

New Christographical and Christological Reflections

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The fundamental question about the identity of Jesus Christ is raised again and again in the history of humankind which was divided by Jesus himself. The known history of the world is recorded as happened before Christ and after Christ. Some people who have problem with the name Christ have changed the terms BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini-Year of the Lord) into BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era). Even if such changes cannot hide the reality of Jesus Christ because a question can be raised about the basis of this nomenclature and the answer would be Jesus Christ. For a believer Jesus Christ is not only the answer to the questions about history but also he is answer to all fundamental questions about existence of everything and humans life in particular.

What is the fundamental question that humans raise about themselves and the world? It is the question about the origin and destiny of human beings and the world. The scientific discoveries may be able to give some answers about the origin of humans and it is proved true by verifiable scientific evidences. But empirical science is unable to provide answer to the question *why* of the human origin. The insight into the destiny of human beings and the innate insatiable thirst of humans for something or someone beyond

themselves and beyond the limitations of space and time, in fact, would throw light on the question about the source or the origin of their existence. The early Christian community experienced, Jesus Christ as the beginning and the end of their life, the Alpha and the Omega, and indeed, the Lord and God of their life.

I. Christology of the Insiders and the Christography of the Outsiders

The confession of a community of people - who were strict monotheists - that Jesus is Lord and God, was nothing but revolutionary. It would not have been possible for them had they not experienced Jesus Christ as transforming their life in such a way that they could not but proclaim him as Lord, the beginning and the end of their lives. A number of the believers of the early Christian community who encountered Jesus of Nazareth as he lived on earth thought of him as “a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Lk 24:19). They knew how their “chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him and they hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:20-21). They have also experienced him as “alive” (Lk 24:23). They certainly knew that he was Jesus of Nazareth, but they could not identify his new mode of existence which transformed their lives in such a way that they began to understand themselves in a new way and struggled to articulate the mystery of Jesus who is alive after he was crucified, buried and was experienced as alive again.

All Christologies begin from the encounter of this all-embracing Reality that transformed the lives of a number of people who were affected by the encounter in such a way that they could not but affirm it both as Jesus of Nazareth and the Lord and God of their lives. They searched their entire Scripture beginning from Torah and going through the prophecies of the

prophets and all the rest of the book of the Scripture and recognized this transforming Reality as the prophesied Messiah. In the process they had to change their concepts about the expected political Messiah who would bring liberation from foreign rule to an understanding of the Messiah or Christ who would establish God's reign and bring liberation from all bondages, physical, psychological, social and spiritual, Then they could answer the question, "Who do people say I am?" and "Who do *you* say that I am?" (Mk 8:27 -28). These questions though presented as raised during the historical life of Jesus, in all probability, articulated and answered after the resurrection experience of Jesus. Certainly, the evangelists have a pedagogical reason to present it as happening during the earthly life of Jesus to make the hearers of the gospel understand that Jesus was already Messiah and Lord even before his resurrection.

The answer to the question about the identity of Jesus were given both by the outsiders and the insiders, by those who have observed Jesus life and his activities and made certain judgment about his identity and those insiders who encountered Jesus as the risen Lord and were transformed by that encounter. The Christology of the outsiders is without any commitment to the Person of Jesus and his good news of wholeness and liberation and the Christology of the insiders is by those who are transformed by the encounter with Jesus and are committed to the Person of Jesus and his mission. Thus two types of Christology have emerged since the time of the New Testament.

Already in the New Testament we have a variety of Christologies though Jesus Christ is One. Those who encountered Jesus as Messiah, Lord and God tried to articulate their faith-experience in the context of their lives as well as responding to the contextual need of their addressees. Those who were outsiders, whether Jews or Greeks, developed Christologies of their imagination based on their world-view and philosophies without encountering

and committing themselves to him. When a Jewish-Christian sect called the Ebonite recognized Jesus only as another human being born as the natural son of Joseph and Mary with extraordinary powers, the Gnostics and the Docetics went to the other extreme and denied his true humanity. According to the dualistic philosophy of the Gnostics whatever is of matter is evil and whatever is of spirit is good. God cannot become truly human because matter is evil. So Jesus Christ could not be really human. The Docetics having the same philosophy affirmed that Jesus Christ is appears to be human and not really human. Surprisingly, this heretical Christology has influence on the thinking of many Christian believers even today.

The Fathers of the Church like Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus fought against such heretical teachings and affirmed that everything God created is good and human body is not evil. So God assumed humanity and became human. Later, when Arius, an Alexandrian presbyter, taught that Jesus Christ was not truly God but only a creature by misinterpreting the NT witness about him, the Council of Nicaea affirmed that Jesus Christ is “God from God, light from light, true God from true God begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father”. The issue of Jesus Christ’s oneness of being with God was expressed using the Greek categories of thought like *ousia* or essence/substance but it was an articulation that was faithful to the original Christian confession that Jesus is Lord and God. The expression consubstantial or *homousios* with God the Father reconciled the belief in the divinity of Christ with the Christian belief in One God or the Oneness of God.

The next stage of Christological reflections began by the insiders explaining the unity of divinity and humanity in the one person of Jesus of Nazareth and ended up by going to extreme positions by devaluing the human nature of Jesus or separating it from his divine nature. The Monophysists claimed that Jesus had only one nature (*monophysis*) and that it was his divine nature which subsumed the human nature after incarnation and the

Nestorians separated the human nature and divine nature in Christ, though Nestorius did not take such an extreme position. The Christological controversy about the union of the divine and the human natures in Christ was resolved by the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 affirming that Jesus Christ is One Person, that he is the Second Person of the Trinity who has two natures, both divine and human. They are united in such a way that this union at the level of the One Personhood is “without confusion, without change, without separation and without division”. This union of the two natures did not take away their distinction that the peculiar property of each nature is preserved. Though the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon used philosophical categories in confessing the mystery of Jesus Christ, they affirmed that they were confessing about the only-begotten Son of God, the Logos, whom the prophets had foretold and believed and proclaimed as the creed of the Church. Council Fathers were articulating the core Christian faith in the reality of Jesus Christ as God became human. Any other Christology that would not recognize this basic affirmation, whatever way this may be expressed would not be the Jesus Christ encountered, believed and proclaimed by the foundational Christian community. In fact, the questions raised about the existence and the identity of Jesus in the modern times ignored the fundamental Christian confession about the person of Jesus that transformed the lives not only of those who formed the community of the Church in the first centuries of Christian era radically and comprehensively but also in the subsequent centuries even in those times the historical existence and the identity of Jesus was called into question.

