives which at their very best stumble and falter in seeking after God. It is the difference between the word and the flesh, and the declarations "I came from God" and "I am from above" assert anew the truth with which the gospel begins that "the word was made flesh". How that truth dominates the apostle's thought has been well summarised by Sir Edwin Hoskyns when he writes: "**The gospel is, as the earlier evangelists had declared, the Word of God. And Jesus is himself the Gospel, is the Word of God. The fourth evangelist does not personify the Word of God. The Word had created him, not he the Word; and the Word of God had confronted the apostles in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. The Word of God written on tables of stone at Sinai was incarnate in Jesus Christ. The evangelist saw that this, with its negative and positive implications, was the very heart of the faith of the apostles. . . The figure of Jesus as the embodiment of the glory of the Word of God controls the whole matter of the Christian religion.**" (The Fourth Gospel, Commentary, Note 1)

PAUL'S LETTERS

It has been said that, while John's characteristic word is "truth", Paul's is "grace". Put less succinctly this suggests that to John the earthly life of Jesus is the uniquely true revelation of God, while to Paul it is the supremely effective act of God's love. In a measure this is true. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he was determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2 v 2), and again "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1 v 23). For him the cross is the manifestation of the power of God: "for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1 v 18). It is the power of God because "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5 v 19). And behind that power is God's love; "God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5 v 8). Thus Paul's thought does essentially centre round the cross.

Nevertheless, while John's primary emphasis may be upon Christ as the Truth, he also presents him as the Way and the Life and, indeed, to John's gospel there belongs what is probably the best known verse of scripture concerning the atonement: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3 v 16). Similarly in Paul's writings, while there may be primary emphasis on Christ crucified, there is no detracting from the fulness of God's revelation in Christ. There is indeed a remarkable parallel between the thought of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapters 3 and 4, and the thought of John in the prologue to his gospel. The passage is one of those interesting examples of how one thought leads the apostle on to another. He begins by speaking of the Corinthians in a figure as epistles written by him, not on stone but in "tables that are hearts of flesh". The thought of the writing on stone carries his mind back to Sinai and to the giving of the law to Moses "written and engraven in stones". He then recalls how the face of Moses shone with the glory of God which he saw in the mount and how he veiled his face when he returned to the people so that they might not see the reflection of God's glory gradually fade away. This veiling of the glory is then compared with its unveiling in Christ hidden from some "in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them". Again there is a transition in Paul's thought. The mention of light carries his mind back from Sinai to Eden and he is at one with John when he writes that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

As John presents not only the glory of the word but also that glory made flesh, so Paul in an oft quoted passage emphasizes in poignant language the same truth. In his letter to the Philippians he wrote: "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men: and being found in human form, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2 v 5-8 (RSV)). This passage, it is sometimes said, brings before us one who laid aside a glory which he originally had and became humble in human form, thus pointing to some pre-existence of Christ. Reliance is placed upon the Greek word translated "was" as carrying the idea of "was originally", but while the word does frequently involve this in classical Greek, it does not always do so, and reference to a concordance

shows numerous examples in the New Testament where it does not. There is the further difficulty that the words translated in the Authorized Version "[thought it not robbery to be equal with God](#)" in the original Greek imply not one who was equal with God and set that equality aside, but, as the translation of the Revised Standard Version quoted above shows, one who set aside the possibility of "[grasping at](#)" that equality. Again the thought of grasping at equality with God is no doubt a reference by way of contrast to the first Adam who succumbed to the temptation "[Ye shall be as gods](#)". Finally we should note that the passage is not a theological discourse but an exhortation to practical humility on the basis of the example of Christ who, though filled with the fulness of God, yet showed by his way of life on earth the ideal of service and obedience.

