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Christology

MUCH OF Christian thought has been devoted to the vexing problem of Christology. Even while Jesus was alive, the question of his true identity was raised by foe and follower alike. For four centuries, his own query "Who do men say that I am?" was debated heatedly within Ecumenical Councils of bishops and theologians—all of whom claimed to be his disciples—yet could not agree how to explain his person. The New Testament as well as the various creeds indicate that the religion of Jesus became a religion about Jesus.

The discussion persists, Christian disagreeing with Christian. For example, in 1965 Methodist theologians gathered at Lincoln College, Oxford to discuss "the finality of Christ". When the conference ended, the British chaplain who led the Bible studies observed:

It is clear that we have reached no finality about the finality of Christ; we are still puzzled by the problem with which we came to Oxford.¹

¹ Dow Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Finality of Christ*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1966, p. 205.

This situation is by no means unique to a theological seminar sponsored by the World Methodist Council. Much the same conclusion could be drawn from a meeting of Anglican or Presbyterian, Lutheran or Congregationalist, Baptist or Roman Catholic theologians. In 451 A.D. bishops of the Christian world assembled at Chalcedon to settle once and for all time the questions about Christology which had greatly agitated the Church since New Testament days. What they succeeded in doing was to compose a creed that drove many Christians into open revolt and separation which continued until a few years ago when Nestorian and Monophysite Churches were welcomed as equal brothers in the membership of the World Council of Churches. It would be fair to conclude that Christology has been the most divisive factor in church history from the apostolic age to the present. Christians have broken fellowship with each other more often over the interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ than any other debatable aspect of their religion. The Lordship of Christ originally designed to cement the ties among Christians has more often than not caused what the majority party calls heresy and schism.

Standard textbooks of systematic theology from an earlier day treated Christology in terms of the decisions of Ecumenical Councils on the two natures of Christ and the Trinitarian controversies concerning the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son from whom proceed the Holy Ghost. That is, the main concern of the Christian theologian was to define properly the dual relationship Jesus Christ has: his ties with human beings and his connection with the eternal God. In most cases, however, theology was interested in demonstrating how Jesus the Messiah was unlike us and how he was like God. To a considerable degree, Christology has had for its primary purpose separating the Messiah from mankind and uniting him with Deity.

Beginning with the Reformation, a decisive shift in methodology took place. Whereas the older theologians stressed the person of Jesus Christ, the newer ones emphasized his function in the economy of salvation. Jesus Christ should be understood not by what he was but by what he did. Calvinism in particular brought

to the fore the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king.^x Christology became an explanation not only of the metaphysics of the person of Christ but also his messianic mission. In other words, Christ was essentially what he was called upon by God to accomplish. The person and his purpose were brought together.

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

According to Professor J. Robert Nelson of Boston University "Christians assert that at a particular point of time, just thirty-three years in the human historical continuum, in a tiny tributary of that vast river of man's earthly existence, in a malodorous cowbarn in a village of small importance, the Master Mind and Maker of this whole dazzling and virtually endless universe became man."² That claim resounds in passages in the works of the Church Fathers, sermons by notable preachers and quotations from creeds, liturgies, and hymns of many different denominations throughout the centuries. Even membership in the very inclusive World Council of Churches is based on a credal ^x confession that Jesus Christ is God and Savior. While exceptionally popular, such assertions tend to obscure or deny the historic fact that Jesus was a man like ourselves. Whatever conventional Christian opinion may assume to the contrary, Jesus was not an alien visitor to our planet from the superterrestrial world. He was one of us, a human among humans, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood.

Professor Bultmann in a famous essay pointed out how the New Testament itself combines myth and history:

Jesus Christ is certainly presented as the Son of God, a pre-existent divine being, and therefore to that extent a mythical figure. But he is also a concrete figure of history—Jesus of Nazareth. His life is more than a mythical event, it is a human life which ended in the tragedy of crucifixion.³

² Dow Kirkpatrick, ed., *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, Harper Torchbook, N.Y., 1961, p. 34.

Christianity must be demythologized, he argued. By this, he meant, among other things, that the Gnostic myth of a divine redeemer who descends from an upper world of light to save men trapped in this lower world of darkness, which was used even in New Testament times to explain the mission of Jesus, has become meaningless to modern man.

Needless to say, Bultmann's essay aroused a storm of controversy and his ideas were denounced as heretical in an official pastoral letter circulated by the bishops of the United Lutheran Church of Germany in 1952. There is, however, among educated Christian laymen and a sizeable group of theologians, growing recognition that the humanity of Jesus must be reaffirmed in the clearest terms.

Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg, the German theologian, has written:

In the contemporary scene it no longer seems particularly remarkable that Jesus was a real man. . . . If Jesus lived at all, if his existence is not to be counted as a matter of spiritistic mysticism, then he was a man like us. The only question is where the uniqueness of this man in distinction from other men is to be seen.⁴

Dr. Erik Routley, a Congregationalist clergyman at Oxford, has observed:

'Jesus is God!'—should Christians say that? The question is one which professional theologians do not find much difficulty in answering. Their answer must be that no statement of Christian faith produced in the first five centuries as carrying authority does say it. . . . What did the early Church say? Nothing in the New Testament urged men to say, 'Jesus is God.' 'Jesus is Lord'—yes: that was the church's earliest battle cry.

⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1968, p. 189.