The Church knew from the beginning that the mystery of Jesus Christ defies all formulations and articulations. The classical Christology of Chalcedon is a Christology “from above” or a “descending Christology”, or an “incarnational Christology”, or, what we could term, a “theophanic Christology” because its basic axiom is the revelation of the “only begotten”

Son of God as human. These faith affirmations about Jesus Christ were questioned by the liberal Protestant theologians of eighteenth and nineteenth century who were inspired by the ideology of Enlightenment. Their interest was not a Christology but a search the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth beneath the New Testament witness about him and the Church's confession of faith about him. Their attempts cannot be called Christologies but attempts to investigate the historical reality of Jesus for questionable purposes. They were moved probably by the spirit of Enlightenment rationalism that asserted that something can be true only if it could be scientifically verifiable.

II. Futile "Quests" for Historical Jesus and the Christographies

The quests for historical Jesus were researches to find the Jesus of history and his authentic teachings beyond and beneath the NT witness about him and his mission. The first of the quests was the Old Quest from 1778 to 1906, and then an interim period or No Quest from 1906 to 1953 and then the New Quest from 1980 to the present day we have the Third Quest.

The quest for the historical Jesus began with Reimarus (1694-1768) who raised the problem of the relation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith in his so called *Wolfen-buettel Fragments* published by G.E. Lessing (1729-1781). For Reimarus Jesus was a Jewish reformer, revolutionary who became increasingly fanatical and politicized; and he failed. It was the idea of his disciples to proclaim him as Messiah and to announce that he rose from the dead and waited for him to bring the world to an end immediately. Reimarus thought that he found the real historical Jesus and this discovery would sound the death knell for Christianity.

The quest for real Jesus of history introduced by Reimarus was brought into sharper focus by David .F. Strauss (1808 – 1874) who stated that the

goal of this quest is to recover the “real Jesus” by isolating the “Jesus of history” from “the Christ of faith”. According to him Jesus of history lies buried under the layers of myths created by the Church. “The historical Jesus was thus turned into the divine Messiah by the pious, but erroneous devotion of the church.”¹ A. Harnack (1851-1930) questioned the Hellenization of the original Christian faith and its alienation through Hellenistic metaphysics. A. Ritschl(1822–1889) sought a historical interpretation of the Christological dogmas. The liberal Protestant Christology further sought to give rationalistic foundations for the Christian belief in Jesus Christ. This found expression in the works of Kant ((1724– 1804), Hegel (1770 – 1831) and Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Kant’s philosophical reduction of religion into a practical implication of morality could include faith in Jesus Christ, but it was not necessary, because everyone possessed the *archetype* of moral living. Hegel’s philosophy gave a rational foundation to the Christian faith in the Trinity and Incarnation as the unfolding of the ‘Absolute Idea’. For Schleiermacher the religious experience or the God-consciousness of every human being finds its perfection in Jesus Christ.

In the quest for finding the Jesus of history, most of the liberal theologians attempted to write a biography or life of Jesus based on each one’s judgment about what is historical discarding most of the biblical witness and the Church’s traditions as fictional. They created their own version of historical Jesus contradicting one another in their “lives of Jesus”. After almost a hundred years the “old quest” came to an end for various reasons. In his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* Albert Schweitzer convincingly showed that each theologian who tried to show the historical Jesus was a creation of his own ideas and not the real Jesus of history. According to him a socialist makes Jesus a social reformer, a rationalist makes him a revealer of true virtues and an idealist makes Jesus an embodiment of true humanity but real Jesus escapes and returns to his own

age. The old quest was rejected by the representatives of form criticism as they showed that the gospels used for reconstructing the life of Jesus were also the products of the faith proclamation of the Church used for preaching, catechesis and liturgy and not Jesus as actually lived and acted. Rudolf Bultmann (1884 -1976) and Karl Barth (contended that it is impossible to reconstruct the actual life of Jesus. Thus the effort to produce new lives of the real Jesus of history was abandoned because the faith of the Church cannot be based on confusions created by the so called historians of Jesus.

In spite of the failure of the Old Quest to reach the Jesus of history, the *New Quest* began with the students of Bultmann led by E.Kaesemann with his paper on "The Problem of Historical Jesus". Accepting the findings of the form criticism and also the affirmation that the NT witness of Jesus is kerygmatic, Kaesemann points out that one can separate the authentic traditions about Jesus and the later interpretations of the Church about him. Unlike the Old Quest which was championed exclusively the Protestants, the New Quest had also the collaboration of some of the Catholic scholars. Using various criteria they could arrive at some authentic sayings and deeds of Jesus with different degrees of certainty and describe some events of this life and death and the origin of Easter faith.² However, the findings of the New Quest remain ambiguous with regard to the Jesus of history. They were influenced by the historiographical and rationalistic pre-suppositions which cannot be applied to Christ-event which is a unique historical and trans-historical event. Further, they followed the positivist school of historiography which demands that the historian must separate historical facts from their interpretations. But this is impossible as there are no pure facts and every fact that is known is already interpreted. The New Quest also produced "Jesus of history," for example, Bornkamm presents Jesus as the sovereign freedom and Schillebeeckx presents Jesus primarily as the eschatological prophet. These are all fragmentary pictures of Jesus. This

cannot adequately present the witness of the New Testament about Jesus Christ. Perhaps a permutation of the New Quest is best seen in the *Jesus Seminar* began in 1985 under the leadership of Robert Funk supported by J.D. Crossan and 50 biblical scholars to analyse the NT texts to determine who Jesus really was and what he really said and did. After so called serious investigation and scholarly discussion the scholars were asked to vote for what they consider the authentic sayings of Jesus using coloured beads.³ The Jesus Seminar scholars published their findings in three reports: *The Five Gospels* (1993), *The Acts of Jesus* (1998), and *The Gospel of Jesus* (1999).⁴

The Christography prepared by the scholars of the Seminar presents the figure of Jesus not much different from any “outsider”. For those members of the Jesus Seminar, the historical Jesus was a wandering Hellenistic Jewish sage and faith-healer who preached the good news of liberation from oppression and injustice experienced by ordinary people of his time through his parables and sayings. He was a radical and iconoclast who challenged the dogmas of Jewish religion and broke the social conventions both in his behaviour and in his teachings. He preached of “Heaven’s imperial rule” which was translated as Kingdom of God. This imperial rule of Heaven was already present among the people but unseen by them. This itinerant preacher and healer presented God as a loving father. He criticized the insiders and socialized with the outsiders. He did not perform any nature miracles. According to the Jesus Seminar members Jesus was born of two human parents, did not die for sinners and did not rise from the dead. Some disciples claimed to have visionary experiences of Jesus after his death but they were not physical encounters. A number of well-known biblical scholars and theologians like Richard Hays, Ben Witherington, Greg Boyd, N.T. Wright, William Lane Craig, Luke Timothy Johnson, Craig A. Evans, Paul Barnett, Michael F. Bird, Craig Blomberg, Markus Bockmuehl, Raymond

Brown, James D.G. Dunn, Howard Clark Kee, John P. Meier, Graham Stanton, Darrell Bock, Edwin Yamauchi, Gerald O' Collins and others are highly critical about the pre-suppositions, methodology and conclusions of the Jesus Seminar group. One could say that they have created another Christography based on their scepticism about the authenticity of Christ-event narrated by the New Testament Witnesses.

