

between the word and faith, between the "once-for-all" and the "now" of its gospel.

As the pilgrim church moves through history each moment is for it the "now" in which all salvation is concentrated, and all that has to be saved is centered. There are the new sins, the new crimes, not only of individuals but of cities and nations, and not only of nations, but of the people of God: from the sack of Rome to the Nuremberg war crimes, the Sicilian vespers to the massacre of Polish soldiers at Katyn, the Crusades to Hiroshima, and added to all these, the vast tale of unrecorded wrongs, unknown to men but all marked down by God from the blood of Abel to the last cry of the poor man, the widow, and the fatherless. And this is how it will go on, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, till the last syllable of recorded time. And against each moment of it, what is there but the little phrase—the scandalon—*per Jesum Christum Dominum Nostrum*, which yet is the fulcrum of the universe, for it is not divine power, or even divine authority, but divine love which moves the sun and the other stars, infinite and boundless compassion. And we men of the church, this Ship of Fools, this Noah's Ark? Our only virtue is that we know where to go, we know where to turn, we know what we have to say. And whether we sing it, as it is indeed worthy to be sung, by Bach and Beethoven or the atheist Janicek—or say it with our own poor, lisping, stammering tongues, this is the heart of it all, this the availing prayer.

"O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us."

9

CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY

The reader has the right to ask a concluding question. It is the same question many people have voiced with regard to the Institute at which these papers were read and discussed. That question is: Did you come to any conclusions? Is there any agreement as to what is the Christian claim regarding the finality of Jesus Christ?

One would hardly expect total consensus from a group of working theologians. Generally, they are persons characterized by probing, creative minds. Most of them are teachers accustomed to the responsibility of exposing the student to many sides of every problem. Therefore, a tight agreement on any doctrine of the church among such a group would not only be a surprise, it would deserve to be suspect.

The problem of stating the claims regarding Christ is not, however, to be explained by the variant characteristics of theological professors. The whole history of doctrine is evidence enough of the inherent difficulties involved in defining and stating the nature of the claims for Christ.

There is, however, one statement of consensus which can be made with confidence. *Christ is crucial for Christianity*. However differently the definitions are made and debated, parties involved do agree that Christianity must take its definition from the nature of Christ himself. For this religion Christ is

final. Whatever he was or is, is what the religion about him becomes.

The diversity of opinion about Jesus Christ is not found only among theologians, but is just as diverse among lay Christians. It would be enlightening, perhaps shocking, for any local church pastor to conduct an institute among the lay members of his congregation on the finality of Jesus Christ. They have at some time or other in their lives answered affirmatively the question put to them in baptism or confirmation: "Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Papers written on what this means to them would quite possibly reveal a wider spectrum than found even among professional theologians.

The modern churchman lives in the modern world. Impulses which figure into the formation of his attitudes and opinions come to him largely from a nonchurch context. Whether this is good or bad could be a subject for extensive debate, but need not be so here. That it is a fact will scarcely be questioned.

Whatever the mood of other generations may have been, our present one is not one naturally congenial to the traditional claims for Christ made by his church. The contemporary mind values highly the nondogmatic stance. It is suspicious of any and all dogmatisms. This results, understandably, from commitments to freedom of thought and expression, from a liberal spirit which makes large room for tolerance of persons who hold opposing views, and from the pluralism of modern society. It also is characteristic of a man who avoids individual involvement and commitment. If the pursuit of truth can be kept an open-ended process, with heavy emphasis on the virtue of objectivity, a person may avoid the agony of choice and the responsibilities of personal commitment.

Western man at the present time expresses himself in much the same manner non-Christian religions state some of their

beliefs. The other religions have little attraction for him as a substitute for his own cultural type of Christianity, largely because they, too, carry with them a culture. The cultural accretions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and others are still so foreign to Western man that he is not really a candidate for conversion. He does, however, find it easier often to agree with them than with the claims of Christianity.

When Dr. Ratanasara characterizes Siddhartha Gautama he does it in words congenial to many Methodist laymen. "At no time did the founder of this system of thought expect his followers to regard him as a divine being. He never asked his disciples to believe anything he said without appealing to their reason. His attitude to knowledge was absolutely liberal. Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, respect for other peoples' views, and tolerance of other systems of thought, were his most outstanding features." Many church school teachers would prefer that attitude to Jesus' statement, "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Sikhism was born in the fifteenth century but its proponents sound completely modern when stating, as Mrs. Wylam does, "The Guru maintained that God can reveal himself to man through all religions. One of the fundamental precepts of the Sikh religion is tolerance and respect for all other faiths, even where there is disagreement on details of belief. . . . Whether man receives this revelation of God depends on his own efforts. . . . Mankind continues now, to be as diverse as he was in the past, and, although there is a certain merging of cultures and races in the modern world, it is not likely that all mankind will ever come under the spiritual sway of one special religion. Nor would this be a desirable state of affairs. . . . This being so, there is no justification for any one religious group to claim that theirs is the only true way to salvation and that it is only by following their particular master that all mankind can be saved."