In several passages Paul associates Christ with God in the works of creation. The best known of these is perhaps that in the letter to the Colossians (Col 1 v 12-17): "[Giving thanks to the Father ... Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son. . . who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.](#)" An examination of the chapter in which these words appear shows that the thought of the Word is as dominant in Paul's mind as it was in John's. In verse 5 it is the word of the truth of the gospel which has come to the Colossians, as elsewhere, in the world, bearing fruit, but in verses 25 and onwards it is expanded into "[the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach. . .](#)" With this we may compare the parallel passage in the letter to the Ephesians where Christ is associated with the works of creation:

["Unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."](#) (Eph 3 v 8-11)

In both epistles there is reference to the mystery hid from the beginning and now made manifest in Christ, and in the letter to the Colossians that mystery is clearly equated with the Word. Nor can it escape notice that the theme of both these letters is the new creation in Christ which is the unity towards which all things are moving, "[the fulness of him that filleth all in all](#)" (Eph 1 v 23), so that the whole creation finds its meaning and purpose in him who is the image of the invisible God. Therefore, as John presents Christ as the embodiment of the Word with all its associations of the manifestation of the creative power of God, so Paul associates Jesus with the work of creation, for the Word was the centre of God's activity and purpose in and for His creation and Jesus was that Word made flesh.

On examination, therefore, we find that Paul's view of Christ is not different from John's. He is the Son of God. Paul describes himself as an apostle "separated unto the gospel of God . . . concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord . . . declared to be the son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom 1 v 1-4). In him dwells "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2 v 9). Yet in all things the Son is subordinate to the Father and remains so even to the end: "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15 v 28). The gospel that Paul preaches is Jesus Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1 v 24), and that gospel is also "the word of God" (1 Thess 2 v 13), "the word of Christ" (Col 3 v 16), or just "the Word" (1 Thess 1 v 6).

THE REST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In discussing Paul's writings no reference was made to the Letter to the Hebrews. Many are of the opinion that Paul did not write this letter, but whatever the truth may be, it is evident that the writer (if it was not Paul) was entirely at one with Paul in his view of the person of Christ. In this letter, Christ is portrayed as the perfect High Priest who, by his sacrifice, has enabled men and women to draw near to God in worship and who is alive to help and encourage his followers and to intercede for them before the throne of God. Emphasis is placed on Christ's manhood because only one who knows by experience the limitations of humanity can have real sympathy for and give real help to those who are burdened by these limitations -: "Wherefore in all things it became him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb 2 v 17-18).

Never for a moment, however, is the reader of this Epistle allowed to forget that this one who is made like unto his brethren is the Son of God. The opening words govern the subsequent thought, presenting Christ as the culmination of God's revelation, "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Heb 1 v 3); the first and second chapters establish his pre-eminence by citations from the Psalms; then Jesus the Son over God's house is contrasted with Moses the servant; and finally the great theme of the whole epistle demonstrates the superiority of the priesthood of Christ as Son of God over priesthoods ordained from among men: "For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore." (Heb 7 v 28)

The phrase which describes Christ as the brightness of God's glory echoes again the prologue to John's gospel and the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, gathering up within itself much of the thought of the Old Testament. The phrase "the express image of his person" introduces a vivid figure not used elsewhere which is concealed by the translation of the English Authorized Version. In the Revised Version there is a marginal alternative which gives just a hint of the underlying idea, "the impress of his substance". In the original Greek the word here translated "impress" is the word which has passed into the English language as "character". It meant in Greek primarily the image stamped on a coin. So our character is that which is stamped or impressed on us. But the character with which Jesus was stamped was not his own but God's. The word "person" bears no physical allusion at all but is akin to that which we describe as nature or personality. In this expressive figure

therefore the writer of this letter asserts that there was impressed upon Jesus the character of God Himself. It is the same assertion as that made by John when he writes of the Son declaring God to men and by Paul when he says that in Christ there dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Of the remaining epistles in the New Testament brief reference may be made to those of Peter and James. Peter adds his testimony to that already noted in John as to the historic foundation of the message of the apostles. He clearly states that the things they taught lay within the compass of their personal experience: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (2 Pet 1 v 16-18). James' epistle is essentially one of practical exhortation rather than of doctrinal exposition. It is, therefore, all the more interesting to observe how James, quite incidentally and as a matter of course, uses phrases which, in fact, have grave doctrinal import. For example, he begins his letter by describing himself as a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, associating the Father and the Son together (James 1 v 1), while later he speaks of Jesus Christ as the Lord of Glory (James 2 v 1), words which contain an echo of John's declaration that men "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

