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A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST
WITH ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
DOCTRINE OF THE MEDIATOR

By

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INTRODUCTION

If one of the Apostles should walk into the average American church next Sunday morning it is reasonable to imagine that he would be no joyful hearer of a sermon springing out of the fact and significance of the Ascension of Christ. The fact is rather that the Ascension of Christ, with its implications for the doctrine of the Mediator and the Exalted One, no longer matters in many pulpits. The burden of this thesis is that the Church has lost, but can recover, the doctrine and dynamic of the Ascension of Christ.

I. THE SUBJECT DEFINED

Subject defined. By the Ascension of Christ is meant the going up into heaven of the Christ who was crucified, who died, who was buried, whose bodily resurrection by the power of God left a tomb forever empty, who appeared for the forty-day period to his disciples and friends, according to the Apostolic writers. That he did so ascend was the conviction of the Apostolic Church, of which Luke's statement in the Acts of the Apostles (1:9-11) may be taken as an example:

And when he has said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." ¹

1. The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament will be used for all New Testament citations throughout this thesis. New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946.

By the Mediator is meant the concept of one who enters into the presence of God in behalf of another for redemptive purposes. The writer to the Hebrews, in particular, presents Jesus as the unique Mediator between God and man. His conviction is recorded in such statements as (10:19-22a):

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

II. THE SUBJECT DELIMITED

The Person of Jesus. Any discussion of the Ascension of Christ, involving, as it does, the supernatural, rises or falls with the estimate of the Person of Jesus. Therefore, this thesis must deal with the problem of the person of Christ, but, having dealt with the major principles involved in the matter of his person, it will not take up such doctrinal issues as the Virgin Birth, etc.

It is very nearly impossible to disengage the problem of the Ascension from the Resurrection, or with Christ's Exaltation, and certain eschatological aspects. These will be taken up in-so-far as these related matters contribute to the significance of the Ascension, or the Ascension contributes to their importance in the historic faith of the church.

Scope of Present Usage. The use or abuse made of

the doctrine of the Ascension, and its implications for the doctrine of the Mediator, on the part of many sects, and minority groups, such as Christian Scientists or Jehovah's Witnesses would prove an absorbing study. The temptation to delve into such aberrations has been side-stepped in the realization that such groups represent a very small proportion of the Christian community.

The concern here is with what has been done with this doctrine in the main stream of historic Christianity. With thousands upon thousands of churches of every shade of opinion covering the earth under the Protestant banner, an appraisal of present usage can at best only be clothed in generalities. They are sharpened somewhat, however, when consideration is given the categories in general acceptance: "liberal," and "Orthodox."

The promulgation of the Doctrine of the Assumption of Mary in the "Holy Year" of 1950, by the Roman Catholic Church, is regarded as too much a mutilation of the doctrine of Christ as a unique mediator between God and man to be ignored in this thesis. It will be considered therefore under "present usage."

Method limited. All other methods of study of the Ascension are recognized as long as each is employed legitimately and honestly. Psychology concerns itself with behavior and experience in behaving. As far as possible this is the primary method of approach.

III. THE SUBJECT JUSTIFIED

A comfort to this generation. If for no other reason, this doctrine should be studied by a generation as confused

as the present one. If Christ is "our Eternal Contemporary" men need to be told today.

A dynamic for evangelism. At the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in the late summer of 1949, one of India's delegates made a most amazing admissions regarding missionary efforts in India. He pointed out that missionary work in India had been a disastrous failure, because the stress had been laid on Christ as teacher. "Now," he said, "The point of stress for the preaching of the Gospel in the world of today is faith in the Resurrection of Christ, by God the Father, who raised him from the dead."² The implication is obvious for American preachers as well.

To Correct Aberrations. A correct understanding of the Ascension will lead to a new appreciation of the place which Jesus the Christ occupies as Mediator and Lord, and which he alone occupies according to the testimony of the Apostolic Church. "Mariolatry" would never have gained a foot-hold, had this doctrine meant to people of Modern times, what it did to the Apostolic Christian community.

IV. SOURCES AND METHOD OF PROCEDURE

Sources. The sources of this study are primarily the Holy Scriptures, particularly the New Testament of course. What

². Pierre Maury, "The Gospel in its Relevance to the Present Time," Man's Disorder and God's Design. (New York: Harper and Bros., undated). Vol. 2, p. 177.

use was made of this doctrine in the belief and practice of the early Church Fathers, the Creed-Makers, the Reformers, and those in the main stream of the church today, will be considered. The use which artists, poets and musicians have made of the doctrine will be described. Reference will be made to the writings of those, who for one reason or another do not accept the doctrine.

Method. The method is that which forms one of the backbones of procedure in study taught at the Biblical Seminary in New York. Psychology, as stated above, concerns itself with behavior and experience in behaving. A candid and unbiassed study of the scriptures reveals certain behavior. The psychologist looks at that behavior, and strives to understand what it was that produced that behavior. The behavior may be that of a man described by the gospel or epistle writer. Or the behavior may be the gospel writer himself in the act of writing these materials. What produces such acts, or such writing? Likewise the behavior of creed-writers, or the missionary in deepest Africa at this moment, and the question is again, What produces such behavior?

That the Ascension caused a traceable change of behavior patterns in the entire Apostolic Church is the contention of this thesis, and its bearing on modern life, when fully apprehended, is incalculable.

CHAPTER I.

CONTEMPORARY USE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

The New Testament represents the Ascension as being a historical fact. It became, along with the proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ, one of the dynamics of the early church's life and mission. The apostles were witnesses of these great historic incidents, and they played a large part in the sermon-material then. What has happened to this doctrine today?

II. DENIAL BY "LIBERALS"

The liberal denial. The liberal school of thinking denies the ascension on the basis of a historical criticism of the Apostolic writings, and alleges that the explanation of the supernatural elements are all mythical, and therefore unworthy of belief by modern man. This generalization will be amply documented in the next chapter. It is also this position that the supernatural elements, including the resurrection, the ascension, etc., are incompatible with the findings of modern science, physics in particular. The attacks center on the Person of Christ, and the issue is sharply and clearly revealed by the enemies of the historic position, as well as by its friends. Kirsopp Lake, a typical representative, draws the line between what he calls the "Experimentalists" and the "Fundamentalists," in their doctrinal differences. He sees that whole fabric as

essentially a unity, that must either be accepted or rejected in toto. Lake sees three parties involved in this dispute:

(1) The Experimentalist, that is the Liberal, open and unafraid to champion his views; (2) The Institutionalists, that is the near-liberal who still reads his liturgies in public, but who doesn't believe them in private; (3) The Fundamentalist, that is the orthodox Christian who believes, and contends for, the faith.

His statement is revealing:

The historic faith of the Church, with which the three parties are concerned is as follows: There is One God, who exists eternally in three hypostases, each of whom is fully and eternally divine, just as human beings are all and each of them human. One of these hypostases, the Father, created the Universe, through the second hypostasis, the Son. This Son was the agent of creation, and, when man sinned, was also the agent of salvation, for which purpose he came down from heaven, was made man, being miraculously conceived by the Virgin Mary through the operation of the Holy Ghost, died for us, rose again from the dead, and went back to heaven, and finally will also be the judge at the last day when he will come again to judge the living and the dead. The third hypostasis, the Holy Ghost, is the source of prophecy in the Bible and of the life of the Church.

It is a perfectly clear and consistent whole. It is to be taken or rejected. ³

For the Liberal, the issue is indeed clear. He rejects the whole. What then shall the Institutionalists do? He is in a church with a prescribed liturgy, and must read the creeds and other statements that are the distillation of orthodox faith and practice?

3. Kirsopp Lake, The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1926) p. 79f.

Lake quotes a manifesto of the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, setting forth the dilemma facing them:

"Are we prepared for a rigid, even-handed, legalistic application of the whole standard of doctrine, discipline and worship? Such an application of the standard plainly embodied in the Ordinal would bind us to a view of the Scriptures held strictly by few of the ministers of this Church.

"We venture to believe that there are many within the Church who could not confidently affirm a bodily ascension, or a visible coming down again of Christ from heaven for judgment, or a raising up again of their flesh, who now express through this ancient medium what they believe to be the underlying religious truths, as, for example, that Christ truly went to God to share in His glory...."⁴

The distressing fact then is that ~~one~~ not only ~~has~~ the liberal with his forthright denial, on grounds which will be discussed below, but the worshipper cannot be sure even when he hears the words of the creeds, for example, that the reader says words which mean something entirely at cross-points to what was in their authors' minds.

III. DISTORTION INTO MARIOLATRY

The year of 1950 was proclaimed a Holy Year by Pope Pius XII. The 425,000,000 adherents claimed by the Roman Catholic church on October 31, 1950, heard on that date the proclamation of the Assumption of Mary as dogma, which everyone of them from henceforth must accept unquestioningly "under pain of exposing himself to the sin of heresy."² The rationale of the Catholic

4. Ibid., p. 98.

2. Newark Evening News, October 10, 1950.

viewpoint will be taken up in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that the Unique position of Christ as the Ascended One, as the Mediator, is dulled greatly through Catholic homage paid to Mary, particularly in the proclamation of the Dogma. Who is the Mediator, if the impression given by Pope Pius' prayer to Mary on the occasion of the Assumption Dogma Ceremony is correct?

"...And we, poor sinners, we for whom the body weighs down the flight of the soul, we beseech Thee to purify our senses that we may learn, from here below, to enjoy God, God alone....

And we take Thee...for guide, strength and consolation in our mortal life....

And we, from the shadows of this vale of tears, await from Thy Heavenly Light and Thy Sweet Pity surcease from the griefs of our hearts, from the trials of the Church and of our Fatherland.

...And we, from this earth and through which we pass as pilgrims, comforted by the faith of the future resurrection, look toward Thee, our life, our sweetness, our hope; lead us with the gentleness of Thy voice, to show us one day, after this our exile, Jesus, the Blessed Fruit of Thy Womb, O Clement, O Pious, O Sweet Virgin Mary. ¹

IV. "CONSERVATIVES" NEGLECT

Neglect by Conservatives. Here documentation is difficult. This writer however, remembers not a single Ascension Day service in any of the non-liturgical churches in the towns he has lived in. (Which is not to say that Lutherans, or other liturgical groups are not "conservative"). Personal observation would tend to indicate that in many conservative quarters the attention is focussed solely on the second coming of Christ, with a tendency to ignore the fact

1. NEW YORK TIMES, October 29, 1950.

that in the Providence of God they have been put in the world, that they have a living Mediator, concerned with their present redemption, and concerned that they should live redemptively.

IV. OBSERVANCE IN LITURGICAL CHURCHES

Liturgical Observance. On page 8, above, the statement was made that certain Episcopalian ministers were troubled by the fact that they could not read the creeds as literally true. There must be many Episcopalian clergymen who do fervently believe in the Ascension, but in a commentary on the Prayer-Book, this statement appears:

The festival of the Ascension, though in modern times much neglected in comparison with the other great festivals of the church, was evidently intended by the framers of the Prayer-Book to be celebrated with special honour....St. Augustine speaks of it as universally observed in the Church, and argues that it must have been instituted by the Apostles themselves or by Church Councils. He says: For those things which are received and observed over all the world, not as written in Scripture, but as handed down to us by tradition, we conceive to be instituted by the Apostles themselves or some numerous Councils, whose authority is of very great use in the Church. Such are the anniversary solemnities of our Saviour's passion and resurrection and ascension into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Ghost from heaven." 1.

Cannon Daniel was concerned with the growing ignorance and indifference in 1894, when he wrote this statement. Would he find more or less interest in this feast today? It is perhaps safe to speculate that no revival of interest has been evident here, more than in other quarters.

1. Evan Daniel, THE PRAYER-BOOK, (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1894) p. 243.

VI. SUMMARY

Summary. The implication of this chapter has been that the doctrine of the Ascension has suffered neglect, distortion, or down-right denial. This is not to say that the picture is one of un-relieved darkness, for there are doubtless untold multitudes for whom the doctrine is very precious and significant. Nevertheless, the fact is that the majority of the theological leaders whose books are pouring from the presses are not favorably disposed toward the Ascension, and their influence is powerful, and subtle.

In the next chapter an attempt will be made to trace the way into which the church has arrived at this state of danger, and in so doing, a way out of the danger may be discerned.

CHAPTER II

FACTORS LEADING TO PRESENT DISUSE OF THE DOCTRINE

I. INTRODUCTION

The contention of the preceding chapter was that the Church today is either denying or distorting; neglecting or giving half-hearted allegiance to the doctrine of the Ascension, which was a fundamental and dynamic part of the preaching and belief of the Apostolic Church. It was pointed out that the majority of the theological leaders whose books are coming from the presses every day are not favorably disposed toward this doctrine. It will be shown later that the doctrine forms a basic part of the historic belief of every major Christian grouping and denomination. Why then is it not given a full and significant place in preaching? One reason is the fact that it takes a courageous minister to proclaim a doctrine in the face of sustained, powerful and subtle denial on the part of the religious leadership, not to mention the attacks by those who stand in the sacrosanct halls of science anathematizing all the claims of the supernatural.

Need the field be surrendered to those who deny the doctrine? The answer to that question will only be possible to make after the position of the attacker has been carefully examined, and likewise the position of the defenders must bear up under careful scrutiny. In this chapter a view will be taken of the path by which the historical critics have arrived

at their position of denial. A statement of the position of the Humanist denial will be presented. The course by which Roman Catholicism, through its teachings concerning Mary, has dulled this doctrine will also come under purview. Basically, it will be seen, the problem for all three is one of Christology.

II. THE HISTORICAL CRITIC'S DENIAL

There have always been those who have denied the teachings of the Scriptures regarding Jesus, wherever those teachings included the supernatural elements, as for example his Ascension. But for these two thousand years countless millions have bowed before the Lord as Peter did, confessing "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16. The Jesus of the New Testament and the historic symbols of the Church, human and divine, is the same one before whom men still lay down their lives in love and devotion.

But in the last one hundred fifty years there has been a growing antagonism toward this Christ as he has been traditionally presented and worshipped. What happened was that the Giants of Science and Reason, occasional visitors in the halls of time, came stalking into history and demanded the obeisance of over-awed mankind. Amazed by the pyrotechnics of scientific wonder-workers, men hastened to build them temples. Their steeples were belching smoke-stacks, their

altars laboratory benches, their candles Bunsen burners, their means of grace the microscope and their field of endeavor the whole natural world. The worshippers in the congregation were the philosophers. Together science and reason brought under their analytical gaze the entire gamut of creation's complexities and drew the conclusion that the supernatural was non-existent, that everything could be accounted for on purely natural grounds.

When this "discovery" was spread abroad it sent religious leaders back to re-appraise Jesus in the newly-found light. The Search for the Historical Jesus was on.

A. C. Wyckoff has traced the manner in which modern scholarship has sought, since the days of Strauss' Das Leben Jesu (1830), to chip away the supernatural elements in Jesus' portrait, leaving Him as he really was, a historical character of excellence who would forever be revered as a great teacher like Plato, but nonetheless only a man.⁸ The task was taken up with great zeal by numerous scholars from that day to this, some with malice and ridicule, others with an almost tender treatment born of a feeling that the pronouncement of science must be accepted and yet a feeling such as Nicodemus must have had when he took Jesus from the cross and laid him in his rock-hewn tomb. In either case the result is the same, Christ is as dead as Plato, though respected more by some.

⁸. Albert Clark Wyckoff, Acute and Chronic Unbelief, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1924) pp.188-218.

Obviously, a dead Christ is not an Ascended Christ, and obviously this is not what the New Testament and Historic Christian Faith presents. It should be noted here that in every case for the rejection of the Christ, the attackers all are in one accord in attacking the New Testament documents as they have survived and come down to the present generation. This point can~~y~~ not be over-emphasized.

Rudolph Otto's "Life and Ministry of Jesus" a representative example of the Historical Critic's handling. Many writers have gone in search of the historical Jesus, and while there are variations in each man's pursuit, they are well typified by the work of Rudolph Otto, "Life and Ministry of Jesus," which is cited here in some detail in order that the method might be rather carefully shown in operation.⁹ Quite elaborate technical works have been written by such men as Frederick William Grant professing to show how the gospels as they now stand with all their mythological frappings came chiefly from Mark, that Mark betrays the hard core of a Document¹⁰ "Q" and that back of that was oral tradition. Such books may be consulted with profit, but it would seem to be more valuable for the purpose of this thesis to take Otto's book and examine it for an insight into the process.