Even pastors may find themselves wanting to believe that this is what Paul meant when he said, "In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness" (Acts 14:16).

Christianity seems to be faced with an anomalous situation. Large numbers of persons in the Christian church find themselves more in agreement with certain basic positions of the non-Christian religions than with the claims of their own faith. This seems to have resulted from the high degree of influence of the modern secular mind on the mind of the churchman. If this be a correct analysis, it means that Western secularism and Eastern religions are in closer agreement with each other than either is with traditional Christianity.

Dr. Will Herberg rightly insisted that his chapter on the Jew and the Christian claim for Christ not be grouped with Buddhism and Sikhism as a "counter-claim." He makes the claim that "Judaism and Christianity . . . represent one faith expressed in two religions—Judaism facing inward to the Jews, and Christianity facing outward to the gentiles. . . . The Jew sees Jesus as emerging from Israel and going forth; he sees him from the rear, as it were. The Christian, on the other hand, precisely because he is a Christian, will see Christ as coming toward him."

The theological task in our time gives a large place to the attempt to clarify the biblical claims regarding Christ. The primary question is to try to determine whether they reflect Jesus' self-understanding or the church's experience of him. Dr. Niles in examining the biblical testimony points out that the Christian Scriptures differ from the claims of all other faiths in that the coordinates within which the graph of the Christian faith is placed differ from the coordinates of other systems of belief. "The very act of faith is different." Christians believe in a different way. This must be understood before one moves

into the biblical claims. Miss Hooker makes her case for believing that in the "Son of Man" concept we are closest to Jesus' own self-understanding, though she readily admits that this view has recently come under the strongest kind of attack.

The Reverend David Jenkins has clearly in mind the new dimensions which in a space age affect man's thinking about Jesus Christ. "We need, and have the opportunity for, a new understanding of the cosmic significance of Jesus which will match our modern understanding of the cosmos. Unless this understanding of Jesus and the modern understanding of the cosmos are brought together, we shall be failing in preaching the gospel for our age, and we shall also be leaving humanity to be swamped in the apparent vastness and indifference of that cosmos as we are now coming to understand it." It is possible to do this, he says, by using the word and wisdom language of scripture and the process language of philosophy.

Though it is essential that the church constantly clarify its understanding of the scriptural claims, it must then take cognizance of the fact that these claims cannot be communicated to modern man as scriptural claims. For this man quite probably does not recognize the authority of Scripture as the church itself does.

If the biblical claim about Jesus is accepted as valid by the true Christian believer, and if he acknowledges an obligation to communicate this claim to those who do not accept it, how can such a claim be stated so as to be convincing to the contemporary mind? The answer to this question would appear to be significant to the task of evangelism, the task of missions, the task of apologetics, the task of social witness, the task of theological education, and, of course, to the whole task of the local congregation and the Christian man.

The problem of communication does not begin, however,

with the hearer, but with the proclaimer. An uncertainty in the initial witness will be amplified into confusion when it reaches the world outside the church. It is fundamentally, psychologically, sound that since the church defines itself as Christian, uncertainty about Christ will seriously distort, if not destroy, its message. The alternative is not rigid dogmatism. Intolerance is a sure sign of uncertainty; it does not convey the message to the unbeliever. There is a false holding of truth which results in failure to communicate. This falseness may be either the shallow tolerance which refuses to define Christ clearly or the strident dogmatism which loses the essential Christ in statements about him which lack his Spirit. The confidence of a believing church should arise out of knowing Christ in an essential definition of his nature which reveals his true Spirit.

The claim is here being made that the church must know in what sense Jesus Christ is final. Such a claim must involve the following elements:

1. To know Jesus Christ is to know God in a way not available in any other revelation.
2. What is available to be known in Jesus is all that man needs to know about God.
3. The whole event of Jesus Christ defines essential human nature. Any man who reaches the true goal of human existence will have done so by approximating the humanity of Jesus.
4. The above claims are not only made valid, but made available to all men by the unique aliveness of Jesus Christ in man's experience.
5. Man's history is finally judged by its approximation to the nature of God whose nature is revealed in Jesus Christ.

If these be accepted as essential elements of the definition of Christ's finality, their clarity need not be surrendered because of the acknowledged fact that endless debates flow out of them.

These definitions of Christ can be held at a primary level, and the definitions of the definitions must be held at a secondary level where the debates will always be needed. Is it valid, therefore, to suggest that there is a distinction between "definitions of Christ" and "definitions of the definitions"?