There remains the book of Revelation. However we may seek to interpret the detailed symbology and imagery of this book, the main purport of its message is clear. It declares in new form the ancient Hebrew faith in the meaning and purpose of history; that history is not just a chance succession of events, signifying nothing and leading nowhere, but manifests the outworking of the purpose of God who is guiding all things to His own pre-determined end. For God is not only Alpha, the beginning, the creator of all things, but also Omega, the end, the One who will bring that creation to perfection by filling it with His glory. So the final vision is of the triumph of the power of God and the establishment of the throne of God and the Lamb. In all this there is the closest association between God and the Lamb: the power of the one is the power of the other; the throne of God is the throne of the Lamb; and, finally, in the holy city, new Jerusalem, "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it, and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof." (Rev 21 v 23). If there were any doubt as to the identity of the Lamb, it is removed by the picture in the fifth chapter of the thanksgiving of the redeemed to the Lamb, an unequivocal reference to the atoning work of Christ as the Lamb of God. In the last book of the Bible, therefore, the divine sonship of Jesus is asserted in all its fulness by the picture of Jesus sharing in the final triumph of the Father when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." (Rev 11 v 15).

THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS

Thus we find throughout the New Testament an identity of view concerning our Lord. His unity with God is never allowed to obscure his humanity and his humanity is never permitted to diminish the fulness of his divine sonship. There is little sign that the minds of the writers of the New Testament were troubled by any of the philosophical questions

which in later years raged round problems such as the relation between the divine and the human in the person of Jesus. One of the first hints of philosophical speculation in the early church is to be found in John's emphatic assertions, both in his gospel and his epistles, that Jesus had indeed come in the flesh, designed perhaps to refute the influence of Gnostic philosophy which failed to give full recognition to the fulness of God's revelation of himself in Christ. Paul also gives a warning to the Colossians: "[Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For, in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.](#)" (Col 2 v 8-9). There is a lesson which has often gone unheeded in later ages in the fact that the earliest speculation was evidently in the direction of denying the full significance of the divine sonship and it was met by the apostles with the most powerful opposition.

The New Testament, however, does not contain any philosophical or dogmatic formulae. Nowhere is there what could be called a complete theological statement concerning either the person or the work of Christ. There is nothing approaching the attempt at definition which was much later hammered out in the Athanasian creed. Our view of him must therefore be built up by moulding into one complete picture the New Testament records set against the background of the preparatory revelation in the Old Testament. As has already been seen there is identity of view amongst the New Testament writers, but it would be foolish to pretend that we can easily encompass that identity of view and all that it involves with our finite human minds, for we are here faced with divine truths the full comprehension of which is beyond us. A lifetime of study and meditation on the word of God leaves us but children conscious that "[now we see in a mirror darkly](#)" and "[know in part](#)", and that full understanding can only come when we see him "[face to face](#)" (1 Cor 13 v 12). The life of Jesus himself discloses the divine quality of humility and never was that quality more needed in men than when they are considering the mystery of the divine revelation, "[even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.](#)" (Col 1 v 26-27).

No doubt one of the reasons why the New Testament writers produce no theological formulae about the person of Jesus is that, because to most of them he was a man known and loved personally, what bound them to him above all things was that sense of personal allegiance and devotion to which reference has already been made. But there was another reason. The burden of their message was that by the grace of God salvation was to be had in and through Jesus Christ, and the object of their preaching was that men might be reconciled to God in him. There was a real danger (and still is) that the gospel might degenerate from the good news of God's saving grace in Christ to intellectual speculation about the nature of God and Christ. So Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "[And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified ... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.](#)" (1 Cor 2 v 1-5). This does not mean that we can afford to ignore the nature of Christ and content ourselves with sentimental reflections about his sin-covering name, his cleansing blood and the power of his cross. What it does

mean is that we must not try to separate the strands of revelation and redemption which God has so beautifully and mysteriously woven into a single thread.