Justification for this may be made on three grounds.

9. Rudolph Otto's "The Life and Ministry of Jesus," transl. by H. J. Whitby, (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co., 1908). 85 pp.
10. See, for example, Frederick Clifton Grant's "The Earliest Gospel," (New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 270 pp.

First, it is a fairly typical representative of the approach of the Historical Critic. Second, it is a practical demonstration of the sculptor at work reducing a greater image to a smaller. Third, it is one of the shortest books of its kind, which makes it adaptable for demonstration in as small an area as is available in the framework of this thesis.

First of all Otto deals with the Historical Sources for the Life and Ministry of Jesus. "Substantially," he says,¹¹ "the only sources are the Scriptures of the New Testament."

The fact that there has been considerable controversy raised over the genuineness of the New Testament as a whole is then described, with the point being made that after the smoke of battle had blown away there were four of Paul's epistles upon which all critics could reach agreement as to their unquestioned integrity, namely those to the Galatians, the two addressed to the Corinthians,¹² and to the Romans. These unquestioned documents "give with certainty the framework of the general features and ministry of Jesus."¹³ The value of these epistles is in showing "without dispute that there lived at one time a person by the name of Jesus, who ... possessed the highest power and supremest worth, and who left a most lasting impression upon a community of disciples."¹⁴ Their further value is to provide a "rule to guide further investigation," and to free men from the danger of dissolving "the entire life-image of Jesus into vague legends, Indo-Brahmanic, Buddhistic and the like."

¹¹ Otto, op. cit., p. 1

¹² Ibid., p. 2

¹³ Ibid., p. 2

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 3

Having established the reliability and value of the four Pauline letters, Otto moves to the next stage. Here he says that "for the details of the picture given us by Paul we must depend wholly on the four Gospels," and then adds, "though here we are not on such secure ground."¹⁵ In the process of restoring, or recovering, the historical truth Otto cites the following considerations. Immediately the attempt is made, Otto declares, "We recognize discrepancies in the narration," for Matthew, Mark and Luke, though somewhat different, are basically alike in essentials.¹⁶ These three are markedly different from John. He sees in the Synoptics something naive and simple, vivid, animating, bringing out the very atmosphere and coloring of the historical situation.¹⁷ John is seen as speculative, written to prove that God had revealed himself in Jesus, a book where "the idea dominates the whole." Otto feels forced to drop John out of consideration for it is, he thinks, far from the historical situation. He feels that John, however, will always be a treasure.

This brings him to the Synoptics then as the source of the historical material, but with a discriminating eye that sees what ought to be separated as less reliable, from that which is reliable. Otto feels that even an amateur might sense that Mark is the Gospel that stands nearest reality. For Mark is

13. Loc. cit.

14. Ibid., p. 3

15. Ibid., p. 5

16. Ibid., p. 6

17. Ibid., p. 7

clear, direct, simple, whereas Matthew and Luke treat the same material in a manner that is circuitous, condensed or simplified. ¹⁸

Here, Otto adds significantly, one can trace the tendency to the miraculous from Mark, to Matthew, to Luke. ¹⁹ Mark, he points out by way of illustration, represents the baptism as "an inner 'visionary' experience of Jesus." Matthew takes the same event, externalizing it, and describing it thus: "And lo, the heavens were opened." The process moves on in Otto's words: "Not satisfied with saying the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove, Luke assures us that 'the Holy Spirit descended ²⁰ in bodily form.'" ²¹

Otto asserts, in an elaboration of this point, that this tendency just mentioned can be seen in the growth of the legendary matter "at the commencement and at the close of the three gospels in the narratives of the birth and resurrection." ²¹ That this has bearing on the Lucan account of the Ascension is obvious.

Having dealt with the problem of the Historical Sources to be used in his portrayal, Otto then proceeds to draw the outlines of the Life and Ministry of Jesus.

The reliable history of Jesus begins where Mark begins, that is at His baptism.

The portions of Matthew and Luke...covering the prenatal, natal, and immediately postnatal circumstances belong to the (according to the historical and critical method) beautiful framework with which legend is accustomed to embellish historical reality. ²²

18. Ibid., p. 10

19. Ibid., p. 11

20. Loc. cit.

21. Loc. cit.

22. Ibid., p. 15

Otto sees all these events as "poetic legend from beginning to end," and yet feels constrained to add that "no one will permit himself...to be deprived of hearing these beautiful narratives," although, "this does not remove the duty of distinguishing legend and history."²³ It is highly significant that Otto adds the following:

The task may appear a difficult one, but it is unavoidable and it is possible. A very large circle of readers have already grasped the distinction between the authority and worth of the Scriptures in the religious and the ethical realm and the same authority in the physical and geographical realm. The geocentric character of much of our Bible teaching has not discredited them as the instruments of spiritual culture.²⁴

Then Otto moves to another step: An argument from silence. "That one is really occupied with legends and not with history is evident to all who have the skill in distinguishing between the history of religion and the formation of legend."²⁵ That process deals with the modern, other New Testament contemporary observer, but the lack of testimony, with regard to the birth stories, is likewise seen as damaging:

"But even the remaining parts of the New Testament do not seem to regard the birth stories as genuine history; Paul does not know them, nor does Mark pay any attention to them. The silence of the Johannean Gospel is instructive on these matters.²⁶

23. Ibid., p. 17

24. Ibid., p. 18

25. Loc. cit.

26. Loc. cit.

In this fashion then one of the historical critics reads, sifts, separates, and then sees that Jesus, as revealed by this process is simply "the son of Joseph....This is almost naively set forth in the two genealogies, purporting to be the proof of his Davidic descent. But both registers trace the line to Joseph."²⁶ According to the method then, his origin can not be regarded as supernatural.

The reliable history begins at the point of his baptism it was pointed out above. What is the atmosphere surrounding this event? There was at this time a wide-spread hope of a coming kingdom. From time to time the hope broke out into "turbulent convulsions and movements against compulsory power" and "it brought forth Pseudo-Messiahs, and won for itself heralds and prophets. John was one of these."²⁷ The message of John was a call to men "of complete resignation and absolute obedience to God." Under the impact of such preaching "multitudes streamed to hear him, and a band of disciples formed around him....Now Jesus came also at first as one of these...."²⁸ After listening to John's preaching, Jesus "submitted to baptism and departed home to deliver, as it seems, the same message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'²⁹"

That Jesus' call came to Him at the time of his baptism is next stated by Otto, Matthew and Luke making it appear as an

26. Ibid., p. 17

27. Ibid., p. 27

28. Loc. cit.

29. Loc. cit.

purely external experience. Mark, however, more accurately it is thought, shows it to be internal. A parallel is then drawn, a usual procedure in the historical critic's method, between what happened to Jesus and the great prophets of Israel. "It happened to Him as to the great prophets of Israel, an Isaiah, or a Jeremiah...."³⁰ Pointing to the Old Testament, he continues, "Isaiah had a vision of God in his temple..., heard his voice and the fearful message he was to bring."³¹ Otto wonders what this experience of Jesus' was, but then states that the reader "will not believe that the heavens opened and that the spirit descended in the form of a dove.... He will be convinced that all this is the objectivization of an unnameable inner experience, with all the above-mentioned concepts even to 'hallucination' playing their part."³² In passing, Otto makes a rather enigmatic "aside" to his audience, a statement pregnant with meaning for the psychologist, "But he will also grant to this subjective experience its mystery and reality."³³

Having disposed of the supernatural and uniqueness of Jesus with respect to his birth and call, the problem becomes more complex, for in the matter of Jesus power, "The narratives of his healing ministry evince such verity as to exclude even the thought of a legendary origin."³⁴ The historical critic explains that here again we have an unusual, but by no means unique phenomenon. The prophets of old had it. The apostles had their "gifts."³⁵

30. Ibid., p. 28

31. Loc. cit.

32. Ibid., p. 29

33. Loc. cit.

34. Ibid., p. 32

35. Loc. cit.

In a further implementation of the assertion that this power was not a manifestation of uniqueness, Otto says that there "is similar evidence that an analogous class of gifts were found in circles not Christian." ³⁶

That Jesus possessed this power to an "unusual degree," at least with regard to healing, is not denied. However, the stand is taken that: (1) "Perhaps Christ's gift of healing which seems so mysterious to us, was 'only' a development of capabilities slumbering in human nature in general." ³⁷ (2) And that, conceding "that Jesus could do wonders, is not sufficient reason for everything accredited to him by tradition." ³⁸ There remains on this point (3) the historical critic's contention that:

The reanimation of Lazarus, and the turning of water into wine depart very widely from that which is historically and conceivably acceptable....Even the Synoptics contain enough that outrun all conceptual possibility, as walking upon the sea, and the feeding of the five thousand with ^{five} loaves and two fishes. ³⁹

When an examination of Jesus' self-consciousness, particularly in regard to His Messiahship, is made by the Historical Critic, he must concede as Otto does, that Jesus was sure of His Messiahship from His calling. This does not mean that it was a unique experience (of Jesus') that might imply more than a prophet's concern and a messianic zeal; that is to say, his divinity is not here, necessarily.

The explanation is offered that "The words 'Thou art

36. Ibid., p. 32

37. Loc. cit.

38. Ibid., p. 34

39. Loc. cit.

my beloved Son,' which he heard then, had the same meaning as 'Thou art my anointed One.'⁴⁰ The effectiveness of this statement is not altered by the assertion, "Indeed the solemn title for the Messiah was 'Son of God.'⁴¹"

That Jesus was convinced of His Messiahship from his call has been asserted. But with regard to the disciples, Otto describes how, up to Peter's confession, Jesus had not claimed the title, nor given his secret to the disciples. What happened in the relationship of Jesus and His disciples is described thus:

Hence his joy and, one may add, his surprise was correspondingly greater to find this conviction gradually and intelligently forming itself in their minds and breaking out at last in the confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."...The confession appeared so wonderful to Jesus that he said to Peter: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father which is in heaven." ⁴²

Attention is next directed by Otto to the events of Passion Week, especially the Death of Jesus. Was this to be the end? As a part answer to that question, Jesus, the night before He died, founded a new passover for His people, the memorial of his death. On that last night, Otto, suggests, there was one thought which filled the mind of Jesus, namely,

If God hands over his servant to weakness and death, he can never be indifferent to the consequences. "The death of the saints is precious in his sight," is the testimony of the Psalms. How much more the death of Jesus? ⁴³

40. Ibid., p. 41

41. Loc. cit.

42. Loc. cit.

43. Ibid., p. 44

There was another thought, however, that formed itself in Jesus' mind on that last night. He realized that his death was inevitable, but saw that God would

by some means or other help him to final victory. The expressions, and the images of Daniel came to his aid and indicated the way in which God would fulfil his counsel despite apparent failure. He appropriated these statements. He would fall now, but hereafter he would come upon the clouds of heaven to hold divine judgment and to establish an everlasting kingdom....It is true this was not fulfilled in a literal sense, but it was fulfilled in a deeper and a truer sense. He came not upon the clouds of heaven, he came in his words, in his spirit, and in the historic effect of the work of his life. 44

The significance of the last sentence should not be lost. Otto then turns to the Resurrection. This poses a problem for the Historical Critic, for here indeed the weight of the entire New Testament theology and apostolic behavior conspires to witness to the fact of the Resurrection. It is worthy of note, in passing, that no critic sees any problem in either the statements of gospel or epistle writers that Jesus died. That is accepted as a fact, unquestioned. But when it comes to the resurrection there is a subtle change in the use of language. Note should be given to the careful way in which Otto makes the following assertion:

No fact in history is better attested than, not indeed the resurrection, but the firm conviction of the first Christian community of the resurrection of the Christ. Indeed the accounts of the Gospels themselves, even that of Mark, are legendary. But we have one account which is certainly one or two decades older than all the accounts of the gospels, which criticism has not impugned and which narrates with almost mathematical accuracy the 'manifestations'. 45

44 Ibid., p. 46

45 Ibid., p. 47

This of course is I Corinthians 15. The statements of Otto at this juncture are of exceeding interest to the psychologist:

Paul evidently classes all 'manifestations' with his own, namely, as a 'vision,' an inner experience and perception of the living Christ; an experience, however, that affords the most absolute certainty. This conviction was the firm reason for his entire ministry,...and the conviction of the first Christian community.... Historical criticism is certainly called upon to establish the fact of this certainty. ⁴⁸

Otto ends his sketch of Jesus' life with a long gaze at the faces of the apostles and the first Christian community, those faces which betrayed an inner sense of peace and trust born of the conviction that Christ was risen, for they did unquestionably believe it. Then, putting pen to paper he asks:

Was this conviction a self-delusion? Or did it, despite legendary and sensuous garnishments, rest, in the last analysis, upon a real fact? Historical criticism has nothing to say for or against life after death. The subject belongs to another realm, to the science of metaphysics and to the region of personal conviction. It is undoubtedly a special case under the most important question of all: 'Does personality belong to the realm of the perishable? or does it belong to the realm of the eternal? Does death end all, or is it simply a passage to a higher existence?' If it is the latter, criticism and historical science has nothing to oppose the conviction of the disciples, that they knew their Lord had come forth from the dead. On the contrary, the circumstance that Jesus, who realized spiritual power to the full, both ethically and religiously - and all such as he - had an experience that lifted him above the perishable - this circumstance

⁴⁸. Ibid., p. 50

will always be the foundation for the conviction that the spirit has no share in the decay of the flesh. ⁴⁹

In the rest of his small book Otto turns his attention to the teachings of Jesus. It would bear a very thoughtful investigation, but is beyond the scope of the present work. For all practical purposes nothing else remains to be added to the portrait of Jesus, the work is done. The significance of what the process has done is not lost to the honest historical critic. The Christ of the New Testament, as it has come down through the years, and the Christ of the Church's faith is dead. But when Otto stands back to look at the resultant portrait he is heard to say:

Traditional views have represented Jesus as that dogmatic "double-being," that "compound person," of whom no man can properly affirm character, or as the incorporation of the "man-in-himself," that is universal humanity in a person.... It is the image of the Gospel narratives that steps forth with decisive naturalness, individuality and will-defined character.... He was an upright, resplendent, genuine, free-born and truly kingly being. He possessed the warmest feeling and love. " 50

Whether this is justified or not, as a verdict of the Historical Critic, there is a kind of wistfulness transmuted into hero-worship which a sensitive soul of Otto's character feels. This can be seen in his closing words:

And we have this all indeed only in fragments,

49. Ibid., p. 49f.

50. Ibid., p. 84

in pieces, falsely put together by the unskillfulness of tradition; we see it all, so to speak, in a dark and badly broken mirror! What must this have been to those who heard him with their own ears, and had an experience of him! What must the original have been, if the disfigured image is so resplendent! Truly the historical image loses none of the reverence, which the disciples of Jesus brought at all times to the Master. Indeed it does not lead us back to the old pictures with the Jesus Lamb, or to the sentimental forms of the earliest Jesus of the mystics; but it leads us by so much the more to a fundamental and ever growing "hero-worship" which breaks out anew with freshness and joy into the ancient acclaims and confessions: Christ our Lord, our Hero, our King. And it is a matter of disposition and individual thought what form this reverence is to take and what depth it is to attain. 51

The terminus of the Historical Critic in his search for the Historical Jesus^{is} at Golgotha. The Resurrection and the Ascension are without basis in fact. He does not live, and Easter joys and Ascension hopes are groundless. "He is not here, he has been dead for two thousand years," is the logical message for the modern scholarship. Albert Schweitzer, in his able and informative book, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, makes clear the result of the Historical Critic's efforts to bring out the Historical Jesus:

The study of the Life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in the quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it had found Him, it could bring Him straight into our time as a Teacher and Saviour. It loosened the bands by which he had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more, and the historical Jesus, advancing, as it seemed, to meet it. But He does not stay; He passes by

51 Ibid., p. 84

our time and returns to His own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last forty years was that, despite all forced and arbitrary interpretations, it could not keep Him in our own time, but had to let Him go. 52

Schweitzer himself does not put as much content into the character of Jesus as would seem warranted, is an observation that can be justified in reading his works, as the present writer has done, yet he has accurately assessed the negative character resulting from the great Quest.

The denial of such doctrines involving the supernatural, as for example the Ascension, has been demonstrated in as fair and objective a way as has seemed possible to the present writer. It was shown that the path through which this method led was an attack on the reliability of the documents. Is the method vulnerable, is it fair, does it follow through to its logical end?