For example, element 1 and element 3 were the issues which produced Nicaea and Chalcedon. "Christian thinkers must necessarily obey the restless impulse to seek words and phrases which will express with all possible clarity what the church has always known to be true of Jesus Christ: the singularity of his person and the comprehensiveness of his saving life," says J. Robert Nelson. The Christian will have difficulty in any generation choosing precise words in trying to explicate the manner in which God could be three persons or the manner in which Jesus could be man and God. The difficulty at this level, however, must not cloud the Christian's primary definition that to know Jesus Christ is to know God and essential human nature.

Vigorous debate always attends the statement of element 4, that the claims are validated and made available by the aliveness of Jesus. This debate has never been more vigorous than in our present generation.

This debate at the level of the definition of this definition is seen clearly in the preceding chapters. The vigor of it cannot be discerned from these pages, but can only be known to those who were present when the personalities of David Jenkins and Carl Michalson met. The basis of the gospel, says Jenkins, "lies in the actual life and death of Jesus understood against the Jewish expectations of God emerging from the experience of their history—with the defining dimension of this understanding provided by the discovery of the disciples that the crucified servant of the kingdom of God was in fact powerfully alive. If the disciples' discovery that Jesus was alive as a continuing

power and presence central to their relationship with God was not a real discovery of an objective fact but only an attitude of theirs, an interpretation which they put upon the facts, then we have no grounds for the further language about Jesus. In other words, the question of the objectivity and reality of the resurrection of Jesus is central to the whole logic of talking about Jesus. This is what the New Testament itself would lead us to expect. The believers who made the New Testament, or whose attitude is reflected in the New Testament, did not believe that they were simply telling a story about the world, man, and God with Jesus as a character in that story. The story they felt able to tell depended on the objective reality of the Resurrection. . . . It does violence to the whole logic of the New Testament use of mythology to give an account of the Christian faith which seeks to represent the Resurrection as simply part and, indeed, a symbolic and mythological part of the Christian story, i.e., of the attitude which Christians adopt to the world and of the story which they tell to represent that attitude. It may be the case that the Resurrection is and can only be myth and symbol. But in that case Christianity is untrue."

The contradiction which Dr. Michalson offered to this definition is based on his distinction between nature and history. "World' in the New Testament, then, is not a quasi-scientific construct, a cosmographic arena upon which history plays out its game. World is a dominantly historical reality, a matrix of relationships into which, when one is fitted, one derives the meaning of one's own existence. Yet, world is not a space which preexists one's participation in it." The fact of the Resurrection is in man's history, that is, in man's experience of it, and not in nature, in objectivity apart from the experience of it.

When the members of the Institute asked the two men to join in further discussion of their positions, Jenkins declared

there was no way in which they could talk to each other. Language was being so misused by Michalson so as to make conversation impossible between them. They did, however, delight the members with an unforgettable afternoon. As radical as the clash appears between the two positions, is it not a clash at the level of a definition of a definition, rather than at the primary level of the definition of Christ? Both men were insisting, as the church must always insist, that claims about Christ are not only validated but made available to all men by the unique *aliveness* of Jesus Christ in man's experience.

There is a definite finality of Christ without which Christianity is not Christian. If the church surrenders that, it surrenders everything. It may carry on what it calls evangelism, mission, and witness, but none of them will communicate to the party of the second part, because the word has been lost by the party of the first part.

The receiver of the communication must, however, be as clearly understood as the proclamation itself. Before we speak we must listen. We must listen, as has been said, to the word spoken in Christ, but we must also listen to the word spoken by man out of Christ.

At first he will insist that he no longer hears the word spoken by the church because it is carried in language no longer in his vocabulary. Once he objected to theological words because they were big and unfamiliar, but more recently he has delighted in being taught polysyllabic words by the scientist. He complained that the expressions of the gospel were not at home in his daily world, but now he has himself become a specialist in his vocation so that he uses words at the office which are not understood at home by his own family.

The task of restatement is a legitimate demand on the modern church, but the objections of the secular man to the language of the gospel may be deeper than he himself knows or

admits. Dr. Nelson says, "Probably few theologians would now maintain that the Chalcedonian decree *invariata* stands as an adequate statement of Christology. . . . But when there is a call to reject or revise the words and concepts of Chalcedon, we must ask whether the reality to which these refer is also being rejected or revised." Dr. John Cobb takes up the challenge to state the Christian claims about Christ in language modern man may find acceptable as a vehicle of truth. "From the very beginning Christians have affirmed that God was present to and in Jesus in a preeminent way. Furthermore, Christians have believed that this presence of God to and in Jesus involved the distinctive initiative of God and was not simply a function of the peculiar virtue of this man. The theological problems to which this conviction has given rise are notorious." The duality which represents the alternate formulas was resolved in an Alexandrine victory over the Antiochenes. Dr. Cobb regards this as unfortunate and explains the loss as a fault of language, at least in part. "They lost out in part because they had available to them no conceptuality for explaining how God could at his own initiative be genuinely present to and in a man without displacing some element in the personal humanity of that man." Then, he proposes his solution for the same problem which the church has in confronting the modern world. "The philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead offers us at this point new possibilities that have not yet been sufficiently explored." He, therefore, devotes his chapter to an attempt to indicate "how from a Whiteheadian perspective a Christian can affirm the special presence of God to and in a man without reducing the man's full personal responsible humanity on the one hand or minimizing the divine initiative on the other."