SON OF GOD

There can be no mistake about the emphasis of the New Testament on the divine sonship nor can there be any doubt about its quality. The events accompanying the birth of Jesus are fully related by Luke and dispose of any suggestion that he was anything other than "[the only begotten of the Father](#)". In the light of the New Testament records it is quite impossible to think of Jesus' divine sonship in the same terms as those in which we think of all men as children of God and God as the Father of all, recognizing that He is the creator and we the created, that we live and move and have our being in Him. Jesus was begotten not created. Equally therefore we cannot do justice to the fact of his sonship by conceiving of it in terms which are more applicable to adoption than begettal. It might have been possible for the divine sonship to have been of this kind, God being pleased to exalt Jesus at the end of his life and because of the quality of that life to the status of a son. Clearly, however, that is not the conception of the New Testament writers. What Jesus was exalted to at the end of his life was the right hand of God when he was raised from the dead, but from the beginning he was "[the only begotten Son](#)".

Even the acknowledgment, however, that Jesus is the Son of God because he was the only begotten Son calls for further reflection in the light of New Testament teaching from which it is evident that there was something unique about the quality of that sonship. A human son begotten of a human father may or may not be like his father. Sometimes the likeness is remarkable, so that observers may say "I can see his father in so and so". Sometimes, and it may be a blessing or it may be a tragedy, the divergence is equally remarkable and provokes the comment "Who would have thought that so and so was the son of his father?" Now the New Testament makes it clear that the peculiar quality of Jesus as "[the only begotten Son of God](#)" was that he completely and perfectly, in all that he said and did and was, displayed the likeness of God because his character, that which was impressed upon him as an image is impressed on a coin, was the character of God. So when Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, a whole world of truth was contained in the short reply "[He that hath seen me hath seen the Father](#)." (John 14 v 9).

Before the birth of Jesus God had revealed Himself to men in diverse ways, in His actions in history and in the spoken and written word delivered to Israel through the law and, the prophets. Thus men had come to know something of the divine qualities of holiness and righteousness, truth and goodness, mercy and forbearance. But these are personal qualities which demand for their full expression, not a spoken or written word, but a life. However much we may contemplate and admire them in the abstract, their full impact is lost unless they confront us and enter into our experience in a living person. If our religion is to be a living, vital thing, the importance of this cannot be over-stressed. Put another way, because God is personal, the fulness of His revelation cannot be contained in spoken or written words but must be made manifest in one who can only properly be described as "[the word made flesh](#)". This unique quality of the divine sonship of Jesus underlies the whole of the New Testament writings, but is brought out in all its fulness in three parallel passages which have already been commented on: the prologue to John's gospel, the introduction to the

letter to the Hebrews, and Paul's discourse to the Corinthians concerning the light of the knowledge of the glory of God which has shined in the face of Jesus Christ.

The thought of God as personal, whose full revelation comes in the person of His only begotten Son, involves the conception of a personal religion in which men and women may be drawn into a personal relationship with their creator. For in Jesus the command "Be ye holy even as I am holy" is translated into terms of human experience in the life of him whose "meat and drink" it was to do the Father's will. The divine qualities are thus seen not merely as something to be wondered at but as something to be copied. "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children", writes Paul (Eph 5 v 1 R.V.). It is here that the two strands of revelation and redemption must be drawn into one thread. The commandment "Be ye holy" leaves us all condemned, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3 v 23). Try as we will, we cannot of ourselves attain to the ideal set before us. Paul wrote to the Romans words which are true of the experience of all men: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom 7 v 19). Nor are we in any better state when the full meaning of the commandment is exemplified in the life of Jesus, for it leaves us dazzled and more than ever conscious of our waywardness and frailty, knowing that of ourselves we can do nothing, caught as we are in the tangled mesh of human sin and evil.

The revelation of God's holiness and righteousness alone, whether expressed in His commandments or in the person of His Son our Lord, cannot draw us into personal relationship with Him. Only love can bridge the gulf between Him and us created by our sin, only love can draw us to Him and only love can keep us in His way. Personal relationships between men and women may owe much to respect, admiration, confidence and other qualities but they can only be fully sustained and nurtured by love. That is all the more true of our relationship with God, and the love must come first from God kindling within us our capacity to respond in love. So the fulness of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus is the revelation of His love, and the depth of that love is manifest in the redemption wrought for us through his death and resurrection. The two strands of revelation and redemption are brought together by John when he writes in his gospel: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3 v 16), and in his epistle: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4 v 8-10)

