

CHRIST RECONSIDERED

Conclusions & Beginnings

This issue of *Affirmation & Critique* brings our third full year of publication to an appropriate conclusion. For this, we are truly thankful to the Lord for His grace, endurance, and utterance. In all of this time, we have covered only two topics: the Triune God in the first five quarterly issues and the person and work of Christ in the remaining seven issues, including this one.

With this issue, we also conclude our nearly two year examination of Christ. We have covered a broad array of topics that are important both for understanding the divine revelation concerning Christ and for experiencing the realities conveyed in these truths. The title of this issue, *Christ Reconsidered*, in many respects captures the essence of our endeavors over the past seven issues—to bring to the fore a reconsideration of the all-inclusive Christ who is revealed in the Word of God, but who has little or no place within the beliefs and experiences of many genuine believers. With such a “small” Christ, a Christ who often is limited to His own human history and often relegated merely to the status of role-model, even a pre-eminent one, is there any real wonder that the church falls short in matching the standard in the divine economy of being to the praise of the glory of His grace? Honestly speaking, however, a “small” Christ is what most believers possess. In many respects, most believers seemingly are faithless in regard to a daily, living encounter with our resurrected Lord and Savior.

Even if we are faithless, however, He is faithful for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). He is our hope, He is our boast, and He is the surety that a reconsideration of His person and work ultimately will resonate within the Body of Christ. When Saul encountered the resurrected Christ on his way to Damascus and questioned the Lord as to His identity, the Lord did not reveal who He once was—Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnated God-man who

was crucified on behalf of the sin of the world. Rather, He revealed who He was at the moment of His interaction with Saul—the consummated, corporate Christ who is identified in life and nature with all the regenerated members of His Body—“I am Jesus, whom you persecute” (Acts 9:5).

He cannot deny Himself, and He is now the all-inclusive Christ, whose experiences of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension have been compounded and incorporated into the Spirit and have been made available to those who believe through the life-giving Spirit. As such He is pneumatic and mingled with our human spirit. All of the compounded experiences of Christ are now also available to every member of His organic Body. He is pneumatic for our experience of and incorporation into the Triune God, which is accomplished through His full ministry in three stages, the stages of incarnation, inclusion, and intensification. In the last two stages, He is also revealed and experienced as the corporate Christ. He is anything but small. He has been enlarged as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. This enlargement is not merely numeric; it is organic because the promise of a corporate Christ is contained in the promise of seed to Abraham. This seed is one, but being one, it is also mysteriously both Christ and the believers (Gal. 3:16, 29).

This is the Christ whom we have reconsidered over the past two years. It is the Christ who is in us as our hope of glory, the Christ of mystery who has been hidden from the ages but who has now been manifested to the saints, and it is the Christ whom we have chosen to announce and teach in our effort to present every man full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:27-28). Sadly, however, this is not the Christ who has garnered much of the recent attention of the Body of Christ. As we seemingly slouch toward the millennium and

as topics of spirituality gain more focused attention, there have been other efforts to reconsider Christ.

These efforts primarily are focused in two directions—one toward the past to discover what can be historically validated concerning Jesus and the other toward the future in a nascent but increasingly frenzied expectation and anticipation of the second coming of Christ. The former Christ is purely historical, while the latter Christ is purely eschatological. Nowhere, however, is the present, living Christ given much consideration. There is a danger in both emphases.

A historical emphasis ignores the Christ of faith, the Christ who is ever living to intercede for those who are willing to come forward to God through Him and who is able to save us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Without this Christ of faith, the vicissitudes of historical constructions, validated and legitimated by “trends” in scholarship, will only eat away at the subjective faith of the members of the Body of Christ (2 Tim. 2:17), robbing them of their organic functioning and leaving them shipwrecked in matters of faith (1 Tim. 1:19). An eschatological emphasis diverts believers from the living Christ as well. In the short term, there may be renewed interest in the Bible and the things of Christ, but much of it is hype rather than hope. We are living in a time when every national and international event is being expertly interpreted as a harbinger of the “second coming.” Even though no one knows the day and hour except the Father (Matt. 24:36), it seems as if the time of the Lord’s appearing has been fixed in the minds of many as being at

or near the turn of the century. But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8). And who will pick up the pieces of shattered lives and shattered faith if the Lord chooses to tarry?

Faith is precious. It can but should not be squandered on much of this age’s consideration of Christ. Rather, we should consider the Christ who is now the life-giving Spirit in resurrection for our experience and enjoyment and who is for the building up of His organic Body. Even though we have come to a momentary conclusion in our reconsideration of Christ, it is our hope and prayer that the articles presented over the past two years will serve as a beginning for many, including ourselves. We have yet to fully comprehend the vast dimensions of our all-inclusive Christ—neither the breadth, nor the length, nor the height, nor the depth (Eph. 3:18). But we have begun, and we invite you, our readers, to continue with us as we

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hopefully, even haltingly, seek to know Him. And we offer a renewed consecration to present the things of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:21), trusting and relying upon Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think so that there will be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21). **A&C**

by the Editors

Note: Many of the articles included in *Affirmation & Critique* over the past three years have been posted on our web site, www.lsm.org/a&c/, and are available for interested readers.

OUR PERSPECTIVE

In coming to the truth of the Bible, we are guided primarily by three things. First, we understand that there is a single economy of God to be seen throughout the Bible. This economy centers on God’s dispensing Himself through His Trinity into His elect. In the Old Testament this economy is seen in many types, shadows, and figures. In the New Testament this economy is presented in the clear words of the apostles. While based on the merits of Christ’s person and on His work in accomplishing our redemption judicially, God’s New Testament economy has the fuller goal of saving man organically, that is, by and with the eternal life of the Triune God. By this life God’s elect are genuinely begotten of God, transformed, and finally glorified. The consummation of this economy is the union of God and man for eternity in the New Jerusalem. Second, the centrality of God’s economy in our understanding of the Bible is based upon the assumption that God can be known and experienced subjectively, not just worshipped and appreciated objectively. God does not intend to remain aloof from mankind in general nor from each of His believers in particular; rather, as evidenced by His incarnation and by His coming as the Spirit, He desires to be intimately and personally related to His elect. The long history of Christian spirituality, though sometimes troubled by excesses, is fundamentally correct in its desire to know and experience God. Finally, we believe that the divine message of the Bible may transcend the intention of its human writers. Holding to the long-standing hermeneutical tradition of the Christian church, we accept the allegorical method for understanding the Bible, particularly its Old Testament, as a valid principle of interpretation.