Ideally viewed, the historical critic takes up his task with a basic premise in mind, namely that he will accept, or reject, the Christ revealed in the Scriptures, on the basis of a careful weighing of the evidence offered by the writers of those Scriptures. This is, ideally, what would seem to be the start of the process. That the mind of the working historical critic actually starts with such complete objectivity can easily be demonstrated

52. Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus (New York: The MacMillan Company), p. 399

to be a somewhat questionable matter. The candid camera is now focussed upon the Historical Critic at his desk. Upon the desk is the New Testament. He begins to think:

First there is the Source book, the only source book in fact. The scholar recognizes that if he is to find Jesus it must be within the pages of Scripture. He acknowledges the fact that the early Church gathered the books making up the New Testament, gathered them with great caution and historical sense, and gathered them on (1) the basis of their highest religious and ethical values; (2) their genuineness (Apostolic or primitive origin); and (3) their authentic narration.⁵³ This seems on the face of it to be an admirable point of departure.

The scene changes to a court room. One by one the authors of the New Testament are subpoenaed and called to give their testimony again as to the person of Jesus Christ. There is no reason why these witnesses should not be called again and again. But what criteria will be used to judge their reliability? Truth will be separated from legend by (1) rooting out discrepancies, (2) eliminating contradictions, such as those in the "narratives of the resurrection in the several Gospels,"⁵⁴ (3) recognizing the growth of Legend from Mark to Matthew, Matthew to Luke, Luke to John,⁵⁵ (4) giving weight to the argument from science.

53. Otto, op. cit., p. 2

54. Ibid., p. 47

55. Loc. cit.

Here the flaws in the process begin to make their ugly presence known. On the matter of discrepancies it can be safely generalized that the variant testimony of witnesses is a corroboration of reliability, and not a discrediting factor. It is an inconceivable that any given person in the world should view any given thing anywhere in the world, at any time, and report identically what any other person might see. This is practically axiomatic, and there is no reason why two Biblical writers should be expected to turn out identical reports like phonograph records from a master press. H. B. Swete has some pertinent remarks on this:

But to discredit a narrative altogether because it betrays imperfections such as these, is unreasonable; they are, in fact, on the whole, signs of veracity, for they are just the flaws we would expect to find in faithful reports proceeding from independent witnesses, especially if the circumstances were of an unusual and disquieting character, and the witnesses persons who were unaccustomed to interpret to others the impressions left upon their own minds. The real student will recognize that it is his duty not to reject such evidence wholesale, but to sift it and elicit the truth which lies at the bottom of conflicting or inadequate testimony. If he does this with perfect honesty, he will find that the process of sifting the Gospel narratives of the Appearances will bring to light a great preponderance of solid fact, which can be set aside only by the stubborn scepticism that is born of pre-suppositions. 56

56. Henry Barclay Swete, The Appearances of Our Lord After the Passion, (London, MacMillan And Co.) p. xv.

Otto places "the close as well as the commencement of the life of Jesus...in the realm of the legendary." ⁵⁷

He does this on the grounds that there are "tangible contradictions found in the narratives of the resurrection in the several Gospels, etc." ⁵⁸ Just what these alleged contradictions are Otto does not indicate, and it would be unjust to presume what he had reference to.

But when Otto professes to see in the resurrection narratives a "tangible growth and self-development of the legend from Mark, to Matthew, to Luke, to John," ⁵⁹ the process is by no means as obvious, or compelling to an objective observer. It would appear that this allegation would rest upon two grounds: (1) First that a sort of vacuum existed between the events as they happened, and the writing of Mark, granting for the sake of argument that his Gospel is first. C. H. Dodd brought out a very delightful little volume in 1950, called simply "About the Gospels," that takes up this very matter:

When Mark was writing, there must have been many people about who were in their prime under Pontius Pilate, and they must have remembered the stirring and tragic events of that time at least as vividly as we remember 1914. If any one had tried to put over an entirely imaginary or fictitious account of them, there would have been middle-aged or elderly people who would have said (as you or I might say) "You are wasting your breath. I remember it as if it were yesterday...." ⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 47

⁵⁸ Loc. cit.

⁵⁹ Loc. cit.

⁶⁰ C. H. Dodd, About the Gospels, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 13

(2) Second, it denies to each author a chance to be heard on his own merits, a chance to tell his story without being being throttled by a listener's pre-suppositions. Here again is a thought from Dodd which merits sincere consideration:

It would be a mistake to suppose that the critical investigation of the tradition behind the gospels leads us back to a simple, matter-of-fact story, without anything of the mysterious, the miraculous, or the supernatural. The first Christians firmly believed that they had a story to tell which was worth telling just because it was not only about what happened under Pontius Pilate, but also about what God had done for mankind. It is in this sense that Mark tells the story....The first witnesses also told it in the same sense. Any other way of telling it would have seemed to them false to the facts as they had experienced them. If we give them another meaning, we do so on our own responsibility, and not on the evidence. There is a challenge in the Gospels and sooner or later we are bound to face it. 61

This sets forth several ideas of value. The Gospels were written by men persuaded they had a story of value. They had each their organizing principles, audience, and purpose. To postulate that an addition in Luke must be suspect of legendary content is to deny his manifest ability as a historian, and to charge him with deliberate falsehood, for he categorically states that he had gotten his material from eye witnesses and wrote his work (one writer among many) as a systematic treatment of knowledge already common.

61. Ibid., p. 23

Nor, when each gospel is treated fairly, allowing each to stand on its own merits, there seems to be no genuinely compelling reason why the process must lead us from a Mark to a John, with an implication that the alleged legends crept in during this process. It might as easily be shown that Mark is a distillation of the other three gospels, rather than a seed-plot. John Erskine makes an observation on this whole matter that has the earmarks of common sense:

Textual criticism has busied itself inventing and solving problems as to which of his own plays Shakespeare wrote, the test being in many cases whether the disputed passages are, in the critic's opinion, the sort of thing Shakespeare ought to have written. It is not surprising that criticism of the same kind has tried to explain by purely fanciful hypotheses whatever in the Gospels is perplexing to a logical and perhaps matter-of-fact intelligence. I prefer the testimony of those who were close to the events they reported, rather than the learned guesses of those who are two thousand years away. 62

Differences ought not then imply dishonesty. The last argument, that of silence, never a strong one, is one that twines itself around the neck of its user more often than not. Even Otto is unwittingly caught, for on the one hand he makes this rather dark assertion: namely, that "the Synoptics are very close to reality," whereas the "Gospel of John is very remote from it." He feels then:

It is evident that, when we seek after reliable sources for the history of Jesus, this gospel is to be excluded...and that we are first of all to confine ourselves rather exclusively to the Synoptics. 63

62. John Erskine, The Human Life of Jesus, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1945) p. 244

63. Otto, op. cit., p. 9

Having dismissed John rather summarily as being without instructive use in ascertaining the real Jesus, oddly enough, this witness whose word is considered as without significance when he does speak, as far as data on the real Jesus is concerned, is made to instruct by his not speaking! Otto puts this sentence in the midst of a discussion of the birth stories, having dismissed them as legendary accretions in Matthew and Luke, "The silence of the Johannean Gospel is instructive on these matters."⁶⁴

This brings the observer of the critic to ask just what is going to be done with the four Gospels when they are unequivocal and absolute in their assertions that Jesus did rise from the dead, for here they are speaking with but once voice of conviction. As has been shown above, this conviction can not be doubted, and is freely acknowledged by Otto. Here, where it would seem the historical critic would be able to make the leap into believing faith, assuming that he was going to accept the testimony given Christ, if it could be shown true, a great obstacle is discovered. The critic draws back, saying "Historical criticism is certainly called upon to establish the fact of this certainty; no more and no less."⁶⁵ In essence it means that what the critic is unwilling to see, he will not see, namely that Christ did not really rise from the dead, because

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 18
⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 49

here is a fact that he cannot bring within the realm of reason. What the psychologist can not understand is how the overwhelming evidence of the behavior, belief, and endurance of this faith can be accounted for in any other way than that it is based upon the solid ground of fact, not myth. At the constituting meeting of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1947 there were those who saw the message of the Risen, Ascended and Returning Christ as the only hope for the present world. But in the study rooms of the same gathering there were others still stoutly defending the mythical theory of the gospels. How long will it be before these men, living within the shadow of Christianity, will tear off their naturalistic presuppositions and acknowledge the living Christ?

Sandays' reflections in 1903 put the feeling of this writer's judgment exactly:

I should not be surprised if Harnack and Wernle...were under the impression that their own views reflect the teachings of the Gospels, and were taken from them. But if they do think this, I feel sure they are very much mistaken. The inference is not sound. It is, I believe, far too roughly and inconsiderately drawn. But in any case, I have little doubt that this is where the weak point in the argument lies--in the region of presuppositions. It is the presuppositions which need a far more serious testing than they have ever received.

The truth is that all these writers represent a reaction--and, I am convinced, an excess of reaction--against the historical tradition of the church. The true solution, I feel sure, is to be sought more on Church lines, i. e., with more firm regard for historical continuity, with a firmer faith that the

66. World Council of Churches, Study Department,
 "The Problem of Restating the Mythological
 Element in the New Testament," an unpublished
 study, May, 1949

Divine guidance of the Church throughout all these centuries has not been really, and even fundamentally wrong. ⁶⁷

III. THE HUMANIST'S DENIAL

The humanist's denial bears a distinct kinship with that of the historical critic's, as outlined above. Here, however, the observer moves into an entirely different atmosphere, into a self-styled "distinguished group of disbelievers," whose leading writer is Corliss Lamont.

"The partisans of immortality," says Lamont, "have two main lines of defense: first the appeal to empirical evidence; second the appeal to arguments." ⁶⁸

The attack upon these two lines of defense is direct and brief. Directing the assault upon the first, Lamont asserts:

It was the alleged rising of Christ from the tomb and his ascension to heaven that provided the early Christians with what seemed to them incontrovertible testimony in favor of personal immortality. The resurrection of Christ was taken by the church to be as definite and certain an historical fact as the crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar. It was the one outstanding and overwhelming piece of supposed empirical evidence available for belief in immortality.

But modern science, its manifold discoveries in the fields of biology, psychology and anthropology., and its general displacement of miracles by law, led many modern religious thinkers to question and surrender the idea of Christ's literal resurrection from the grave. ⁶⁹

67. W. Sanday, Outlines of the Life of Christ, (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1908) p. 250f.

68. Corliss Lamont, The Illusion of Immortality, 2nd edition, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), p. 153

69. Ibid., p. 153f

This is as bald a revelation of a pre-supposition as Sanday could ever wish to see. But the interesting thing to be noted here is that in spite of the flat I-do-not-believe attitude, the fact that there are some 500,000,000 million people who make at least a nominal claim to membership in the Church, and acknowledge the living Christ of the Church, compels these attackers to examine the source material. Short shrift is made of these documents with the explanation that the "historicity" of the records respecting the resurrection can readily be accounted for on one or more of the following grounds:

- (1) Jesus was not really dead when he was taken from the cross.
- (2) Or if he was dead, his body might have been taken away by his followers and deposited elsewhere.
- (3) The imaginations of Jesus' disciples got the better of them.
- (4) Because the "impact of such a great and appealing person on a rather primitive culture established just the sort of psychological situation in which reports of miracles and superhuman accomplishments might be expected to take root."

⁷⁰ These "explanations" will be familiar to any one who has studied White's excellent study, "The Resurrection Body." They simply do not stand up under application to the narratives of the New Testament, as Dr. ⁷¹White shows. Nor are they commensurate in dignity to the calm, objective approach usually associated with men on

⁷⁰. Ibid., p. 154

⁷¹. W. W. White, The Resurrection Body, (Albany New York, Frank H. Ivory and Co., 1923), pp. 75-79

a scientific study of the origins of a noble and worthy institution like the Christian Church. The similarity in the method of the attack, if not the spirit, to that of the Historical Critic's will be readily recognized: Destroy in the documents whatever testifies to the supernatural, in accordance with one's presuppositions, and perforce the Christ is de-supernaturalized.

Lest there be any doubters left standing, unconvinced by the assertion of the worthlessness of the gospel records, Lamont leads a second attack, an attack characterized by the atmosphere of ridicule and exaggeration. The attack is on the philosophical position, but it proceeds on the same unsound basis that was used to deal with the empirical evidence. Ignoring the Bible altogether, or any other documents that portray what philosophers have thought on the subject of immortality, Humanism and Science solemnly affirm that because they do not see how, on the basis of their observations, they will not concede immortality to be a possibility.

Lamont and his colleagues are philosophical monists, that is to say, they believe that the personality and the physical body are inseparably a part of each other. For example, Somerset Maugham is quoted as saying, in practical terms: "For my part I cannot see how consciousness can persist when its physical basis has been destroyed." ⁷² The stumbling

72. Lamont, op. cit., p. 183

block is alleged to be over the problem created by the use of the Greek word, sarx, translated for centuries "flesh," by users of the Apostles' Creed, though more recent English usage has made it "Body." Lamont says: "The Apostles' Creed explicitly states that there will be a resurrection of the flesh."⁷³ Lamont reveals the burden which has been put by modern Humanism on that word in such statements as the following:

Not a hair or a finger-nail will be missing....St. Thomas Aquinas, who accepted with certain qualifications Aristotle's dictum that the soul is naturally united to the body as its form, writes "We cannot call it resurrection unless the soul return to the same body, since resurrection is a second rising....And consequently, if it be not the same body which the soul resumes, it will not be a resurrection, but rather the assuming of of a new body." To this day the general position set forth above has been, in the main, the accepted doctrine of the Christian Church. ⁷⁴

If this construction were put upon the word, it would indeed put an incalculable strain on the Christian intellect. Before the believer scuttles the ship at this threat there are two considerations to be born in mind.

What is the body, of which Paul, or the monist speaks? Even if it were granted that the body and personality are inseparable accompaniments of each other, no non-monist would demand that when the monists speaks of the body that

73. Ibid., p. 46

74. Loc. cit.

an image, a monstrosity be conjured up, fashioned out of all the physical molecules which have ever gone into and out of that body in time, before an intelligent discussion can begin. It seems to be a gratuitous assumption to put the Apostles in the position of saying (and all the Christian church with them) that when they think of the body, looking forward to the resurrection, that there must be a great assembly of finger-nails, hairs, etc., to each body, any more than when a monist looks at a body this moment, he must think of it in terms of that body plus a stream of returning finger-nails, hair, etc. The Apostles, and St. Thomas for that matter, could hardly be expected to possess the knowledge of physics, biology, or physiology now enjoyed by the average college graduate, but it would be a further gratuitous assumption to impute to the Apostles less of the deposit of common sense and observational power than a man living in 1951.

Language is a problem, and new knowledge complicates its usage. But the Apostles reached out for words which best seemed to meet the need for describing something beyond the reach of ordinary experience. Bernard of Clairvaux, writing his "O Sacred Head," eight hundred years ago expressed his frustration thus:

What language shall I borrow,
To thank thee, dearest Friend,
For this thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?

What then must have been the reaching out for words adequate to describe the resurrection of Christ. They reported sincerely and with conviction that the Tomb was empty, that they

saw the risen Lord, and saw the marks in that body made by the driven nails of the Roman soldiers on Golgotha's hill. It was a real body, not a mythical one, not a monstrous one.

Turning to I. Corinthians, the same problem manifests itself. Paul makes one perfectly clear statement which the 1951 Lamonts have overlooked, whether deliberately or not, which should help to lay their straw man in the dust: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." (15:50) In the same chapter Paul recognizes that there is a mystery here, and while neither he nor other Christian thinkers have plumbed its full depth, yet here is something to be grappled with, and defined as clearly as human eyes can see it. There is, he says, to be a resurrection body, but it will be a spiritual body, a body with its own glory, God-given. It will be a body "with splendid additions," as Dr. White so aptly phrased it, a body related to the body now possessed, after the analogy of the seed and the wheat. 75

The believer, then, faced with this mystery, need not lose heart. For if Lamont (or anyone else) could explain, or pass judgment on, or declare impossible the plans of God for man in a new world beyond, then he would no longer be a man, but God. It would take a stout-hearted and conceited philosopher to soberly assert that God is no bigger than he is. The fortieth chapter of Isaiah is the ~~antidote~~ needed here!

