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# The Christ of human reason

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Thesis - The Christ of human reason.

A. L. Brockway.

B.A. S.J. 1897.

## The Christ of Human Reason.

We honor great men for those powers, or deeds which distinguish them above their fellows. Jesus Christ, by his purity of life, words, and deeds has shown himself to be the ideal character of the race.

The highest honor, (the noblest estimate) ever given to human nature was manifested when Jesus Christ "tasted death for every man." Christ did not die for Socrates because he was a great thinker, but because he was a man. He did not die for Napoleon because he was a great warrior, but because he was a man. He did not die for Shakespeare because he was a great genius, but because he was a man.

Christ died upon the cross for these men, not because of those qualities which distinguished them above others, but because of those qualities which they possessed in common with the way-side beggar.

Jesus thought that human nature, even in its most debased and abandoned state, was savable, and this seems to be an entirely new truth announced to the world. When you turn to the New Testament, you find a revelation of hope! Here we see Christ receiving into his kingdom Publicans and Magdalens, and delivering them from the thralldom and power of sin. He most beautifully tells the story of the poor prodigal, who had degenerated into the worst vices and sins, and who yet returned to his for-

mer self and to his father's house, penitent and purified, and from that hour until this, repentant prodigals have been returning and receiving the Father's Kiss of reconciliation.

Now, it is my purpose to give some reasons for faith in Christ, aside from those derived directly from the commands and teachings of Scripture. You will therefore, be asked for no concessions of faith, either in Jesus, the Bible, or in the doctrine of Divine inspiration. We shall attempt to examine the character of Jesus of Nazareth, just as we would examine the character of Washington, or Lincoln, or any other great man of the past.

And first, let us observe that Jesus Christ is not a product of human invention. Upon the truth or falsity of this declaration, rests all faith in Christ and his religion. Were it shown that such a character as Jesus Christ never existed, then his religion and his church would fall to the ground.

The character of Jesus, as described in the Gospel, is absolutely unique. It is a perfect character; an ideal, or more correctly, the ideal for all time. There is not a single defect in his life. The verdict of Pilate is the universal verdict of mankind. "I find no fault in this man," and again, "I bring him forth to you that you may know that I find no fault in him." Is there in all history, another such a character?

There are some who deny the existence of Jesus. They say, "The Evangelists invented him." In other words, they declare him to be a fiction. Now of these persons, we think we have a right to demand a solution of the problem as to how this perfect character ever came to be invented. If they reject the New Testament history, let them explain if they can, how this flawless character ever came to be invented, - how he ever came to be thought of, and how Jesus ever got into history, into literature and into human life.

Were Jesus a product of literature only, then how does it come about that four men, about the same time, were seized with an impulse to write about this ideal character? Three of these writers were Jews and the Jews were not a literary people. Least of all, is it conceivable that they wrote Romance; especially not, these unlearned fishermen of Galilee.

It was the Greek mind which produced Dramas. The Hebrews wrote none. Take the four little books written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Study them as you would any other four little books; remember that their Authors were poor men, with no literary ability and you will be convinced that they wrote of one with whom they were acquainted and familiar.

It is an axiom in literature that no man can create a greater character than himself. Water cannot rise above its level.

And that which creates is always greater than that which is created. How then could the Evangelists have created such a character as Jesus? Is it possible to suppose that these ignorant Galileans were capable of inventing and understanding the deep meaning of the sermon on the Mount? No, it is inconceivable. Even Socrates and Plato, mighty as they were, <sup>in philosophy & learning</sup> were incapable of producing such a document.

The man who supposes that Jesus never lived, must suppose that four poor, ignorant Galileans were able to accomplish a task which all the great doctors and philosophers had failed to accomplish. But it is easier to write a great speech than it is to portray the character of the man who made it. This the Evangelists have done by simply writing down the words they heard him speak, and recording the acts which they saw him perform.

Neither Matthew, Mark, Luke nor John were either great or good enough to write the sayings of such a character and describe the character itself without seeing Him with their eyes, hearing Him with their ears, and handling Him with their hands.