Lord—and Lord alone to be sure: but not, precisely, God. The New Testament records large claims made by Jesus; but even His enemies did not, as there recorded, accuse Him of more than making Himself out to be 'equal with God'.⁵

Dr. Nels F.S. Ferré of Andover Newton Seminary declared:

Jesus was just as human as anyone else. If anything, Jesus was not less man but more. He was human the way God means us all to become human. We may even say that in a real sense he was the first fully human being.⁶

In somewhat similar fashion Dr. Dow Kirkpatrick, a Methodist minister, reminded the delegates at the Oxford conference mentioned earlier:

Man needs to become true man. Jesus Christ is true man. The finality of Christ is that he is Final Man. He is what every man was meant to be, and what man in his true humanity wants to be.⁷

Finally, Dr. John A.T. Robinson, Anglican bishop and noted New Testament scholar, publicly ridiculed the conventional viewpoint about the divinity of Jesus by saying:

...the traditional supranaturalistic way of describing the Incarnation almost inevitably suggests that Jesus was really God almighty walking about on earth, dressed up as a man. Jesus was not a man born and bred—he was God for a limited period taking part in a charade. He looked like a man, he talked like a man, he

⁵ Erik Routley, *The Man for Others*, Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1964, pp. 53-54.

⁶ Nels F.S. Ferré, *Know Your Faith*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1959, p. 41.

⁷ Dow Kirkpatrick, *Ibid*, p. 204.

felt like a man but underneath he was God dressed up—like Father Christmas. However guardedly it may be stated, the traditional view leaves the impression that God took a space ship and arrived on this planet in the form of a man.⁸

Unification theology teaches that Jesus of Nazareth was fully human because that is the evidence we find in the oldest and most authentic stratum of tradition in the New Testament. None of Jesus' contemporary followers thought of Jesus or treated him as a divine being who had temporarily deigned to visit the earth and dwell among mortal men. To those on the outside and no less to those in his inner circle, Jesus appeared and acted like another human. What set him off from others was not his personality or his nature but his mission. Jesus was different from ordinary men because he had been chosen by God to be the Messiah. Or as Paul phrased his own Christology, Jesus was called by God to do as the second Adam what the first Adam failed to accomplish. Because the first man did not carry out the purpose of creation, another man had to take his place and play his original role. This idea is compatible with Jesus' own description of himself as the Son of Man.

For Unification theology, the essential distinction between Jesus and any other Jew of first century Palestine is derived from his messianic mission. Because he was the "Anointed" of God he towered above his contemporaries in authority and significance. Process theologians sometimes contend that one cannot explain in a rational fashion the two natures of Jesus Christ on the basis of Greek substance philosophy. We would not have this baffling problem if we returned to the historical humanity of Jesus on one hand while at the same time recognizing his divine function or office. Paul Tillich underlines the fact that early Christianity was based on the confession: Jesus is the Christ.⁹

⁸ John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1963, p. 66.

⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1957, v. II, pp. 97-98.

Trinitarian Christian theologians have an incurable weakness for using slippery language in that what they seem to say may not be exactly what they mean. In the case of Christology, for example, they frequently admit the full humanity of Jesus in one paragraph only to deny it in the next. While the humanity of Jesus is being welcomed at the front door, the deity of Christ is allowed to slip in through the back. We see this most clearly in certain theologians' treatment of the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry. At the beginning they talk about the virgin birth and at the end they insist on his bodily resurrection. Because each of these historic dogmas effectively denies the full humanity of Jesus Christ it becomes necessary to consider them in some detail.¹⁰

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Bishop Robinson paraphrased the popular Christian understanding of the virgin birth as "Jesus hadn't got a human father, but God took the man's part." Of this he observed:

Someone I know recently said to me, genuinely puzzled, 'But Jesus' mother *must* have been a virgin. If he had had a human father he couldn't have been the Son of God.' But let's be quite clear. This was not the issue

¹⁰ Earlier it was mentioned that primitive Christianity never considered Jesus to be identical with God and Dr. Routley was also quoted to that effect. While this assertion is true of the original disciples of Jesus and Palestinian Christianity, Professor Oscar Cullmann of Basel and the Sorbonne points out that the New Testament does make a few references to Jesus as God (O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 306-314). First it is important to note that Jesus is not called God (theos) in the Synoptic Gospels which represent the closest texts we have to Palestinian Christianity. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is identified with God in 1:1, 20:28 and according to some manuscripts 1:18 (a reading not accepted by the RSV). In I John 5:20 it also looks as though Jesus Christ is called "the true God". In Hebrews 1:8-9, Psalm 45 addressed to God is applied to Jesus Christ. Cullmann interprets Rom. 9:5, a doxology, as another place where Jesus Christ is designated as God, but again RSV prefers another reading. II Peter 1:1 refers to "the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ". In all these cases we must remember that the New Testament itself exhibits the doctrinal changes which took place as soon as Christianity spread outside of Palestine and was interpreted in Hellenistic ways. What Jesus said and was looked quite different when reinterpreted by or for the second generation of Greek-thinking Christians.

for Jesus' followers or for early Christians. *They* were not convinced he was the Son of God because they knew he hadn't a human father or because of anything that happened when he was born. They were convinced by what they saw in him. He showed them a new kind of living, a new kind of loving, quite out of this world.¹¹

The virgin birth of Jesus is not securely rooted in the New Testament as a whole. Paul knows nothing of such an idea and speaks of Jesus as one born of woman (Gal. 4:4). Since Paul seemed to have a distinct aversion to marriage, had he known of the virgin birth idea he would undoubtedly have used it to good advantage. Similarly, the virgin birth is absent from Mark, our oldest Gospel, and is missing from Q, the early collection of sayings used by Matthew and Luke. Even John, the most recent Gospel, has no reference to this unusual nature of Jesus' conception.