This is a legitimate enterprise. There may be other vehicles acceptable to the men of our time which can be enlisted in the effort to speak the word convincingly to them. Here again we

must be aware of the distinction between the primary definition of Christ's finality and the secondary level of the definition of the definitions. To disagree about Whitehead is not the same as disagreeing about Jesus.

It was suggested earlier that the insistence of modern man that the language of the church is incomprehensible may not point only to a fault in the language of the church but in the language of secular man. This ought not be said often, lest it destroy our ability to listen, but it must be said. Otherwise, we may hear his words and think we have satisfied the need by confessing a guilt consciousness for our failure. What is called for is a deeper hearing until we know that man is saying something about man.

When we are able to engage in this deeper hearing, we should rejoice, for we are then at the point of the secular confirmation of the finality of Christ.

The ultimate question for an individual is not the objectivity of truth nor the objectivity of the world, including other individuals. These objectivities may be real, and they are accepted as real by most men. The ultimate truth for an individual is the truth which is real in his experience. Nothing is true for me unless it is true for me. If Jesus Christ is final for me, this finality must be known to me in my own experience.

The arena of truth is, therefore, in the nature of man. Whatever an individual believes will make him a true human being is what he accepts as true. Individuals are known by us all to define truth differently, to accept sometimes opposing propositions as true. Each one, however, accepts what he does accept, for the same reason another one accepts the opposite. Each person somehow is convinced that what he accepts as truth is that which will fulfill his nature.

The way in which an individual is saved from solipsism is to be bombarded by claims to acceptance from sources outside

himself. If he chooses to believe tables are unreal, he will bump into tables which challenge his prior acceptance. The world is an other-complex which contends for entry into the world of the self-experience as truth. Because of this no man can ignore the claims other existences make on behalf of themselves. A claim made by the other-complex must be assessed by the self-experience.

One of the facts of life in this world is the existence in its history and in its present moment of the claim made with regard to Jesus of Nazareth. There it is. The factuality of the claim is as real as a table.

The mission of the Christian church is to see that no man is ever allowed to live and complete his search for truth without being confronted by this factuality. Any man's system of acceptable truth is incomplete and unsafe, and by that much untrue, if it has been accepted without being apprised of the existence of the claim for the finality of Jesus Christ.

The severest kind of judgment of God may be expected on his church at any point where it is giving itself to activities which do not intentionally go to the point of secularity in every man and confront his self-experience with the finality-definition of Jesus Christ which is a part of the other-complex.

The reason why the church may perform this mission in confidence is that the claim fits the need. Man needs to become true man. Jesus Christ is true man. The finality of Christ is that he is Final Man. He is what every man was meant to be, and what man in his true humanity wants to be. The "godness" in Jesus is unique in that he not only, like every man, is a product of the creative hand of God, but he is the creative hand of God "fleshed out" so that it can now reach into humanity and make it true.

When any individual experiences this he knows the end, that is, the meaning of all history, universal and cosmic. The

end has come into the present. The church has a language which is adequate to carry the freight laid on it by the "finished work of Christ." That language, as Dr. Rupp reminds us, is the word and the sacraments. These are not given to the church to be treasured in their outmoded accretions. They are given because not only are they adequate, which the "slang" of man isn't, but because they are renewable.

Rupert Davies of Bristol, who led the Bible studies in Colossians, also summed up the conference. His closing words amply sum up this volume:

It is clear that we have reached no finality about the finality of Christ; we are still puzzled by the problems with which we came to Oxford. But there is no disposition among us to detract from the majesty of Christ; he stands before us as redeemer and saviour, of us and of all mankind, as Lord and judge; as the meaning of history, and the agent of God in creation, as the perfection of human life and the central figure of the coming consummation. We do not clearly know how to express our convictions. We are discontented with the categories of Chalcedon, but not much less discontented with other, more recently formulated, terms. Yet our abiding concern is to set Christ forth as Lord as truly and effectively as the Church has ever done throughout its history; and we are therefore the more committed, because we have been here together and here have worked together to find the way in which this can be done, the *thought-forms* in which we can make it clear to ourselves and to others, the *language* which we can use, and the worship which we can offer.