Measure the thoughts of the Evangelists themselves with the thoughts of Jesus and you will see how narrow and meagre they are. When Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," and of the Sadducees," His disciples missed the spiritual im-

port of His words and in their ignorance, thought that Jesus referred to physical bread. The disciples sought for ~~exalted~~ places in the New Kingdom, two of them even desiring a place next to Christ, while on the other hand, Jesus said "If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself." Whenever Christ made reference to the "Kingdom of Heaven," his disciples invariably thought the reference was to the Kingdom of Israel. Peter thought the Gospel was only for the Jews. Jesus said, "Go you into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Even in Gethsemane, Peter drew his sword to fight, while Jesus rebuked him and calmly submitted to His enemies, praying for those who nailed Him to the cross. The Evangelists <sup>themselves</sup> tell how, at the crucifixion they all forsook their Lord and left Him alone in the hands of His enemies. Yes, the character of Jesus towers mountain high above any one of his disciples, and so it is evident that they could never have invented such a character. Then, Jesus was not an ideal Jew of His time. All other great men of the past have been influenced by the age in which they have lived. This was true of Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, and all other great religious teachers. But this was not true of Jesus. He was uncontaminated with the selfishness and self-righteousness of the Jews of His day. Although a Jew in blood, he was not a Jew in thought or action. The Jews were

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narrow but Jesus was as broad as humanity. The Jews held other nations in contempt, but Jesus welcomed all who came to Him. He taught and revealed the universal brotherhood of the race and made every member of it, Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, bond and free, eligible to citizenship in the Kingdom of God. His fundamental law was love. He taught that "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen," cannot love "God whom he hath not seen." And again, he says, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." The Jews hated their enemies, Jesus said, "Love your enemies." He calls himself the "Son of Man," thereby indicating that he belonged not to one age, to one nation only, but to all ages and all nations, - a brother to every human being.

The Evangelists make no effort to paint a dramatic character; they simply write down the words they hear him speak and in simplest language, describe the works they see him perform.

Again, the story of Jesus cannot be a myth. Mythical characters are always affected with the weakness of men, who lived in the age in which they are purported to have existed. Read a description of Theseus, or Isis, or Osiris, or Thor, or Vishnu, or any other of the myths and you will find that this is true. How far removed is the simple history of Jesus from any of these supposed Deities. Myths always present something gro-



tesque or monstrous; but Jesus appears as a plain man, with a personal history- a man among men in His humanity.

Then the method of thought employed by Christ differs from the manner of thought employed by men. This may be partly due to the fact that He does not seek the same end which other great men have sought. He did not construct a system of universal knowledge, or adopt any fixed method of reasoning. He did not even construct a history or a philosophy of His life or mission. He simply stated truth and pointed out evil and good with an authority inherent in Himself. "He taught as one having authority and not as the Scribes." And indeed, he seems to go through no mental operation to arrive at the truth. He says of Himself, "I am the truth."

He never began with an axiom in His reasoning. He built up no theory but simply instantaneously announced the truth. In this again, He differed from any other man that ever lived in this world.

Again, no man ever planned like Jesus. He utterly excluded force. Love is the only weapon which He recommends to his followers. He offers no worldly gain or honors to His disciples for their services. He says, "If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Priest-craft is not an invention of Jesus for again Jesus says

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"He that would be greatest among you, let him be your minister." He told His disciples that poverty, trouble, sorrow, persecution and even death awaited them if they remained true to Him, and He taught them not to depend on human wisdom or learning but instead, of this He said, "Tarry ye at Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Again and finally, He died to establish His Kingdom. The Kings of the earth have desired to live long, in order to establish their Kingdoms. Expecting to die soon, He provided no successor, and although as He said, "His Kingdom is not of this world," yet He continues to reign ever His saints and there are millions of men and women in the world to-day who would die for Him.

He chose a handful of poor unlearned fishermen to be the Heralds of His Kingdom saying unto them, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." Think of it! Who ever heard of any other King planning thus to establish his Kingdom?

And now what has been the result? The disciples did tarry at Jerusalem: the power came upon them, converts were made by the thousands to the new faith; the disciples were persecuted, exiled, drowned, put on the rack, beheaded, burned, crucified, and slain in every other conceivable way; but the wrath of earth and hell combined could not stop this onward march of the Kingdom of Him, who was and is the King of Kings. That little church that

was once afloat, in a little boat on the Sea of Galilee, has now overspread the earth and is moving forward more rapidly and more victoriously than ever, reaching out into heathenism; overturning the shrines of Idolatry and bringing light, civilization and salvation to the nations of the earth. And the prophecy of Jesus made to his disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto the Father," is being fulfilled before our eyes. The fruits of Christianity are after all, the greatest proofs of Christ's Divinity. We do not need an astronomer's chart to become aware that there are stars in the firmament; we who have eyes may turn them upward and each behold for himself. So we may, each for himself behold the character of Jesus Christ and look upon His work in the world and be convinced.

So long as the religion of Jesus continues to purify and elevate individual, social and national life;- so long has the church nothing to fear from Scepticism, Atheism, or Infidelity. For men beholding the power of the Gospel, will say with the Centurian of old "Surely this man was the Son of God."