It will be seen then that here in the realm of Humanism the problem resolves itself into a simple Christological one.

75 White., Op. cit., p. 27

The conceit of the Humanist is boundless. Says Lamont, "The three most eminent of American philosophers, Morris R. Cohen, John Dewey, and George Santayana, are convinced that this life is all." ⁷⁶ And again, he quotes Dewey, "Of belief in immortality more than of any other element of historical religions it holds good, I believe, that 'religion is the opium of the people.'" ⁷⁷ For men who pride themselves on their rational, empirical approaches, it is a strange sight that an effect as profound and far-reaching as Christianity, contemporary and historic, can be explained away as being without a cause any bigger than an ordinary human being. The spectre of pre-suppositions rides a deadly traitor among this army fighting a supernatural Christ.

It would not be unfair to ask what effect the leaven of Deweyite disbelief, of teaching has had upon the minds of men and women passing through higher institutions of learning and out into the adventure of life has been. A thoughtful editorial-writer in the Catholic World holds up a grim picture, a devastating indictment in these words: (Speaking of Dewey)

He claims that history proves that belief in the supernatural has been the source of violent conflict and destructive of basic human values; so it must go....But let's look at the facts. In these first fifty years of our century, Liberalism has had its day...And what were the blessed fruits of this half-century when the lights of heaven were darkened and the supernatural was eclipsed?

Thirty-seven million total casualties in the First World War, fifteen million men killed in the Second World War, and about 400 million

77. Lamont, Op. cit., p. ix

76 Ibid., p. 265

children starving to death today, according to the U. N., the 16 million slave laborers in Russian C amps, and that awful massacre at Hiroshima and its portents of the future, and the war in China and Indochina, Korea, Malaya? Could this earth possibly be more fair than in this golden half-century of the twilight of the supernatural? Who says we need God? 78

Perhaps it is this dreadful panorama of a bruised and bleeding world which has brought men to turn again to the one way out. That seems to be the inference of the writer above, for in the same article he writes:

The editors of the ultra-liberal "Partisan Review" recently published a book entitled, "Religion and the Intellectuals." It is an impressive array of intellectuals on the present trend to religion in their ranks. That there is such a pronounced trend will come as a surprise to most of us, but PR vouches for it, and PR is hardly a religious organ. 79

IV. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DISTORTION

Turning to the Roman Catholic Church's position on the Ascension, and Mediatorial implications of the Ascension, of Christ, one tension is relieved, and another heightened. For here is a great body of Christians who agree that Christ did ascend, and that He does exercise the office of a Mediator. But here the Protestant is bewildered, because Christ is not the only one who has ascended bodily into heaven, nor is He the only one who has mediatorial functions! Mary, the

78. Editorial, unsigned, in The Catholic World, Vol. CLXXII, p. 163, December, 1950.

79. Ibid., p. 161

mother of Jesus, is likewise blessed in as signal a manner - according to the teaching of the Roman Church. The Eastern (Orthodox) Catholic Church also believes in, and celebrates yearly, the Assumption of Mary, as it is properly designated, but the doctrine is of particular significance as it pertains to the Western sector of Catholicism, for here it was recently proclaimed an official dogma of faith.

Difficulty is encountered as soon as an attempt is made to understand why the Roman Church has, over the centuries, increasingly exalted Mary to her present high status as a Mediatrix, interceding on high. A brilliant essay on this problem appeared in November, 1950, written by an eminent Catholic theologian, at present on the faculty of St. Paul's College, Washington, D. C., one James McVann, C. S. P. A recognized authority on Canon Law, Father McVann writes:

"It is one thing that the church believes a certain truth, as divinely revealed, another to find justification for that belief." 80

How then shall this new doctrine be justified? There are, according to this authority, three possible grounds upon which justification may be made: (1) Is it in the Holy Scriptures? (2) Is it in the writings of the Fathers? (3) Are there theological reasons for the fitness of the doctrine?

80. James McVann, "The Crowning Jewel for a Queen," The Catholic World, CLXXII:1, 028, November, 1950, p. 130.

With reference to the first standard, the Holy Scriptures, McVann leaves the reader in no doubt, with the flat statement that the doctrine is simply not there. John Dam-⁸¹ascene and Thomas Aquinas make that perfectly clear.

Protestant readers of the Bible may be surprised to learn, however that there are certain figures in the Bible which can be understood to apply to Mary's Resurrection. For, understood aright, "the ark of the covenant fashioned of imperishable wood, and borne triumphantly from Egypt to Mount Zion," is an Old Testament application. From the New Testament, Mary is pictured in the description of the "Woman in heaven 'clothed with the sun and the moon, and the crown of 7 stars.'" But, says McVann, respecting these and other refernces in the Scriptures, "are useful only to illustrate the doctrinal implica-⁸²tions of a truth understood from another source."

As to the second standard, the writings of the Father's, McVann concedes great obscurity and confusion. The earliest Father of the Church to write unmistakably about the Assump-⁸³tion of Mary was St. Gregory of Tours, who died in 596 A. D. But St. Jerome (who died in 420 A. D.) had his opinion! McVann quotes him:

Many of us doubt whether she was assumed together with her body, or departed without her body. How or when, or by whom her most holy body was taken from there, or where it was taken, or whether it rose again, is not known. ⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 130

⁸² Ibid. cit.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 128

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 129

Jerome's prestige, it is said, had a powerful effect on the development of attitudes toward the Assumption for several hundred years.

Nevertheless there were growing assertions of the doctrine. St. Modestus, a seventh-century Patriarch of Jerusalem, preached a memorable homily on the Feast of the Falling Asleep of Mary, the early name of this doctrine. In the eighth century three prelates, unnamed by McVann, spoke of the Assumption, with such statements as "She entered heaven with her own body." At the beginning of the sixth century, McVann goes on, the Feast of the Assumption was listed in many of the church calendars.⁸⁵

In other words, this doctrine has been part of the belief and practice of the Roman Church for more than a millenium. If there is no Scriptural justification for holding it, no unanimous voice of the Church Fathers' in approval of it, what then? The answer lies in the third test, that of the theological reasons for the fitness of the doctrine. Here the Romanists have been busy.

The fitness of the teaching moves through three stages: First, a list of the reasons which demand such a doctrine. Others had doubtless listed them, but McVann chooses that composed by Benedictus XIV, Pope during the years 1740 - 1758. It is demanded by (1) the dignity of the Mother of God, (2) her excellent virginity, (3) her

85. Ibid., p 128

surpassing holiness beyond men and angels, (4) her close union with Christ, her Son, (5) Christ's own regard for His most worthy Mother; (6) which seems to come down to a summary point, namely the Divine Motherhood of Mary. As⁸⁶ corroborative testimony to this, McVann adds the words of Aquinas:

By the fact that she is the Mother of God, the blessed Virgin has a certain infinite dignity from the infinite good that is God."⁸⁷

The Second stage in the fitness argument is this: If Mary is the Mother of God, possessing certain infinite dignity, then the Assumption is further demanded by the conclusion that she is exempt from the bonds of death. Here McVann calls upon Matthias Scheeben, author of a volume entitled Mariology, to state the implications of the stage of reasoning now reached:⁸⁸ It is that (1) Mary is exempt from the dominion of death. Though she did die, yet she was exempt from the dominion of death because she was free from sin; it was thus "a falling asleep." Further (2), Mary is exempt from decomposition. Death is noble; decomposition, shameful, a last earthly remnant of the curse of sin. Her dignity and place exempted her. Finally (3) the result of her immunity from death⁸⁹ was Mary's Assumption.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 130

⁸⁷ Loc. cit.

⁸⁸ A volume the present writer could not locate.

⁸⁹ McVann, Loc. cit.

This brings the development of the fitness of the doctrine to the last and most significant stage. In regard to the whole matter of redemption, the first outcome was the bodily resurrection of Christ, the perfect victor over evil. The ultimate outcome will be the bodily resurrection of all the just at the world's end. Into this picture Mary is now placed:

Mary, like a second Eve undoing the harm of the first, shared in that redemptive work of her Son. Not only as the beneficiary without compare, but also as its chief instrument; and furthermore, an instrument whose work of mediation would go on in heaven. 90

All this, as outlined, suggests McVann, is sufficient to show theological reasoning:

These arguments suffice to show theological reasoning. They all demonstrate the need of this doctrine as a consequence of Mary's God-given privileges. Scheeben puts it all into this sentence: "Mary's bodily assumption into heaven is so firmly established in the biblical and ecclesiastical idea of her person, and so clearly contained therein, that the church needs no special historical tradition to establish it." 91

After tracing out the whole matter as skillfully as McVann has done, it is highly interesting to note his most important point:

The greatest assurance about the dogma, short of the papal definition, comes thus: (1) It is taught by the ordinary teaching authority, and (2) that it is believed by the entire present church. 92

90 Ibid., p. 131

91 Loc. cit.

92 Loc. cit.

In the face of such a superbly presented array of argument the Protestant believer may feel that the Romanist stronghold of defense is impregnable. After all, there are millions of people who are now living, who do believe in the doctrine of the Assumption, and its concomitant doctrine of Mary as Mediatrix? One does not brush the evidence of such belief, and the behavior produced by such convictions aside, as inconsequential. It is, however, a fair question to ask what the ground for such belief and behavior is; how can it be justified?

The preceding paragraphs have presented the Romanist justification as objectively as possible, but the question now presents itself, is the justification justified? In the investigation the grounds of justification were these: (1) Acceptable if deduced from Scripture; (2) acceptable if taught by the Fathers; (3) acceptable if theologically fit. The first was eliminated because of a total lack of direct evidence on the doctrine.

That argument is, however, a two-edged one! If one is willing to justify a doctrine because it is stated, or can be deduced in the material of Scripture, what about the weight of Scripture against such a doctrine? It would seem reasonable to infer that a doctrine which the scripture definitely contravenes would logically be discarded, if the Scripture is found worthy of supporting another.

Philip Schaff, in his monumental Creeds of Christendom, presents in a remarkably lucid way the growth of the Catholic views on Mary, particularly as they are attenuated into the doctrines of her Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, with an expert refutation given at each stage.⁹³ The doctrine of the Assumption is predicated on the assertion that Mary was exempted from the dominion of death, as shown above. Death, it is said, is noble; decomposition however is shameful. Being the Mother of God this dignity spares her from such shame.

Now if Mary died, as is freely admitted by Romanists, but one conclusion can be drawn when the fact is considered in the light of Romans 3:23, "The wages of sin is death...." Had Mary actually been free from sin, the clear meaning of the Apostle's words seem to indicate, she would not have died. Schaff makes this powerful point, in citing such passages as Romans 3:10,23, 5:12,18, I. Corinthinas 15:22, II. Corinthians 5:14,15, Galatians 3:22, Ephesians 2:3, I. Timothy 4:10, and Psalm 51:5, that the plain, incontrovertible testimony of Scripture is that all are sinners, and that all are in need of redemption. This being true, then there follows this shattering declaration by Schaff, a statement that would

⁹³ Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1877), I. 112.

destroy completely the towering reverence and worship now accorded Mary. Here are Schaff's words:

St. Paul emphasizes the actual universality of the curse of Adam, in order to show the virtual universality of the salvation of Christ - and to insert an exception in favor of Mary would break the force of the argument, and limit the extent of the atonement. Perrone admits the force of these passages, but tries to escape it by saying that, if strictly understood, they would call in question even the immaculate birth of Mary and her freedom from actual sin as well, which is contrary to the Catholic faith; hence the Council of Trent has deprived these passages of all force of application to the blessed Virgin. 94

Can there indeed be any escape from the clear-cut facts. Sin, the clear teaching is, brings death. Mary died, a fact denied by none. The Council of Trent notwithstanding, the exception made for Mary is completely unsupported, respecting her death - and its cause. As for the assertion that corruption was not a part of the history of her body from death to the Assumption, it is impossible to separate death from decomposition in any intellectually sound mind, if words are to have any meaning.

It would put far less a strain on intelligence to say that Mary did not die, and therefore did not see death's relentless grinding into powder of the mortal's remains. And the position would be just as tenable, or untenable, as one is constrained to see it.

It will be seen then that the same Scriptures that would have been used to raise, or support the doctrine of

94. Ibid., p. 113

the Assumption of Mary, actually bringing from the heights to a rubble heap this conception of Mary's Assumption. In the same decisive manner, the Holy Scriptures, claimed by Romanists to be one of the authorities for the construction of doctrine, sends a torpedo straight into the hull of the idea of Mary's Mediatorship: I Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time." This is of course at the base of the Book of Hebrews. Is there any escape from the unambiguous assertions of Scripture where they impinge on such a doctrine, if one is to use the same scripture as a possible authenticating instrument of a truth.

The same force applies to the writings of the Father's. If one would use them to raise, or help support a doctrine, then what is to be said if these same men categorically deny the doctrines presented them in a given experience. Without laboring a point, the position of Mary was, as indicated above, by no means as exalted as present dogma would appear to indicate. Schaff treats this question of the Fathers' opinions, and the following quotation will suffice to show how acutely the Fathers perceived the real problem:

"Gregory of Nazianzen and John of Damascus, the last of the great Greek Fathers, teach that she was sanctified by the Holy Ghost. 95

95. Ibid., p. 117

Now if Mary was sanctified by the Holy Ghost, Schaff wonders, what possible meaning could this have for a sinless person?⁹⁶ The whole problem of the person of Mary has troubled and plagued the Romanist Church, in all its history, and the Fathers cannot be brought to a unanimous decision, so as to bring peace to the troubled waters.

This leaves the doctrine of fitness, surviving alone, as a justification for the Assumption and the Mediatorship of Mary, except that after this excursion into the Scriptures and the Fathers' writings, the last position appears to have suffered the fate of Troy.

Assuming, however, that the position does stand, is it resting on the rock of truth, of consistency, of fitness? The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, a necessary prelude to the later doctrines poses special difficulties. Schaff says that:

Leading Thomists and Dominicans rejected the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as contrary to tradition and derogatory to the dignity of Christ, the only sinless being. 97

Yet, because of Mary's dignity as the Mother of Jesus, she posed a problem for the great debates on original sin. The main trouble with solving the problem by explaining that to bring the Saviour into the world,

⁹⁶ Loc. cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 122

the Mother of Jesus would have to be sinless, is, according to Schaff's discerning eye, proving too much, for it would logically "demand a sinless grandmother, etc., " and so on, ⁹⁸ ad infinitum. Moreover, if she is exempt from original sin, by the merits of Christ, one becomes involved in a hopeless contradiction, because, Schaff goes on, "The merits of Christ are only for sinners, and have no bearing on sinless beings." ⁹⁹ Confusion is deepened when one turns to Mary's own song, in which she says: (Luke 1:47) "And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Darkness falls completely when the mind seeks a way out of the difficulty presented by the cumulative arguments on the person of Mary which at length make her officially Assumed bodily to heaven, where she is prayed to as the great Intercessor, as the Intermediary between man and the Redeemer; and the specific emphasis of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, on the Uniqueness of the Redeemer's Person, the Uniqueness of His Mission, an emphasis so clear that it can not possibly be interpreted to include another. There is One coming, in the Old Testament, who in the New Testament writings has come, as the Redeemer. He Himself repeatedly says: "I" do this or that; "I" go to prepare; "I" come again; "I" pray; all in such striking emphasis that it seems impossible to infer anything else than the uniqueness which is ascribed to him by Scriptural writers. Where does Mary fit into all this? The

doctrine of fitness, as developed by Rome's apologists, rather than justifying the extravagant claims made for Mary, leaves in its wake an assortment of pieces, like a miscellany of parts from several jig saw puzzles, which defy being put together to produce a picture showing Jesus Christ our Lord, and Mary His Mother, in their proper place and perspective in the great plan of Redemption.

An investigator who stops in his task to contemplate precisely what has happened can find a feeling of congruity again when he searches for an understanding within the pages of the Bible as we have it, a search which will be undertaken in the next chapter.

