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## THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN RECENT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

The high claims of Jesus in our historical sources and the claim of Christianity to finality or to be the absolute religion have proved a difficulty to all modern types of religious philosophy which reject the claim of the New Testament to be a supernatural revelation and which cannot accept the New Testament doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

In point of fact all attempts to give a philosophical basis for Christianity which could do justice to its historical element, to the central place of the Person of Jesus, and to the finality of Christianity, apart from Christian supernaturalism, have failed.

We agree with Karl Heim<sup>1</sup> when he says that the attempts to bridge the gulf between the eternal and the historical, and to see in Jesus the central object of religion and in Christianity the final religion, have been along two lines. One is the Hegelian which by a process of logic attempts to see the fulness of the Divine Idea in the form of a popular representation (*Vorstellung*) in historical Christianity. But in the last analysis we have only the *Idea* of Divine Sonship and Saviourhood. Its full and final realization in Jesus is not done justice to, and can never be reached along this high *a priori* road. Just why these ideas could not be realized in many mediators, the Hegelian philosophy of religion can never show. And Heim is right in saying that Hegel was the last great religious philosopher who attempted to deduce from a philosophical system the New Testament idea that there is

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<sup>1</sup> "Zu meinem Versuch einer neuen religionsphilosophischen Grundlegung der Dogmatik" (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, N. F. Jahrgang 4. Heft 6. 1924).

present state of the Church, the question of "Modernism" could not be left untouched. The author very vigorously attacks Modernism, using the word to denote (as he forewarns in the Preface) those who feel justified in repeating the Church creeds and prayers while at the same time repudiating the meaning of important phrases therein. He thinks that a church that retains the original Gospels, even with an Italian Pope, "provides us with an infinitely better religion than a school which offers us selections from a New Testament expurgated by mutually hostile professors"; and he prefers the meanest Roman chapel to the finest temple where they preach a "sham German Jesus" (p. 190). The Modernism of France and England, in seeking to meet the difficulties of faith, "endeavors to disarm doubt by dissolving truth" (p. 250). Modernists would of course reply to Dr. Pullan that he is in a frame of mind altogether too conciliatory to Rome, and he would have here some important matters to explain to his critics. The solution is not in a backward drift to Rome to keep immune from the poisonous effects of Modernism, but in remaining fundamentally loyal to fundamental Protestantism. But in case such a choice ever had to be made, we feel that the content of essential Christianity would be far safer in the hands of such as Dr. Pullan and his kind than with those who change their philosophy and theology with the setting of each day's sun.

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## EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

*Jesus of Nazareth. A Biography.* By GEORGE A. BARTON, Ph.D., LL.D., Professor of Semitic Languages in the University of Pennsylvania, and Professor of New Testament Literature and Language in the Divinity School of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia; sometime Professor of Biblical Literature and Semitic Languages in Bryn Mawr College. In "Great Leaders Series" edited by E. Hershey Sneath, Ph.D., LL.D., Yale University. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922. pp. xvii, 396.

The inclusion of a biography of Jesus of Nazareth in a "Great Leaders Series" will seem to the thoughtful Christian man to be a far greater blasphemy than the ordinary profanity of the street could possibly be. But it must be confessed that the contribution of Dr. Barton fits in well in such a series; for in this book, despite the pantheizing use of the term "deity" as applied to our Lord, Jesus is presented as a great religious leader and nothing more. The only incongruity appears in the use of the adjective "great." The truth is that the majestic Person presented in the Gospels is here reduced by a process of rationalizing of His life and evisceration of His words to such triviality that it is difficult to see how anyone could possibly call the resulting figure "great."

Dr. Barton is inclined to accept the extremely early dating of the Synoptic Gospels which would place the Gospel of Luke at 58-60 A. D., and the Gospel of Mark perhaps even at 39-41; and he accepts as having

