

DR. RONALD H. LOVE
CHRISTOLOGICAL TITLES
LESSON THREE
CHRIST
“Iesous Christos”

With sanctimonious pride the token was boldly laid upon the table of our Lord. The candidate was indeed deemed worthy to receive the sacrament of forgiveness. Having been previously visited by the church elders with an accompanying inquisition into the worthiness of the patron’s soul, the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper could be received at Seceder Church in Ireland. It was the annual observance of the service that focused on the solemnity of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Only the pure in heart were welcome to participate. The days previous were always approached by communicants with trepidation and fear. Who would want to be damned as ignoble, condemned to remain seated with the scourging eyes of the righteous are fixed upon the hideous ones.

Things changed in May of 1809 with one bold act of refutation. Alexander Campbell, a student at the University of Glasgow, placed his esteemed token on the altar before the clergy, arose and walked out, renouncing his allegiance to the Church of Scotland and all institutionalized religions.

In September of that year he arrived in America where he partnered with his father Thomas in Washington County, Pennsylvania, to establish a religious community absent of creeds and hierarchy. Each individual was granted the liberty to interpret the Bible as he/she best understood it. Their motto became, “Where the scriptures speak, we speak. Where the scriptures are silent, we are silent.” Their goal was to restore unity among the sects. “Let unity be our polar star,” became the mantra for a universal Christian community.

This began the early nineteenth-century “Restoration Movement” in America. One outcome of this endeavor was the establishment of the Disciples of Christ or Christian Church, derogatorily called Campbellites in one era. Like most denominations it has since lost the vision of the founders Thomas and Alexander Campbell, but be assured that one need not approach the altar of Christ this day with a token in hand. In the spirit that blest the original adherents, let us always adulate its pioneering principle: “Christians only, but not the only Christians.”

The word “Christian” designated those who were followers of Christ. In Latin plural nouns ending in *-iani* denoted soldiers who were under the command of a named general. Rome, in the first century, considered Christians to be soldiers under the leadership of Christ. As Jesus of Nazareth was executed as a threat to the stability of the empire, so must be his corps of followers. The evangelist Luke informs us that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch,” which was a Hellenized city. (Acts 11:26)

“Christ” is derived from the Greek word “Christos” which is equivalent in definition to the Hebrew word “Mashiakh,” translated into English as “Messiah.” Both words mean “anointed one.” The Hebrew word literally means “to anoint, smear with oil, pour oil over someone.” In Judaism the “Messiah of the Lord” refers to reigning or past kings, thus the title was bestowed upon a number of individuals in the course of centuries. Samuel had Saul anointed (I Sam 16:13) and David was anointed king over Israel (II Kin 9:12). The anointed one was the leader of the Hebrews. In the Christian community the “anointed one” is solely reserved for a single individual, Jesus of Nazareth. As the Anointed One he is the Messiah, the fulfillment of all law and prophecy, who does take away the sins of the world.

Immediately after the Resurrection the title Christ was always preceded with a modifier, “the Christ,” or “the one who is called Christ,” or “indeed that this is the very Christ,” along with other very similar transliterations. Underpinning this affirmation, Matthew opens his gospel with the declaration, “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Christ.” (Mt 1:1) Equally sobering, John concludes his gospel with the acknowledgement, “that Jesus is the Christ.” (Jn 20:21) It was an unequivocal title of respect, honor, and devotion. This can be noted in the confession of Martha, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you

are the Christ...” (Jn 11:27) There is Peter’s well known assertion when asked directly, “Who do you say that I am?” responds, “The Christ of God.” (Lk 9:20)

Christology swiftly evolved in the few short decades after the Resurrection, with an accompanying shift of terminology. It was the transference from the dignity of enthronement, “the Christ,” to a personal Savior who dwells among us, expressed in the proper name, “Jesus Christ.” Neither expression is wrong, but they are mutually exclusive in interpretation.

