



CRANMER THEOLOGICAL HOUSE UPDATE

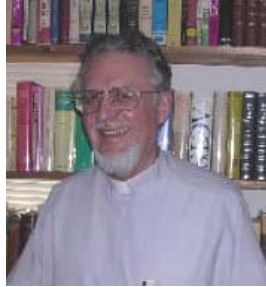
*A Reformed Episcopal
School of Ministry*

www.cranmerhouse.org

January 2010

From the Dean's Desk CTH Status Report

We are beginning a new calendar year at CTH, and we are half way through our 16th year! Though our growth is not exponential, we continue to grow; we praise the Lord for that. A large ACNA parish has opened its doors to us to allow us to meet there free, which is an answer to prayer. Moreover, we are beginning our Lay Institute class again. Dr. Crenshaw will teach Christology to lay people at another ACNA parish beginning January 7th for six sessions, two hours each session. Please pray for this to be profitable for all.



You may hear an audio preview of the course at <http://www.sfrec.recdss.org/ChristLayInstitute.mp3> (about five minutes).

The second quarter (Jan-Mar) courses are:

- *Pastoral Administration* (The Venerable James Payne)
- *Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Dr. Crenshaw)

The third quarter (Apr-Jun) courses are:

- *Apologetics* (The Very Rev. Frank Levi)
- *Medieval Church History* (The Ven. James Payne)

Requests

Please consider a gift to Cranmer House to help us in this time of lesser giving due to the economy. Also, pray for:

- A building in The Woodlands for the seminary
- New students, especially for the Deaconess Studies program
- Our Lay Institute program that is designed to reach out to other churches in our area
- Traveling mercies for our professors and students

Another Way to Donate that Costs You Nothing!

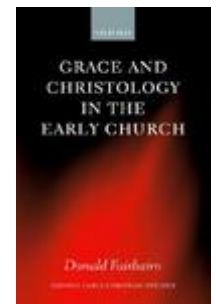
Would you like to donate to CTH while you shop online? The next time you need to buy anything from Amazon.com, start at the DMA WOC website (www.dmawomen.org), and click on the Amazon Associate link in the left navigation bar. Anything you buy from the Amazon online store during the next 24 hours after you click will return a percentage to CTH. The transaction does not raise the price of your purchase, but it does benefit the seminary. What could be better than that?

CTH Parish Visits

Please consider scheduling one of our professors to visit your parish and present the needs of Cranmer House. We have always found these visits profitable for your parish and fun for all!

Book Reviews

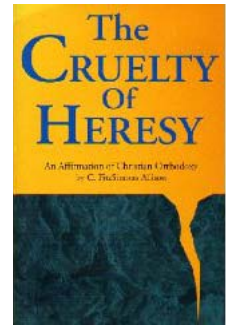
Grace and Christology in the Early Church is a technical work, another Oxford Early Christian Study, by scholar Donald Fairbairn, who is Professor of Historical Theology at Erskine Theological Seminary, South Carolina. Erskine is a seminary of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), where I served for some years in the past. He demonstrates from the fathers that one main concern they had in guarding the unique personhood of Christ as God and Man in one person was that otherwise there is no grace from God to save us. In other words, they had concerns over the person of Christ to preserve the work of Christ. To put this another way, Dr. Fairbairn demonstrates that the Chalcedonian statement of 451 A.D. was not just imperialism forced on the Church by Constantine but that it was the faith of the Church with concerns for our redemption. The au-



thor's knowledge of theology, the early fathers, and their languages is breathtaking. It is not inexpensive but worth every penny.

For laypeople, here is another gem. C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy*, a short paperback that is inexpensive. Bp. Allison, retired Bishop of South Carolina of The Episcopal Church, is a very conservative man who loves the Lord. This is designed to give laypeople an overview of the person of Christ, His importance, the old heresies that are still with us,

and how cruel it is to promote them. It was probably a not-so-subtle reminder to his own denomination that they distort the person of Christ to their own peril and to the peril of those to whom they minister. Pastors, this would be a good study to use with your people.