No one should leave this investigation into Roman views on Mary without feeling first of all a sense of pity for millions of people who have been led into a false position of according Mary as much, or more, homage and worship than Jesus. Hodge waxes eloquent, when he says in a discussion on the Invocation of Saints,

How fearful the consequences of turning their eyes and hearts from the one divine mediator between God and man, who ever lives to make intercession for us, and whom the Father heareth always, and causing them to direct their prayers to ears which never hear, and to place their hopes in arms which never save. It is turning from the fountain of living waters, to cisterns which can hold no water. 98

Secondly, those who rail bitterly against what is
 98 Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) III. 284

manifestly a gross treatment of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ our Lord should find it a salutary exercise to remember that this doctrine was born of an attempt to safeguard and clarify the Divinity of Christ in the face of determined efforts of heretics to destroy that Divinity. ⁹⁹

A fresh examination, and a re-newed affirmation of the Doctrine of the Ascended Christ, is the one way of leading the misled back to a sound spiritual vantage point, from which needy man may lift his yearnings for peace in the heart and peace among men, and be assured of a hearing at the Throne of God, through the Ministry of the great High Priest.

The whole matter of the Assumption, now made a compulsory part of the faith of Rome's adherents, involves the whole matter of revelation, tradition, papal infallibility, as inextricable constituents, matters on which Protestants have been unable to see eye to eye with their Catholic friends since the days of the Reformation. The system is of a piece, and by its very nature, and its latest pronouncements, can only widen the gap between the Protestantism, and Romanism. The observation of Schaff, nearly a century ago, is still a valid, incisive and timely appraisal of the elemental differences between the two:

Romanism stands and falls with Mariolatry and Papal Infallibility; while Protestantism stands and falls with the worship of Christ, as the only Mediator between God and man, and the all-sufficient Advocate with the Father. 100

99. Hodge, Op. cit. p. 285

100. Schaff, Op. cit. p. 112

IV. GENERAL NEGLECT

The Doctrine of the Ascension has suffered, it has been suggested, along with all the doctrines involving the supernatural, in the deadly way shown up to this point. The poison spread from teachers, to preachers, to congregation, and then turned back to continue the fatal cycle. Wilbur M. Smith, in his very readable "Therefore Stand," paints this picture of the result:

"Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God," and if the Word of God is not heard how can people believe, and if they do not believe, they are unbelievers. In thousands and thousands of Protestant churches today (we are not criticizing but simply stating a fact, which everyone recognizes) the Word of God concerning Christ and salvation is not expounded, unfolded, and explained, from one year's end to another. There are congregations of a thousand and fifteen hundred people today, who, from the first Sunday of January to the last Sunday of December, hear nothing about the Divine plan for saving men, through the grace of God, in Jesus Christ. We are substituting international peace, a new world order, a love for humanity, the wonders of science, the various popular phases of philosophy, attacks upon capital, etc. 101

Such a statement is almost impossible to document, and the temptation will be strong in some hearts to write it off as the rantings of a conservative, a fanatic. New York is a long way from Chicago, and so is the Moody Bible Institute from General Theological Seminary, and Smith himself would doubtless

101. Wilbur M. Smith, Therefore Stand, (Chicago; Moody Press, 1945), p. 172

be surprised to find an ally in this quarter. An Episcopalian, and an instructor in Christian Apologetics, William Norman Pittenger analyzes the present-day result of the "liberal" interpretation of Christianity. The "liberal" gospel presents (1) a simple religion involving no contradictions to the modern mind, (2) a religion of the great Hebrew prophets, lived out by the Galilean, (3) a religion fostering ideas of man emerging from bestiality to a golden age, rather than the depravity of man, and a religion (4) whose theology stressed: The Fatherhood of God - but not His Omnipotence; A Divine Jesus, that is one who "incarnated" values believed to be desirable, and who could therefore be conceived of as Leader, or Master; Nothing about Jesus as a Savior from sin; and nothing about "last things."¹⁰²

Both are agreed that man has sustained a great loss in sacrificing the historical faith of the church, and the causes adduced are strikingly parallel; Secularism; Off-base philosophy; Ignorance of the Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and the historic symbols; Unwarranted¹⁰² reverence for Science, etc. The difference in outlook

between the two men is that Smith sees darkness closing down in a relentless and terrifying manner until the Second coming¹⁰³ of Christ, whereas Pittenger sees Barth rising like the sun

on the present darkness, and thinks that neo-orthodoxy, with

¹⁰², Compare Smith, op. cit., pp. 57-60 and Pittenger op. cit., pp. 140-180.

¹⁰³. Smith, op. cit., p. 479.

its emphases of: Man as Sinful, Man's Need for Redemption, The Transcendant God, Revelation, and Eschatology offers
 102
 promise of a new hope among men.

Here is a most interesting fact: Wilbur M. Smith wrote his book as a "Plea for a Vigorous Apologetic in the Present Crisis of Evangelical Christianity," and the argument of the book is based upon three points:

(1) a consideration of the creation of the world by God, as an apologetic for this age of scientific emphasis; (2) a chapter on the evidence for the resurrection of Christ from the dead, as an apologetic for this age so constantly demanding historical certitude; and, finally, (3) a discussion of a righteous judgment to come, as the apologetic for such an hour as this when our ethical standards are fast disappearing. 103

A lost respect for eschatology was an inevitable accompaniment to a lost respect for the person of Jesus, conceived supernaturally. Smith sees eschatology coming into its own again, as a result of turning back to the historically presented Christ. This renewed interest in eschatology is also shown by Pittenger, as pointed out above, to have grown from the neo-orthodox concern with Christ's person and work.

Here is an interesting fact, the writer suggests above, because from the two points of view represented by Smith and Pittenger there is a meeting of minds on the

102. Pittenger, op. cit., pp. 64-70. Pittenger is well aware of the flaws of neo-orthodoxy, however.

103. Smith, op. cit., p.xvi

doctrine of last things, as at once a way to spiritual recovery, and as an explanation of why the Ascension, and other phases of the supernatural in Christ, have been neglected. The doctrine of last things, taking hold of the mind, means that a man gives himself to a consideration of his destiny as an individual, the destiny of the race of which he is a part, the destiny of the creation of which he is a part.

Such a concern can only have significance if it also includes a search into the place of God in the pages of History, past and prospective, and the place, plan, purpose and person of Jesus Christ in the total scheme of things. To neglect what the doctrine of the Ascension has to say here is to lose the key to the meaning of tomorrow, and much of today.

Perhaps it was just this thought which gripped Pierre Maury's heart as he visited the World Council of Churches meeting in Amsterdam in 1949. His words are contained in the World Council's Publication:

The church addresses modern man...by preaching that the world and history have an end...by the decree of Another....The Church must respect history, because it knows that since the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, the meaning of every period of history has become clear....We have arrived at the final stage of history....The Church must speak in a way apt to this particular epoch....the interval between the Ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God, and His return in glory. 104

Pierre Maury, Op. cit., p. 103.

In any case, the fact^{is} that the World Council meeting in 1949, does well to recognize that the World Councils dating back to 325 A. D. have taken the same view toward the significance of Christ's Ascension, a solid rock in the foundation of Faith.

V. SUMMARY

This chapter has traced out the way in which the doctrine of the Ascension, with all that it signifies in Christian thought, has suffered through the devious path of downright denial of the doctrine, through an oblique attack on the Person of Christ, in an attack on the documents which testify of Him. It was shown to be essentially a matter of pre-suppositions based on the alleged inconsistency of believing in a supernatural Christ and accepting the findings of modern science. It has shown that Mary came gradually to supplant Christ in the hearts of many Christians because of a loss of the doctrine of a supernatural, Ascended Christ, estimated in its proper perspective and worth. It has suggested the way in which the doctrine has lost itself in neglect, and in half-hearted acknowledgement by large sectors of the Church, because man became earth-bound in outlook. The hunger for a message of strength for the Church in a world of confusion is rightly directed to the Ascended Christ. To see that doctrine as valid and life-giving, as sound, will be the task of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III.

A ROAD TO RECOVERY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ASCENSION

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychology recognizes the right of every man to come to the Scriptures, to examine the portrait of the Christ, in all its richness, and the right of every man to interpret what he has seen. Theologians, higher critics, philosophers have each exercised their rights, for example. But the psychologist demands that the examination and the conclusions drawn be based upon an honest, fair, objective handling of the data by any man who presumes to enter upon such an examination. The data in this instance falls within the province peculiarly his own, says the psychologist, for it is the study of behavior, and experience in behaving. Working honestly and soundly within the legitimate bounds of his field, the psychologist suggests that the doctrine of the Ascension is not only something which the wistful modern may have again to bring light to his eyes, but is in fact a doctrine which marches straight into his life as a dynamic and living constituent of a truly triumphant and conquering faith. This chapter is devoted to such a study of the data, presented to the reader within the Holy Scriptures, as one road of that recovery.

II. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH DEFINED

Psychology is a science, which is to say that it deals with data which can be observed, classified and formulated, and from which certain conclusions may be drawn.

It insists that the behavior and experience in behaving which comes under its careful scrutiny is as real and observable a material with which to work, as is the chemical mixture in a laboratory test tube.

Psychology maintains further that there are observable cause-and-effect aspects of relationships between personalities significant and inevitable, just as there are cause-and-effect aspects of the "relationships" of one chemical substance with another, significant and inevitable. Sugar, for example, is the inevitable result of combining, in certain uniform structural amounts ($C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$), Carbon, Hydrogen and Oxygen. Nothing that is in the final product, sugar, can be there apart from what was inherent in its constitutive elements. If they are absent, any of these parts, sugar is not the result. On the other hand, if sugar is before one in the test tube, it cannot be accounted for unless all three elements are reckoned with. The point for the psychologist is that more cannot be derived in a given datum of behavior - a sermon by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, for example - than can be accounted for in what Peter himself was, in what Christ was, and in the nature of their relationship. The other side, and perhaps more important for the purpose of this discussion, is that neither can less be derived from the datum that is being observed; that is, full allowance must be made for what has gone into the making of the product. In the illustration just offered, it means giving full weight to what Peter was, to what Jesus was, and to the relationships they had with one another.

This procedure, moreover, calls for an objectivity in the handling of the data of psychology's world that is at least commensurate with the objectivity maintained toward the handling of the data of the chemist's world. Few people can convey themselves to an adequately detached point of view from which the present world might be seen in its true perspectives. But surely a visitor from another planet would be vastly more impressed than the average earth-dweller is with the fact that more than 500,000,000 people are joined in the world's largest institution, the Christian Church; that one book, the Bible (especially the New Testament) is read in well more than a thousand tongues, the pillow of black and white, red and yellow, the world around; that the living, exalted Christ is worshipped yet in countless churches in every continent. Pre-suppositions lead some men to say this great phenomenon is based on an illusion, a lie. The psychologist asks simply that he be allowed to examine the sources of this phenomenon, without pre-conceived notions or prejudice, before passing judgment on the contemporary scene.

III. THE DOCUMENTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

The psychologist cannot allow anyone to look at these sources and then twist the documents to shreds because the Christ they portray is manifestly, and without apology, presented as Divine as well as Human. He simply suggests that if the gospel records, for example, are to be used as sources for the portrait of the Jesus of history, then one ought to paint what is there,

however it may or may not comport with one's previous outlook.

The fact is that the portrait of Jesus presented in the gospels and epistles has survived for nearly two thousand years, and they have survived because men have recognized in their writers the touch of truly great artists. They deserve to have a respectful hearing before they are relegated to the siberian's wasteland, whither the arch-deceivers of history have been driven.

T. R. Glover, in his valuable book, The Jesus of History, suggests, in three canons for the study of any human character, past or present, in somewhat more detail just what this process means at its best. Without these three canons applied, says Glover, "The acutest critic will fail to give any sound account of a human character."¹⁰⁵ Here are his canons:

First of all, give the man's words his own meaning. Make sure that every term he uses has the full value he intends it to carry, connotes all he wishes it to cover, and has the full emotional power and suggestion that it has for himself....The English-born clergyman in Canada who spoke of a meeting of his congregation as a "homely gathering" did not produce quite the effect he intended; "home-like" is one thing in Canada, "homely" quite another, and the people laughed at the slip — they knew what he did not, that "homely" meant hard-featured and ugly....

The second canon is: Make sure of the experience behind the thought. How does a man come to feel and think as he does? That is the real question antedecedent to any real criticism. What is it that has led him to such a view? It is more important for us to determine that, than to decide at once whether we think him right or wrong....We have to ask ourselves, What is the experience that leads Jesus to speak as he does, to think as he does? In his case, as in every other, the central

105. T. R. Glover, The Jesus of History, (New York: George H. Doran Company), 1917. pp. 16-20

and crucial question is, What is his experience of God? In other words, What has he found in God? What relations has he had with God?

The third canon will be: Ask what type and of what dimensions the nature must be, that is capable of that experience and that language. One of the commonest sources of bad criticism is the emphasis on weak points. The really important thing in criticism is to understand the triumphs of the poet or painter...we are studying....Lamb's punning jest at Wordsworth - that Wordsworth was saying he could have written Hamlet, if he had the mind - puts the matter directly. What is the mind that can do such things? The historian will have to ask himself a similar question about Jesus. 106

The deep significance of each of these points is clear to the honest inquirer, and they lead to a further observation respecting the man who takes these documents into his own hands, and seeks to hear their voice. He must be possessed of an unimpeachable sense of honesty and integrity, and a wholesome humility.

Kirsopp Lake, for example, has written an entire book on The Historical Evidences for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. His explanation of the purpose of his book is that "it attempts to discuss this with adequate fullness, but without transcending the bounds of historical research, and passing into the region of psychology and philosophy."¹⁰⁶ This sounds like a commendable effort, but a careful reading of his book betrays a continuous and almost fanatical effort to throttle, and discredit

106. Loc. cit.

107. Kirsopp Lake, The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1907. p. 1.

the testimony offered throughout the Scriptural writings. But even a guided tour of the battle-field with this attacker, serves only to reveals how substantial the scriptural bastions are — the evidence does not collapse. And the field of psychology, which was strictly to be avoided by his own word, Lake enters time and again in an unwarranted, and impossible attempt to make psychology serve his pre-conceived ends. The women who come to the tomb, for example, he suggests, probably came to the wrong tomb, and this is "important because it supplies the natural explanation of the fact that whereas they had seen the tomb closed, they found it open." ¹⁰⁹ As for the Ascension, Lake thinks Luke was confused: "When he wrote the gospel, he thought that the Ascension took place on the third day, but when he wrote the Acts, he thought that it was after forty days." ¹¹⁰

There is nothing in the Acts which suggests any historical kernel except the Christian belief in the exaltation of Christ....The period of forty days is nothing more than a favorite Jewish number; and the Ascension in the clouds seems to be based on the story of Elijah; while the two young men who speak to the disciples afterwards seem to be a reflection of the two men into whom the original young man at the tomb had been developed in the tradition used by Luke. ¹¹¹

Such handling of the documents does not give Luke credit for much intelligence as a historian, weighing, sifting, selecting carefully the evidence for the good news he seeks to share, to say nothing of his integrity. It is precisely this illegitimate incursion into psychology which should be denied, unless the method is understood, and honestly employed.

^{109.} Ibid., p. 250

^{110.} Ibid., p. 233

^{111.} Ibid., p. 236

IV. AUTHENTICITY SELF-EVIDENT

This method does not imply that all problems will be solved and made transparently clear to anyone who comes to the study, even with openness of mind. Indeed, as one examines the root causes for the belief and action of the church through the ages to the present day, it is likely that one will be confronted with a cause the magnitude of which is larger than any mortal of the common lot of men could either endow -- or understand, in all its meaning.

In short the psychologist sets himself the task of the conductor of great music, to enter reverently, and sympathetically and earnestly into what it was the composer felt and lived. He exposes himself to the Scriptures, listens to the pen scratch of creativity and the heart-beat of love. In that task he may find a cacophonous outpouring from which he must flee forever, or, what seems more likely, he will hear the majestic sounds of a full-flowing symphony and chorus sounding forth in joyous, reverberant praise into every recess of his yearning heart.

This writer avers that the inspiration for the work of the New Testament authors was the Ascended Christ, with all that doctrine implies. They believed, wrote and acted upon the Ascension as a historical fact upon which they had planted their feet. Their documents are an authentication in themselves, and will now be demonstrated.

V. THE ASCENSION NARRATIVE EXAMINED

The Ascension is described or alluded to by Mark, in his Gospel, and by Luke in his Gospel and in the Acts. The account in Acts chapter I will be examined first, since all critics agree that the description here, as given by Luke, is his without dispute.

