

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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Christianity and the Living Christ

THE object of our faith as Christians is JESUS CHRIST as He exists today. Christians are not worshippers of a CHRIST of yesterday whose body moulded under the Syrian skies and who for nineteen hundred years has been lifeless and inert; they are the worshippers of a CHRIST whom the grave could not hold and who, clothed with unlimited power, is at the right hand of God, accessible to all. All instructed Christians approve the answer which the Shorter Catechism gives to the question, "Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?"—to wit, "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and *continueth to be*, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, *for ever*." What JESUS was yesterday, He is today—and will continue to be forever.

It should not be supposed, however, that the fact that the object of our faith as Christians is CHRIST as He exists today affords any warrant for any degree of unconcern about Him as He existed in the days of His flesh. There are those who seem to think that because the object of their faith is the living CHRIST they need not be greatly concerned about His earthly, historical life. Such a notion not only overlooks the fact that we are indebted to the historic records of the earthly CHRIST for all the real knowledge (factual or doctrinal) that we possess of CHRIST as He exists today but the equally important fact that CHRIST as He exists today would have little or no value for us were

it not for what He experienced while He dwelt among men as a definite historic person. This means that CHRIST would have little or no value for us today were it not for the fact that the virtues of His earthly experiences are perpetuated in the life He lives today. So far from saying that the earthly life of JESUS has no interest for us because the object of our faith is JESUS as He exists today, we say rather that JESUS as He exists today would have no interest for us were it not for the life He lived on earth. The earthly life was indeed but a stage in the career of the Son of God, but it was a necessary stage if sinners were to be saved, and hence one that can never lose for us its significance. The life that He lived on earth, the death that He died were prerequisites to the functions He now performs. Hence we must never allow the fact that the object of our

faith is the risen and glorified CHRIST to lead us to underestimate what He experienced in the days of His flesh. The net results (as it were) of His earthly life were carried over into and made the permanent possession of His risen and glorified life. Apart from that fact He would not be qualified to bestow upon us the forgiveness of our sins or to grant us an inheritance among the saints in light.

But while we should permit nothing to lead us to minimize the earthly historical life of JESUS as recorded in the Gospels, we should never lose sight of the fact that He is consciously alive today. Some have denied that such a person as JESUS ever existed. Such denial is absurd and has been repeated by but few. But fatal as is such denial to the Christian's hope, it is no more fatal than is the denial that JESUS lives today as one Who is able to save to the uttermost those who put their trust in Him. That JESUS is everywhere represented in the New Testament as infinitely more than an historical character is obvious to the most casual reader. LUKE, for instance, tells us in the preface to the book of *Acts* that in his former treatise (his Gospel) he had dealt with the things that "JESUS began to do and teach, until the day in which He was received up," thus implying that in what he was about to write he was to deal with the things that JESUS continued to do and teach after His ascension. In harmony with this we find that this book deals with *The Acts of the Risen CHRIST* rather than with *The Acts of the Apostles*, the

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Apostles being regarded as but the instruments through whom the risen CHRIST continued to carry on His work in this world. It is hardly necessary to add that all the writers of the New Testament share LUKE's viewpoint. Not only did all these men write subsequent to CHRIST's death but all were firmly convinced that He was a living, ever present reality. PETER is the mouth-piece of the primitive Church as a whole when he wrote: "Blessed be the God and FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead, . . . whom having not seen ye love; on whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." Apart from the resurrection and ascension as the transition points between the time when the object of the Christian's faith was the earthly, historic JESUS and the time when it became the risen and glorified JESUS, the subsequent significance of Christianity as a factor in the life of humanity is inconceivable.

Suppose that when JESUS was put to death He had stayed dead! Then Christians in as far as they worshipped Jesus would be guilty of an exaggerated form of hero worship. Then we might have some knowledge of a Jesus that was but nothing of a JESUS that is. Then there would be such a thing as a Jesus of history, but not a Jesus of experience. What a cold and lifeless and inert thing the Christian religion would be were it not for the fact that CHRIST not only lived and worked in the past but lives and works at present as prophet, priest and king and so one from whom men can obtain satisfaction for their needs as truly as when He trod the earth. The secret of Christianity's power lies in the fact that it proclaims a living CHRIST—in whom men can justifiably put their trust, from whom they can receive power to overcome sin, with whom they can walk hand in hand through this dark world up to and through the very gates of death itself.

The stress which Christianity places on the living CHRIST is motivated by a

practical interest. Hebrews 13:8 is a typical not an exceptional statement. The writer's object in introducing this great statement into his epistle was to incite his readers to lead genuinely Christian lives. In the verse immediately preceding he had reminded them of their former teachers and exhorted them to imitate them; and then lest they should think he was asking too much of them he goes on to remind them that "JESUS CHRIST is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever." It was, he said in effect, the living CHRIST who had made possible the lives of their predecessors and what he wanted his readers to realize was that they too could live such lives because this same JESUS CHRIST stood ready and willing to do for them all He had done for their predecessors. It is as though we should remind our readers of those who since the Gospel was first proclaimed have most adorned it by their characters and deeds, and then urge them to imitate them, to walk in their footsteps, to do as they did. And then lest some of them should think we were asking too much of them we should bid them recollect that JESUS CHRIST is all He ever was, that there is nothing He has been to any past generation that He is not to this generation—the generation of which we are a part. It was

JESUS CHRIST who made their lives possible; and since He abides the same through every change and chance of time we need only repeat their faith in order to repeat their victory.

To maintain that through faith in the living CHRIST we can imitate those who in ages past have most adorned the Gospel by their lives is not to maintain that we can or should do exactly the same things they did. That would be the case only if the age in which we lived were an exact replica of the age in which they lived. Whether we will or no we live in the twentieth century and so must necessarily face its problems and adjust ourselves to its conditions. But while it is not to be supposed that we should attempt to imitate the saintly men and women of former generations in the sense of doing exactly the same things they did, we should and can imitate them in the only sense in which imitation is possible—namely, by staying our souls on the same great Christian verities, by manifesting the same loyalty to truth and conscience, and by serving our age and generation as faithfully as they served theirs. This we can do—because through all the world's changes JESUS CHRIST remains the same and so stands ready and willing to be unto us all that He was unto them.

Editorial Notes and Comments

Where is the Trouble?

THE *Presbyterian*, in its issue of February 25th, contains the following editorial pronouncement: "We are convinced that the differences which trouble us as a denomination are more ecclesiastical than theological." This pronouncement does not deny that as a denomination we have theological differences and that these are a source of trouble; but obviously it does imply that these theological differences are relatively unimportant as a source of trouble compared with our ecclesiastical differences, and that if the latter were remedied the former would give us small concern.

Such a pronouncement, it seems to us, rests on a diagnosis of the situation in the Presbyterian Church that attaches primary importance to what is really quite secondary. The emphasis should be reversed. What is more, our ecclesiastical troubles as a denomination are rooted in our theologi-

cal differences to such an extent that if the latter were remedied the former would largely disappear of themselves. Whereas orthodox Presbyterianism stresses not only the parity of the ministry but the parity of the ministry and eldership in the government of the church, Modernism in all its forms tends to the development of a form of clericalism that is worse in many respects than the clericalism of Rome since it rests on human ability and learning instead of alleged divine illumination.

This pronouncement adopts in principle the slogan of those who advocated the reorganization of Princeton Seminary, viz., that the differences there were personal and administrative not doctrinal. Misled by that slogan many voted for that reorganization who otherwise would have opposed it. What has been the outcome? Today Princeton Seminary is under the control of a Board of Trustees, two of whom are signers of the heretical Auburn "Affirmation" and