The historical research using all the possible methods of enquiry could establish with certainty that Jesus of Nazareth lived at a particular time and a particular place in history. It cannot show how his life was significant for the entire humanity and the world. It can only affirm the reality of Jesus' existence but who he is because his life extends beyond space and time. The early Church experienced and confessed that Jesus is Lord and God though he lived as a human and in him and through him humans are transformed and are given the power to transform the world. The NT witness about Jesus is that there is continuity between historical life of Jesus and his trans-historical existence. He lived once in history and continues to live in history in another mode of his being. He is encountered more deeply and intensively through faith in him than he was encountered by others during his earthly existence. So there is no dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith because he is both as Jesus of faith. There is no more quest for the Jesus of history but the quest that is only valid is to find him as the meaning one's own existence and the meaning of the world. Therefore, the Christological reflections continue for the sake of understanding the mystery of Jesus Christ.

Many of the present day reflections about the person of Jesus Christ are not Christologies in the strict sense of the term. I would consider them as Christographies. They are only narrations or descriptions about the person of Jesus Christ from the perspective of those who consider him as one who belongs to the special groups of people who had great influence on the lives

of others of their contemporaries and on the generations who came after them because of their way of life and teachings. They place Jesus among the founders of religions or religious movements, moral or ethical teachers, sages, prophets or philosophers, social reformers, religious or socio-political revolutionaries and so on. All these and many more labels may fit him but they would not define him. Certainly such labels would fit other historically important personalities. The mystery of the Person of Jesus Christ goes beyond all categories of thought and description. Jesus is someone *more* than all other historical personalities who influenced the lives of their contemporaries and other generations. What is *more* in him makes the difference. All Christologies are based on what makes him distinct from other great personalities of the world. All Christographies are descriptions about him similar to others who had a positive influence on the lives of other humans. But authentic Christology is the systematic articulation about the *who* and the *what* of Jesus Christ by those who had a transforming encounter with him and recognized him as the beginning and the end of their life or the meaning of their life. The so-called Christologies of the present times are not real Christologies but Christographies. They are many. They differ according to the context they emerge from and also according to the specific problems for which they find Jesus as an answer because of his way of life and teachings. Those who propose such Christographies may or may not believe in him as the Lord and God of their lives. Therefore, some Christographies are based on authentic Christology or they pre-suppose faith in Jesus Christ as the Logos who became human but there are other Christographies which do not pre-suppose the authentic Christian affirmation about the Person and Nature of Jesus Christ.

III. Contemporary Christographies

We have made a distinction between Christologies and Christographies. The Christographies try to present Jesus as a significant person of history who transformed history as none had done before or after him. Therefore those who have recognized Jesus as the one whose quality of life is unparalleled in history would not only search to find out whether he really existed in history but also whether the teachings attributed to him really originate from him. They would also investigate about the truth content of the narrations about his life and mission in the New Testament. In the second half of the twentieth century also such attempts were made as they were done in the two previous centuries we have seen above with different “quests” for historical Jesus. Can anyone really find out who Jesus really was (in se) and what his birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection or the totality of the Christ-event has done for us (propter nos)? The testimony of the early Christians who were of Jewish, Hellenistic Jewish and Gentile origin articulated their transforming experience of Jesus Christ and it was accepted as credible witness by the subsequent generations. Their belief in the testimony about Jesus Christ was validated by their own encounter with the same Christ. The testimony of the disciples and the first Christian community about Jesus Christ is articulated in a religious language. No language, however developed it may be, would not be able to articulate any ordinary human experience adequately. It is still more difficult to express any religious or spiritual experience. Therefore, the language that articulates any religious experience is descriptive, evocative, symbolic, metaphorical and mythical. The so called quests are therefore, futile attempts when it analyses the texts which narrate the experience the reality of Jesus in all possible means of literary forms and styles available to them.

The contemporary Christographies try to present a particular image of Jesus Christ which may have some reference in the NT or in the context

of the life of Historical Jesus and try to explain the life and mission of Jesus to show that particular image of Jesus is the real one. They present Jesus as a Revolutionist, a Charismatic and holy Jew, an Eschatological Prophet, a Social Reformer, a Cynic Teacher and so on.

1. Jesus: A Charismatic and Holy Jew

Geza Vermes (1924 -2013) is credited to have begun the *Third Quest* with his publications on the historical Jesus⁵. Though born in a Hungarian Jewish family he was baptized became a Catholic priest and later left his priesthood. Later he became a professor of Jewish Studies at Oxford. In 1973 he published his most debated book, *Jesus the Jew*, then ten years later *Jesus in the World of Judaism*, and - completing the trilogy in 1993 - *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*. All these books affirm that Jesus can be understood only as a Jew and in the Jewish settings. Nobody denies that Jesus was a Jew. It is a truth according to the NT testimony about him. Vermes asserts that Jesus was a totally eschatologically inspired person, very charismatic, who fitted very well into the world in which he lived. Many may not have any problem with that assertion too. But further he denies the divine Sonship of Jesus. According to Vermes Jesus was someone who was concerned about the fate of the Jews at a particular point in Jewish history. For Vermes, Jesus was a Jewish holy man like Honi, the rain-maker and Jesus' contemporary Hanina Ben Dosa. The place of Jesus is among such holy people of Judaism. He can be distinguished from other holy men of Judaism only by his preaching of "faith-trust", repentance and the preaching of the Kingdom of God. Vermes would not admit that Jesus is truly Christ or Messiah or he is the Son of God as believed and proclaimed by Christians. He holds the view that the New Testament teachings on the Person and the Mission of Jesus are added to the story of Jesus by later Christian writers.

Those well-known biblical scholars like John P. Meier and Joseph Fitzmyer and many other biblical scholars dismiss the Vermes's view that

Jesus was made into Lord and God but affirm that the divinity of Jesus was the faith-affirmation of the early Christian community.

2. Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet

Many of the present day Christographies of the West give importance to the Jewish origins of Jesus and try to fit him into the mould of Jewish tradition of prophets and the Jewish world-view on the origin and destiny of the world. One of such Christographies is the presentation of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet. Already Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss had dealt with this theme in the past. In our times E. P. Sanders, Bart Ehrman, Paula Fredriksen, Gerd Lüdemann and John P. Meier hold the view that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. According to E.P. Sanders like the prophets of the Old Testament Jesus also proclaimed the destruction and the restoration of Israel and he was a follower of John the Baptist who called the people of Israel to repentance and conversion. Jesus continued the tradition of John the Baptist. He believed that he was the agent to renew Israel. For this purpose he called the twelve disciples representing the twelve tribes of Israel and he believed that the coming of the Kingdom of God was imminent. John P. Meier, renowned Catholic biblical scholar who has published 5 volumes on *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, holds the view that historical Jesus was Elijah-like miracle-working eschatological prophet. Certainly, his scholarly works focus only on the historical Jesus and not about Christian faith in Jesus Christ.

