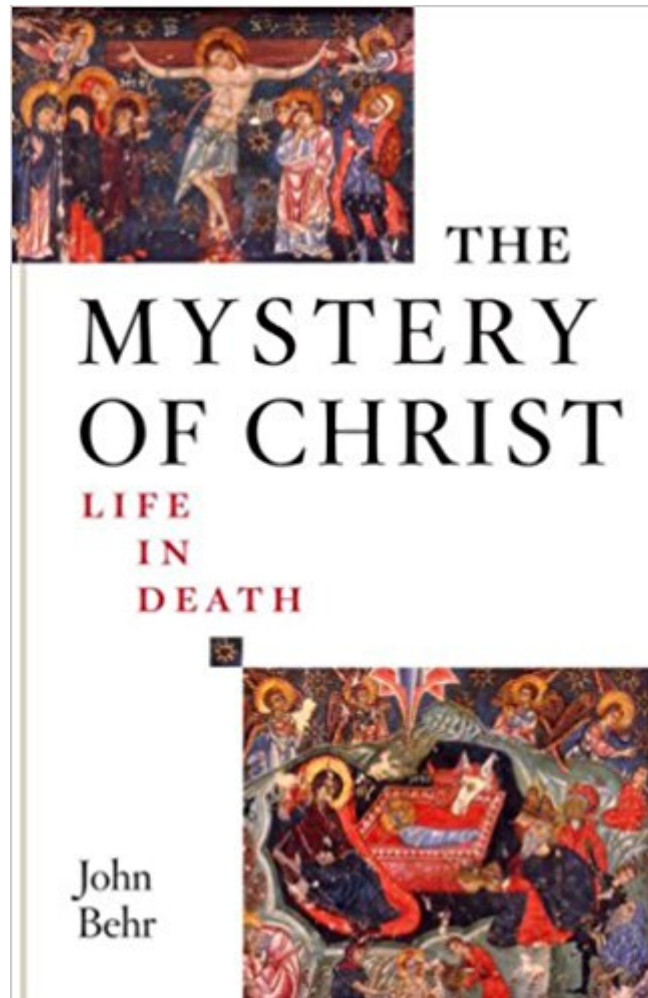




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# **The Mystery Of Christ: Life In Death**



## Synopsis

5 full-color plates This dynamic, challenging, and transforming vision of Christian theology, presented in a systematic manner, invites readers to approach the mystery of Christ in the same way that the first disciples of Jesus Christ learned theology. Although the disciples had denied and abandoned the Crucified One, they came to realize, through the reading of Scriptures and the breaking of bread, that Jesus had given himself up for the life of the world, so transforming death into life, darkness into light, and flesh into word. Beginning with the Passion narratives, Fr Behr examines how we search the scriptures to encounter Christ and thereby realize that we were created for this encounter, thus opening a profound perspective on creation, the fall, sin, and salvation history. He further explains how Christ is born in those who are born again in the Church, their "Virgin Mother," so that they become truly human, after the stature of Christ, and continue the incarnation of the Word by glorifying God in their bodies. By returning to the approach of the early Church, this fresh study by a renowned patristic scholar offers a way out of the problems that have beset theology and scriptural study in recent centuries. "A Christian's first concern is for truth. The Mystery of Christ provides astounding insights into the truth, indeed the many truths, of and about God's gospel in his Son Jesus, the crucified Lord." -Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko, Dean Emeritus, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. "This magnificently conceived, tightly presented and argued introduction to Christian theology is brilliant...I haven't enough superlatives to do it justice." -Rev. Dr. Andrew Louth, Professor of Patristics and Byzantine Studies, University of Durham

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is very interesting; I've not read much by Fr. Behr before. Where it might be helped is that it is not terribly systematic and strikes me as repetitive at points. It almost can't decide if it is a work of systematics or of spirituality. I think that was Fr. Behr's idea, but in this case it does not come off as a unified work. I am in support of systematics that support prayer (see Matthias Scheeben, for instance), but I think it limped most in not having clear goals and clarity of expression at points.

Its a beautiful book with beautiful content!

A powerful journey through the core Christian teachings as revealed by the early fathers of the church. I enjoyed Behr's interaction with a pre-modern understanding of Christianity in light of modern and post-modern scholarship. The book is concise, with thought provoking ideas and quotations on almost every page.

Very Christ-centered book. Helps wash away apostate thoughts about the Christian faith.

The Mystery of Christ calls the Church to shift its theological focus from the various Trinitarian and philosophical formulae of recent centuries to the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Father John Behr is a professor at St. Vladimir's Seminary and a noted patristics scholar. His many articles and works throughout his career have focused on the Cross as the foundation of Orthodox Christian theology. The Mystery of Christ is a summary of the first two volumes of his ongoing Formation of Christian Theology series, an overview of Christian theology up to the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Christian theological reflection was shaped by the apostolic proclamation, which in turn was shaped by the Risen Lord opening the Scriptures to the Apostles. The disciples were not able recognize Christ as the Son of God during His earthly ministry. The light of the Passion and Resurrection illumined the disciples' exegesis (analysis/explanation) of Scripture so that they could see Christ prefigured throughout the entire text - for example, Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis, the Passover lamb slain in Exodus, and the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. The disciples were able to draw from the Scriptures (what Father John calls the "Old Testament") and the Eucharist the key to understanding the events of Christ's life, as well as "a thesaurus, a treasury of imagery, for entering the mystery of Christ". Father John writes that the four Gospels are more than historical narratives, but interpretations of Christ's person and work expounded with references from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. For St. Irenaeus of Lyons, the faith received in baptism is the "canon"

