

## The Leadership of Jesus.

The question of the proper conception of Jesus, and his place in Christianity is one which is of prime interest to many of the men in the Divinity School, and causes not a little thought and discussion. Closely following this there arises another question of no less importance, viz: the proper spirit in which to present Jesus and his teachings to men with whom we may come in contact. What I may say is simply the way the problem presents itself to me. I present it not as an exposition, but rather as an interrogation. All may be considered as one question asked for the express purpose of bringing forth answers.



The rise of the question in my mind dates from a specific event, which, with some hesitation, I relate to you.

A few months ago at the funeral services of a very dear friend, the opportunity came for seeing from another's

point of view, <sup>the conception of Christ.</sup> After the usual exercises,

when all but two or three of the friends had left the house, I found myself in the room where the casket still remained. The father, mother, and a friend were the only ones in the room besides myself.

The mother knelt before the casket and in a simple prayer, addressed ~~fa~~ in fact to God and in fact to Jesus the Christ, besought Jesus to care for her only son upon whom she was looking for the last time.

To her Jesus was the nearby

friend, who would help her and sustain her in trouble, who would care for her son. God was far away, <sup>the transcendent God.</sup> but I could almost see Jesus standing opposite her looking upon the sorrowing mother with compassion and love in his face. He was the friend and source of strength.

For the first time in my life I understood what Jesus Christ means to those who thus believe in him; the nearby friend and helper, showing the compassion and love which belong to the nature of God, He was the interceder between God and man.

<sup>P</sup> I come away from that love asking the question "Can Unitarianism overcome such a faith?" My question went unanswered for many a day, but at length I began to satisfy myself



with my answer with explanations  
 I believe that this particular  
 event simply represents an inherent  
 demand in human nature for  
 a conscious knowledge of a close  
 relationship between God and  
 man. Man feels that he is  
 akin to God, and this sense of  
 relationship demands some  
 adequate expression either in  
 symbol or in thought. I would  
 call this inherent sense of the  
 nearness of God and man, the  
Christ Idea. Either in thought  
 or in symbol this idea must be  
 satisfied.

The general movement of history  
 from a religious point of view  
 is a series of confirmations of  
 this demand in human nature



for the satisfaction of the Christ Idea. It is one constant conflict between the conception of God as Transcendent and the conception of God as imminent. Not only is it shown in specific events as narrated in history, but the general characteristics of Jewish religion indicate it.

In the early history of the Jewish people, we find, as the accounts indicate, a belief that in specific events from time to time God came down to the earth and held council with men. Exodus is full of such traditions. Here the Christ idea is satisfied by a symbolic event. Again in the Old Testament Jewish religion speaks through the prophets, and thus indicates his nearness to man. But during

the third period of Jewish history, God is represented as being displeased with the Jewish people. They consequently feel his aloofness. The transcendent God no longer shows his nearness to man, <sup>by special events</sup> but the Christ idea gives rise to the Messianic hope.

Into the midst of these conditions comes Jesus of Nazareth with his great insight into the needs of the human heart. He was indeed the Messiah, for his doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, the close relationship of between God and man, answered the inherent demand of the Christ idea. But the people were unable to comprehend his teaching in full. They still clung to their



conception of a transcendent God,  
 who could show his closeness  
 intimate relations with ~~God~~ ~~and~~  
 men, only by some specific  
 Revelation. Now in their confusion  
 of these two ideas, 1<sup>st</sup> the transcendent  
 God, and 2<sup>nd</sup> the immanent God  
 they misapprehended the true  
 nature of Jesus' teaching. They  
 knew that his teaching of the Father=  
 God of God satisfied the Christ  
 Idea, but because of Jesus' life,  
 his of service and love, because  
 most fully he lived the life  
 of his own teaching, they, influen-  
 ced by their idea of a transcendent  
 God, looked upon Jesus as a special  
 and peculiar revelation of God.  
 They crowned him with the  
Christ Idea.

Then followed the period in which year by year Jesus became more and more an historic figure. Disputes arose concerning his nature, and centered about the question of a special revelation of ~~a~~ transcendent God on the one hand, and ~~an~~ a natural revelation of an immi-nent God on the other. Out of the confusion of this period in which Jewish, Greek and Oriental ideas were so closely intermingled, we emerge in 325 at the council of Nicæa.

