

# Canadian Churchman

Toronto, September 25th, 1919.

## Editorial

### HUMAN AND DIVINE

**D**URING the past twenty-five years there has been an increasing tendency to emphasize the humanity of Christ almost to the exclusion of His deity. It is an emphasis which can be readily understood in the light of some of the statements made about our Saviour which seemed to remove Him from the sphere of reality. It might be declared with considerable truth that no generation has entered into the idea of the humanity of Christ more adequately than the present. We realize that when Jesus lived on earth He lived a real, earnest, intense human life, one in which ethical sanctions and values played as real a part as in our own.

The "Jesus of History" has been accurately placed in His age and environments. We know the books He read, the teaching He heard in school and synagogue, what the men of His time taught and said, their hopes, their fears, their passionate religion mingled with intense nationalism. We know the best and the worst about them. We can conceive Jesus moving among them and understand more of their misunderstanding of Him.

But dull students should we be if we did not also observe the remarkable contrast between Jesus and the men of His age. He lived with them but He was not one of them. Never did He confuse religious fervour and nationalistic enthusiasm. He carried on the highest strain of the prophets: that God's will for Israel was concerned with greater things than national ambitions. His catholic spirit vexed their narrowness. He met their opposition and insults with a majesty that spoke of God. Their theological puzzles proposed to trap Him He solved by lifting them to the highest plane. There was no note of self-preservation in His words. He thought neither of their favour or their feud. He met violent death at their hands with a steadfast calmness which compelled from the lips of a pagan the testimony that He was a son of the gods. Never was man like unto Him.

Human and entirely human is the way some writers describe Christ. They say He is the noblest product of mankind, without blemish, without flaw or error. Humanity as it should be. But they overlooked the fact that they are interpreting humanity in the light of Christ's example. They have taken Christ as normal humanity.

But leaving Christ out of the question we know that the normal man is one in whom dissatisfactions are greater than any achievements, one who is conscious of faults and exasperating lapses, continually tripped up by every-day situations which show his inability to sustain a high level of spiritual life.

If such writers try to turn the corner by suggesting that the perfectly human is the normal and that Christ was such, and that we are abnormal, they are faced with the fact that in such use of the term *perfectly human* they have passed into a different category from the human as we know it by experience and observation, and as it has been known for centuries. The perfection of Christ's humanity is indeed an evidence of His deity, but that is because such perfection is absolutely contrary to the experience of men.

These writers, who rather insufferably commandeer the words "thoughtful" and "thinking" to describe those who come to their conclusions, who balk at the word "deity" and accept only "divinity," have perhaps lost sight of the fact that it is through the Incarnation that our ideas

and ideals of humanity have been raised. They measure Jesus by His own standard, and discover that He comes up to it.

It is to be remembered that the humanistic trend does not present the whole truth of the Christ of the New Testament. Within twenty years after the Resurrection of Christ His disciples' estimate of Him could be stated only in terms of deity. In the earliest epistles the highest honour which language could bestow was given to Him. By the time of the earliest epistles the deity of Christ was not even a moot question. We never see it a moot question in any part of the New Testament. Always Christ is God.

There are some writers on the first three Gospels who claim that in parts of the record which represent Christ as entirely within the limits of our experience we have the true picture, and that where He exceeds our experience the records are not exactly true, but must be carefully sifted for the substratum of "truth" which lies under the change for heightened effect. But it is to be noticed that here the *unusual is taken as untrue* and the usual as true. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that such writers are working on the hypothesis that Jesus was only human and can be completely explained in terms of humanity as we know it.

No one can gainsay the fact that the Christian Church was founded on the belief that "Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead." You may say that you cannot believe the same thing, but that does not alter the fact of the foundation belief, for the four great epistles are admitted to be genuine by everybody alike.

It is necessary that faithful ministers of God's Word should emphasize the full truth about our Lord,—but not in that wooden way in which men have spoken of His deity as though He were not really concerned with the problems, circumstances and aspirations of human life. Some teachers of religion leave a conception with their hearers of a Christ Who had only one foot on the ground, so to speak, that He never had to face a problem through, that there was always a secret door available for Him. They represent Christ's earthly life as a plot with a *deus ex machina* solution.

The note of unreality is bound to come into such teaching, and as a result there must come a protest against the distinction between what for want of better terms may be called the "official" and the "personal" in Christ's life.

To think that He came here to be and do a prescribed thing is the obstacle. The protest against the "official" view has its value in contending for the reality of Christ's humanity. Certainly it seems to lower our conception of Christ to think of Him as living an "official" life and dying an "official" death. For us it removes Him from the realm of the real. It is easy to fall into a Docetic conception.

But this difficulty arises because we have confined our conception of "official" and "personal" to human experience. An "office" makes demands which lack of will or power frequently prevents us from fulfilling, or which are sometimes fulfilled with the will in opposition or passivity. In Christ there is no such distinction. It cannot be granted even that the "official" is the "personal" in action, and "personal" is the ground of the "official." There is nothing official which is not personal, and nothing personal in state or act which is not official. Complete identity is the real relation. This is contrary to human experience, but it is only another way of saying that Jesus is absolutely at one with the Father—in perfect communion. And this, too, is contrary to human experience.

## The Christian Year

### Prayer for the Church

(SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY)

THE NEED OF PRAYER UNIVERSAL.

**T**HE collects for the fifteenth and sixteenth Sundays are prayers specifically for the Church. Here is a striking example for us as to what ought to be at least the occasional direction of our prayers. Do we pray for the Church? Most of our prayers public as well as private are for ourselves as people and as Christians. The second and third collects at morning and evening prayer are for those who together offer them, and for others who are associated in the local worship, yet are they not selfish prayers inasmuch as they ask for grace and guidance to live pure and holy lives. Our collect to-day prays for the Church, the larger corporate unity, in its divine and comprehensive aspect as a living distinctive instrumentality in the process of human redemption. It is an illustration of how wide is the prescribed range of prayer. If there is anything under the sun in which the mind of God is actively engaged, independently of our prayers, it is the work of the Church, for it is His Church; and yet we are asked to pray to Him to keep that which is His very own. This is borne in upon us when we pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into His harvest. It occurs to us that the Lord of the harvest will indeed look after His own harvest without our prayers. But we are his harvesters and we must will to go, that through us He may prepare for the garnering. If we are asked to pray for this—and we can see the efficacy of our prayer—surely we may with faithfulness pray for all other things even though it should seem to us that the great God will carry on as He thinks best without our prayers.

THE THREEFOLD EFFECT OF THIS PRAYER.

When we pray for the Church we do at least three definite things.

(a) We improve our conception of the Church. Our natural tendency is to localism and parochialism. Our realization in this as in other things is largely limited to the area of personal experience. We need to have our imagination stimulated and quickened so as to be able to extend our realization to wider fields. Prayer for the Church involves an effort to form a more definite conception of her great spiritual unity in its definitely corporate aspect as viewed not only imaginatively from our side but as it is both seen and commissioned from God's side. We are impelled by the effort of prayer, if it is real prayer, to a clearer conception of the thing prayed for.

(b) Our energies are stimulated. That which is not worth praying for is scarcely worth working for, and conversely, that which is not worth working for is not worth praying for. It was often asked during the war why the Church kept on praying for victory. Surely prayer goes before work. One would not dare pray for a thing which he would not put forth every effort consistent with truth and honour to accomplish. If one prayed for a thing which he did not consider worthy of his best effort to bring about his prayer would not be a prayer at all. The more we pray the more we must work, for prayer articulates need and a realized need takes form in an effort to have it fulfilled. Prayer is the antecedent of which effort is the counterpart and complement.

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