Matthew and Luke alone contain virgin birth stories. These agree only on the general thesis that Joseph found Mary pregnant before he had consummated his marriage to her. In details, the two Gospel accounts vary greatly. Professor Martin Dibelius, the celebrated form critic, concludes that Luke has preserved for us an old Aramaic legend about the birth of Jesus in which he is considered to be the literal Son of God because he was fathered by the Divine Spirit. This sort of idea parallels the somewhat common Egyptian notion that the gods customarily practice intercourse only with virgins. Matthew defends the general idea of the virgin birth against an obvious objection by reporting that Joseph learned of the origin of Mary's pregnancy by special revelation. Matthew, however, is probably most interested in the virgin birth because he sees in it a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Is. 7:14).

Pannenberg agrees with the Biblical scholars who believe the virgin birth legend probably emerged relatively late in circles of the Hellenistic Jewish Christian community. Others have

¹¹ John A.T. Robinson, *But That I Can't Believe!*, Fontana Books, London, 1967, pp. 11, 24.

suggested that the idea is more pagan than Jewish. But why then do we find it in Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels? Actually, the belief that divine beings have sexual relations with ordinary women is not totally alien to the Old Testament as we see in a Genesis story (Gen. 6:1-4).

According to Pannenberg, early Christians sought to demonstrate that Jesus was the Son of God from the very origin of his earthly life. It was not enough to say that Jesus was raised to the right hand of God after his death. It was insufficient to maintain that he was anointed the Messiah at his baptism. Jesus should have been at least equal to Samson (Judges 13:5), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) and the Servant of the Lord (Is. 49:5) who were called by God from their very birth. According to Luke and Matthew then, Jesus first *became* God's Son through Mary's conception. As Pannenberg indicates, this legend stands in an irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the pre-existent Son found in Paul and the Fourth Gospel.

The virgin birth is also connected with the doctrine of original sin. Because original sin is transmitted through the ordinary biological method of reproduction, Jesus was conceived in a miraculous way to keep him untainted by the sin of Adam. This, of course, really denies his full humanity. Perhaps worse, the whole argument is based on an ancient and false view of the mechanics of human reproduction. The old notion was that the father alone produces the child; all the mother does is carry her husband's child in her womb. But we now know that the mother and father are equally responsible physically for the child they jointly produce. Consequently, even if Jesus were free of the original sin he would ordinarily inherit from his father, he would inevitably inherit the taint of original sin from his mother who is also a child of Adam. Roman Catholics only push the process one step further back into the past by affirming the Immaculate Conception of Mary as well as the virgin birth of Jesus.

The legend of the virgin birth may also be related to the encratic belief that sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is by itself sinful. Many religious groups have asserted that spiritu-

ality and chastity belong together. Sex, we are told, dirties the soul. In line with this attitude, Jesus was born from Mary without her ever succumbing to the sinful passion of ordinary human lovemaking. Jesus then was no byproduct of an act of lust. Since some of the Essenes in Palestine during the lifetime of Jesus practiced celibacy, this idea was not totally alien to the Jewish mind. How much it lies behind the creation of the virgin birth legend we have no way of determining.¹²

Once we have explained the legendary character of the virgin birth traditions in Matthew and Luke, it becomes imperative to replace them with something better. Many liberal Protestants reject the virgin birth myth and assume that as Mary was the natural mother of Jesus so Joseph was his natural father. Even the Gospel of John has Philip call Jesus "the son of Joseph" (1:45).

As attractive as this idea may be, especially as an illustration of the full humanity of Jesus, a different conclusion may better fit the history behind our New Testament traditions. Ethelbert Stauffer points out that when Jesus is called the son of Mary in the Gospels, to a reader in the first century this would mean he was an illegitimate child. If such be the case, the origin of the virgin birth legends becomes crystal clear. They were invented to explain and defend the fact that Joseph was not the real father of Jesus. In fact, in some Graeco-Roman circles, illegitimate children were explained by the assertion that the women involved had been seduced by an amorous god. In Mary's case, an early Jewish explanation was that she had a tryst with a Greek soldier, but this taunt probably did not originate until long after the Christian legend of the virgin birth was in general circulation.

If Joseph was not the father, who was? The New Testament itself is silent on such matters. Perhaps the fact that Joseph still married Mary and accepted Jesus as his legal son would indicate that he knew who the father was, that he was someone close to him

¹² Pannenberg's treatment of the virgin birth is to be found in *Jesus—God and Man*, pp. 141-150. He concludes that the item on the virgin birth in the creeds can be justified only because it protects the Church from Docetic and Adoptionist tendencies.

or important enough to hush up the affair as quickly as possible. The suggestion has been offered that Zechariah, the priest and husband of Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, might be involved. The New Testament contains no textual evidence for such an idea or against it. Yet the suggestion has an intriguing quality about it. If Jesus were the child of Zechariah, he would bear the physical lineage of the Hebrew priesthood and the legal lineage of the house of David. Thus in one person he would fulfill the national concept of a Messiah who comes to restore the throne and also the common Hebrew dream of a priestly Messiah who would head a new theocracy. As the son of Zechariah, Jesus would become a half brother to John the Baptist producing in effect another Abel-Cain relationship at the very beginning of God's new dispensation. This explanation of Jesus' paternity would also serve to illustrate the traditional Christian comparison between Mary and Eve.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Professor Pannenberg in his book on Christology¹³ makes several important points concerning the resurrection of Jesus. For the earliest disciples, the resurrection of Jesus was seen as part of the general apocalyptic hope. Only for the second generation of New Testament writers was it a special event which happened to Jesus alone. Originally the rising of Jesus from the grave was considered the beginning of the imminent universal resurrection of the dead. For the disciples if Jesus had been raised, then the end of the world had begun and the Last Days had arrived; he was the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, the first born from the dead. The connection that once existed between the event of the first Easter and the expectation of the eschatological Day of the Lord is often overlooked.

