

Christianity IS Christ

By Jim Fowler, *contributing writer*

Part 5

Disintegration of the Gospel

How important is this integration of Christ's person and work, the integral oneness of His being and action? Is it really of serious import to insist that the unity of His essence and expression be maintained? Should we endeavor to challenge the traditional dualistic detachments of "Christian religion," and upset the religious status-quo that separates Christ from the activity that goes by His name?

This author believes it is imperative that we address the issue of the detachment and disjuncture of Christianity from Christ, for such a perversion constitutes a disintegration of the gospel, the revelation of God in Christ. The issue at hand is but another form of that initially addressed by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, when he confronted the Galatian believers who were being duped into denying that Christianity was constituted in the life of Christ alone, without any encumbrances of additional belief or action. Paul accused those who succumbed to such disconnected accretions of a circumscribed ritual, of "deserting Christ, who called them by His grace, for another gospel which is not good news at all, but a distortion worthy only of damnation" (Gal. 1:6-9).

If the *homoousion* issue of the integral oneness of the Trinity was important enough to address at the Council of Nicea in the fourth century; and if the *sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura, sola Christus* issue of the singularity of the redemptive efficacy of Christ's justifying and sanctifying work received by faith was important enough to address in the Reformation of the sixteenth century; then, the issue of the integral oneness of the ontological essence and dynamic expression of Jesus Christ in Christianity and the Church is certainly timely and important enough to address in the twenty-first century.

The disintegration of Christ and Christianity in contemporary "Christian religion" allows the ontological essence of Jesus Christ in the Christian individual to degenerate into an obliging endorsement of history or theology. The dynamic expression of Jesus Christ in the Christian individual is diminished to the dictated exercise and effort of moralism and ethics. The ontological essence of Jesus Christ in the Church collectively is reduced to an organizational entity of ecclesiasticism. The dynamic expression of Jesus Christ in His Body is replaced with the determined enterprise of religious planning and programs. Christianity is, thus, mutilated and mutated by man-made "Christian religion" - which has no value before God (cf. Col. 2:23).

Consider the serious logical consequences of allowing Christianity and Christ to be thus divided, divorced, and disintegrated. Without the recognition of the ontological and dynamic connection and union of Christ and Christianity, there is an inevitable deficient and defective understanding

of the Trinity - of God's action in the Christian and the Church through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus Christ, the "*Righteous One*" (Acts 3:14; 7:52) is separated and severed from the dynamic expression of Christian righteousness, with the subsequent insistence on pious performance of Christian living, then the efficacy of the death of Christ is denied, and the cross is but a redundant, superfluous, and unnecessary tragedy of history (cf. Gal. 2:21). When "Christian religion" mutates Christianity into mere morality generated by the self-effort of human ability, then "*the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished*" (Gal. 5:11b), as the "finished work" of Christ (John 19:30) is left unfinished, to be completed by human commitment and ability. When Christianity is conceived of as anything less than the ontological presence and dynamic activity of the living Lord Jesus, then some separated and detached entity is formed and formulated, whether it be in thought construction or ecclesiastical construction, and such construct becomes the object of idolatry. These are serious abdications and aberrations that must be addressed and challenged.

Though some have called for a "new reformation," ¹ such could merely imply a re-forming of the existent theological belief-systems or ecclesiastical constructions, which would be inadequate. What we need is a complete restoration of the recognition of the reality of the risen Lord Jesus, as the essence and expression of Christianity, which constitutes the restoration of humanity to God's functional intent by the indwelling function of Jesus Christ in the Christian.

The affirmation that Christianity is Christ, that "Christianity is the divine," ² is not merely advocacy of another variant epistemological ideology, or the defense of a more precise orthodox belief-system. This is a call to return to the reality of the risen and living Lord, Jesus Christ as the ontological essence and behavioral expression of Christianity. There will, without a doubt, be some theological objectivists who will attempt to pass off this integral Christocentric emphasis as perfectionistic idealism or subjective mysticism. They will insist on the retention of detached cerebral and ecclesiastical objectivities, which deny and disallow the real and vital spiritual experience of the living Spirit of Christ, for themselves and for others.

John R.W. Stott vividly portrays pictures in words, when he writes, "Christianity without Christ is a chest without a treasure, a frame without a portrait, a corpse without breath." ³ Are we content to sit idly by and allow "Christian religion" and its empty, sterile theology misrepresent Christianity in such a lifeless and fallacious manner? Now is the time to unashamedly affirm that "Christianity is Christ," and to witness such personally by allowing the resurrection-life of the living Lord Jesus to be "manifested in our mortal bodies" (2 Cor. 4:10-11), by the grace of God, unto the glory of God!

FOOTNOTES - Part 5

(1) Torrance, Thomas F. *Theology in Reconstruction*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965, pp. 259-283.

(2) Kierkegaard, Søren. *Attack on Christendom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 102, 132.

(3) Stott, John R.W. *Focus on Christ*. New York: Collins, 1979, pg. 155.

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