or criterion of truth used to interpret the Scriptures. Subsequent theological reflection was shaped by his framework of Scriptures, the canon of truth, apostolic tradition, and apostolic succession. Through this framework, we can also discover that God reveals His love and purpose for us through the Cross. Father John writes that "Christ's taking upon himself the role of a servant, voluntarily going to the Passion...actually manifests his true divinity" and the transcendence of God manifest in darkness and death transforms the life of the world. The apostolic preaching narrated in the Gospels allows us to truly contemplate this mystery. This encounter with the Word opens a new perspective on the Creation and Fall. Father John quotes the philosopher Kierkegaard - "we only understand life backwards, but we must live it forwards" - to illustrate the entire span of God's economy. Like the disciples at the Passion, we have abandoned Christ through our sinfulness. Despite our failures, He calls us to be His companions and to share table fellowship with Him. The Eucharist is "a taste of a life not bound to death and hell", in which humanity can understand and transcend sin and death. Because of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection, we are now dead to sin and alive in God. This is an ongoing process until the Lord's return; we are "in travail" according to St. Paul. However, Christ is incarnate in those who are born again in the Church, their "Virgin Mother", through the Holy Spirit. Humanity is no longer the "barren one", but continually gives birth to Christ in the body of His Church through the Gospel proclamation. By sharing in the life of Christ and glorifying God in our bodies, like the martyrs and ascetic saints, we become fully human in His stature. Dying to sin reorients us from the sinful abuse of the passions to the fulfillment of our creation. The climax of the book, in my opinion, is this explanation of our life's purpose: "Christians themselves, as forgiven sinners, are called to become wounded healers, extending the work of God to the whole world, to a point - the final eschatological point".

Professor of Patristic studies at St. Vladimir's Seminary school, Rev. Dr John Behr has a new book out, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*, on how the early followers of the Christian faith studied and followed the Scriptures. Over time these practices have been lost and to fully understand Jesus Christ and the Bible, one must study the same way that the early Church followers did. He breaks his book into five chapters. Chapter one discusses that the study and understand the Bible should start at the death and resurrection of Christ. Some scholars call this new belief studying the Bible thru death and resurrection 'vision'. Behr uses the writings of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa to support his view. He also writes that the Western faiths should not feel depressed or ashamed of the death of Christ. It was thru his death that he was able to beat death and save humanity. The second chapter discusses how the early church spread and preached the new belief thru the

writings of Irenaeus of Lyon. Throughout the book Behr discusses of how one must understand the meaning of the words in the Bible. When one can understand the true meaning of the words they can then understand the true meaning of Christ. Christianity has changed recently into a faith based on historical facts. This is not how it should be by Behr. The faith has to accept what is in the Bible as more important than just facts. The Bible goes beyond what facts are, because Christ and the Father are more than just facts. Chapter three bases itself off the facts from the previous two chapters. The reader at this point has been able to see the Bible thru the death and resurrection 'vision' similar to the early church followers did and now with these gifts, read the early scripture or Old Testament and be able to understand from Creation to Psalms that the Bible was discussing Christ the whole time. Also included in the chapter, he writes of the greatness of Christ when he shows his weakness. When Christ was weak on the cross he was able to help humanity more than at any time. Chapter four gives into the original interpretation of the Virgin Mary as not only the virgin mother of Christ, but also the virgin mother of the Church. With each new baptism in the faith a new child is born from her. Similar to Mary, the Church keeps her virginity. The last chapter discusses the importance of the body and soul in Christianity. It has become prevalent, especially in the Western Christian faiths, that the soul is the item saved and the body is bad. Behr rebukes this by saying that Christ was the perfect model of the body and of the soul. Both must be saved and become in the image of Christ. The body can lead to sin, but without a body you cannot achieve glory in Christ. For people who want to go in-depth of the Christian faith, especially of the Orthodox faith, one should read this book. It allows the reader to read the Bible in a new way that is different from the usual. When one reads the Bible with the death and resurrection 'vision' on, they can better understand that when G-d created man he was creating the likeness of Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament Christ is mentioned in every portion. The problem that arises from this way of reading the Bible is how can one truly understand the importance of the death and resurrection of Christ without knowing the portions that lead up to him? How can you just start with Christ who the Bible reader would consider just as a random person? Behr attempts to answer it, but fails to do so. Except for that complaint, this book depicts how the faith was practiced during the early period of the Church and how tradition and scriptures are vital to understanding the true meaning of Christ very well. This book should be used for all scholars who are interested in Christianity. It is a quick read, which does not require that much background in Christian religious history or belief. I do advise that for novice of the Christian faith to read the book at least twice, making sure that you do not miss anything. The novice reader should consult a religious scholar with any questions that they have from the book.

Reverend John Behr (Professor of Patristics, St. Vladimir's Seminary) presents *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*, a scholarly approach to Christian theology, penned in a systematic manner that answers quandaries that have arisen in theological and scriptural studies in recent centuries. Beginning with the Passion narratives, *The Mystery of Christ* discusses how holy scripture itself can be searched to find Christ, how Christ is born within those souls who are born again in the Church, and how His word becomes his new incarnation through the words and actions of those who glorify God. An inset selection of color plates illustrates this rich theological examination, open to Christians of all backgrounds despite its scholarly format.

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