Secondly, Professor Pannenberg sharply distinguishes the resurrection of Jesus from the resuscitation of a corpse. The daughter of Jairus, the young man from Nain, and Lazarus only temporarily returned to this life from the dead. Jesus' resurrection

¹³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, pp. 53-114.

involves the concept of a transformation radically different from all life with which we are familiar.

According to this modern German theologian, the Easter traditions are of two types: those about appearances of the risen Christ and those about the empty grave. We should limit our concern, he says, to the Pauline account of the resurrection appearances. For those in the Gospels not mentioned by St. Paul "have such a strongly legendary character that one can scarcely find a historical kernel of their own in them." Even those in the Gospels corresponding to Paul's statements "are heavily colored by legendary elements, particularly by the tendency toward underlining the corporeality of the appearance."¹⁴

Pannenberg emphasizes that the Pauline report in I Corinthians, chapter 15 was very close to the actual events themselves. That is, the appearances were not freely invented in the course of later legendary development. Paul himself on the Damascus Road saw a "spiritual body" rather than a person with an earthly body. He presumes that what he experienced was like that imparted to the other apostles. His vision and theirs involved extraordinary appearances not perceived by all present. These in turn could be related to recent studies in parapsychology which suggest the possibility of visionary experiences that are more than subjective projections, and indeed manifest extrasubjective reality. However, Pannenberg becomes very cautious, probably too much so, at this point. We could compare the visions of Jesus by the disciples with other visions of him reported by the Christian saints or the similar visions of the Blessed Mother Mary occurring at Guadalupe, Lourdes and Fatima.

Next Pannenberg considers the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb. St. Paul nowhere mentions this report but Pannenberg feels that within the Jerusalem community there had to have been reliable testimony about the fact of an empty grave. He agrees with those who argue that the resurrection could not have been maintained for a single day in Jerusalem if all concerned had not agreed

¹⁴ Pannenberg, *Ibid*, p. 89.

that the tomb was indeed found empty. He adds that Jewish polemic against Christianity never tried to deny that the grave was found empty, though that would have greatly strengthened their case.

Other possibilities have been mentioned, even though Pannenberg does not find any of them convincing. Jesus could have been buried as a criminal in any tomb that happened to be empty or in a mass grave without anyone having taken the trouble to inform Jesus' followers of its location. Or the tomb could have been broken into by grave robbers which were plentiful at that particular time. In any case there is general scholarly agreement that the empty grave in Jerusalem was far from Galilee where the first appearances of the risen Christ took place. We have two separate traditions.

Pannenberg doubts the historicity of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances because they underline the corporeality of the risen Jesus. The logic of the Gospels seems to be that Jesus could appear in Galilee because he left his grave to travel there and remained in Palestine until his physical ascension into heaven forty days after Easter. If we believe in a spiritual immortality rather than a resurrection of the flesh, it would seem to be easier to treat the empty tomb as an early Christian legend. Many scholars therefore follow Bultmann in denying the historicity of the empty grave stories.

Actually the Marburg New Testament critic goes much farther. He and his disciples deny that the resurrection of Jesus in itself can be called an historical event. Historical research cannot establish the actual facticity of the resurrection. All the New Testament scholar can affirm is the faith of the early Church. Christians like Paul and the authors of the Synoptic Gospels themselves regarded the resurrection as an event in time and space. The most the Biblical critic can conclude is that men believed they had seen Jesus alive after his death.

Bultmann himself states quite flatly: "An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceiv-

able."¹⁵ As he argues, the Easter event is an event of faith. It is not what happened to Jesus but what happened to his disciples that is important. The resurrection texts are only vehicles of a new self-understanding on the part of the first Christians and expressions of the faith of the original Palestinian community.¹⁶

Several very different questions are involved and one must carefully separate them. First, one has to look at the New Testament accounts and judge their reliability as historical sources. This alone is a very complicated task requiring every help which the New Testament scholar can give us. The average layman lumps all the resurrection stories together and accepts or rejects them in toto. The careful student on the contrary may distinguish, for example, between what Paul says from the narratives in the Fourth Gospel, accepting the former and rejecting the literal historicity of the latter. Secondly, one must seek to discover the fundamental theological or Christological meaning behind the stories. What doctrinal purpose does the resurrection text serve to illustrate? Thirdly, one must try to understand in contemporary language what the New Testament authors were trying to convey. And lastly, but most importantly, we must decide the value the Easter faith has for us now.

Believing that the resurrection of Jesus was a spiritual one, *Divine Principle* is primarily interested in the final problem, an explanation of the significance of the resurrection for the contemporary Christian. How do we explain for ourselves what happened after Jesus was nailed to the cross?

In the conflict of good and evil which constitutes human history as we know it, Satan used the failure of John the Baptist, the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, the faithlessness of the disciples, the cowardice of Pilate and the narrowmindedness of the Pharisees to send Jesus to the cross. Satan, by exercising his power over men, crucified Jesus. God, in turn, by exercising His authority, raised

¹⁵ R. Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 39.

¹⁶ For a summary of this debate in German theological circles see Carl E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1966, pp. 78-102. A defense of Bultmann's general position by an American Methodist theologian can be found in Carl Michaelson, *The Hinge of History*, Chas. Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1959, chapter VIII.

Jesus from the dead. As the cross had been a triumph for Satan, Easter represented an even greater victory for God. From this time on Satan was on the defensive and God took the offensive.

In the New Testament, this theory is stated quite symbolically. Jesus laid a foundation for his ministry by his forty day period of fasting and inner struggle in the Judean wilderness. The crucifixion effectively negates Jesus' messianic ministry on earth. Satan had removed him from the scene. From a purely historical perspective, the mission of Jesus was cut short by his death on the cross.

