

The Lord Jesus Christ

SWAMI SUPARNANANDA

His life is full of sweetness, tenderness, tragedy, and pathos. It is spiritually inspiring, inviting, and elevating. We must try to understand this great life of Jesus with a critical mind.

Let us turn to philosophy for a moment. The one who climbs the path step by step is not a mere person, but the soul. It is through this journey that superhuman powers manifest themselves in the vessel of the human being. This is the very core of *Sanātana Dharma*. In Christian theology there is, indeed, the idea of the individual soul, but it has no *chit-parināma* (no conscious ending). In the Christian world, the soul has no past, though it is said to have an infinite future. How strange this idea is! Within the span of a single birth, both 'Plato and the Hottentot'—that is, the sage and the savage—are deemed equal and assumed to have given up all their cravings for life. Is such a thing possible for Self-knowledge?

In the Semitic religions only a single birth is recognized; there is no rebirth. Even the Lord Jesus had no previous human birth. At least there is no reference to that. Then, how far can a man advance in one life? Is that not too great a demand? The claim that the fullness of eternal life can be attained in this one fleeting life is a serious flaw of such a doctrine. It is precisely this aspect of the Christian faith that has drawn the criticism of Christian intellectuals.

The real truth is this: in the human vessel the pure soul finds itself fallen. Now

it must rise again through its own efforts. This is the meaning of life. Such is the view of *Sanātana Dharma*, as taught in the Vedas, and it is entirely reasonable. But how then did the soul's past become empty, and how can all be equal in that emptiness? Can anything be born out of nothing? Will science ever accept that? If all began from the same void, then how did differences suddenly arise? Who is responsible for the great disparities that followed? If everyone's past were the same, then, by the law of cause and effect, the present should also be the same. Then who is to blame for the vast inequalities among men in this world? Are they themselves responsible? But there is no such explanation. And yet it is claimed: for this, one will suffer eternal hell; for that, another will enjoy eternal heaven! What kind of judgement is this? Such verdicts have come from the Christian or Semitic world. They admit of no answer, nor are questions allowed—asking would itself be heresy.

The truth is that inequality existed in the past, and therefore it is seen in the present. This must be admitted. The future too will be diverse. Thus, from a beginningless past to an endless future, through all this variety unfold your destiny and mine. It is a long *tapasyā* of the indwelling Lord. Rising from purity to greater purity through righteous living, and at last attaining stability in eternal life—this is the Vedantic truth about the journey of the soul, now honoured and celebrated across the world, in every home and land. The credit for this goes to

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Swami Vivekananda. As he himself once said: 'Had I lived in Palestine, in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears, but with my heart's blood.' To Swamiji, Jesus preached this graded development in purity as evident in Advaita Vedanta.

We bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. For the sake of humanity He silently endured unbearable torment. He gave His life for the good of others. He placed complete faith in the truth of Divinity. Carrying His own Cross, symbolic of the burden of the world, He walked to the place of execution. In the name of justice, a mock trial was staged. A band of cowards crucified this great soul, revealing the extremity of barbarism, and killed Him. The body fell lifeless, but through the awakening of the eternal soul, it rose again. This resurrection dispelled the sorrow of death, and led mankind to the immortal realm. In Jesus' teaching, there is no death—the immortal soul has been resurrected. Even when the body perishes, the soul abides.

Yet how did the Christian world come to oppose Vedanta? That is a subject for research. Which of the Gospel writers

(among the four) is responsible for this? In truth, it seems to us that the doctrine of sin, and along with it, the doctrine of hell and heaven, were later additions by the disciples; in the teachings of Christ Himself there is no contradiction, no scope for doubt. He is the immortal person. The Bible should be read in the light of Swamiji's Vedanta. His 'Sermon on the Mount' bears witness to this. To Christ's own followers, Swami Vivekananda appeared almost as Jesus reborn—revealing the majesty, expansiveness and the power of human greatness, and giving reassurance to the afflicted world.

The death of Jesus, the man is true, and equally true is the resurrection of the Spirit. Death is but the destruction of the body; it leads the way toward eternal life. To Jesus, we, therefore, pray with humility: Forgive us, Lord; we do not merely seek pardon. For pardon means the washing away of sin—a process that will purify, refine, and pacify us. He gave His life so that we might live. He rose again to strengthen the faith of the doubter. All of this was to lead man toward the divine path. In every vein of His being flowed the current of compassion for the welfare of humankind. ■

* Swami Suparnanandaji is the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Kolkata.

The Perfect never becomes imperfect. It is in the darkness, but is not affected by the darkness. God's mercy goes to all, but is not affected by their wickedness. The sun is not affected by any disease of our eyes which may make us see it distorted. In the twenty-ninth verse, "taketh away the sin of the world" means that Christ would show us the way to become perfect. God became Christ to show man his true nature, that we too are God. We are human coverings over the Divine; but as the divine Man, Christ and we are one.

The Trinitarian Christ is elevated above us; the Unitarian Christ is merely a moral man; neither can help us. The Christ who is the Incarnation of God, who has not forgotten His divinity, that Christ can help us, in Him there is no imperfection.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, pp. 3-4