The first matter to be considered is that of the writer himself. Is this merely the record of a careless, over-imaginative enthusiast, or of the cool, discriminating historian at his best? The psychologist finds high significance in the author's own statement of purpose, for it reveals something of himself, and exactly what he proposes to do. It affords as well a continuing standard against which to measure what flows from his pen. In Luke 1:1-4 appears the following meaning-filled preface:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

This is a very revealing passage. His purpose is to lay bare truth, fact, in an orderly manner. His purpose is to transmit accurately information from those who were in a position to know the facts, because they were eye-witnesses

and ministers of the word, and that from the beginning. His own work, he declares, has been a matter of careful concern and investigation for some time past. He is dealing with history, things that have been going on among us, close at hand. Critics may carp, but they must take into consideration this hard fact - here is a man who states quite clearly that he is not spinning out a flowery legend of some far away events, but joins with other like-minded souls to make a recording of history as it has unfolded before, and in the lives, of many people. His gospel plunges immediately into the birth narratives, and moves swiftly through to his picture of the ascension, in masterly fashion.

His scholarly approach is commensurate with his skillful craftsmanship in composition and word usage. One cannot miss the significance of the fact that Luke uses "over seven hundred words which occur nowhere else in the New Testament."¹¹² This is an amazing display, and it means that here is a writer who knows, and carefully uses, many words which have nuances of meaning that more prosaic writers would sort into less carefully discriminated word-containers which make reading so dreary with monotonous repetition.

Luke was a physician. His training would foster the development of observational powers, that would prove useful

112. Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1890. Vol. I., p. 242

to him in weighing the testimony offered him in his sources, and would lead him to insights others might lose in the use of testimony. It would seem particularly relevant in any discussions of the facts of human life, as for example in those bearing on Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection.

He was an intimate of the early Christian leaders, and of the Christian community's life and growth, as he himself reveals in the so-called "we" passages of the Acts.

Coming to the portion under discussion in Acts, the student is met again by a sober, dignified statement of his purpose in relating the events in Christian history beginning at the Ascension. His statement opens the book:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus both began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 1:1-4

Again one is faced with the same objective manner of the scholar. His data is still fact, and he looks on what he has written as a fully adequate record of the story of Jesus, until the day when the Ascension took place. It is simply stated as a fact, without any half-hidden reservation as to its historicity.

So much for the author. One might be tempted to feel that perhaps the author himself might be a man of unimpeachable integrity, and yet could be wrong because his sources of information were ill-informed, or not

trustworthy, or not in a position to know the facts alleged.

If this were true, it would obviously vitiate the reliability of what the author had written. It behooves one to see exactly who these men are that are involved in the Ascension experience, for it is patently clear that the story of the ascension must have come from those who were participants of the experience. Chapter one (of Acts) marshalls some thirty or more specific facts about these participants, some of which will be suggested here.

They are the apostles. Now the critic might have doubts as to whether Jesus ever really rose from the dead, but here he is faced with eleven men, and there is no question at all as to whether they are still alive. They are there talking to him who had chosen them, the very same men who had come from their nets, and toll booths, and had followed him all through his journeys. They had spent forty days with him, from the time of the resurrection. They had moved from doubt to belief. This in itself is a datum of behavior that cannot be underestimated for its importance. His death was an event which they could not understand. There was no doubt in their minds that he was dead when he was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb for three days. But to live again? How could they understand and effortlessly accept a fact so totally

outside the scope of normal human experience, except for those occasions when he raised up the dead, such as Lazarus. But he was the one who brought Lazarus to life - and if he should die then it would seem gloomy indeed. One speculates if the cry shouted at the dying Christ might not have lodged with painful resignation in the hearts of the disciples, that bitter taunt of the rulers, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" (Luke 23:35).

But he showed himself alive, by many proofs, to these men. Were they dreaming? Hardly, men do not dream for forty days without waking up to reality. One would have to be naive to the extreme to believe that eleven men would be lost in a spell for that period of time.

He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God. This was their testimony, these rugged fishermen and business people, and it is perfectly consistent with what they had heard from the beginning from the lips of Jesus. His purpose, Jesus said in the days of his public ministry was that of an inner compulsion, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom...." Lk. 4:43. This seems to move with such naturalness throughout the gospel narratives that one would suspect as strange, as fabrication, the introduction of something extraneous at this highly important juncture.

Fact upon fact is list here from which one cannot escape, and each of them is calculated to drive home the identity of these men who had each given up their entire lives to Christ, and who now continue to act on his commands. He charged them

not to leave Jerusalem. They didn't. He charged them to wait for the promise of the Father. They did. He reminded them that he had promised this before. He had, as John attests. He spoke of John who baptized with water, and that they were to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. They had heard John the Baptist make the same declaration.

Their question as to the restoration of the Kingdom is highly significant. It was the same question that had come to their lips before on this same mountain. His answer was cast in the same terms. But their asking not only reveals their identity, but their "at this time," betrays their faith run to new heights. Do you at this time restore, is most revealing. It indicates that they saw in his new living state a new set of conditions. It matters not that the question also shows a materialistic overtone. It merely weaves in more tightly the story that had begun long before Calvary. Their later behavior shows that after his ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit that something happened to turn their thoughts in other directions. Up to this point they might still have dreamed of the twelve thrones, but following the event here, the question never arises again, nor does it assert itself in their preaching.

Ye shall be my witnesses - with power, after....

Each word underlined is fraught with meaning. The whole book of Acts is the corroboration of the reality of that statement, particularly dramatic in the case of Peter. Crushed before the word of a maid during Jesus' trial, he denies Christ. After this he preaches with boldness and success to thousands.

By-passing the Ascension itself for a moment, these eleven returned to Jerusalem. "Why," one must ask at every point. Because they believed that Jesus had given them that distinct marching order.

Then lest anyone should have a shred of remaining doubt as to their identity, Luke mentions each one by name, and each name conjures up memories of dedication and fellowship in the company of Jesus. How seriously they took their commission is shown by their choice of Matthias, and again an unconscious revelation of importance. The choice was fixed upon one who had (1) companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus was with them from the day he was baptized, until the day he was received up, (2) and who had been chosen by the Lord.

This is significant for it shows the importance these future witnesses placed in personal, intimate knowledge of Christ. It shows their own conviction, back in Jerusalem, away from what might have seemed a dream, that

they had had a real experience, had heard a solemn charge, and they set themselves in preparation for that ministry of witnessing. And it would be difficult to exaggerate the most striking feature right here (and often later), namely that they now prayed to Jesus, their Lord. Such behavior would be impossible to account for unless something extraordinary had taken place there on the brow of Olivet.

This passage is a well from which one could dip for a long time without exhausting the features that must compell earnest attention from every honest student. There are some two dozen or more time notations that find significance in this chapter. There are more than a dozen place locations, and each of these often-overlooked "minor" contributions to the narrative assume great weight in establishing the historicity of the events. Moreover, this writer has made an intensive study of the Greek of this passage, and is confronted with an embarrassing wealth of information which he has not scope here to handle. Luke's wide choice of words is very significant just in this passage at hand, and makes an exceedingly rewarding study to any one acquainted with that language.

Having examined the setting in which the ascension is placed, by thinking somewhat about the author, somewhat about the apostles, each in their relation to this Person,

it will now be useful to the understanding of their behavior to look at the brief ascension statement itself. It is evident that something extraordinary is to be found to produce the behavior noted, and to supply the meaning to a narrative that begins on such an exalted note.

It says simply that upon the occasion of his last words of promise, that they were looking at him and while they were looking upon him he was raised up on high. The Greek word for "looking" used by Luke is one which emphasizes the seeing with the bodily eye, perceiving "by the use of the eyes," an emphasis on the physical act.¹¹³ An appropriate word for a "witness" indeed. This is the kind of word which a jury likes -- a man sees something with his own eyes. Something else ties it into reality, he is seen to rise upon a cloud, not just into a hazy, overcast sky, but Luke narrows it down to "a cloud," a small but important note.¹¹⁴ Again another word is added to the going up, this time the word in Greek that symbolizes to be taken up, and carried away, but with a distinct note of separation, of withdrawal, a suggestion of finality.¹¹⁵ Again the eyes are mentioned, with a different word used, almost as if the author were to say, now these men didn't imagine this they saw it with their own eyes.¹¹⁶

113 Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, (New York, American Book Company, 1889), p. 103

114. Ibid., p. 424

115. Ibid., p. 643

116. Ibid., p. 470

Who can imagine the thoughts that came racing through their minds at this unexpected turn? For surely this was an eventuality that filled them with wonder. How long they watched those heavens is not stated, but their faces and eyes must have betrayed a boundless longing, for again the master uses a word filled with expressiveness. Why are you standing here gazing up into the heaven, asks a voice. Vincent notes that the word used here for "gaze" is from a root which means to stretch, to be intent upon something, the same word that is used of the fixed attention which His hearers gave Jesus, when He preached to them in the synagogue of Nazareth.¹¹⁷

Then comes the word of crucial importance, that this same Jesus, (each word deserves emphasis and study), the same one they had known from Galilee to Calvary to Olivet, and whom they had just seen ascend into heaven would come again the same way in which they had seen him depart. It emphasizes the experiential aspect. You know him. You have seen him go. This same one will return, down from the heaven into which you have seen him go. How definite and clearcut this statement is, and what a galvanic thing it was, for the disciples thereupon turned back to Jerusalem. Those feet marching away from Olivet that day began the

117. Op. cit., p. 444

great march of the church of God who walked, and walk to the place of witness to the resurrected Christ, now exalted in glory.

These men believed they were witnesses to a fact of history. Their evidence is clear, and their behavior is, as seen in the ascension day itself, and in the history that follows, a clear validation of it.

There are difficulties which this writer is well aware of, in the realm of physics, and science in general, and he does not mean that this study eliminates them. But he does contend that whether we fully comprehend the facts presented does not matter. For the truth is that from every piece of evidence offered in the Scriptures there breathes an air of authenticity and genuineness. The apostles and their followers throughout history have transformed life, and this would not have been possible unless the message they preached and wove into the texture of life were not essentially ~~true~~, unless it were all they represented it to be. One does not drive a battleship through the seas with a five horsepower outboard motor.

Aware of the brevity of this treatment, though he thinks it adequate for the present purpose, the writer believes it would be helpful to see whether this doctrine of the ascension is at all hinted at in the gospels, and to this he now directs his attention.

VI. ANTICIPATIONS IN THE GOSPELS

At first blush, the doctrine of the ascension appears to be an isolated phenomenon of the book of Acts, one to be glossed over quickly, if noticed at all, especially by the seeker for the historical Jesus, who delights in His sermons, and His gentle manner of devoted helpfulness. But a careful reading of the gospels reveals an almost innumerable list of references to Christ, particularly those in which he speaks of His own nature and mission, that can have absolutely no meaning unless Christ rose from the dead, and unless He is the Ascended Christ. To eliminate them is to destroy the very heart of the Christian Gospel, if it does not indeed destroy Christ altogether, for if He spoke rightly the Ascension falls quite naturally into its place in the scheme of redemption. If he did not know what he was talking about in his persistent references to matters eschatological, then of course the Ascension has no meaning — but neither has any other word of Jesus. If he was wrong on one count, then his word on other matters would become suspect.

The allusions in the gospels to such things as his going to the Father's house, his returning in glory, are of a piece with the ascension, and with what it implied in the way of his exaltation, his session, and intercession, with God. A few of the many citations will suffice.

Was the ascension a fact, or the imaginative creation of the New Testament writers? The gospels report what Jesus said, did and taught. Are there foregleams of the ascension in these records?

It is interesting to note that even before the birth of Christ, there is an intimation of this doctrine in the annunciation. Mary is reported as hearing:

He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end. Luke 1:32,33

At the outset of his ministry Jesus entered the Temple and cleansed it, and answering the angry protests and the challenge of the Jews to his authority, he says:

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he has said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. Jn. 2:19-22

This passage is valuable in two respects, showing the consciousness of Jesus regarding the resurrection (and the resurrection can be regarded as having no enduring significance apart from the ascension), and showing the reactions of the disciples. They understood that initial revelation no better than the Jews, for they had just started to walk with him, calling him a teacher.

John has another incident early in the ministry of Jesus, remarkable again in that he addresses himself to the Jews, and is reported as saying:

For as the Father hath life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:26-29

This again is a stupendous claim recorded by John, that has direct relation to the doctrine of the ascension.

In the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded by Matthew, Jesus says:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me ye evil doers." Mt. 7:21-23

The Sermon on the Mount is often mentioned as the kind of "creed" that is desirable, because it seems to be just great teaching without supernatural elements intruding themselves. But here is Jesus' own claim, as understood by Matthew, which projects him into the heavenly place that Luke suggests he ascended to in his description of the Ascension.

This same boldness is recorded by Matthew in the grouping of parables about the Kingdom of God, where Jesus says:

He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evil doers and throw them into the furnace of fire; there where men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Mt. 13:37-42

Many such passages could be adduced, such as Mark 4:37-41, Matthew 10:28-33, John 2:23-3:21, John 4:27-42, 5:29, Matthew 8:23-27 and parallel passages, Matthew 10, John 6:22-71, esp. verse 62, etc. Then there are the striking announcements (three) of his death and resurrection. Scores of additional citations could be added, but in each of them there is a tremendous cumulative effect being generated, until one comes to the great triumphant notes expressed in the shadow of the cross a few days away.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
Luke 21:27

And how can one begin to plumb the profound depths suggested in the rich passages of John devoted to the last hours when Jesus, ^{and the disciples} were together in communion before he was taken in the Garden. He bows down, conscious of whence

he came and where he was going and in inexpressible tenderness kneels to wash the disciples feet. He tells them he is going to prepare a place for them. He prays, commending them to the Fathers care, for he returns to the Father. John 13-17.

It can readily be seen that the story of Jesus unfolds in his preaching and ministry fit as hand to glove the story of the ascension. It could have been no other way. Yet until it actually took place the disciples found it very nearly impossible to believe, much less to understand. Is this not the simple record - and a testimony to the honesty of the gospel writers. It will be helpful to turn now to the rest of the New Testament to see if the whole coheres in this supernatural Christ who came down from the Father to redeem men and ascended on the fortieth day after his resurrection.

VII. REACTIONS OF APOSTLES AFTER ASCENSION

When one considers the effects of the Ascension in the rest of the New Testament, one is confronted with such a mass of testimony that one scarcely knows what to select, for in fact the entire rest of the Acts and all the epistles are grounded solidly upon a gospel of an exalted King, an Interceding Priest and a Coming Judge. The preaching of the apostles was an immediate reflection of the power of this experience in the Apostolic circle. The day of Pent-

testament is an outstanding example. One senses the thrill and persuasive power in which Peter preached and in which he concludes so magnificently:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know--this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David said concerning him,

I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken....

This Jesus did God raise up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says,

The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet."

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Acts 2:22-36

What a testament of faith this is -- and it is based on experience. He bases his appeal on his own experience, to which he witnesses, and appeals to them on the basis of their knowledge. This was not done in a corner, this crucifying. They knew that he had died, but Peter knew he lived. Three thousand souls came to know the Christ of whom he spoke.

This was typical of the sermons preached, as recorded in Acts. Salvation based on the hard facts of experience, and it was manifested in the lives of the preachers, and through them in the lives of the early church.

Paul addresses the Romans, his theme being the Gospel unto salvation to every one who believes. He puts it this way in his introduction:

The Gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith for the sake of His name among all the Gentiles, including yourselves who are called to belong to Christ Jesus. Romans 1:3-6

No dead Christ his. He was the living Lord, from whom he had received his apostleship, having seen the Lord, and into whose living fellowship he called his friends in Rome.

I. Corinthians is built on this same conviction, growing out of the facts as Paul has received and believed them.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve....I Cor. 15:3-5

He goes on to describe the appearances, even to himself, and then launches into a discussion on death. Now it appears to this reader that there is a most interesting fact in his whole discussion. The Corinthians were troubled about death, but apparently there was no question at all

in their minds as to whether Christ was living. They were not sure about themselves, but they were evidently convinced of a certainty that Christ had risen. This seems to be born out by the fact that he states that if the dead do not rise then Christ is dead, a fact of which they were not persuaded. It is those who are Christ's at his coming that will be lifted up, he goes on to say -- and concludes on a note of wholesome motivation to work for the Lord, because it isn't in vain.