St. Luke alone among the Evangelists refers to a second forty day period which prepared for the witness of the later Church. In that length of time, surely intended as a symbolic figure, between the resurrection and the ascension, the risen Christ laid a new foundation by training his disciples for an important mission on their own. To put this idea in more technical theological language, God initiated a new dispensation based on the purely spiritual authority of Jesus. By uniting with Jesus who was no longer physically present with them, Christians could become the Body of Christ, his hands, his feet, his members. In the mind of the author of the Third Gospel and the book of Acts, salvation history (*Heilgeschichte*) goes from the first Advent to the Second Advent, from the Nativity to the Parousia.

LOGOS AND SOPHIA

The Fourth Gospel opens with a long poem or hymn about the Word of God (Logos) which the author adapts to explain his particular understanding of the nature of Jesus' work and office. The Logos idea comes from a Hellenistic mystical tradition and was employed by Philo of Alexandria in his unique synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Mosaic religion. Out of an analogous cultural milieu came the Christian Platonism of Clement and Origen. A further similarity in language and spirit is seen in the mystical higher paganism of the Egyptian Hermetic literature. C.H. Dodd uses these facts to provide the background for his commentary on the Fourth Gospel. Bultmann on the other hand prefers to relate the Johannine literature to the Gnostic philosophy

derived from Iran. Others emphasize the homogeneity between the book of John and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

According to the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the Word was with God from the beginning and was the means by which He produced the creation. As the Greeks saw it, the Word served as a mediator between the ideal and the actual. It provided a necessary bridge between the invisible world of spirit and the visible world of flesh. Augustine reports that all this is pure Platonism until we come to the uniquely Christian assertion that the Logos became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth and dwelt among us.

As Unification theology points out, the Fourth Gospel does not necessarily mean that Jesus, the man of Nazareth, was a pre-existent divine being who came to an alien material world for a brief visit. Rather, it indicates that the Word, God's idea of man, was in the divine mind from the beginning. The Logos was God's plan for creation.

To understand another part of the teaching of *Divine Principle* in relationship to traditional Christian theology it may be useful to refer to a second Greek concept: Sophia. In Greek, Logos is the masculine term for Word and Sophia is its feminine counterpart, usually translated Wisdom. The Wisdom poems of the book of Proverbs provide the major canonical source for an understanding of Sophia (chapters 8 and 9). These in turn are said to have been originally derived from the cult literature of the Egyptian goddess Isis. Whatever the source, for Hebrew thought the Holy Spirit was commonly considered feminine rather than masculine.

According to Unification theology, the eternal plan or idea of God for mankind involved both a masculine and feminine aspect. In the mind of God there always subsisted an eternal Adam and an eternal Eve. Since God and all things created by him have polarity, the Word must also have polarity. Perhaps to distinguish between the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine plan for creation we can speak of the eternal Logos and the eternal Sophia. Adam and Eve, the first human pair created by God, were intended to be incarnations of the divine Word. Adam was designed to be a physical manifestation of the Logos and Eve, his counterpart, an

embodiment of the Sophia.

In the theology of the *Divine Principle*, God created one man, Adam, for whom He made a woman, Eve. Because of the Fall, they failed to fulfill the purpose for which they were created. God must, then, restore one man in Adam's position and, through him, a woman to take the place of Eve. Adam and Eve were to marry with God's blessing when they reached spiritual and physical maturity, thus becoming perfected Parents of a mankind wholly centered on God. So far Unification theology somewhat parallels common Biblical and Christian thought.

Divine Principle goes on to emphasize an aspect of the New Testament teachings of Jesus largely overlooked in conventional Christian theology. More than once, Jesus referred to himself as the Bridegroom (Mark 2:19, Matt. 22:2-3, 25:1). Unification theology uses the concept of the divine Bridegroom and divine Bride as the key to its anthropology and soteriology, its doctrine of man and doctrine of salvation.

If Jesus, the incarnation of the Logos, had found his proper mate, he and his Bride would have become the true Parents of a new family of God in accordance with the divine purpose of creation. Why Jesus did not marry is one of the unfathomable puzzles of the New Testament history. From the Biblical record we gain not the slightest hint as to the reason he remained a bachelor.

After the crucifixion and in spite of it, the spiritual mission of Jesus continued. God used the masculine Logos previously incarnate in Jesus with the feminine Sophia to carry on His work of restoring mankind on the spiritual level. According to *Divine Principle*, the Holy Spirit works with the risen Christ in Eve's place.¹⁷ Making restitution for Eve's part in the Fall, the Holy Spirit inspires and comforts the human heart leading us back to God. Through the give and take of love, the eternal Christ and the Holy Spirit give spiritual rebirth to all those who unite with them.

✧ ¹⁷ Elksai, the leader of a group of Jewish Christians during the reign of the Emperor Trajan, claimed his revelation came from two celestial beings, a masculine Son of God and a feminine Holy Spirit. J. Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, Regnery, Chicago, 1964, p. 65.

THE TRINITY

Although the Trinitarian controversy of the fourth century and the Christological controversy of the fifth can easily be separated, they should be viewed as two chapters in a single story dealing with how Christians explained the relationship between the human Jesus and the eternal God. In this same sense, the Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and that at Chalcedon in 451 really involved the same problem from different angles. That Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal yet distinct persons in one divine substance and that Jesus Christ possesses two natures in a single person are highly complicated concepts from Greek philosophy to explain that the man of Nazareth was not just an ordinary man but one carrying out a divine mission. For some reason it seemed too simple to say that as Messiah, Jesus had answered God's call.