Here the idea of a transcendent God prevailed, the idea of an immanent God is forced into the background, and Jesus, <sup>the word</sup> and his teaching are ~~found~~ lost



Jesus Christ is declared to be  
 nothing less than God himself  
 living upon the earth as a  
 human being. It is the old Jewish  
 idea of a transcendent God again.  
 God had been down to earth, and  
 revealed himself again, but  
 in the form of Jesus Christ. But  
 in the death and resurrection  
 of Jesus, he had returned ~~to~~  
 again to his heaven. <sup>#</sup> Here they  
 were indeed in a dilemma  
 The inherent Christ idea must  
 be satisfied, but Jesus and  
 his teaching of the Fatherhood  
 of God, of an imminent God  
 had been lost in the Christ of  
 doctrine, and the Christ of  
 doctrine was lost in the  
 declaration that Christ and

such a person as the Christ of Dogma is referenced to be. The Christ of Dogma arose to meet the demands and ideas of the Christ idea under a transcendental conception of God. In other words the Christ of Dogma takes this place beside the infallible Church, and the infallible Bible, as symbol words used of to satisfy the Christ idea of the human heart.

Thus far then we have 1<sup>st</sup> that Christ idea, inherent in man, which must be satisfied. 2<sup>nd</sup> An Infinite God, our Father, the God of Love and Justice. 3<sup>rd</sup> Jesus of Nazareth, the man who has realized most fully the true conception of the relation of man to God.



of the relations of man to God  
 Now I believe that any preaching  
 if it is to be successful, if it  
 is satisfy the religious feelings  
 in man, must meet fully  
 and satisfactorily this inherent  
 demand of the Christ Idea, the  
 Either by symbol or by thought  
 we must satisfy this feeling  
 of relationship with God. I cannot  
 see how any church can long be  
 successful and ignore this  
 fact of religious life. It is  
 evident that Unitarians cannot  
 hope to satisfy this demand  
 through Jesus. It seems  
 very clear to me, that if we  
 present what is the logical  
 and rational conception of  
 Jesus of history, we shall  
 fall far short of any adequate

satisfaction of this demand of the Christ idea. As a redeemer of the world, in the sense in which the Christ of Dogma has been presented to people, we cannot with honesty present Jesus. It would be mere playing with words, and such devices are deplorable. The demand of the Christ idea cannot be met by any honest conception of Jesus.

But still I believe that the Unitarian point of view offers by far the most adequate ~~solution~~ satisfaction of this demand. The Christ is but a symbol, of the same nature as the infallible Church, and the infallible Bible. But



in the Unitarian conception of God, God's imminence, we can meet this demand with a real truth, not a truth which rests upon a symbol, but a truth which is vital, and answers to man's inner feelings, and meets the facts of religious life. I believe that this conception of the imminence of God is the teaching of Jesus, God the Father, God of love and justice. This is the one great truth of Unitarianism. Upon this truth and its significance we must dwell continually; upon this truth we must put our emphasis. When we can wake people feel the full meaning of the Fatherhood

of God, God in the soul of man, the close personal relation of God and man, then we shall meet <sup>the demand of the Christ idea</sup> in a way which we need not meet it by symbolic teaching. In short first, foremost and forever, we must preach the Fatherhood of God as the one great truth of all religious life.

When this is accomplished when people come to see the true relationship of God and man, then as a natural and logical outcome they will learn to distinguish between the Christ of Dogma, a symbol <sup>or satisfier</sup> of the Christ-idea, and Jesus of Nazareth, who thought a truth, which satisfies it



in fact. Under the conception of the Fatherhood of God, the Christ of Dogma, no longer has a place in religious teaching, and Jesus of Nazareth will again assume his proper place in the history of the world, as the greatest prophet, the man of greatest spiritual insight.

Under such a conception we will see Jesus, as a man, who ~~was~~ was born and lived and died, in very much the same way as others; as a man who was tempted and struggled against his temptations as we do, but, I think, that every one will say with a greater success; they will see a man of great personality, with

wonderful miracle.

Under these conditions we may speak of the Leadership of Jesus. He is our leader because he saw the great truth of the Fatherhood of God, of the miniseries of God. He is our leader because in him we see a man who comprehended the social, moral and political conditions of his time, who crystallized the thoughts of his age, and made his own great contribution. He is our leader ~~to~~ because he formulated a truth which every century of history is confirming. He is our leader because he lived and in accordance with the divine law of love to God, and love to man.



As our leader we look to  
 him for guidance, but that  
 guidance is not to be found  
 in a specific set of laws, not  
 in specific directives, not in  
 specific modes of action under  
 special circumstances, but in  
 the spirit of his life. Behind  
 his doings and sayings, behind  
 the traditions of his doings and  
 sayings, there is a man whose  
 point of view in life, whose  
 attitude towards life, whose  
 spirit in living, stands out  
 like a beacon light upon a rocky  
 coast. That is the Jesus we  
 want to find, and that is  
 the Jesus we want to present  
 to the world as our leader.



Read before the Harvard  
Militarism Club meeting  
at the home of Mrs. Liffamy  
Feb. 19 1903.