Galatians reflects his moving faith:

I have been crucified with Christ;
it is no longer I who live, but Christ who
lives in me; and the life I now live in
the flesh I live by faith in the son of
God who loved me and gave himself for me. 2:20

Ephesians has some direct allusions to the ascension in chapter 4, verses 8-10, but an even more striking passage is that found in the second chapter where he shows the great benefits deriving to those who have given themselves to Christ:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of
the great love with which he loved us, even when
we were dead in trespasses and , made us alive
together with Christ (by grace you have been
saved), and raised us up with him, and made us
sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ
Jesus, that in the ages coming he might shown
the immeasurable riches of his grace in kind-
ness toward us in Christ Jesus. 2:4-7

In Philippians Paul sees another aspect which is
a product of the ascension:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we wait a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like unto his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself. 3:20,21

I Timothy has an allusion which appears to be the core of early Christian didactic:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory. 3:16

His comment following this creedal gem is that Timothy must be careful because there will be those who "depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits," and his warning seems particularly apt at this present time. Its relevance to the facts that are to be believed because they are facts, and to avoid the treachery of those who are deceitful is both a challenge and a warning today.

The second epistle bears a note which all the apostles could have endorsed -- if a man suffers for his faith it is because it represents something real and dynamic within. Paul says that he is suffering and wearing fetters for the sake of the gospel, but he feels that tomorrow will bring blessing:

The saying is sure:
If we have died with him, we shall also
live with him;
If we endure, we shall also reign with him.
2:9,11,12

The Book of Hebrews has its own contribution to the understanding which the writer had of the meaning of the ascension. He saw in it the deep meaning of atonement, for here is the book of priesthood. As soon as one thinks of the priesthood one thinks of sin, of sacrifice, of suffering. The Old Testament pictured the scene with enduring pathos, the people sorrowing over their sins, the priest entering the sacred place, but never does one feel the boundless sense of joy over sin forgiven that is evident when one comes to one such as the writer of Hebrews evidences:

great
Since then we have a high priest
who has passed through the heavens, Jesus,
the Son of God, let us hold fast our con-
fessions. For we have not a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weak-
nesses, but one who in every respect has
been tempted as we are, yet without sin-
ning. Let us then with confidence draw near
to the throne of grace, that we may find
grace and receive mercy to help in time
of need. 4:14-16

His meaning is made more clear in chapter eight,
and then his unique mission is set forth in unmistakable
terms,

He entered once for all into the
Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats
and calves but his own blood but his own
blood, thus securing us an eternal redempt-
ion. 9:12

I Timothy 2:5 brings out even more sharply the
uniqueness of this mediator:

For there is one God, and there is one
mediator between God and men, the man Christ
Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.

What room this leaves for Mary as Mediator in the scheme of God's redemptive plan for man may be left to the imagination. The last mention of Mary in Scripture, in any capacity whatever, was in a place of common prayer for the promised Holy Spirit in Acts one.

The Revelation catches up and breathes into full flower the concept of the coming King and Judge, perhaps best exemplified in the passage Handel makes glorious music in "The Messiah":

The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,
and he shall reign forever and ever. (11:15)

Thus there is seen (though far too sketchily in this limited presentation) in all the life and writings of the New Testament Church a firm, enduring faith in what was regarded as a fact beyond gainsaying, that Christ was seen to ascend into heaven, and upon that conviction the church grew until it reached with mighty power the great fellowship it now is, worldwide and reaching on into eternity.

VIII. SUMMARY

This chapter suggested that the method of psychology is one avenue by which the great doctrine of the Ascension may be recovered for a dynamic of faith today. Psychology deals with behavior and experience in behaving. With that approach to the New Testament, it has shown the faith of the church of the Apostles the fruit of belief in the reality of the ascension.

CHAPTER IV.

MEANING OF ASCENSION TO LATER BELIEVERS

I. INTRODUCTION

The Preceding Chapter inquired into the Ascension, as a psychologist would seek to do, namely by examining the behavior of those who were participants of the event, and by observing the effects upon the apostolic community which the doctrine believed by them produced. Recognition was made of the scientific dictum that one cannot get more from, nor less from, a given cause than what is inherently in that cause. The effect, that is to say, cannot be more nor less than the cause out of which it grows. Running through the entire New Testament was a tide of behavior which could only be predicated upon something as extraordinary as the ascension. Jesus of Nazareth became both Lord and Christ, is at the hand of God, the priest, Judge and coming King. This question of the ascension might have died with the New Testament Church, but it did not. It became an integral part of the symbols of faith in the church all through history, calling forth the creative imagination in artists, and affording a strong rock of hope in the present world. Here again is material of evidential value, and these attest to the reality of the foundation in fact upon which

the historic church has built its faith and practice. Attention will first be drawn to the writings of the Church Fathers. Clement murmurs a prayer out of faith in the ascended Christ when he writes:

O Thou who alone art able to do these things and far better things for us, we praise Thee through Jesus Christ, the high priest and guardian of our souls, through whom be glory and majesty to thee, both now and for all generations and for ever and ever. I. Clem. LXL 3 118

He continues (in II Clement) with the coming One in mind as he warns:

For the Lord said "I will come to gather together all the nations, tribes and languages." Now by this he means the day of his appearing, when he will come and ransom each one of us according to his works. And the unbelievers "shall see his glory" and might, and they shall be amazed when they see the sovereignty of the world given to Jesus and shall say: "Woe unto us, that it was thou, and we knew it not, and did not believe, and were not obedient to the Elders, when they told us of our salvation. II. Clem. XVII. 4,5. 118a

Polycarp wrote to the Philippians in the following vein, as an encouragement to holy living:

"Wherefore girding up your loins serve God in fear" and truth, putting aside empty vanity and vulgar error, "believing on him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory," and a throne on his right hand, "to whom are subject all things in heaven and earth," whom all breath serves, who is coming as "the Judge of the living and of the dead," whose blood God will require him. II. 1,2 118b

Barnabas writes with a freshness that seems very up-

118 Kirsopp Lake, ed. The Apostolic Fathers (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, MCMXLIX), Vol. I. p. 117

118a. Ibid., p. 157

118b. Ibid., p. 285

to-date on another aspect which touches a by-product of the resurrection, worship on the first day, but is of interest for its specific reference to the ascension:

The present sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but that which I have made, in which I will give rest to all things and make the beginning of an eighth day, that is the beginning of another world. Wherefore we also celebrate with gladness the eighth day in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and was manifest, and ascended into heaven. XV. 8,9 120

The fathers believed in the ascended Christ, and found it a motive to careful living in the sight of the living Christ, as well a solemn point of admonition in recognizing the Sovereign who would return in Judgment.

III. THE CREED-FORMULATORS

The Apostle's Creed is an amazingly vital thing, forming as it does the elemental creed of virtually all Christian Churches today. People may believe more than it asserts, but certainly not less, and its endurance for a time almost as long as Christianity itself, is a tribute to the correspondence found in the experience of men through all these generations to that which is evident in the creed. It categorically speaks of the ascension, the session at the right hand of God, and the return from thence to judge the world. It is difficult to understand the vigor with which McGiffert attacks the ancient

120 Ibid., p 397.

symbol, when he says that it "is very far from being a summary of the church's faith in the first or second or any other century," especially in view of the fact that he quotes Irenaeus (130?--202?) as saying that this symbol came down from the Apostles and reproduced their faith to which all Christian teachers must conform.¹²¹

It is quite evident to the honest observer that it does pretty well match the New Testament writings. But his attack is readily understood when later he puts himself in the position of those who say that the New Testament does not even represent the core of Christian belief among the apostles. He ignores totally the results of the faith as evidenced in the preaching, the converts, the martyrdom, when he speaks with a tone bordering on ridicule of the resurrection as being but the "bare word of a company of ignorant strangers from Galilee" who could "explain his disappearance only as an ascension into heaven."¹²² Such success as they had, McGiffert ascribes not to the facts they themselves claimed to base their preaching on, but to be an "illustration of the contagion of personal enthusiasm and devotion."¹²³

It would seem that Irenaeus would be in a far more advantageous position, time-wise at least, to know whether it did in fact represent the earliest distillation of the Christian faith.

121. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought, (New York, Scribner's), 1932, p. 135

122. Ibid.; p. 12

123. Ibid.; p. 13

The growth in understanding of the Ascension made itself manifest in the Nicene Creed, first drawn in 325, then enlarged in 381. At the latter date it added: "Whose kingdom shall have no end," and "come with glory."¹²⁴

Eastern creed-makers made a significant contribution following a meeting to discuss (and condemn) Cyril's "Confession" in 1631. This gathering provided an inspiration for the Eastern church to make some definitions of what Orthodox faith was. Cyril's desire to bridge a gap between divided churches, though it failed, stimulated some important thinking, and out of this came a statement dealing with the problem of Christ's nature representing a great forward move: the two-fold states were "his incarnation and humiliation, his exaltation and sitting at the right hand of the Father, as the Mediator of Mankind and the Ruler of the Church."¹²⁵

The Synod of Jerusalem in 1672 was deliberately calculated to refute Cyril's Conference. It was the eastern version of the Council of Trent, repudiating Lutheranism, and Calvinism, for what might appear obvious reasons. Certainly one of them was the position on Mary, for here enters the first eastern-church Mariolatry, officially:

The work of Christ. He is our only Mediator and Advocate for our sins; but the saints, and especially the Immaculate Mother of our Lord, as also the holy angels, bring our prayers before him, and give them greater effect.¹²⁶

¹²⁴. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, (New York, Harper & Bros.), 1877, p. 28.

¹²⁵. Ibid., p. 125

¹²⁶. Ibid., p. 63

It would appear that here the creed-makers had gotten rather away from the doctrine which the Holy Apostles believed. They were probably caught up by the pressures of the Reformation preaching.

Later western developments were quite well crystalized in the Council of Trent, in 1546. This Council asserted the Nicene Creed as the principle of faith, with this somewhat interesting, and parallel, development to that in the east, mentioned above; for this Council said:

If any one asserts that this sin of Adam...is taken away either by the powers of human nature, or by any other remedy than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath (I. Tim. 2:5) reconciled us to God in his own blood, being made unto us justification, sanctification, and redemption (I. Cor. 1:30) let him be anathema. 126

As an afterthought, exemption from this anathema for Mary was made - "The blessed and Immaculate Mother of God." 127

This step was vital to the growing doctrine, which was to be further developed in Papal proclamations. It marked also the definite break, which was not to be healed, with evangelicals, who could not believe that the clear teachings of the Apostles were so to be violated.

Protestant developments can best be summarized later under the section dealing with the reformers, since they so intimately twine around the chief leaders, and have continually affected their followers.

126. Ibid., Vol. II., p. 85

127. Ibid., Vol. II., p. 88

IV. THE CATECHISMS

The Catechisms grew out of the heat of controversy, following the rise of the Reformation. The Lutherans were, and still are, in an extremely difficult position regarding the Ascension. It has become all involved in Luther's conception of Ubiquity and the Lord's Supper, topics not within the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that the teaching of Luther was that it verged on the ridiculous to think that Christ ascended to a place, involving unnecessary problems of space and time which are not really relevant. It seems to have arisen from the interpretation he placed on the Real Presence in the communion. Schaff observed most interestingly during the last century:

"In the modern revival of orthodoxy, Lutheranism, the ubiquity of the body of Christ is either avoided, or advocated in only the hypothetical form, and mostly with a move toward a more literal acceptance of the kenosis. Phil. 2:7 128

The Presbyterian and Reformed Catechisms, as well as many others were formulated very much along the lines suggested by the Apostles' Creed, with the later additions that seem to fill out the meaning of his ascension more clearly. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, for example, makes a very full treatment of Christ as prophet, priest and king, emphasizing the exaltation of Christ, ascended into heaven, and coming again. 129

128. Ibid., Vol. II., p. 296

129. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, (Philadelphia, Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.) 1944, pp. 14-16

VI THE REFORMERS

Here again the limitations of space press upon one, so that having aluded to Luther above, the writer will content himself with a reference to Calvin.

Leroy Nixon has done great service to the church in making available the sermons of John Calvin in English translation. He feels that the personal note in Calvin's preaching is what kept people flocking to hear him, and that it is the need today. Thus far he has made available four sermons on the Ascension. Calvin proceeds in methodical fashion to weigh out the Greek meanings in carefully measured terms, that seem somewhat tedious. But he does come to the point that warms the soul, and feels that one of the primary lessons of the Ascension, is the way in which Paul felt that those who loved Christ should seek those things which are above.

For our affections must ascend to heaven, or otherwise we would not be at all united to Jesus Christ....How? In true chastity, in sobriety, in true charity, in temperance, in diligence, in patience, in every other virtue. These are the wings to raise us to heaven. 130

Thus far this paper has dealt with the behavior seen in those engaged in Christian ministry, with the except- of several of the critics mentions. At this juncture, the writer would like to call to witness those who have brooded over this theme in the various arts.

130. John Calvin, The Diety of Christ, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company), 1950, p. 208f.

VII. THE FINE ARTS

Belief in the Ascension has been shown to be the core of New Testament literature, an enduring element in the writings of the Fathers, a vital segment of the creeds, a dynamic of the Reformers. As powerful evidence that could only have been produced by a mighty historic fact, these manifestations are invaluable. But it has not been only the theologian and ecclesiastic who has proclaimed and lived by this doctrine, but the manner in which the teaching has been seized upon by the creative mind of poets, musicians and painters is equally striking. The Ascension represents many things to many minds, and it is not the purpose of this thesis to expatiate upon the many facets which sparkle under the hand of the jeweler's wheel as he takes this gem of Christian doctrine and grinds it down to reveal all its flashing radiance. By-products, or corollary doctrines come in abundance, and what some of these are may be hinted at in the artists' creations.

Poems, many of which have been set to music, have flown freely for centuries from contemplative souls standing in the shadow of Olivet.

Venerable Bede (673-734 A. D.) wrote these words in expressing the gladness of a Christian toward the doctrine:¹³¹

A hymn of glory let us sing;
New Hymns throughout the world shall ring;
By a new way none ever trod
Christ mounteth to the throne of God.

131. Philip Schaff, Christ in Song, (New York, A. D. F. Randolph), 1869 p. 305

The apostles on the mountain stand,
 The mystic mount, in Holy Land;
 They with the Virgin-Mother see
 Jesus ascend in majesty....

The "Te Deum Laudamus," a Latin, fourth century poem called "the most famous hymn, not of Biblical origin, of the Western Church," gathers up "much of the Christian heritage from the Apostles' Creed and from the Preface, the 'Sanctus' and the 'Gloria in Excelsis,'" and was put, significantly, by Martin Luther as the great confession of faith second only to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene

Creed.¹³² It goes in part as follows:

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.
 Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
 When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man,
 thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.
 When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,
 thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven
 to all believers.
 Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the
 Glory of the Father.
 We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge.
 We therefore pray thee, help thy servants, whom
 Thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
 Make them to be numbered with the Saints
 in glory everlasting....¹³³

It is not difficult to see the same elements of belief in the resurrection, ascension, Lordship, intercession, coming Judge, etc. that were in the minds of the apostolic church. Schaff lists twenty-one poems in his anthology which bear on the Ascension, coming up to the works of Tersteegen, the Wesleys, Peronnet and others, each bringing

132. William Chalmers Covert & Calvin Weiss Laufer, Handbook to the Hymnal, (Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Christian Education), 1935. pp. 550f.

133. James Dalton Morrison, Masterpieces of Religious Verse, (New York, Harper & Bros), 1948. p. 109

out one or more of the factors of belief growing out of the Ascension.

Edwin Markham's "The Ascension," breathes a moving intimacy with the documents of the New Testament so alive that one almost feels himself at Olivet:

Mary Magdalene telleth to the family at Bethany
the Story of the Ascension.
In the gray dawn they left Jerusalem,
And I rose up to follow after them.
He led toward Bethany by the narrow bridge
Of Kidron, upward to the olive ridge.
Once on the camel path beyond the
City, He looked back, struck at heart
with pain and pity —
Looked backward from the two lone cedar trees
On Olivet, alive to every breeze —
Looked in a rush of sudden tears, and then
Went steadily on, never to turn again.

Near the green quiet of a little wood
The Master halted silently and stood.
The figs were purpling, and a fledgling dove
Had fallen from a windy bough above,
And lay there crying feebly by a thorn,
Its little body bruised and forlorn.
He stept aside a moment from the rest
And put it safely back into the nest.

Then mighty words did seem to rise in Him
And die away: even as white vapors swim
A moment of Mount Carmel's purple steep,
And then are blown back rainless to the deep.
And once he looked up with a little start.
Perhaps some loved name passed across His heart,
Some memory of a road in Galilee,
Or old familiar rock beside the Sea.