Three factors should be taken into account in order to set the stage for consideration of this basic issue. First, the brief statement that Jesus was the Christ rather quickly lost most of its meaning when the Christians took their religion out of Palestine into the wider Graeco-Roman world. Even in Jerusalem, people like Caiaphas and Pilate could think that being the Christ meant simply posing as a pretender to the long-vacant throne of David. Who in Ephesus or Corinth, Galatia or Gaul could care about a religion whose founder was merely king of the Jews? The messianic hope in its most restricted political and nationalistic form could have no attraction once Christianity severed its Palestinian roots. In the Graeco-Roman world, the Church was literally forced to find a new terminology to make its basic religious message understandable. Within the New Testament the careful reader can easily note the struggle to discover a new Christian vocabulary.

The non-Jewish world had a highly sophisticated metaphysical world view derived from Plato and his interpreters, a theology of the pagan Mystery religions based on the myth of a dying and a risen god¹⁸ as well as the moral philosophy known as Stoicism.

¹⁸ Samuel Angus, *Mystery Religions and Christianity*, Scribners, 1925; R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, Meridian Books, N.Y., 1956, pp. 156-161.

Consequently it was natural and almost inevitable for Christians to reinterpret their original faith along these lines. St. Paul himself attempted just such a theological reconstruction, though his efforts were but a prelude for what would follow. Hellenization then began in the New Testament.

Secondly, the desire of the Church for a reasonable and convincing explanation of its doctrines about God and Christ was reinforced by the purely political concern of the Roman Empire for ideological unity. Constantine himself had become a Christian sympathizer and a patron of the new faith because he thought of the Church as a stabilizing and cohesive power in Roman civilization. Preeminent in his mind was the desire to have one faith for one world. To preserve political unity he sought ecclesiastical uniformity. When the acrimonious debate between Arius and Athanasius over the person of Christ threatened the internal peace of the Empire, he summoned the bishops to a meeting at Nicea to calm ecclesiastical passions. For him and in most cases, for his successors, the Ecumenical Council and an agreed-upon statement of belief were methods employed to end disruptive ecclesiastical bickering. This non-theological aspect of Christological and Trinitarian development should never be minimized.

Thirdly, theology must be viewed in the light of the uncritical devotion of the Christian masses. Theology is more than an adventure of ideas alone. It represents a rationalization of what people feel as a result of worship. Theology grows out of liturgy. When men hear Jesus, listen to his teachings and follow him as disciples they will have a very different attitude about him than when they pray to him or sing hymns about him. For the first century, Jesus was a man who commanded the loyalty of his followers. For the Christians of the fourth century he was the cult object of a very elaborate ritualistic Church. A theology based on the leadership of Jesus was replaced by one built on praising him. Even the Patriarch of Constantinople, like Nestorius, was unable to correct popular piety with the logic of a sound theology. When he protested that Mary was not the Mother of God (*Theotokos*—God bearer) but only the mother of Christ, he soon found himself denounced as a

heretic even though reason was on his side. He was condemned and deposed because against him ranged the full force of popular Christian devotion. To quote the ancient Latin formula, "Lex orandi, lex credendi": the law of prayer is the law of belief. When Christianity sang hymns to Christ as a god, and this was reported to the emperor by the younger Pliny, it was virtually inevitable that soon the creed would define him as a god.

On the basis of a modern history of Christian dogma, for example, that prepared by the Latin American Professor Justo L. Gonzalez, one can view the transformation of Jesus who was the Messiah (Christ) into Jesus, the Son of God consubstantial and co-equal with the Father.¹⁹ As we have suggested earlier, identifying Jesus as the incarnation of the Logos was the first big step in that direction. This claim, made first by the Fourth Gospel, was thoroughly worked out by Origen of Alexandria. In fact, as a result of his careful and consistent systematization of this thesis, the weakness of Logos Christology became apparent and Origen's followers were excommunicated as heretics.

Origen started with the common faith of his time that God can be described as Father, Son and Holy Spirit even if the divine nature is much higher than anything our intelligence can conceive. The divine essence is beyond any definition man can frame. In agreement with the popular opinion, the learned Alexandrine Biblical scholar asserted that the Son was the same substance as the Father, co-eternal and co-equal. The Son proceeds from the Father much as an act of will proceeds from the understanding.

What then is the difference between the Father and the Son? According to Origen, the Father is the absolute transcendent God. The Son is the intermediary between the unspeakable One and the multiplicity of the world. In other words, the Son is the Logos, the bridge between the finite and the infinite. The Son, as the New Testament asserts, is the image of God, His name, His face. To use Origen's metaphor, God the Father is a statue of such immense dimensions that it is too big for man to see, so the Son is a small

¹⁹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1970, v. I.

enough replica that it is comprehensible to the beholder. Or to quote another remark by Origen, Father and Son are two Gods who are one in power. While he takes care to assert the unity of Father and Son, he subordinates the latter to the former. Origen's disciples may have gone even further in making the Son somewhat inferior or less divine than the Father. At least so the enemies of Origen charged.

Origen was as famous a Biblical exegete as he was a theologian. His interest in scriptural interpretation stimulated the birth and growth of Biblical studies at Antioch. Lucian, founder of the school of Antioch, dropped Origen's allegorical exegesis and insisted that Biblical study concentrate on the literal meaning of the New Testament text. Arius was a product of the School of Antioch and in many ways could be called a left-wing Origenist.