3. Jesus the Prophet of Social Change

There are Christographies that present Jesus as a prophet of social change or a social reformer. The scholars like Richard Horsley, Hyam Maccoby and Gerd Theissen view that Jesus was conscious of the socio-political situation of his times and proclaimed the inauguration of God's reign which involves also the liberation and renewal of the entire Jewish society. According to Horsely, "The focal concern of the kingdom of God in Jesus'

preaching and practice, however, is the liberation and welfare of the people. Jesus' understanding of the "kingdom of God" is similar in its broader perspective to the confident hopes expressed in then-contemporary Jewish apocalyptic literature. That is, he had utter confidence that God was restoring the life of the society, and that this would mean judgment for those who oppressed the people and vindication for those who faithfully adhered to God's will and responded to the kingdom. That is, God was imminently and presently effecting a historical transformation. In modern parlance that would be labelled a "revolution."⁶ However, Jesus did not advocate violence or support the Zealots or any revolutionary group that used violence as a means to liberate themselves from all kinds of oppression. According to Horsely, Jesus' command of loving enemies was restricted to the enemies within the Jewish society and not to outsiders or foreigners. His mission was to exhort people to live in harmony and peace here on earth and did not bother much about life beyond this earthly life. Though Horsely's Christography is appealing and is recognized by many scholars his views on Jesus' teaching about loving the enemies as exclusively restricted to the members of the Jewish society and his neglect of the eschatological aspect of Jesus teaching are not accepted by biblical scholars.

4. Jesus the Wisdom Sage or Jewish Cynic

We have seen in general the Christographies of the members of the Jesus Seminar. Some of them like John Dominic Crossan, Robert Funk, Burton Mack, Stephen J. Patterson find there are similarities between the teachings of Jesus about the practice of virtues like love and compassion as well as devaluing power, possessions, positions etc. and the teaching of the Cynic philosophers of Greco-Roman world. According to them the city of Gadara was not very far from Nazareth was a centre of Cynic philosophy. In Galilee both Hellenistic and Jewish thoughts could mutually influence each other. For John D. Crossan⁷ Jesus was more like Cynic sage from Hellenistic

Jewish tradition than either a Christ would die to save sinners or a messiah who would liberate Jewish people from foreign rule and establish a Jewish kingdom. It is obvious that there are certain similarities between the images of Jesus presented in the New Testament and the wisdom sages or Cynics of Hellenistic tradition. But it is an absurd conclusion that Jesus was only a wisdom sage or a Cynic.

IV Contemporary Christologies

Here we could consider the Christological reflections of some well-known theologians since 1951 which was 1500th year of the Christological affirmation of the Council of Chalcedon.

1. Christocentric Christologies

Karl Barth (1888-1968), considered to be the greatest Protestant theologian since Calvin, is the foremost representative of Christocentric Christology. His influence on Western theology has been widely recognized. Reacting to liberal Protestantism's effort to show that ultimately Jesus is "only a human being and provided only an example of moral living but did not save us from our fallen human condition" (R.A. Kereszty. p.252), Karl Barth affirmed the Christological statements of the Councils. According to Barth there is an absolute difference between God and human beings, and humans have no capacity to know or receive God they are under the power of original sin. The fallen nature of humans can create only idols which are mere projections of their mind. Barth is known for his Christocentrism. For Barth there is no other key to the understanding of God, humans and cosmos except Jesus Christ. Even his main work, *Church Dogmatics* in all its 11 volumes is "one long explanation and unfolding of this one name, Jesus Christ".⁸ He reaffirms the Chalcedonian statement about the person of Jesus Christ as *Vere Deus* and *Vere Homo* which would mean that the Logos has taken upon himself human nature in addition to his divine nature. But Barth

emphasized the divinity of Jesus Christ as the centre of Christian faith to such an extent that Christ's humanity seems to lose its significance.

2. Anthropological Christologies

Under this title we can include the Christological trends in various shades of Christologies which have one thing in common, i.e., the understanding of Jesus Christ in and through anthropological categories. It would include the demythologizing existentialist Christology of R. Bultmann to P. Schoonenberg's reversal of theophanic Christology of Chalcedon.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) like Barth revolved against liberal theology but did not share in Barth's renewed interest in classical Christology. Influenced by Heideggerian existential interpretation of reality and the radical form-critical analysis of the New Testament, Bultmann asserted that we cannot speak of God or Christ without reference to our own existence. Therefore, any theological or Christological discourse cannot but be anthropological. Bultmann's existentialist Christology is to be found in his essay on *The Christological Confession of the World Council of Churches*.⁹ Bultmann with his religio-historical school's approach to the NT asserts that the statements in the NT about the person of Jesus Christ are expressed in a mythological lingo and a radical demythologization of these statements would lead us to the Christ proclaimed by the early Church. That Jesus Christ is God is more a confessional than dogmatic statement. It is not an assertion about the ontological nature of Christ. According to Bultmann, any objectifying assertion about God's being is absolutely false. The confession that Jesus is God can be correct only if it expresses the significance of Christ for the believer, *Christus pro me*. God or Christ is to be understood as the event of God's or Christ's acting as a power that affects us in certain moments. Christ's deity is the living experience that cannot be conceptualized. The divine and human dimensions in Christ are not natures but the miracle

of Christ is that 'human word is heard as divine word'. Hence Bultmann repudiates both orthodox and liberal attempts to objectify Christ as the one divine person and the historical Jesus respectively. For Bultmann the content of the Kerygma is the cross and resurrection, or the Christ of faith, and not the historical Jesus.

Bultmann's existentialist Christology is a functional one in the sense that it presents Christ as the one who invites human beings to a fundamental decision for himself. One cannot accept the contention of Bultmann that 'Christ is God' is only the experience of the significance of Christ for the believer. Though Bultmann's existential Christology is accused of individualism, it was a new trend in Western Christology. Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1967) and Paul Tillich (1886 – 1965) developed their own versions of existentialist Christology after Bultmann.

a. Karl Rahner

Anthropological Christology finds its best expression in the Christological reflections of Karl Rahner (1904 – 1984). To Rahner Christology is transcendent anthropology and anthropology is deficient Christology.¹⁰ How does Rahner arrive at such a conclusion? Rahner's Christology is built on his anthropology which has its foundation in what is called 'Transcendental Thomism'. According to transcendental Thomism every human knower moves continuously from one horizon of knowledge to another tending towards the infinite horizon. This movement towards the infinite, the Absolute, is a constitutive dimension of every human being. According to Rahner, "Human being is spirit, that is, he/she lives life in a perpetual reaching out to the Absolute, in openness to God"¹¹ These movements towards God would have been absurd if there were no corresponding movement from the side of God towards human beings. In other words, a human being is a self-transcending reality and God is a self-

communicating reality. Jesus Christ is the meeting point of this double movement of God and human being towards each other. In Jesus Christ humanity has realized the fullness of its possibilities.