In the act of redemption, therefore, the revelation reaches its climax as the full nature of the love of God is revealed. If Jesus was not the Son of God in the full sense of the only begotten Son revealing God's character to men, then both the revelation and the redemption are robbed of their full significance. It is easy to recite verses such as those quoted from John's writings and to sing paraphrases of them in hymns such as

"Wondrous was Thy love in giving
Jesus for our sins to die",

and yet to deny the full import of the words. On a purely human plane, a gift must cost something to the giver. How much more is that true of the gift of God's only begotten Son, the "price" which was paid for our redemption. Here is the cost to God of human sin and pride and the measure of the depth of the riches of His love, which Paul says God commends "[toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.](#)", Full justice can only be done to that truth by insistence on the fulness of the divine sonship. Tremendous harm has been done by presenting our redemption in the crude terms of a human sacrifice offered to placate the offended righteousness of God instead of seeing it first and foremost as the work of the love of God who "[was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself](#)" (2 Cor 5 v 19). "All real thought about the atonement", it has been wisely written, "about the meaning of the Cross of Christ, must of course start from the love of God." (Temple, *Christian Faith and Life*, Chapter 5). That love is revealed in Christ, and it is the revelation of the love of God because of the unique quality of the divine sonship.

"[While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us](#)": when we face the Cross, we are confronted not only with the depth of God's love but also with the depths of our sin. For it was no exceptional sin but the sin of men and women like ourselves which "[crucified the Lord of glory](#)". Thus at one and the same moment in history and in one and the same act there stand revealed both the riches of God's love and also the starkness of human sin, and the contrast serves to heighten the reality of both. Nothing could disclose the lengths to which human sin will go more fully than that the Son of God should be taken by wicked hands and crucified. It would have been crime enough so to deal with any man, and the crime is greater when committed against the Son of God. The divine sonship is therefore essential to give full meaning to the Cross in its disclosure of man's sin as well as God's love, and that disclosure is essential to our salvation, for it is only when we have been brought to know what sin is that we can begin to know what the love of God means. It is significant that one of the best known and most loved verses of scripture about the love of God is set in close association with another about God's judgment on human sin. Where John writes "[God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life](#)", he writes also "[And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.](#)" (John 3 v 19). There can be no doubt concerning the identity of the light which came into the world. It was the true light of whom John writes in the prologue to his gospel, "[the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ](#)" of which Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and the brightness of God's glory with the vision of which the letter to the Hebrews opens.

SON OF MAN

The glorious vision of the Son of God must never, however, blind our eyes to the fact of his humanity. As the divine sonship is essential to the fulness of the revelation coming to its climax in God's redeeming love, so the humanity of Jesus is essential if that revelation is to be understood and the redemption made effective in reconciling us to God. Only the Son of God can reveal the Father to men, only the death of that Son can reveal at one and the same time the riches of God's love and the depths of human sin. But only the Son of Man can be the effective vehicle for the expression of that revelation. Israel of old had learned something of what God was like in His mighty acts, in the principles written in His Law, in the music of their poets and in the words spoken through the prophets. But deeds and

words, whether written or spoken and however sublime or beautiful, are inadequate vehicles to express what is meant by holiness and righteousness, mercy and truth, justice and faithfulness. These are personal qualities and their full expression can come only in a person, one like ourselves. It was because he was Son of Man, made, in all points as we are made, that Jesus was the perfect medium of God's revelation. "And the Word", John writes, "was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1 v 14). Only thus, when the language of revelation is made to fit our human needs and the likeness of God confronts us in the Son of Man, can we come to know God: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17 v 3).

But just as the two strands of revelation and redemption are brought together in the divine sonship, so they are also in the humanity of Jesus. Consequently his humanity touches not only the vehicle which was chosen to convey the revelation in all its fulness but also the means which were chosen for our redemption. Isaiah foresaw this when he gave expression to the poignant words of his prophecy concerning the suffering servant:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every pie to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isa 53 v 3-6)

The prophet here does not speak of any technical or legal process whereby God reconciled the world to himself, but of the reality of human experience. For the human experience of Jesus is essential to our redemption: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb 2 v 10). If Jesus had not entered fully into our life, so that he might experience in the flesh the reality of temptation and suffering and all the weakness and frailty of humanity, there could be no meaning in the words of Isaiah. But because of that experience the words come to life, "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows". Through our own experience of human sympathy when in measure we enter into and share the sorrows of others, as a mother can in a very real sense be said to take on herself the sorrows of her child, we may perhaps catch a glimpse of the way in which our Lord, as Son of Man, took on himself the iniquity of us all and "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Pet 2 v 24).