Arius was a priest in Alexandria who carried the subordinationist ideas of Origen to their logical conclusion. He too began his theology with the concept of the Logos but he did so on the basis of the most absolute monotheism. Christ, he maintained, is not an emanation from God or part of the substance of God or of a similar nature as God. The Son is not God but the first creature made by Him. Although the Patriarch of Alexandria was also a disciple of Origen he felt Arius had gone much too far and convened a synod which deposed him. Arius promptly moved to Nicomedia where he was reinstated by his friend, Bishop Eusebius. Worried by the effects of an ecclesiastical row, the Emperor Constantine sponsored the Council of Nicea which declared Arianism heretical.

Bishop Eusebius was in charge of the diocese where Constantine had his summer palace. Once he got back from exile, he launched an attack on his anti-Arian foes. He persuaded the Emperor to command the Patriarch of Alexandria to restore Arius to communion, an act frustrated by Arius' death before the order could be carried out. Eusebius next moved against the Patriarch of Antioch whom he caused to be deposed for adultery, tyranny and heresy. Athanasius, the foremost defender of Nicea, was likewise condemned by a synod of bishops at Tyre directed by Eusebius.

Another leading Nicean, the Bishop of Ancyra, was denounced and banished as a result of a synod held in Constantinople. To add insult to injury to his enemies, Bishop Eusebius was the prelate chosen to officiate at the deathbed baptism of Emperor Constantine and under Constantius, the new ruler, became Patriarch of Constantinople.

Any reliable church history can be consulted for details concerning the final triumph of Athanasius and denunciation of Arianism at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. Constantine had insisted that the equality of the Son and the Father be put into the Nicean Creed. Perhaps at the suggestion of Bishop Hosius of Cordova in Spain, the Emperor's theological expert, the Nicean Creed employed the word *Homoousion*—"of one substance". As the debate persisted for more than a half century after the Nicean Council, some bishops coined a compromise word *Homoiousion*—"of like substance". But the original word remained in the creed. After more than fifty years of theological controversy and ecclesiastical politics of the most disreputable sort on both sides had rent the Church from top to bottom, the disputants were back where Nicea had started out in the first place. Though there were still various ways to interpret it, the orthodox Christian conclusion was that the Son of God is co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father.

Many readers of church history feel uneasy about what took place in the age of the Fathers and the final results of Nicea and Chalcedon. Some contrast the simple appeal of the New Testament Gospels and the exceedingly complicated metaphysical distinctions made by the Patristic theologians. Others blame the Church for ever getting enmeshed in the subtleties of Greek philosophy. Not a few are critical of the way Christians concentrated on creeds rather than conduct. In an age of theological reconstruction and innovation like our own, Nicea and Chalcedon look like moss-covered gravestones over a very dead past.

Unification theology returns to the Biblical view that the Messiah is supposed to restore man to the position God intended for him before the Fall. When one starts with that ideal, most of

Christian Trinitarian and Christological speculation looks like an unnecessary as well as unfortunate detour. If the essential work of the Messiah is to become the second Adam, subjugating Satan and restoring the position of Eve in order to lay the foundation for a new family of God, then trying to work out the relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the reality of the Godhead misses the point completely. Instead of looking at Jesus' role as the Messiah and second Adam, traditional Christology largely abandoned his historical position as a human being in order to emphasize his allegedly supernatural status: as a virgin's son who was miraculously resuscitated from the grave three days after his crucifixion. Once this mistaken direction became entrenched, Trinitarian speculation virtually exhausted the energy and ingenuity of the Church Fathers.

Of course, in one sense there is a trinity formed by the restored Adam and Eve centered on God and completely united with Him; but such a practical trinity based on the fulfillment of the purpose of creation has nothing in common with the dogma of the three hypostases in one ousia. By expending so much of its time and talent on such intricate definitions of the Deity, wondering how Christ could be "very God of very God", the ancient Church ignored the practical import of the central petition of Jesus' prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

THE ATONEMENT RECONSIDERED

In traditional formulations of Christological dogma there is usually an explanation of the Atonement. Ever since St. Paul's day, Christians have concentrated on the saving significance of the cross. As many have indicated, the early Church shifted its attention from the life of Jesus to his death. In the Apostles' Creed, an elaboration of an ancient Roman baptismal pledge, there is nothing said of the teaching and ministry of Jesus. Between the mention of his birth from the Virgin Mary and his suffering at the hands of Pontius Pilate, the creed contains only a comma. The essence of the Christian religion seems to be the single claim that Christ died for our sins.

Several historical factors can be mentioned to explain the change from a this-worldly hope for the kingdom of God to an other-worldly longing for heaven. Perhaps most important was the widespread "failure of nerve" which poisoned the atmosphere of the Hellenistic world. Then there was the conscious transformation of the original Jewish-Christian message into a Mystery religion theology which claimed that Jesus was the dying and risen Lord who offered men the medicine of immortality through mystical and sacramental union with him. Not least significant, of course, was the gradual recognition on the part of Christians that Jesus had not brought about the kingdom in the physical form envisioned by the eschatologically-oriented apostolic age. Since the kingdom had not come on earth, attention was shifted to the purely spiritual benefits which Christ might bestow upon individuals as they prepared themselves for the after-life.

Judaism knew nothing of a suffering, rejected and crucified Messiah. As Paul openly admitted, such an idea was a scandal and a stumbling block. Some scholars like T. W. Manson feel that Jesus himself combined the ordinary concept of the Messiah with Deutero-Isaiah's interpretation of the nation of Israel as the Suffering Servant of God. However, this novel synthesis was not attempted until Jesus had encountered serious opposition and his ministry seemed doomed to almost certain failure. As the Gospels plainly show, the disciples themselves could not believe that their Messiah must suffer and be rejected.