Rahner's attempt was to interpret the traditional Chalcedonian formula which affirms that Jesus Christ is true God and true human in a way that would make it meaningful to his contemporaries. The doctrine of two natures does not express the full human life of Jesus Christ. It is the human life of Jesus Christ that challenges the entire humanity to realize its potentialities. Rahner's Christology overcomes the dangers of humanistic liberal theology as well as the earlier Barthian negation of the God-given capacity of human beings to enter into relation with God. However, Walter Kasper doubts whether Rahner has taken the historical importance of the Christ-event seriously in his effort to give a metaphysical explanation of the same. Further, according to Kasper, Rahner's Christology lacks the dimension of the theocentric dialogical relationship of Jesus to his Father which was the primary concern of the New Testament.¹² In spite of such drawbacks, Rahner's anthropological Christology greatly influenced contemporary theological thinking, especially, in the Catholic circles.

b. Wolfhart Pannenberg

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014) like Rahner, follows an anthropological Christology. For him Christology must begin from the humanity of Jesus. He objects to the traditional incarnational Christology's approach 'from above' because it presupposes the divinity of Jesus and makes it difficult to identify the distinctive features of the historical Jesus. Further, this approach is from the position of God, concentrating on how His Son became human.¹³ According to him, our approach must be 'from below', from historical Jesus who can be discovered behind the apostolic Kerygma. Pannenberg's attempt is to show that from the observation of certain features in the historical Jesus himself one can ascertain that Jesus is the Son of God. Within "the

frame-work of apocalyptic expectation of the end of time, Jesus was certain that in his person and activity God's offer of salvation had irrupted into the present. So he spoke with the authority of God and invited people to avail themselves of this offer of unconditional salvation. But his death on the cross seemed to negate his claims. Yet through the event of resurrection from the dead....he is one with God and is himself God".¹⁴ Even before his resurrection he was Son of God but with the resurrection it became evident.

Pannenberg's approach takes the historical life of Jesus and his resurrection seriously for the development of Christology. He insists on taking the humanity of Jesus seriously though in the process he jettisons some of the NT data (e.g. narratives about the birth of Jesus in Matthew and Luke and the Logos Christology of John) which would not fit into his programme of developing a 'Christology from below'.

c. Piet Schoonenberg

In the approach of Piet Schoonenberg's (1911 - 1999) to Christology one finds a serious challenge to the traditional Chalcedonian Christology. In his controversial work *The Christ*,¹⁵ Schoonenberg questions the Chalcedonian solution of uniting the divine nature and human nature in one person of the Logos. According to him, such a solution of replacing the human subject with divine subject would not make Jesus a real human being. The Christologies which consider God and human as rivals would end up finding solutions to the problem of relating 'God *and* human' and not 'God *in* human'. To Schoonenberg the self-evident fact that Jesus is a unity in himself, that is, he is one person, as well as the fact that Jesus is a real human would be the starting points of Christological reflection. Chalcedon asserts that Jesus is one person and a unity in himself and the NT confesses that he is a real human and his humanity "comprises of all our existence except sin, thus also a positive realities as well as the spiritual soul of a human being".¹⁶ But his difference from us is his unique relationship with God. This unique

relationship finds expression in Chalcedon that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of the Father, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

A real human must be a real subject of his personality. So Schoonenberg inverts the doctrine of *enhypostasis* and *anhypostasis*. According to him, it is not the human nature which is enhypostatic in the divine Person, but the divine nature in the human person. This anthropological approach would overcome the dualism in Christology and affirm that Jesus is a real human being, “the eschatological human” filled with the highest degree of the presence of God. Modifying his position after the intervention of the Vatican authorities, Schoonenberg would add that Jesus is also enhypostatic in the Logos as the ground of the human reality and the presences are mutual and reciprocal. However, he would assert that the humanity of Jesus is not anhypostatic.

Schoonenberg’s approach to Christology is radically new and challenging. He proposes an alternative Christology which is appealing to the modern mind by presenting, the real human, with the most perfect and the highest presence of God. However, it is doubtful whether Schoonenberg’s Jesus Christ would still be “God from God” and “Light from Light” of the Creed.

d. Edward Schillebeeckx

In the twentieth century no theologian has made such a thorough – going and extensive study on the person of Jesus Christ as Edward Schillebeeckx (1914 - 2009). In his three volumes on Christology *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*;¹⁷ *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*.¹⁸ Schillebeeckx’s avowed interest is to make Jesus intelligible and meaningful to his contemporaries. For this he makes an extensive search in the sources of the NT traditions using the methods of critical exegesis to find out the original Jesus behind the ‘Christ of the Church’ and behind the

layers the NT traditions. From his studies he reconstructs a picture of Jesus as the eschatological Prophet who proclaimed the Kingdom of God, healed and exorcised, entered into table-fellowship with the social and religious outcasts and through the parable of his life presented a liberating experience of God. For Schillebeeckx Jesus' experience of his *Abba* was the source and secret of his being. His message and manner of life were founded on this unique relationship.

Schillebeeckx's Christology is based on the creedal confessions of the early Church. They include the *Maranatha* Christologies which confess that Jesus Christ as the eschatological Lord and Master of life, the Christologies that present Jesus as the one who performed deeds of power out of compassion for the people, the Wisdom Christologies which identify Jesus as God's Wisdom that reveals God's plan of salvation and brings about salvation and the Easter Christology which gives importance to the death and resurrection of Jesus. In relating all these Christologies to the historical life of Jesus, Schillebeeckx's notion about the reality of resurrection became very controversial. He emphasized the experience of the disciples about the continued presence of Jesus more than the reality of resurrection. The Church believes and confesses the reality of resurrection which is the source of the experience of the disciples that Jesus is alive.

e. Hans Kueng

Hans Kueng (1928-) claims that he wishes to be an apologist of Christian faith and that is the reason for his interest in interpreting Jesus Christ in a way meaningful and acceptable to all sections of society in the contemporary secularized world. The questions he raises and tries to answer are: Who is Jesus? What did he want? In his most popular books, *On Being Christian*¹⁹ and *Does God Exist?* he attempts to an outline on his reflections on Christology.

The picture of Jesus that emerges from the Synoptic Gospels is that of a human who was wholly and entirely a human and a model of what it is to be human and who demanded a final decision for the cause of God and humans. The true man Jesus of Nazareth is the real revelation of the one true God for those who believe in him, and he is God's word and will in human form. He is God's advocate, delegate and representative whose person and works were vindicated by resurrection. The other statements about the divine Sonship, pre-existence, creation, mediation, incarnation are expressed in mythical and semi-mythical language. They are meant to substantiate the divine origin of the uniqueness, un-derivability and unsur-passability of the call, offer and claim manifested in and through Jesus. Kueng's attempt is to liberate the meaning of the person of Jesus Christ from the Jewish and Hellenistic categories of thought and expressions. His insistence on a functional Christology starting with the historical Jesus may not end up in affirming that Jesus is true God in the way as the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon did. Though Kueng's attempts were successful in presenting Jesus Christ in a language meaningful to contemporary society, as is evident from the popularity of his writings, it is not clear whether his functional Christology can ignore the support of an ontological Christology.

