

Jesus Christ was in the beginning what He is to-day. His person and His teaching have undergone no change. But the person of Christ and the truth of Christ had to take their chances in the world as it was. And the world as it was was no highway specially prepared for His heralded progress as the accepted Saviour, and so after His death His reputation and His doctrine came into the hands of all sorts of men, who treated it in all sorts of ways. He was devoutly worshipped; He was humbly trusted; He was reverently studied; He was critically analyzed; He was cynically despised; He was bitterly hated; He was pitilessly persecuted. Two hundred years after His death there were Christians in every part of the world. But they were Christians of every nation and language; and to their interpretations of Jesus Christ they had brought all the varieties of their different nationalities, their cults, their prejudices, their traditions, and their customs.

We should greatly err from the facts of the case if we imagined the universal Church of that period as possessing the homogeneity of our own Church to-day. Methodism has remained for one hundred and fifty years a contented and unfaltering disciple of the teaching of the fifty-two sermons and the notes on the New Testament. But in the same length of time early Christianity had largely lost sight of the Scriptures, and had incorporated with it uncertain tradition and surrounding religions. Nor could anything less than a miracle have prevented this from being so—it was impossible for men to be other than they had been made by their ancestors and their environment. And that they should miss the truth to a degree was about inevitable. Even in the lifetime of Paul he saw it was his duty to lift up his warning voice and say, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

But what I wish specially to notice is not what the Christian people throughout the world thought of Christ, but what the Church in its corporate capacity thought of Him. What did the men who had a right to speak say of Him? or rather by what means did they interpret Him? The answer to this