Once the attention of Christians became focused on the cross it was to be expected that they would adopt a variety of views by which the crucifixion was made to look like the work of Providence and an act of enormous benefit to the believer. Within the context of temple Judaism, for example, it was possible to interpret the death of the Christ as the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Another view, equally primitive, claimed that the cruel death inflicted on Jesus was the ransom God had to pay the Devil to purchase the release of a captive humanity. Yet another opinion was that Jesus became the voluntary substitute who restored God's offended sense of honor by suffering the

punishment rightfully required of the race of Adam for their disobedience, rebellion, concupiscence and criminality. Since none of these doctrines of the Atonement has been found convincing to all Christians, to say nothing of non-churchmen, an alternative explanation has been offered in which the cross is seen as the ultimate expression of how far divine love will go to show its concern for a prodigal humanity. According to this moral theory of the Atonement, God loves us so much that to bring us back to Him He is even willing to send His Son to die on the cross or, as another version of the same interpretation puts it, God cares for us so deeply that to restore us to Him, He Himself suffers the agony of the crucifixion.

It would be unfair to dismiss such Atonement doctrines without first recognizing the cultural, psychological and moral impact they have made on countless individuals and the general course of western civilization. Born in an age permeated by a failure of nerve, Atonement theories have reinforced a mystical and monastic escape from the world, as well as provided a religious underpinning for a general philosophy of world negation—one which seemed very realistic as the Roman Empire fell and European man entered the Dark Ages. Psychologically such doctrines undoubtedly assuaged the guilt complexes of a St. Paul, an Augustine, a young Luther and a Soren Kierkegaard by projecting them on a cosmic screen and making them the key to redemption. There is little doubt that the pulpit message, Christ died for our sins, has given comfort to large numbers of distraught individuals who might otherwise have found it difficult to keep what Tillich terms “the courage to be”. By preaching an evangelistic theology, the Wesley brothers, it has been said, turned frustrated British factory hands from social revolution to personal religion and saved industrial England from a bloody French-like Reign of Terror. And further, a rather crude and literalistic theology of the saving blood of Christ has been employed by some sects to console and often redeem social derelicts and the despised outcasts of urban civilization.

In spite of all such extenuating circumstances, many have

found Atonement doctrines and theologies of shed blood unjustifiable. First, they depart from the original interpretation of the messianic role. Second, a philosophy of world negation upon which they are founded represents a denial of the original purpose of creation. Third, they divert Christian efforts from the establishment of a true world-wide family of God so imperative in our time. By rediscovering the authentic meaning of messiahship Unification theology attempts to provide a Christian impetus for a much-needed "life affirmation", as our world prepares for a new social order, occasioned by the meeting of East and West in our global village.

CHRISTOLOGY: A NEW BEGINNING

Having commented at some length on the traditional Christological and Trinitarian formulas, let us briefly explain Unification Christology. At many points the following interpretation may seem to depart rather widely from well-known views handed down from the past. Nearly everyone is agreed, however, that Christianity must reinterpret its message in the light of intellectual and cultural changes going on all about us. When certain theologians like Thomas J. Altizer of Emory University shocked everybody by announcing that God died in our century, they meant in part that the old theology had become complete irrelevant for modern man. Something different, something new, is required if the Christian religion is to make a positive contribution toward a new, more progressive civilization.

To begin, *Divine Principle* rejects the notion that Jesus was God Himself. Patristic Christianity was right to condemn Docetic, Patripassionist and Modalistic Monarchian views that Jesus was God and not man. The Synoptic Gospels contain an early Palestinian stratum of tradition which makes the complete humanity of the historic Jesus quite plain. Jesus was in appearance no different from other men. Even his brothers failed to see anything unusual about him. In fact, one of them, James, did not join the Christian movement until after the crucifixion. Because of his very human

qualities, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. According to the earliest Gospels, he often retired to a lonely spot to pray because, as a man, he needed strength from God to continue his exhausting ministry. Like anyone else, he was hungry and sleepy at times. More than once the Evangelists tell us, he broke down and wept. Jesus also became disheartened by the opposition he encountered from the Pharisees and the disbelief of his fellow-countrymen even in his hometown of Nazareth. He was filled with distress when his inner circle betrayed, denied and then abandoned him to his fate. For proof that Jesus was thoroughly human, consider his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and his lonely cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Athanasius of Alexandria correctly argued that Jesus could be of help to us and could be our Savior only if he were one of us in every respect. Unification Christology maintains that if Jesus were not subject as a human being to the temptations Satan puts in front of us, he could not be in a position to overcome them and liberate mankind from Satanic domination. If Jesus were not human, his life, his teachings, and his example would be irrelevant.

If God in human flesh or a divine visitor Himself were to save mankind, he would have come a lot sooner. Besides, if it could have been done, man would be an eternally valueless being of creation and could certainly never be entitled to exercise dominion over it. If a great scholar does all the paperwork for his son, then the son will be inept in that area all his life. When the Messiah is called, God can only help him to function in his role; but he, as a man, must use his own reasoning, will power, and intuition.

Traditional Christianity makes much of the complete sinlessness of Jesus. If he were morally flawless it was only because he never allowed himself to transgress God's moral law. He dedicated himself totally to the divine will. In this sense Albrecht Ritschl was right to think of Jesus as not one with God in essence but harmonious with Him in will. So was Paul of Samosata, Patriarch of Antioch, deposed in 268 A.D. for saying that Jesus and the Word were united only spiritually and that the Logos dwelt in Jesus as in a temple.

By his calling and work alone was Jesus set apart from his contemporaries, therefore his morality and capability are not unreachable. As Adam and Eve were to form the original trinity with God, Jesus in attaining perfection would have paved the way for all of mankind to receive the same blessing. The book of Revelation therefore intimates a final marriage of the Lamb (19:7-9), True Adam with True Eve, which *Divine Principle* envisions as the feasible hope for a new beginning.

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