3. Theopaschic Christology

In the Christological approach of Juergen Moltmann and Eberhard Juengel Jesus, the crucified, reveals God, in a way hitherto unknown. Suffering being a universal experience, a Christological approach that takes the sufferings of humanity into account has a universal appeal. No wonder, then, this approach to Christology had a tremendous influence on the liberation theologians, especially, Jon Sobrino.

a. Juergen Moltmann

The starting point of the Christological approach of Juergen Moltmann (1926-) is the conviction that the cross of Christ reveals God. In his book

*The Crucified God*²⁰ he points out that the epistemological principle of the theology of the cross as the dialectical principle i.e., the deity of God is revealed 'in the paradox of the cross. Moltmann argues that we have to take the crucifixion of Jesus seriously as the unique event that reveals to us that suffering is a mode of God's being because God is love. The cross is not something that just happened to the human Jesus, but it happened to God himself and therefore the Christ-event on the cross is a God-event. It reveals the intra--Trinitarian relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father suffers the death of the Son in his love for the forsaken human and the liberating force of the cross reaches out to us through the Spirit. The whole history of humanity, both positive and negative, is taken up into the 'history of God'. There is no human suffering or death which would not be at the same time the suffering and death of God himself. Therefore, God's victory over suffering and death is assured and consequently also human salvation.

J. Moltmann's approach to Christology which I termed as a theopaschic Christology reveals the suffering God in and through the suffering of Jesus and consequently in the sufferings of the whole of humanity. The very concept of a suffering God appeals to the suffering people giving them hope that they are not alone in their suffering. It also gives them courage to oppose the dehumanizing situations in life. J. Moltmann's Christological approach has, therefore, socio-political consequences. Compared to the anthropological approaches to Christology he seems to stress more the divine revelation in Jesus than the revelation of what human is in relation to God.

4. Liberation Christologies

The Liberation Christological reflections developed in the Latin American countries especially after Vatican II. While remaining faithful to the orthodox doctrines about the Person and mission of Jesus Christ the

liberation theologians affirmed that a meaningful Christology must pay attention to orthopraxis more than orthodoxy in order to be relevant for a large majority of the poor and the oppressed in the Latin American countries.

a. Jon Sobrino

Jon Sobrino (1938 -) from El Salvador published the English version of his book on Christology titled, *Christology at the Crossroads* (1978) which was originally written in Spanish and published in 1976. He is critical of the traditional Christology with its orthodox doctrines including that of Chalcedon which are too abstract and do not have any impact on the lives of the people for whose liberation God has become human. According to Sobrino, Jesus is the true liberator, "so long as we remember that it is through Jesus that we learn what liberation really²¹ is and how it is to be achieved." Like other liberation theologians, Sobrino also gives more importance to orthopraxis or right action than to orthodoxy or right belief.

The starting point of Sobrino's Christology is the historical Jesus and his proclamation of the kingdom of God. Both the understanding of the kingdom of God and God himself developed in the course of Jesus' life. He experienced and proclaimed a God of love and less a God of power. Therefore, the same love of God was the source of the actions of Jesus. "Historically, Jesus acted out of love and was *for* all human beings. But he was *for* them in different ways. Out of love for the poor, he took his stand *with* them; out of love for the rich he took his stand against them. In both cases, however, he was interested in something more than retributive justice. He wanted renewal and re-creation".²² For Sobrino, the incarnation of God in a sinful world that opposes God is the beginning of the way of the cross. The cross is the outcome of Jesus' historical stand against the systems and the structures of injustice and oppression and it reveals a God who suffers because he is love. The resurrection is the vindication of Jesus' life and the expression of the power of love. Jesus Christ is, therefore, the embodiment

of God's liberating love and following him means to stand for the values of the kingdom and in solidarity with him and with the power of his Spirit to transform the world. So an authentic Christology leads to orthopraxis.

b. Leonardo Boff

Leonardo Boff (1938 -) is from Brazil. He uses the title 'liberator' for Jesus and titled his book on Christology, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology of Our time*, originally published Portuguese in 1972. Boff begins his Christological reflections with the life and mission of historical Jesus as Sobrino does. According to him, "the historical Jesus puts us in direct contact with his liberative programme and the practices with which he implements it."²³ The liberation Jesus proclaimed is integral. It is a programme of liberation *from* all types of bondage and the liberation *for* the kingdom of God. Marxist social analysis can assist in the way of discerning what are the factors that create injustice and oppression that hinder the way of human fulfillment. These factors include social, economic, political and ideological structures and systems. The liberation from these enslaving structures alone would not be sufficient for the fullness of liberation or salvation Jesus proclaimed and effected through his life, death and resurrection but it includes also the liberation from the oppressive and sinful structures. Boff says, "The salvation proclaimed by Christianity is an all-embracing one. It is not restricted to economic, political, social and ideological emancipation, but neither can it be realized without them."²⁴ Boff admits that there is no direct proclamation about the programme of socio-economic and political emancipation in the teachings of Jesus but his stand against "principalities and powers" and his eventual death by condemnation by those in power indicate that Jesus proclaimed a liberation that is integral or holistic.

c. Sebastian Kappen

Sebastian Kappen, S.J (1924-1993) committed to the Person and the mission of Jesus, argues that the authentic Jesus' tradition must enter into

dialogue with the genuinely original forces of self-transcendence within the religious and cultural traditions of India for an integral liberation of everyone and the cosmos. He develops his Christological reflections in his book, *Jesus and Freedom*.

The picture of Jesus that we have from the gospels is as the one who rejected all forms of political and economic power that would dehumanize humans. He began a movement of liberation with the powerless poor and the marginalized of Palestine. It is the historical who can perform the prophetic function that can liberate India from its anti-human structures and systems. But Jesus as proclaimed in India was made to fit into this cosmic religiosity. . Therefore, Kappen's plea is to set free the prophet in Jesus to walk freely on the Indian road to challenge the systems and structures that perpetuate dehumanization and exploitation and unite people of all religions and ideologies to work for the unfolding of all humans without excluding anyone, including even the oppressors and exploiters. He was the prophet of a counter-culture.

Jesus is the supreme revelation of ethical and prophetic religiosity that has humans as its centre. In this religiosity God-experience expresses itself in its concern for humans. The ethical and prophetic religiosity of Jesus is very close to the ethical religiosity of Buddha but also radically different from it. It is not the negation of God or Absolute that brings out the best in humans but surrendering oneself to the Absolute who is the fullness of compassion and love. It is in right relationship with God that humans become truly human and recognize the true humanity of the other. For the God whom Jesus encountered as his loving Father humans are more important than religion and laws and even Jesus, God's own Self. The God whom Jesus encountered is an anthropocentric God.