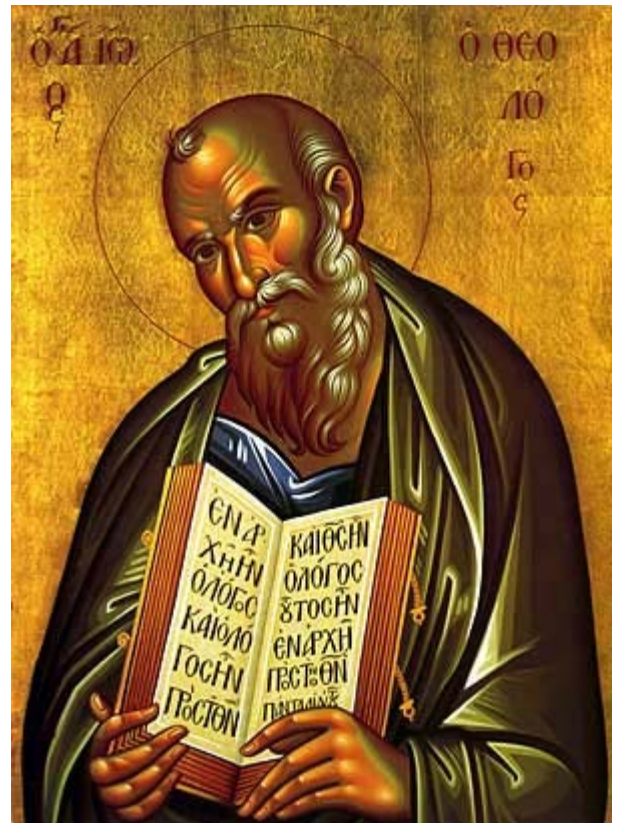
The Very Rev Dr Curtis I. Crenshaw, Th.D. Ω

The Feast of St. John the Evangelist God Invested

(1 John 1:1-2)

The Rev. Mr. Jonathan O. Trebilco, M.Div.

A young man sat in a wooden boat mending broken fishing nets that had torn in the previous day's catch. Just a few feet away from him sat his brother, also busily engaged in the same activity, and close by was the brothers' father, directing his few employees for the day's business. They were fishermen; it was a family business. It probably was not a large operation, but the father, whose name was Zebedee, had his two sons James and John with him to work in, and one day, he supposed, to inherit the family business and carry on the tradition as he had done for his father before him. As the busy men looked up from their nets, they saw three figures walking down the shore of the lake towards them. The Figure in the center of the group, was a man in his early thirties, and the men on either side were fishermen whom the Zebedee family knew from their dealings on the shores of the lake of Galilee. The three figures drew close to the fishermen, and the young man in the center walked forward to greet them. He asked to speak to the two brothers James and John. We don't know all the words He spoke, but from the result, we know that He communicated with authority, for it was Jesus Who spoke. Jesus *summoned* James and John to join Him in His mission. He called them to be His disciples, He commissioned them to be His Apostles, meaning that they were ordained as official witnesses of His life, death, and resurrection, and sent into the world to proclaim Him. The young John, a



fisherman following in the footsteps of his father, found that day his life interrupted, his life interrupted by the One Who Himself spoke the words of eternal life. And John became an eyewitness to the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Son of God made flesh, of God manifested.

Today we commemorate the life and ministry of that Apostle of Christ, St. John the Evangelist. Why do we do this? Because through the eyewitness testimony of St. John we encounter the words and actions and Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would like to direct your attention to John's words as they were read this morning in our Epistle Lesson, 1 John 1 verses 1-2:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life was with the Father and was manifested to us.

