

5-1982

## The Present Christ

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### Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul, "The Present Christ" (1982). *Faculty Publications - George Fox School of Theology*. 268.  
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# THE PRESENT CHRIST

BY PAUL ANDERSON

**I**NTO the arena of everyday life the Living Christ invades. Loving, wooing, calling us to himself, He pursues us each—as the Lover seeks His beloved—until all our attempts to find meaning, love, peace, culminate in our being found by Him.

Not knowing who or what it was that sought us, we often have ignored the tender voice of the divine Lover. But sorrier still are the times we fled . . . not because we didn't recognize His voice, but because we heard it all too clearly.

Incessantly tracked by the Hound of Heaven, we fled that voice, which "beat more instant than the feet."<sup>1</sup> We fled Him "down the nights and down the days,"<sup>2</sup> hoping that some way, somehow, the piercing sound of His call would cease. Yet out of His mercy He withholds our desire, meeting instead our deeper need. For God has made us for himself, and our souls remain restless until they rest in Him.<sup>3</sup>

He calls to us in the solitude; yet even amid the fevered rush of life's traffic, His calling persists. It may be dulled by the inward and outward turmoil of our lives, but it is never overcome. It may be ignored because we prefer to remain in darkness rather than to come into the Light, but it is never extinguished. Despite the clamoring of inward "oughts" and outward "musts," the one voice beyond the many breaks through with awesome clarity. It tells us we are loved; for *He calls us each by name*.

Enveloped in the rich warmth of the divine Lover's Presence, we begin to experience wholeness such as we had never known before. The realization that we are loved enables us to lift our defenses and ex-

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amine our lives. Standing open before God, we no longer fear confessing our failures and our heartaches. As we look honestly at ourselves we become aware of our need before God and Christ's invitation to take our pain begins to come alive in a marvelous new way.



I experienced an analogy to this process several years ago when I visited an elderly gentleman whose wife had died the previous evening. As we shared together, tears began to well up in one eye, and then the other. He began to weep softly, and a flurry of "things to say" rushed through my mind—as though that were the only way to help. At the time, however, words did not seem appropriate. As I took his hand I said, "Friend, I'm not going to say anything for the next few moments. Just let me take your pain."

During the following moments I pictured the closeness this couple had shared over the last half century. I focused on the joy and pain, mingled together until his loss and agony became a part of me. I'm not sure what happened during the silence, but after a few moments I noticed that his breathing became easier and tears no longer flowed. The quiet was broken by a sigh and a statement, "You know, I think it's beginning to help. Thank you . . . thank you."

There I began to see a new, clear picture of how *God enfolds us with His love* and brings healing into our lives. As I drove home, the image came so clearly of the Present Christ, with hand outstretched, saying, "Friend, let Me take your pain. Let Me enfold you with My Love and bring you a healing power beyond your own." And this hand is reaching out to each of us, now.

As we learn to clasp the outstretched hand of our Lord, we find that the debilitating disappointments of life lose their grip on us. For He was wounded to

receive our injuries. He became failure to erase our failings. It was He who bore our sorrows in His body on the tree. And by His stripes *we are healed*.



The frozen nightmares of the past melt before the One who declared to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven."

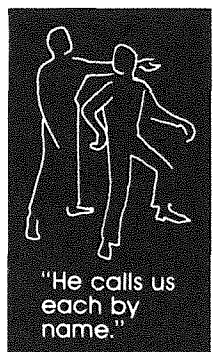
The exhausting anxieties of today are eased by the One who invited the woman at the well, saying, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give shall never thirst."

The dread uncertainties of the future are overcome by the One who proclaimed to the confessing thief on the cross, "Today you shall be with me in paradise."

The Present Christ calls us each by name; He enfolds us with His love; and then, *He sends us out to serve*. As our pain is dealt with, at last we are freed to lift our eyes beyond ourselves and to focus on the needs of those around us. No longer do we find our energies consumed in the task of protecting our easily threatened pride. We are given the radical privilege of participating in the ministry of our Lord. We become agents of the very grace and reconciliation that we ourselves have received.

Having chosen to listen for His loving voice and having chosen to take His hand in faith, another choice yet remains. It is the choice between the two basins: the basin of the palace, and the basin of the upper room.

The difference between these two basins is basically the difference between self-preservation and servanthood. Although Pilate sought to preserve his innocence by washing his hands and denying his debt, he could not. Yet this truth remains: They that try to preserve their lives lose them, while they that find life, find it by laying down their lives for others. This was illustrated by our Lord. At the last supper He stooped beside each of the Twelve and




tenderly washed their feet. The message behind this cleansing was far more important than the act itself. Jesus didn't just leave His disciples with the commandment to love people—He demonstrated it by becoming their Servant.

In a world characterized by selfishness, the way of our Lord poses a dramatic contrast. The most striking statement ever uttered is "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." The Present Christ invites us each to follow His example, and through His Spirit we are given the ability to do so. It is then that our lives become healing love for others.

As we learn to abide in Christ and He in us, we find that all things become new. On one hand, nothing matters—in comparison to His Presence. On the other hand, everything matters because of His love. By faith we receive His grace; and yet it is by His grace that we are enabled to be faithful to the calling at hand.

The Living Christ confronts us each, saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." His call is clear, yet He awaits our invitation before entering in. When you hear His voice, do not hesitate in your response. Let all your attempts to find truth be fulfilled by opening your heart to

the One who *is* Truth. Take heart, friend, for you would not have sought Him had you not already found Him.<sup>4</sup>

He is present, and He is Love. Let the communion begin. 

<sup>1</sup>From the first few lines of Francis Thompson's poem, *The Hound of Heaven*.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>An adaptation of St. Augustine's *Confessions* (Book 1, Chapter 1), "Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." (Translated by J. G. Pilkington, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980.)

<sup>4</sup>From Pascal's *Pensees* #552. The exact quotation is, "Console thyself, thou wouldst not seek Me if thou hadst not found Me." (Translated by W. F. Trotter, New York, 1958.)