The prophetic message of Jesus must enter into dialogue with the Indian religious sense of the one-ness of the cosmic, the human and the divine of God's dream. Kappen expresses this embodiment of the Divine in

Jesus without using the traditional Christological titles like Christ, Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man etc. Kappen seems to believe that these titles would alienate Jesus from the realm of history by giving him a mythical self which can be manipulated. So Kappen prefers to express the meaning of the Person of Jesus as, “the Inspired One”, “hitherto unparalleled and unique manifestation of the Divine”, the One in whom the human spirit and the Divine Spirit so united to form one flame, “the eternally Other”, “the symbol and reality of total negativity” and “the way to wholeness”. These descriptions of Jesus, according to Kappen, would reveal the continued presence of Jesus as the Divine in history as the wayfarer and challenge to realize the ultimate hope.

5. Dalit Christology

The Dalit Christology²⁵ is being developed in India by those who are oppressed and ‘broken’ (dalit) by the discriminatory and inhuman caste system of India that condemns millions of Dalits to a life of poverty, misery and social discrimination. According to James Massey, three elements play an important role in Dalit theology: ‘the aspiration of Dalits for fuller liberation, the recognition that God is on the side of the Dalits and the conviction that Christ is the model for the struggle, a struggle which continues even today through the Holy Spirit.’²⁶ Among the Dalits there are about 2.5 million Dalit Christians who see Jesus as their liberator identifying himself with their pains and struggles. According to Monodeep Daniel, “We see the experience of rejection in Christ. So, the Dalit experience of alienation, of rejection, we see in Christ. For instance, for us, to see the death of Christ and relate it to us as an idea of substitution is very difficult for us. I mean we don’t need anybody to die for us. We all die every day. How does the death of Christ substitute our killings every day? It does not relate to us. But solidarity does. Solidarity is salvation for us.”²⁷ They recognize that Jesus suffers with the Dalits and not specifically for them. This is further explained by James

Massey: “Now, Jesus, who was born in a desperately poor family, spent the whole of his life working for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. That is why for me, as a Christian, it is a natural expression of my faith commitment to be involved in the movement for Dalit liberation, because Jesus, the person in whom I have put my faith, became for me what I am today—Dalit, oppressed and despised, in order that I and millions of others like me could be liberated. But if Jesus is my source of inspiration, people from other faiths may have their own sources from which they draw their strength, and that is fine by me.” Jesus is believed and encountered as a Dalit who is both the source and example for the Dalits for their struggle for liberation to live as dignified humans.

6. Feminist Christology

The articulation of Christologies from the perspective of women is a critique on the traditional Christologies which are seen to be articulated from the perspective of men who have a patriarchal mind-set. So the traditional Christologies are accused of interpreting both the Biblical revelation as well as the Christological doctrines in such a way that it supports the domination of men and subjugation of women in the Church which is called to be community of equal discipleship without any gender discrimination.

a. Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenz

The main critique is against emphasizing the maleness of Jesus in the Christological reflections rather than concentrating on the reality of God becoming human with its consequences for both men and women and for the entire creation. The feminist biblical scholars like Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza with her challenging book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*²⁸ inspired many women theologians to interpret the meaning of Jesus Christ that is liberative and life-promoting for women who suffer various types of oppression and discrimination for the only reason of being women.

b. Anne Carr

Anne Carr (1934 - 2008), in her book, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*, argues that the classical Chalcedonian formula speaks only about the divinity and humanity of Christ and not about his maleness. According to her, many women who pray to Christ and pray with Christ experience that the Christ-event has been life-giving and liberating for women. But the traditional Christology with its symbols and explanations about Jesus Christ stresses the maleness of Christ and not his humanity and thus exclude women. As the Church Fathers affirmed, "What was not assumed was not redeemed", Jesus Christ is the source of redemption for both men and women because of their equality as human persons.

The main reason for emphasizing the maleness of Jesus rather than his humanity in the Christological reflections in the past, according to Anne Carr, is the unfortunate influence of the anthropology of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas presumed that the male is the "more noble" sex of the human species and women are somehow defective as human beings and therefore, God could incarnate only as a male. The male represents the fullness of God's image and so Jesus' maleness is not just a historical and contingent fact and headship of the society or the Church belongs to the male members.²⁹ This idea of 'headship' itself functioned in an oppressive way, though Jesus' headship was exercised by being a sacrificial victim, with self-surrender on the cross and by a servant-leadership. According to Carr. The gospels present Jesus as the one who exhibited remarkable freedom and openness to women and preached an inclusive discipleship. His disciples and friends included Mary Magdalene and others that the first witnesses of his resurrection were women. The New Testament stories provide sufficient indication that women are to be treated as human persons and as such their equality as persons must be recognized and affirmed. A Christology from the perspective of

women provides women to interpret the meaning of Jesus Christ that is liberative and inclusive.

c. Elisabeth Johnson

Elisabeth Johnson (1941 -) presents a feminist Christology rooted in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus as well as the Wisdom tradition of the Scriptures. The main ideas of her feminist Christology are articulated in her books, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (1990) and *She Who is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (1992). According to her, the problem for feminist Christology is the distorted manner the maleness of Jesus is interpreted in the traditional Christological discourse and its implication for ecclesial praxis. The official androcentric theology emphasizes the patriarchal image of God and therefore, if Jesus is God he must be male or there must be some affinity between divinity and maleness. Further, the maleness of Jesus is used to stress the androcentric image of humanity and, consequently, to affirm the superiority of men over women. For Elisabeth Johnson a feminist Christology can be developed from the attitude and actions of Jesus in relation to women. Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom included the proclamation of justice and peace to all people. He showed preferential option for the marginalized which included women. Jesus called women to be his disciples who stood by him even when his male disciples deserted him at the moments of his agony. He was crucified for the values of the Kingdom which proclaimed especially, the equality of all God's children, both men and women who are called to a life of self-emptying love and compassion. After his resurrection, Jesus was identified as *Sophia*, or Wisdom, "revelatory of the liberating graciousness of God images as female..."³⁰ Therefore, women as friends of Jesus-Sophia can share equally in the mission of Christ and represent Christ.³¹ Elisabeth Johnson attempts to reclaim the rightful place of women in the society and in the Church through her feminist Christology.

Other feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly are critical of the traditional Christologies that are developed by emphasizing a patriarchal image of God and the maleness of Jesus based on the androcentric scholastic and medieval thinking that justified male domination by untenable theological reasoning. Their critique offers new challenges to the development of an inclusive and liberating Christology in our times.

7. Cosmic Christology

An approach to Christology from the perspective of Jesus' relation to the whole cosmos is primarily Pauline. The cosmic Christ of the Pauline letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians did not further develop probably due to the fear of pantheism. But the challenges of the scientific theory of evolution to the Christian doctrine of creation and the serious concern for ecological well-being in recent times created a renewed interest in considering Jesus as the cosmic Christ.