The Apostle John was an eyewitness of something, and he was commissioned to bear witness to the world concerning this something, or more accurately, this Someone. Notice what he says. He says that Life, *the* Life which was from the beginning, the Life that is eternal, is a Person, and this Person came into the realm of visibility. God was manifested. God revealed Himself to the human race by appearing in our world on a wavelength we could understand. The invisible Son of God, became visible. “We heard Him speak with our ears,” says John, “we saw Him with our physical eyes, we reached out with our hands and touched this manifestation of Eternal Life, this Son of God, and it was real, solid, warm human flesh.”



We saw, in the latter half of the twentieth century, the emergence and rapid growth of the audio-visual revolution. New forms of technology have

made us eager for the latest and greatest in sound quality and visual clarity. We will settle for nothing less than surround sound and High Definition Television. The clarity of sound is such that music sounds as though the orchestra or the band is sitting right in our living room, and the picture is so vivid it leaps off the screen at us. It looks and feels real. My wife complains every time she sees an advertisement for Blu-ray Discs. She says, “Now we’re going to have to replace all our DVDs with Blu-ray!” I tell her, “That’s the agenda, honey.” We think “audio-visual” is so modern and sophisticated. But God had us beat by a couple millennia. His audio-visual, *and* tactile manifestation was by genuine Incarnation. The Son of God did not merely *appear* to be a real human, He actually did become a human being: was born, and grew, and lived and walked among us. God came among humans as a human and communicated to us in our language. In the words of the hymn writer Charles Wesley, Jesus was “Our God contracted to a span / Incomprehensibly made man.”

Now John wrote this letter for a very specific reason. We discover his purpose at several intervals in the letter, not least of which is a warning which John the Apostle-Bishop sends out to his readers, whom he calls his children, in the churches over which he exercised oversight across. John wrote to warn the churches, that when men come to them preaching and teaching the Word, they must be careful to discern the message. What is the criteria? Only those who teach that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1 Jn. 4:3) he says, are to be accepted. And those who do not confess that Christ appeared in the flesh are “of the spirit of Antichrist,” they stand in opposition to God and to His Son through Whom He revealed Himself – don’t listen to them.

We know from the records of ancient Christians who lived at the time of the Apostles and just after, that the Apostle John not only wrote this letter for a specific reason, but that he penned the magisterial Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, not merely to record the words and actions of Jesus, but in response to that false teaching which had come into the Church which denied that Christ came in the flesh. You see at some point, even at this early stage

in the history of the Church, even before all the Apostles had died, a group of people, who initially moved within the body of the Church, began to express the idea that the Son of God had not *really* become flesh, had not really become a Man. No, they said, He only *appeared* to be flesh, only looked human. The whole life of Jesus – birth, growth, eating and drinking, sleeping, suffering, dying – it was all a charade. His body was a phantom. It only appeared to sleep, and eat, and drink, and suffer pain. He was never really one of us. He was pretending. It wasn't real.

No wonder then, that in the opening lines of His Gospel, John said that the Son of God *became flesh and lived among us* (Jn. 1:14). No wonder that in his letter, John bore witness to what he had seen, heard, and touched: Jesus is God, He is the Life, but John also knew that His appearing as a man was not artificial. John had seen, and known a real human being not phantom. The truth, to which John bore witness, was far more staggering than the petty, shallow misrepresentation of the message, which these heretics had introduced into the Church.

Have we become insulated to the awesome nature of this great Fact, which we confessed again in the Creed this morning? Have we subdued the tremendous mystery with sentimentality? The writer Frederick Beuchner thinks we have:

The Word became flesh. Ultimate Mystery born with a skull you could crush one-handed. Incarnation. It is not tame. . . . It is uninhabitable terror. It is unthinkable darkness riven with unbearable light. . . . space/time split apart, a wrenching and tearing of the very sinews of reality itself. You can only cover your eyes and shudder before it, before *this*: "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God . . . who for us and for our salvation," as the Nicene Creed puts it, "came down from heaven."