The Apostle Paul in his letters never employed the appellation “Christian” in reference to converts. In lieu of this our relationship to the risen Jesus is promoted as being “in Christ” or “in Christ Jesus.” Perhaps the last letter Paul wrote and considered his most explicit theological treatise, he incorporated this phraseology in reference to the believers in the city of Rome, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 8:1) An added dimension is ascribed to messiahship – it defines the Anointed One as now active in human affairs.

During Jesus’ life and the few years following, he was a nondescript figure. One prophet among many, a miracle worker amidst a school of others, the leader of a religious sect the Roman authorities found contemptuous, requiring cautious but expeditious management. The absence of Jesus from secular writings during the first century is reflective of his small role on the contemporary scene. Though, Jesus as the Christ, his celebrity did not go entirely unnoticed. Josephus, a Hebrew, who was contracted by Rome to write a history of the Jews, described the death of James as “the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ.” (Ant 20.9.1)

Two Roman historians provide additional affirmation. Suetonius mentions public disturbances instigated by a Chrestus forced the hand of Emperor Claudius. Suetonius specifically wrote: “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.” (Life of Claudius 25.4) The translation is unclear if this is in reference to Jesus or a Jewish Christian; in either case it is an acknowledgement of the use of the title Christ among members of the church. The word Chrestus shows how little understanding the Romans first had regarding Jesus and the church. The word “Chrestus” meaning “excellent” was sometimes scribed for “Christ” which means “anointed.”

Roman historian Tacitus reports that Christus, the one from whom Christians take their name, suffered death at the hands of Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. Tacitus wrote his passage reflecting on how Nero blamed the Christians for the great fire in Rome on July 19, 64. The fire, by-the-way, was started by Nero himself to distract the populace from their economic depravity and the opulent spending of his administration. Incriminating the Christian community was meant to divert political attention from the real culprit. Tacitus historical account reads: “Hence to suppress the rumor, he fastened the guilt, and punished Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.” (Annals 15.44.4) This again attests that the understanding of the presence of one who was known as Christ was prevalent, but not prominent.

Iesous Christos is Jesus Christ in Greek. Through the eons of time the title of Christ acquired symbolic significance. His name was often abbreviated in art monograms as IC or XC. The Chi-Rho symbol, explicitly displayed on the stained glass windows at Central United Methodist Church, is derived from the first two letters for Christ in Greek. It is the symbol that Constantine saw in the heavens in 312 before leading his troops to victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, the engagement which secured his empire. It is avowed to be the moment of his conversion experience and the forerunner to the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire.

Prior to the Guttenberg Press and movable type transcribing by hand was inexorably time consuming and the cost of printing prohibitive. Therefore, Christ was abbreviated as Xt or simply X, and Christian as Xn. “Xmas” has not taken Christ out of Christmas, only our lack of historical understanding has demonized a symbol once commonly employed.

XOXOXOXO. Hugs and kisses, perhaps accentuated with a pink Cupid sticker. A touching way to sign a letter to our precious beloved; but, it is also sorrowful to dilute the real meaning of sincere, committed and covenantal love with such shallowness. Through most of history illiteracy prevailed, even to the extent that an individual could not even write one’s own name. To secure a legal document the signer would instead pen an X, sealing the document in the name of Christ. Then, in reverence, the individual would kiss the X. In time the kiss was substituted by encircling the mark. The next time you sit down

to write a love letter, allow the significant other know that XOXOXO goes beyond the reaches of hugs and kisses, for the words in this correspondence are sealed in the name of Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Ron Love

[To view Chi-Rho visit web site:

<http://images.google.com/images?gbv=2&svnum=10&hl=en&sa=X&oi=spell&resnum=0&ct=result&cd=1&q=Chi-Rho+%2B+symbol&spell=1>]

[To view IC & XC monograms visit web site:

<http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&q=Christ+Pantokrator+mosaic+from+Daphni%2C+Greece%2C+ca.+1080-1100&btnG=Search+Images&gbv=2>]