Further, the letter to the Hebrews, more than any other New Testament writing, shows that the human experience of Jesus is essential not only to his work of redemption but also to his continuing work of intercession. For in that letter the living Christ is presented as a great high priest who makes intercession for us and who is able to do that because through his human experience he knows what it is to be tempted:

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be

touched with a feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb 4 v 14-16)

Only one who was not only Son of God but also Son of Man could be said to be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

Finally, only the Son of Man can set us the perfect example of what God would have us be like. So his life and death are designed to be not only an inspiration but also a pattern for us. For the divine qualities revealed in him are not just to be admired and wondered at but to be copied. Peter says that Christ "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." (1 Pet 2 v 21-23). Paul exhorts us to strive after his humility, each of us in lowliness of mind counting others better than ourselves and letting that mind be in us which "was also in Christ Jesus: who ... took upon him the form of a servant ... and ... humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil 2 v 3-8). In the letter to the Ephesians the love of Christ is to bind together those who are his in one body which is to grow up into Christ the head and it is to be the standard of love which is to regulate the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. "A new commandment I give unto you", said Jesus, "that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (John 13 v 34). So the old commandment was given new force by the example of the Son of Man who loved us and gave himself for us.

THE PROBLEM FOR FINITE MINDS

The divine sonship and the humanity of Jesus are therefore essential to preserve the full truths of the revelation and redemption. But these are divine things beyond human experience and they need to be approached humbly and carefully with full consciousness of the limitations of the human mind. From early in the Christian era to our own day history abounds with examples of the difficulty of comprehending with finite minds and expressing through the inadequate medium of human language the merging of the divine and human in the person of our Lord. In particular in the third and fourth centuries after Christ, when much of the foundation was laid of the creeds now commonly accepted by Christendom, the air was charged with accusations and denials of heresy. This was no sort of atmosphere to beget a balanced view of what in all its fulness must ultimately pass our comprehension, and it is not surprising therefore to find that it produced extreme ideas. It is all too easy today, as it was 1,600 years ago, to emphasize a part of the truth as if it were the whole. Those who perceive that over-emphasis on the humanity of Jesus may debase him in our thought and not only fail to do justice to the fulness of God's revelation but result in positively harmful views of the atonement, may err towards over-emphasizing his divine to the exclusion of his human sonship. On the other hand those who fear that over-emphasis on the divine sonship may detract from the truth that he was made one with us, may err in the direction of appearing to deny that he was indeed the Son of God.

Three creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian, illustrate something of this difficulty. The Apostles' creed is the earliest and simplest:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate . . ."

Next comes the Nicene, reaching its final form about 450 A.D.

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible.

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, The Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father . . ."

Finally the Athanasian in the fifth or sixth century carries the thought of the Nicene to a further extreme:

"For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the substance of His Mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting . . . Who although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ; One not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance: but by unity of Person."

The language of the Athanasian creed can only be understood at all against the historical background of the arguments of the time, and even then the ordinary man is likely to take it on trust and say "Amen" to it with but the dimmest perception of what it means.

Nevertheless the main development from the Apostles' to the Athanasian creed is clear: while the former adheres to the language of scripture in affirming that Jesus is the Son of God, the latter goes far beyond it in asserting that he is "perfect God". This may be represented as a victory for those who were determined at any price to uphold the divine sonship and not allow the revelation to be minimized or the redemption distorted by those who chose to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. But if it was a victory, it was a costly one, won by carrying the conception of the divine sonship to an extreme which the New Testament does not justify and which must lead logically to the quite unscriptural view that in some sense God Himself died on Calvary.