Came down. Only then do we dare uncover our eyes and see what we can see. It is the Resurrection and the Life she [Mary] holds in her arms. It is the bitterness of death he takes at her breast.

Well, the false teaching that Jesus was a phantom and not a man persisted, and continued to plague the Church. About fifteen years after the Apostle John died, a man named Ignatius was the Bishop of the church in the city of Antioch in Syria, the city which had served as the Apostle Paul's home base,

the city where believers were first called "Christians." Bishop Ignatius was denounced as a Christian, placed under arrest, and taken in chains by ten Roman soldiers to the city of Rome. And when they got him there, they threw him to the wild beasts in the Coliseum for the crowd's entertainment. En route to his execution, the Bishop wrote several letters, and one of the issues he addressed was the heresy that Jesus had not become a genuine human being. Ignatius had no intention of facing a gruesome death for the sake of a phantom Christ, with a phantom hope. He sounded the same warning to the churches in his letters as John had concerning



anyone who might suggest that Christ had not truly participated in the human race: "Be deaf," Ignatius warned his readers, "whenever anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, who was the son of Mary; who really was born, who both ate and drank; who really was persecuted under Pontius Pilate" (Tralians 9.1). Ignatius emphasized in his writings that Christ "truly suffered just as he truly raised himself – not, as certain unbelievers say, that he suffered in appearance only" (Smyrnaeans 2.1).

Who would, after all, devote themselves wholly, body and soul, to a Lord that refused to devote Himself? To a Christ that really wanted nothing to do with the mess of planet earth? For a Savior Who walked three feet above the ground but refused to

really *be* one of us? The Apostle John says “we love Him because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). We devote ourselves fully to Him because He devoted Himself fully to us, He didn’t just look like a servant, He became a Servant. He didn’t pretend to enter into human life He *did* enter in. You know what was wrong with the false teachers that troubled the Church with their vision of a phantom Jesus and a pretend Incarnation? *They intensely disliked the notion that God would invest Himself in this world.* They thought it was *beneath* God, to come into the human condition.

Recently I was watching the old PBS series *Cosmos* which was hosted by Carl Sagan in the late 70s. Carl Sagan emphasizes something in his documentary that the atheists Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens have taken up as a kind of mantra against Christians. They all say, “You stupid Christians. Let us inform you. There are not only billions of stars, but billions of galaxies. Even if there *were* a God, a Creator, He would never hang out with us microbes on this speck of dust we call earth! The universe is humungous, so the Christian faith must be false.” To which we respond, “*We know*, thank you very much. Why, the prophet Isaiah, using the poetic method of the Hebrew language, 700 years before Christ said that all the nations, all the cultures, all the peoples, are but a drop in the bucket from God’s perspective. Yep, we know. We got it. But the point is, *He made it* and so *He cares about it.* Cares so much He got right down on His hands and knees to be *part of it.*”

The poet Luci Shaw, meditating on the reality of the real-flesh-and-blood Infant lying in the manger on that first Christmas, reflects on the radical nature of Christ’s involvement. Listen to her words:

Breath, mouth, ears, eyes
He is curtailed who overflowed all skies, all
years.
Older than eternity, now he is new.
Now native to earth as I am, nailed to my poor
planet, caught that I might be free.



I love that last line. He became native to this earth. He was nailed down to this poor planet. Here’s another way to put it: in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, God *invested* Himself *fully* in the world and in His purpose of redeeming and restoring it. The reality of the Incarnation, the scandal of St. John’s message, is that God is really *involved* in humanity.