P. Teilhard de Chardin

It was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) who initiated the process of reconciling science and religion in a refreshingly new way contributed greatly to the development of a cosmic Christology. According to Teilhard the process of evolution from elementary particles to complex organisms and finally to consciousness has its origin and end in Christ. Teilhard asserts that the prodigious expanse of time preceding the birth of Christ was not empty of Christ. He is the alpha and omega point of the process of evolution. The human race as well as the material universe will be finally incorporated into the body of Christ.

Teilhard's Christological approach rooted in the Pauline cosmic Christology opens up new possibilities of searching for a meaningful relationship with the material universe as it is also the body of Christ. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato si* recaptures the Pauline Christological

insights about Christ's relationship with the entire creation. Both by the incarnation of the Logos and by Christ's resurrection the entire creation is positively affected through the humanity of Jesus Christ.³² It challenges the merely materialistic and consumerist approach to nature which creates ecological disasters. Further, it can give new insights for an eco-spirituality.

From Christologies to Christophany

The search of Raimundo Panikkar (1918 - 2010), born of a Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother, for a meaningful Christology which is cross-cultural and inter-religious led him to an insight into *Christophany* which transcends all cultures and religions and at the same time remains at the heart of all cultures and religions because it is a transforming vision into the mystery of reality.

For Panikkar, the Christophany that he proposes stands for the disclosure of Christ to human consciousness and the critical reflection. Unlike Christology from which Christophany does not totally depart, it emphasizes a more passive attitude of receiving the impact of Christ over against a more aggressive search by human reason for intelligibility. It reintegrates the Christ figure into a cosmological vision as well as integrates with critical discernment the homeo morphic equivalents of the same in other traditions where there is an epiphany of the sacred or the divine. Though christophany does not claim to be universal it claims to offer a credible figure of Christ which enables Christians to enter into dialogue with other religious tradition and to remain open, ecumenical and tolerant. Christophany develops in continuity with the traditional Christology and it is a description of that epiphany of the real which Christians call Christ. He is the mediator and not an intermediary, fully divine and fully human, the light that illumines everyone and everything is made by him and in him, the alpha and the omega and all in between. Therefore every being is a Christophany. The Christian discovers Christ *in* and *through* Christian revelation and experience. It is not a mere confession

that Jesus is the Christ that saves one but the existential encounter with the reality that the name of Jesus Christ discloses. It is through the personal experience in communion with the community of believers i.e., the Church, Jesus is recognized, acknowledged and believed to be Jesus Christ, through whom the universe was made, the Son of God, Light from Light, True God from God.

Since the identity of Jesus Christ transcends the spatial and temporal limitations and belongs to the mystery of person and personal relationship, Panikkar's fourth sutra of christophany says that Christians do not have a monopoly of the knowledge of Christ. The Christian experience of Jesus Christ and the reflection on him do not exhaust the mystery of Christ. There are many aspects of this mystery which surpasses all understanding can be recognized in the insights of other religious traditions. Christophany by its very approach to the mystery of Christ and its openness to the manifestation of the Christic mystery in other religious traditions can promote dialogue and collaborative action to face the ecological and human crises of our times.

Christophany considers that 'protological, historical and the eschatological Christ is one and the same reality distended in time, extended in space and intentional in us'. Christophany shows that if Christ is not a dead symbol creation, redemption and glorification relate to him. Creation is *creatio continua* which is the foundation on which concrete time, temporality of every instant rests. The protological Christ or the pre-existent Christ is the same as the historical Christ and the historical Christ cannot be separated from the Eucharistic Christ or the risen Christ. In the same way, the Christ of the parousia cannot be separated from the Eucharistic and risen Christ. Thus Christophany helps us to integrate past, present and future and thus to live consciously a tempiternal life. Therefore, the incarnation is not only a historical event but also a cultural event intelligible in a particular cultural context. In the Semitic culture it was intelligible because of its understanding

of history. Outside the Semitic culture its intelligibility depends on its trans-historical value. In Hindu India the experience of the Christian Christ is better re-enacted by the sacrifice of the Eucharist than by the narrative of Bethlehem. Christophany reveals to us the reality of a Church which has no boundaries. The nature of the Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, as *sacramentum mundi* or in Greek *mysterioutoukosmou* refer to a cosmic Church. The ecclesiology of the Fathers must prevent us from a microdoxical interpretation of the Church reducing it only to an official Church and to a mere historical phenomena. It is the Church that exists throughout the universe the locus of salvation.

Panikkar affirms that Christophany is the manifestation of the mysterious union of the divine, human and cosmic “dimension” of reality. As Jesus Christ is pure transparency whoever encounters him encounters the Father as well as the full Huamn and the cosmos. He is the living symbol of divinity, humanity and cosmos. This experience, according to Panikkar, is the cosmotheandric intuition. Further, Panikkar says: “In Jesus Christ the finite and infinite meet. In him the human and the divine are united. In him the material and the spiritual are one to say nothing of masculine and feminine, high and low, heaven and earth and, obviously, the historical and trans-historical, time and eternity.”³³ Christophany shows that Christ cannot be separated from the Trinity, humanity and history. If Christ is separated from the Trinity he is just like any great teacher or prophet, if he is separated from humanity he becomes another God. If his humanity is separated from his historical context he becomes a gnostic figure who does not share our limited human conditions.

Panikkar’s Christophany is inseparable from his Christology. His Christology grows into christophany which offers a new, integrated and transforming vision of reality and its symbol, the figure of Christ. If Christology is the root, Christophany is the fruit. Christophany offers a challenging vision

that liberates Christians from a narrow and sectarian understanding of Christ to a richer understanding and a better appreciation of the gift of the person of Christ in dialogue with other religious traditions and cultures and to work in harmony with them to face the ecological and human crises of the contemporary world.

Conclusion

We have seen that in our times there are many Christographies and Christologies. If Christographies approach Jesus of Nazareth only as a significant human being who existed in history and had a great influence on the history of the world, the Christologies are the articulations of faith in Jesus Christ who is encountered both as human and divine and as the one who transformed humans and their world through his being and actions. In almost all the modern approaches to Christology a paradigm-shift from the Alexandrine model Christology of stressing the divinity of Christ to the Antiochene model is evident. The stress is on the humanity of the historical Jesus. No modern Christology can avoid the need for asserting the historical reality of Jesus and real humanity. It is also necessary to have the services of a relevant philosophy to make an intellectually well-founded statement about the Person of Jesus Christ.

The most important challenge to Christology today, whether in the West or in the East, is to re-discover the meaning of the person of Jesus Christ and the salvation offered by him in the context of the claims of other saviours and mediators of religions and in the context of secularization. Further, the challenge is to see the complementarities of the various approaches to Christology to unfold the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ who reveals not only who God is, who humans are and what the world is but also what their unique relationship to one another is.

Endnotes

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