

THE TRUTH OF THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

Study 19: The Christ of the Church

FIFTH DAY: JESUS CHRIST REVEALED IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

1. The life of Jesus in Galilee did not exhaust the life of Christ. That was but one episode in His career. The Christ must be read in the life of His Church, for Jesus in His larger life has been creating history since the days by the lake Gennesaret. We cannot understand Him apart from what He has been doing through the centuries. His Church is the most marvelous creation of history, its growth being as vigorous to-day as ever.

2. It is not right to strip off all that life and thought in which the gospel from the beginning down to the present has found expression, and to place the essence of the gospel in one or two simple ethical maxims that Jesus preached. The Holy Spirit of God was promised by Jesus to His followers, and we believe that each age has had a larger appreciation of the truth of the gospel than any that preceded it. The meaning of the life incarnate in Jesus is becoming plainer from century to century in the Church of God. "Particular and changing forms of the development of Christianity in so far as they are variable are not of its essence . . . but it is the general traits of its figure, the elements of its life, and their characteristic properties that constitute its essence, and this essence is unchangeable like that of a living being, which is the same as long as it lives and in the measure of its life" (Loisy).

3. But what is the Church? Does it consist in organization, or in a common spiritual life? The answer to this should be plain from studies 2 and 3. In Eph. 3:18 there are these very significant words, "with all the saints." Full knowledge of the Christ will not be possible till the roll of the saints is complete and each one tells his story. These saints compose the Church. Its foundation is given in Matt. 16:16-18; 1 Cor. 3:11. If Peter was the first Christian, the Church is the body of believers whose life is hid with Christ in God (Eph. 4:3-16). Therefore it cuts right across religious denominations. Unfortunately a strange delusion often blinds men, but wherever there is faith in and love towards Christ there is true unity of spirit. The Son of man has multitudes of folds to-day, but only one flock (John 10:16 R. V.). God His Father is the great Shepherd and Bishop of the souls of men (1 Peter 2:25), and He chooses them from every denomination, many perhaps who belong to none. This loyalty to the living Son of Man which we call faith is the deepest motive in the Christian heart. It may be as intangible as gravitation, but it is an elemental power cementing the Kingdom of God whose foundations cannot be shaken.