Almost 600 years before the coming of our Lord, a young Indian prince named Siddhartha was raised in the context of extreme privilege, born to a family whose opulence stood in stark contrast to the squalor and poverty of the peasants in his region. The young Siddhartha lived in the *most* sheltered kind of existence imaginable. His parents, so the story goes, gave instructions to all their servants that their child should never see a poor person, a beggar, a deformed person – that he should never be exposed to human suffering. But for all his parents’ safeguards, their young prince one day happened, quite by accident, to see a filthy, deformed beggar lying in the street. For a young man never exposed to such degradation, the experience was transformative. He spent the rest of his life seeking to form a response to human suffering and pain. He came to the conclusion that he had found, not an answer, but a way of escape. And he began to promulgate a teaching that our real problem is our life of attachment to physical things, to the world, to life. He believed that we must seek detachment, not only from excess of material goods from immoral behavior, but detachment from the world itself – detachment from the physical universe itself. For, he believed, we can eradicate pain, eradicate suffering, if we escape reality itself. He taught that all of the things around us, the entire cosmos, is mere illusion. That, far from entering fully into life, we should withdraw from life, we should discount the world in which we live, and we should strive to squelch, not only bad desires, but *every* desire, extinguish our own personality and individuality. The only hope (if you can call it hope) which he could offer, was the extinction of the individual human person, and non-existence after death. The world knows the

young Indian prince Siddhartha, by another name, Buddha, and Buddhism the way of detachment which he forged.

But in stark contrast to the Buddha's response to suffering, God categorically rejected the way of detachment from the physical universe and from humanity and from suffering. He got involved. What are the ramifications of God's approach? Well, among other things, what this means for us is that God is not in the business of quick fixes, He is not an escapist. His Son went *through* the long agonizing process of being born, growing up, going to school, working hard, being misunderstood, having relatives and friends and enemies. His Son went through the dark agony of the cross, and rather than avoid the whole mess of sin and suffering, He took it upon Himself. Not apart from, but *through* the process of crucifixion and death, He was victorious.

And we are united to Jesus. God will not give us quick fixes or fast remedies. He will not always pull us out of difficult situations. He does not call us to a life of detachment, to live off in some spiritual seclusion devoid of contact with our fellow man or our needy world. He does not permit us the easy way out. But then again, Christ was and *remains* flesh. Do you ever consider that? The Son of God became, and *remains invested* in humanity. He not only became a human being, He retains His human nature. He rose from the dead with a real physical body, and took that humanity into Heaven. He is our High Priest Who *still* sympathizes with our weaknesses because while He is the Son of God, He became, and remains a human—He truly is the one Mediator Who bridges the gap between God and Man.

In view of His radical intervention and investment in our world and in our race, dare we shirk our responsibility or abandon hope when we know that He went through the long trial of being human, with all of its joys and all of its sorrows? Dare we seek the quick way out when He promises to bestow upon us the grace and the power we need to persevere? He promises to work *within* us, by His Spirit. He promises that *through* the perplexing dif-

iculties of this world He will work out His purposes for us. He promises to transform the grave itself into the gateway to life eternal.

We have heard in this Scripture the testimony of an officially sanctioned eyewitness to the appearing of the Son of God among us. The Apostle John's response to those who denied the reality of God's condescension in the Incarnation is, "Don't listen to them! Their 'God' is a fiction, a deity who stands aloof and only pretends to care." John's message is that in Jesus Christ, God is *invested* in this world, and in our lives. Are we invested in His purpose for us? Amen. Ω

The following poem is offered with prayers for the end of the state-sanctioned murder of innocents that has continued since January 22, 1973.

The Voice In Ramah

Herod, in fear that he would lose his throne,
Spoke death on all the babies that might be the One.
Innocent boys who sweetly in their cradles lay
Died violently that day.

And Rachel wept aloud.

Yea, Bethlehem's mothers mourned for babes adored,
Sweet lives cut short, hopes severed by the sword.
But many now no pity know. They feel no dread
Of unborn babies dead.

And Rachel weeps again.

The state says you may kill them if you please,
To gratify desires and live in ease.
That day in Israel babies died.
Now thousands daily die,

And Rachel weeps alone.

—Dss Teresa Johnson