THE ISSUE TODAY

The issue to-day is a fairly simple one. There may be various refinements of it in detail, but broadly three possible views of the person of Christ present themselves:

- (1) The view of many modern thinkers that Christ was a great man whose life came closer than that of any other man to the ideal life and whose teaching contains more wisdom than that of any other;
- (2) The view of the Bible that Christ was something much more than a great man: that he was the Son of God and that the whole significance of his life and teaching, death and resurrection, derives from that fact;

- (3) The view, of the creeds that Christ's earthly life as Son of God was the incarnation of God Himself, that the relationship between the Father and the Son is a timeless one stretching back before creation and forward into all eternity, so that justice can only be done to it by thinking of Christ as Very God of Very God.

The question must arise at once whether those who subscribe to the first view can properly claim to be Christians at all, seeing that the view involves discarding so much that is essential in New Testament thought. The essence of Christianity is that it is a revealed religion, and that demands that we think of Christ as something more than a great human teacher, leader or philosopher. Again, at the very heart of Christianity there stands the symbol of the Cross, speaking to us, of our redemption wrought not by any work of ours but by the love and grace of God in Christ. But that love and grace are in him by virtue of his divine sonship and, if he be not the Son of God, his death can be of no more value or significance to us than that of any other martyr who has chosen death rather than depart from what he has conceived to be the way of right. The Christian hope depends on the activity of God in revelation and redemption, culminating in the sending of His Son into the world as bearer of the divine truth, love and grace. A view of the person of Christ which finds no room for these essential ideas involves in fact a turning away from faith in God's purpose to humanism and reliance on the capacity of man to work out his own salvation.

There remain the second and third views, both of which recognise that no view of the person of Christ is adequate which does not do full justice to the following truths:

- (1) That in Christ men beheld the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, because in him there dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;
- (2) That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and in the gift of His Son commends His love to us and calls us to a new life in which we have fellowship with Him and with Christ through the indwelling of the spirit of Christ in our hearts by faith;
- (3) That Christ was made in all points like his brethren, tempted and tried as they are, yet without sin, that he might
 - (a) Give us the example of the life of perfect obedience to God's will and the overcoming of evil with good; and
 - (b) Be a merciful and faithful high priest to make intercession for us before the throne of God's grace, being himself touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

In reviewing New Testament teaching it was seen how fundamental are these ideas. Do they demand the view of Christ which is taught by the creeds? The contention has already been considered that only the creeds do real justice to the truth that "[God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself](#)" and it has been seen how that truth is presented in the New Testament without recourse to any such ideas or language as those of the creeds. Does the disciple's experience of life in Christ then call for language such as is found in the creeds? Dr. W. R. Matthews has written of the Trinity:

"...the doctrine itself is no part of the original gospel. The Athanasian Creed and even the Nicene would have been strange in the ears of St. Paul and St. John. Nevertheless the experience, to preserve which the dogmas of the Incarnation and the Trinity were formulated, is plainly expressed in the New Testament . . ." (*God in Christian Thought and Experience, chapter 4*)

Later he defines this experience:

"The fulness of the Christian experience of God is summed up in the Apostolic benediction: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'; it is through the favour of the Lord Jesus Christ that we know the love of God and are partakers, in full measure, in the fellowship of the Spirit." (*Ibid*)

Of the reality of the Christian experience and fellowship there can be no doubt. The whole purpose of the gospel which John preached was ". . . that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1 v 3). Similarly in a beautiful passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph 3 v 14-19) Paul prays for the realization of the ideal of the Christian life which involves being strengthened with might by God's spirit, Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, and being filled with all the fulness of God. But never do John or Paul suggest that to conceive of or to enjoy this fellowship it is necessary to think of Jesus as other than the Son of God, for it is a fellowship with the Father and the Son made possible by the work of the Father in the Son:

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 5 v 20)

The language of the New Testament, therefore, without the engrafting of the philosophy of the creeds, is enough, when properly understood, to preserve fully the essential truths concerning the revelation and redemption which are in Christ Jesus. Those truths are essential because they alone can open our minds and hearts to the love and grace of God and it is only in responding to that love and grace in loyalty and allegiance to our Lord and Master that our lives may be moulded anew after the pattern of him who himself is the image of the invisible God. (Col 1 v 15)

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