And suddenly there broke upon our sight
A rush of angels terrible with light --
The high same host the Shepherds saw go by,
Breaking the starry night with lyric cry --
A rush of angels, wistful and aware,
That shook a thousand colors on the air --
Colors that made a music to the eye --
Glories of lilac, azure, gold, vermillion,
Blown from the air-hung delicate pavilion.

And now his face grew bright with luminous will:
 The great, grave eyes grew planet-like and still.
 Yea, in that moment all His face fire-white
 Seemed struck out of imperishable light.
 Delicious apprehension shook the spirit,
 With song so still that only the heart could hear it.
 A sense of something sacred, starry, vast,
 Greater than Earth, across the being passed.

Then with a stretching of His hands to bless,
 A last unspeakable look that was caress,
 Up through the vortice of bright cherubim
 He rose until the august form grew dim —
 Up through the blue dome of ^{the} day ascended,
 By arching-flights of seraphim befriended.
 He was uplifted from us, and was gone
 Into the darkness of another dawn. 134

A thoughtful reading of this poem leaves one with something of the feeling of intense longing and yearning pictured by Luke.

The use to which this theme has been put in the hymnals of the church is simply fabulous. Dr. John J. Moment, himself a contemporary writer of hymns, addressed a young peoples' group in the writer's church several years ago on the subject of editing a hymnal. He pointed out that estimates of the total number of hymns composed for the church run in the neighborhood of some 500,000, over the two thousand years of the Christian era. He then noted that the problem of selection is the primary one, and while not so difficult when starting the process with 500,000, becomes extremely difficult when the field is narrowed to some 5,000 that may be said to have genuine current popularity.

When one takes in hand the task of further sifting to a number of some five hundred hymns for the average hymnal, it requires extreme sensitiveness to the church at large to satisfy its expressions of faith. Now in the "Hymnal" of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, it is positively amazing to feel the total impact of the selection

of hymns for use by the Sunday morning congregations, as they reflect the belief of the church in the Ascended Christ, who lives, reigns, and returns again.¹³⁵

Of 513 hymns in the main body of the "Hymnal," some sixty do not expressly mention Christ, and most of these appear in the opening sections of the book dealing with God as Father, as revealed in Nature, etc. For the most part they gather up the Old Testament teachings on God, many of them being arrangements of Psalms, such as "All people that on earth do dwell," hymn number 1 (Psalm 100), or "Unto the hills around do I lift up My longing eyes," hymn number 96, (Psalm 121), and the church cannot be without them.

But of the rest of the hymns in the "Hymnal" every single one explicitly or implicitly rise to honor the Incarnate and Eternal Christ. There is no escape from Him! Several hymns deals expressly with the Ascension, and Bishop Christopher Wordsworth's "See, the Conqueror," recognizes the historic event, with its implications for time and eternity:

See, the Conqueror mounts in triumph;
See the King in royal state,
Riding on the clouds, His chariot,
To His heavenly palace gate:
Hark! the choirs of angel voices
Joyful alleluias sing,
And the portals high are lifted
To receive their heavenly King.

Who is this that comes in glory,
With the trump of jubilee?
Lord of battles, God of armies,
He has gained the victory;

135. Clarence Dickinson & Calvin Weiss Laufer, eds (The Hymnal) Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1933.

He who on the cross did suffer,
 He who from the grave arose,
 He has vanquished sin and Satan,
 He by death has spoiled His foes.

Thou hast raised our human nature
 In the clouds to God's right hand;
 There we sit in heavenly places,
 There with Thee in glory stand:
 Jesus reigns, adored by angels,
 Man with God is on the throne;
 Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension
 We by faith behold our own. (Hymn 173)

This writer ventures to say that if the doctrine of the ascension were to be taken from the hymns of the church, virtually every hymn in the book would have to be deleted, for prayers to Christ the Lord, Praise to Christ the Lord, Consecration to Christ the Lord, Trust and Comfort in Christ the Lord, Communion with Christ the Lord, Serving Christ the Lord, at home and in mission fields, Hopes of Heaven through Christ the Lord -- all ideas expressed in the hymns filling the hymnal -- fall in ashes if Christ is not now ascended and living.

In the realm of painting, the Ascension is not as popular a theme as some of the more dramatic Biblical subject matters. such as the crucifixion or the last judgment. Nevertheless some outstanding artists have attempted to capture the meaning of this event. Cynthia Maus (in "Christ and the Fine Arts") has three "ascensions" which she illustrates and comments upon.¹³⁶ Joseph Aubert (1840-1924) has a white-robed Christ surrounded by the eleven apostles, and a small group

¹³⁶ Cynthia Maus, Christ and the Fine Arts, (New York, Harper & Bros.), 1938. pp. 467 - 475.

of more distant worshippers. Miss Maus feels that this is a satisfying picture because it reveals his disciples as a group of disciples who are dedicated and determined to serve the Christ, not as a "haggard, weeping, discouraged 'sheep-without-a-shepherd' group," which is certainly the impression left by Luke.¹³⁷

Gottlieb Peter Biermann's (1758 - 1844) treatment of the subject has simply the figure of Christ ascending, without the band of followers being seen. The hands are spread in a gesture of blessing, and the countenance of the Christ shows the same general tone of benediction, with almost a suggestion of great expectations as He looks downward at His followers, who should receive the promise of the Father after His departure.

The third "ascension" included in Miss Maus' book is a portrayal of the event in wax carving by D. Mastroianna, which combines the thought of his ascension with the scene described in Revelation 7:9-10, 14. It is difficult to make an adequate appraisal of this picture, because it doubtless suffers from the photographic process. Maus sees abounding joy in the disciples of long ago and the present as they come before the Lamb on high.¹³⁸ Perhaps this is correct, yet the writer feels that an expression of fulfilment, and hope-arrived-at is the dominant and significant motif here, though

^{137.} Ibid., p. 470

^{138.} Ibid., p. 475

neither interpretation would do violence to New Testament development of the idea.

Albert Edward Bailey includes but one "ascension" in his "The Gospel and the Fine Arts," that by Fritz von Uhde¹³⁹ (1848-1911). Bailey remarks that there are few satisfactory "ascensions," and it would appear that Bailey has chosen one of the lesser of the few he feels do satisfy. One is tempted to suggest this because of the fact that in this book Bailey categorically denies historic reality to the resurrection, and other events following it, stating flatly that the accounts of the appearances are purely¹⁴⁰ "apocryphal" narrations. Von Uhde, Bailey feels, has conceived of the ascension in human fashion, as "less a revelation of bliss than a realization of infinite loss."¹⁴¹ This writer is not in a position to know whether such a kinship would be acknowledged by Von Uhde were he living.

If Bailey's interpretation of the picture is right, then Luke is wrong. But the picture does reflect a feeling of unity between earth and heaven in the left hand reached down over the worshippers, and the right hand of re-union with the Father in heaven, as elements which impress this viewer. Is it not possible that the picture was meant to show the sense of completion of one phase of Christ's ministry, and His gladness at entering the place of inter-

¹³⁹ Albert Edward Bailey, The Gospel in Art, (Boston, Pilgrim Press) 1946 p. 410

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 410-413

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 404

cession for his own.

J. R. Aitken, in his "Christ and the Men of Art," enumerates, but does not illustrate, many other ascension pictures, such as the sixth century "Ascension" in Saint Sophia's Church.¹⁴² Another sixth century work, "Christ as Pantokrator," ("ruler of all") is in the Church of the Divine Wisdom in Constantinople, typical of an extremely popular theme for the next four hundred years.¹⁴³

Luini (1465?- ?) painted a "Crucifixion" with many episodes from the life of Christ woven into it, among them the Ascension. Ruskin said of this work, "I would give the whole Sistine Chapel for the small upper corner of this, with 'The Infidelity of S. Thomas,' and 'The Ascension.'"¹⁴⁴

Of particular interest to Americans is John La Farge's "Ascension" in the Church of the Ascension, New York City. A "grand fresco" development of this theme, the picture has been called the most important religious painting in the western hemisphere by Joseph Lewis French.¹⁴⁵ The picture is painted on a canvas twenty-six feet wide and twenty feet high, and was completed some sixty years ago. It is truly a magnificent painting filled with hope and adoration, triumph and expectation as it portrays the Christ lifted up surrounded by angelic

¹⁴². J. R. Aitken, The Christ of the Men of Art, (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark), 1915. p. 71

¹⁴³. Ibid., p. 143

¹⁴⁴. Ibid., p. 173

¹⁴⁵. Joseph Lewis French, Christ in Art, (Boston, Colonial Press), 1899. p. 254

hosts, and upward looking, the faithful disciples stand in poised longing, but consecration.

Royal Cortissoz, for many years, until his recent death, an art critic of the New York Herald Tribune, wrote of this picture:

In the presence of the sacred pictures of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we talk of an illusion which we fear has since been lost, and declare that the day for Biblical illustration is gone by. La Farge gives the best possible answer to this pessimistic conclusion. Nobly designed, flooded with color of the deepest splendor and most exquisite delicacy, imbued with the spirituality of a high imagination, his painting puts before you, on the heroic scale which it demands, the scene which marks the culmination of our Christian faith. 146

VIII. SUMMARY

This chapter has sought to describe something of the sustained interest which the doctrine of the Ascended Christ has held in the lives of men for two thousand years, since the event took place. Creed-writers, theologians, poets, painters have each stopped to look at this scene, and have come away to weave the event into the texture of their own lives. Their feelings are shared week in and week out by churchgoers the world over, who find the symbols, paintings, hymns, awakening within them the same responses of gladness, trust and power which the ascended Christ evoked in his circle of apostles and disciples. The noble living of the saints in all the ages has a testimony to the reality of the

146. Royal Cortissoz, "John La Farge," (New York, Houghton Mifflin Co.), 1911. p. 171

Christ, living and ascended. One does not gather figs from thorns.

Cynthia Maus points out that "more poems have been written, more stories told, more pictures painted, and more songs sung about Christ than any other person in human history."¹⁴⁷

Why this perennial, persistent pre-occupation with Christ over these two thousand years? This is the question of the psychologist. The answer is in the Personality of Jesus Christ, whom God raised up on High. Only He is a cause sufficient to explain such behavior.

The next, and last chapter will summarize the evidential importance of the Doctrine of the Ascension of Christ, and seek to draw conclusions of pertinence to contemporary Christianity.

¹⁴⁷. Op. cit. p. 2

CHAPTER FIVE - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I. PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY REVEALS SOURCE OF APOSTOLIC DYNAMIC

The burden of this thesis is that the study of the doctrine of the Ascension, through the instrument of psychology, reveals a disparity between the role this doctrine played in the apostolic church, and that which it plays today.

It has suggested that psychology, the study of behavior, and experience in behaving, is one way in which the doctrine can, and must be strengthened and re-established in contemporary preaching. Psychology deals with the data of human behavior, and finds in that behavior the same laws of cause and effect traceable in the laboratories.

It asks, when it sees an effect, what is the cause which is adequate to produce such an effect. The apostolic circle believed in, preached, and lived in the light of the doctrine of the Ascended Christ, with all that doctrine implies. Was this ground of belief and practice hard, historic reality, or mere imagination run wild?

That it was based upon reality is the only conclusion that seems reasonable. The testimony of the apostles was examined. They said they saw Jesus ascend. Their testimony was seen as credible, because of the manifest seriousness of purpose displayed in their lives. Their testimony was cred-

ible, one feels, because of the correspondence one feels with them in reading the narratives. These men found it hard to believe that Christ should have to die, even though he told them that was redemption's way. They found it hard to believe that he was alive, once they had seen him die on the cross. The stubbornness of this disbelief is seen in Thomas' "I will not believe!" To record this in the writings of the apostolic church is to show what is believable because it is true, it is the feeling any modern would have in the same situation. To have put down stubborn disbelief is not the work of an inventor, but of an accurate historian.

The transformation in belief and behavior that could be observed by Jerusalem's people can only be explained if something adequate to cause that change is presented, and it is simply recorded in the Ascension narrative. It alone can sufficiently answer the "Why" of the Psychologist. It alone suffices to explain the claims which Christ made for himself in the Gospels, and to explain the lofty doctrines of the Epistles.

II. FAITH AND LIFE ENRICHED THEN

The effect which the doctrine of the Ascension had upon the faith and life of the Apostolic Church is electrifying when one thinks of it. The apostles, and the early church, were changed from weak, fearful men to messengers who proclaimed in the very Jerusalem, with its evil rulers, its

outraged religious leadership, its multitudes who shouted "Crucify," the wickedness that these men had done, and the message of his exaltation. It helped them see that gold and silver were not the things that counted any longer, for they gave what they had, the healing strength of God, in the name of Jesus Christ. They stood up under persecutions of the most extreme order with a sense of unruffled calm and self-possession, whether beaten, bruised, forsaken, because they felt that if they suffered with Christ they would also reign with him.

Nor was the change wrought in the disciples and apostles alone. People by the thousands were won to this Christ, and found the same transforming power and joy filling their lives with serenity and trust in spite of the lash or lion. They trusted in him as Lord, as High Priest, as Coming King, doing all things through Christ who strengthened them. They came, in fact, to be called Christians, because they were so much like the One they loved and worshipped.

Such behavior could only be explained if the Ascension were a living reality, a continuing dynamic to these believers. Why then should not the modern give full weight and belief to the event which provoked it, is the question which the science of psychology asks?

III. FAITH AND LIFE MAY BE ENRICHED NOW

This thesis has not been written as a matter of pure

curiosity and pre-occupation with a segment of Christian doctrine which had relevance only for people two thousand years ago. Life is too short for occupying the chair of the religious dilettante, and the world is faced with far too serious problems vital to its very survival, for one to pass his time on meaningless trivia.

It is rather the urging of this writer that the world needs to know that the Christ is not buried somewhere in an unknown tomb, as loud voices of science and humanism proclaim, but that he rose and ascended on high. By going back to the root of the matter in the historical documents, he believes that the word of witnesses on the scene are more to be trusted than his prejudiced contemporaries. Moreover he is persuaded by studying the changed lives of those who witnessed the ascension, that there is a doctrine here on which he may plant his feet with complete assurance because his mind is satisfied by a study of the facts, and his heart responds in love and adoration, for what Christ was to the apostolic church he reveals himself to the latest comer on the stage of history.

Men need to see the historic Christ, and they need to see the Eternal Christ. This is why the contemporary preacher needs to turn back to the New Testament for his own enrichment, and the enrichment of his people. H. B. Swete in urging this study says:

Few persons who examine the second half of the New Testament with the purpose of collecting all that it teaches upon this subject will arise from the task without surprise at the wealth

and variety of these revelations. It is certainly not through any want of Apostolic guidance if the glorified life of our Lord fills a relatively small place in modern preaching and thought. 148

It would appear that unless today's ministers give due place to the Ascension, they are denying to themselves and their people that dynamic which demonstrably made them new creatures in Christ, and effective witnesses to His glory, in the early days of the church.

IV. THE ONLY HOPE THE ASCENDED CHRIST

Upon this serious note this thesis ends. Never has the world seen such a great flow of men and women to the Church of Christ as is being witnessed today. There is today a great sense of wistfulness, of longing, of aspiration, all heightened by the imminent threat of war whose terrors defy imagination, heightened by the degree of corruption and decay permeating the entire social structure of this allegedly "Christian" nation.

One may well ask whether there is not an intimate relationship with the present state of affairs, and the kind of preaching which has presented for several generations the historical Christ, the Jesus of Nazareth, who is called in from week to week to unroll the scroll called the Sermon on the Mount, and then sent back to his niche with Plato and Confucious. If psychology has shown anything, it has shown that the Christ of the Mount is of a piece with the Ascended Christ -- they are inseparable.

The greater question is not, however, whether there is a relationship between the kind of preaching that is heard, and the kind of life that exists up to this moment, but rather from this moment on, What shall be done with Christ? Unless he is proclaimed in all the fulness of His being, the wistfulness, longing and aspirations will be dashed in the lives of men by the barbaric cataclysm of atomic warfare.

Unless men know Him as Lord, it is hardly reasonable to expect anything but corruption, personal and social. Unless Men know Him as High Priest, it is hardly reasonable to expect that sin should do anything but thrust its slaves into despair, Unless men know Him as the Triumphant King, it is hardly reasonable to expect anything but hopelessness for the world of tomorrow.

The Ascension is the door through which holiness, happiness and hope came to the Apostolic Church. Let it be opened wide again today.

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