an historical base a larger part of the Gospel material than is usual among Modernist writers. Even the Gospel of John, he believes, is founded on genuine historical tradition, not merely in its account of events but even in its report of Jesus' words. But these comparatively conservative conclusions in the sphere of literary criticism result, not in any sympathy toward the great elements in the Gospel narrative, but in a curious return to the rationalizing method which was in vogue in the early years of the nineteenth century before the days of Strauss. The miracle narratives in accordance with that method are explained as incorrect supernaturalistic interpretations of actual, though purely natural, events. Thus the "lepers" of the Gospels (even ten of them at once), according to Dr. Barton, were cured of eczema or some other comparatively trifling skin disease; and beside "leprosy" not only nervous disorders in the narrower sense but also lameness and blindness and the long-continued trouble of the woman mentioned in Luke xiii. 11-13 yielded to the "radiant, magnetic life" of Jesus or His "unique psychic or magnetic power." And both the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus were resuscitated from a "comatose state" by the same method. Scarcely anything in the gospels is exempt from this rationalizing treatment; and even the feeding of the five thousand is subjected to it. That incident does not indeed yield to the treatment. It must have an historical basis if Dr. Barton's theory of the Gospels is right, but what that basis is and how it came to be distorted into the present narrative our author, after an elaborate discussion, is unable to say.

The same minimizing treatment as is thus applied to the narrative element in the Gospels is also applied to the record of the words of Jesus. The discourses contained in all four of the Gospels are regarded as to a considerable extent authentic, but are deprived of their offense by a modernizing interpretation. Of the features of the present book, this feature to our mind is the saddest of all. It is unutterably sad to see the most gracious evangelical utterances, especially in a book intended for young people, deprived of all their significance and made into trivial assertions of general moral or religious principles. Particularly in the sphere of sin and grace does this lack of comprehension appear with pathetic clearness. Dr. Barton actually wrestles at considerable length with the question how Jesus knew that the man borne of four was a sinner (as though He did not know that all men were sinners); and of course the parable of the laborers in the vineyard with its wonderful presentation of the grace of God (see for example the fine treatment by Father Huntington, *The Bargainers and the Beggars*) is regarded as presenting serious difficulty to the "modern mind." As for Jesus' teaching about heaven and hell, which really is at the very center of everything that He said—that is apparently regarded as presenting such difficulty to the modern mind or as so distasteful to the author of our book that it is altogether or almost altogether ignored.

The treatment of the Messianic consciousness is not especially distinctive. Dr. Barton believes, after the fashion of the older Liberalism, that Jesus was conscious of standing in a unique relation to God, and

that this uniqueness of His relation to God found expression in the category of Messiahship which he accepted for Himself at the baptism, but at first kept secret and designated enigmatically by the use of the term "Son of Man," until the category was applied to Him definitely by Peter at Caesarea Philippi. But if in such matters the book is not distinctive, the extreme lengths to which it carries both the rationalizing method in dealing with the miracles and the minimizing exegesis of Jesus' recorded words make it (in view of the author's well-known gifts of thought and expression) an interesting representative of certain tendencies of the present day. It looks as though the circle were being completed—as though the naturalistic "quest of the historical Jesus" were returning to the rationalizing method which so aroused the scorn of Strauss and the great exponents of the mythical theory. Another tendency is also manifest in the present book—namely the anti-historical and anti-intellectual trend of Modernism, especially in America. Dr. Barton says, in connection with the question of miracles (p. 34):

"It is all important that each one form in his or her mind an image of Jesus against a background that will make him seem most real. It is only thus that his life—the most holy and powerful life for good that has ever been lived in the world—can have real influence upon us. As we live at a time when one theory of the world is passing away and another is taking its place, each one must make his mental picture in accordance with what seems to him reality. Only so can he find Jesus a real Saviour—One who is able to help him in the actual difficulties in which he finds himself."

Here we have subjectivism and pragmatism in an extreme form. Jesus is to be pictured, according to Dr. Barton, not as He is, but as He will seem most real to us, and be most in accord with our theory of the world and our notion of what will give us help! Our protest against such pragmatism is two-fold. In the first place, we are opposed to it for its own sake—we do not believe that the search for objective truth ought to be given up. And in the second place we are opposed to it because it does not even accomplish the end toward which it strives. The truth is that pragmatism is a very impractical thing. If we fashion a Jesus in accordance with our preconceived ideas and our notions of what is good for us, such a Jesus can give us only what we have already; He is a Jesus that we make for ourselves. Very different is the Jesus of the New Testament. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth ought to be brought near to the "modern mind." But there are two ways of accomplishing that result. Dr. Barton seeks to accomplish it by conforming Jesus to the modern mind. But might not another method be chosen—might not the modern mind be conformed to Jesus?

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*The Character of Paul.* By CHARLES EDWARD JEFFERSON, Pastor of Broadway Tabernacle, New York City. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923. pp. viii, 381.

The distinguished pastor of Broadway Tabernacle is an admirer of