

since it is now an explicitly interconfessional community (though its sister community at Grandchamp, which has not developed along the same lines, happily was represented). In the event Prior Roger Schütz and Frère Max Thurian (now a priest of the Catholic Church) made their appearance in the final week. Exposure to the full range of the consecrated life in the Roman Catholic Church was a salutary cutting down to size, and a reminder that Anglican (and Protestant) communities are all located in the zone of the vocations crisis: a situation that we share with the Catholic communities that are geographically near to us, but without the encouragement, *except through them*, of better things in other countries. The ecumenical implications are plain enough. In such circumstances it was cheering both to be encouraged to take a full part in the discussions of the Circuli Minores, and to be invited to address the whole Synod. I was happy to be able to refer, if only briefly, to fifty years of theological exchange between the Dominicans of the English Province and the Community of the Resurrection — most of it, for me, an extended preparation for a memorable experience.

## “Christology”: What’s In a Word

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Yes, Christology is the *logos* or science of the Christ. But science is the invention of the Greeks, and while *Christos* is Greek, too, it does duty here for “Messiah.” The word contains the encounter of Jerusalem and Athens that has been the sustaining event of the whole of Western culture, which, in these days, and notwithstanding the abiding vigour of Indian thought, is increasingly the culture of the world. And already thus far “Christology” proves itself a weasel word. For if indeed we speak of an “encounter” of two “cultures,” then Athens bids fair to absorb Jerusalem as just one more collection of human conventions and *nomoi*. But if we say that “Christology” signifies the destruction of proud arguments (*logismoi*) and the capture of every thought unto the obedience of Christ (see 2 Cor 10:4–5), then it may be thought that

*logos* can no longer recognize itself here.

Or maybe this meeting of Jerusalem and Athens inscribed in “Christology” is just a confusion. “Messiah,” originally a title, here means the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and functions as a proper name. So Christology is the science of an individual man. According to the most thoughtful of the Greeks, however, there can be no *logos*, no science, no *episteme*, of the individual as such.<sup>1</sup>

Neither for us moderns is science of the individual as such. Chemistry may be about radium, but it isn’t about *this* radium atom. It’s about the nature of radium, and so tells you about this atom insofar as it has the common nature. But it doesn’t give you the history of this atom, or that one, or any one. With Christology, however, we are surely concerned with a one and a unique. How then a science, a *logos*-logy of him?

Where we are concerned to know an individual human being, we ordinarily write a kind of history. Anthropology is about man. But not about this or that man. There is one anthropology for all men insofar as they are men. But insofar as they are many individuals, distinct from one another, we have to have many biographies. Not *logos*, but *graphie*—writing about, not science of, the individual. There is biography of Harry Truman or of Winston Churchill. There may be “Churchilliana.” But there isn’t a Churchillology. What would that even mean? There is no treatise on Trumanitas. We tell his history, his story. Why not, then, a Christography? How a Christology?

And how can followers of a Jew have a science of a Jew? Israel tells a narrative. It is Greece that writes a treatise. Israel pursues an historical understanding of herself and the nations, an understanding achieved in terms of identifying agents, motives, actions—those of God and of Israel herself. Greece pursues a contemplation of all things in the light of being. To gain a science is to bring something into the light of being, to measure it against the horizon of being; that’s what gaining a universal is—seeing how this thing stands in the light of being.

All this is familiar enough. And we can say that the Church inherits and pursues both these paths of reflection when thinking about Christ. First and immediately, reading Christ against the background of Old Testament narrative, seeing in him the continuation of God’s agency, the fulfilment of Old Testament promises, the Church follows the path of Israel. This way of proceeding is productive of the New Testament itself, but one should think also of the Scriptural theology of the Fathers. The second way is productive of conciliar Christology—the understanding of Christ produced at Nicea, Ephesus, Chalcedon—and finds an especially convincing expression in the Christology of St.

Thomas. Here, the Church contemplates Christ, no longer with the practical contemplation of Hebrew sapiential tradition, but with the theoretical contemplation of Greek philosophy, and asks how he is “in himself.” The effort is to understand Christ against the background of being, and inserts discourse about Christ into the philosophical discourses of the Greeks.<sup>2</sup>

It is sometimes thought that there is an easy way to dismiss the second way in the name of the first. But it is not so. In the first place, the second way of proceeding is not entirely extra-biblical. Just as Hellenistic thought-forms and expressions are already taken up in the latter parts of the Old Testament, so too in the New Testament. And anyway, what does the decision of the Church to preach Christ to Greeks without requiring them first to become Jews mean, if not that the word of God in Christ can be heard, not only as completing the history of salvation of which the Jews were heirs, but also as speaking that word about being which it was the glory of the Greeks to devote themselves to bring to speech? How else fulfil the dominical command to preach the gospel to the whole world, including Greeks? So, evidently, the attempt in some sense to make Christ intelligible in terms of Greek culture and philosophy is perfectly legitimate.

All this is familiar enough. Or is it? As long as we think these two paths proceed on parallel tracks, the familiarity is soporific. But it is the force of the one word, “Christology,” to keep us awake. The point of the one word is that here, if not elsewhere, the *logos* is the *logos* of a history, and that this history cannot be itself unless the “science” of it is articulated.

But it might be that we are mistaken to think we ought to take these two “ways” in any way, either by themselves or—in some unimaginable sense—together. Perhaps Christology is to be fitted into neither path. Maybe it is something by itself.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Cor 1:22–24

The first part of this passage seems to block access to Christ from either Athens or Jerusalem. Christ, in his unsurpassable uniqueness, seems to stand over against both ways. He does not quite fit into the series of public, political, divine acts of power recorded in the Old Testament, nor does his death exemplify any recognizable philosophical wisdom. But there is the second part of the passage as well. “Standing over against” has meant not a simple abandonment of the attempt to

understand Christ in the two ways, but a more elaborate path, according to which Christ is apprehended as a power and wisdom that, if not anticipated by Jerusalem or Athens, at least yet rightly bear those names. "Standing over against" generates an understanding of Christ by contrast, a subsequent criticism of the inherited paths of understanding, and the possibility of a final sublation of these now criticized paths.

As to the Old Testament, then, Christ is not simply one more prophet. He is the last prophet, the completion of prophecy. The word of God does not come to him; he brings it in his person. "Of old God spoke to our fathers in the prophets, but now he speaks to us through his Son." Further, the God who speaks is now Father, since Christ is his Son, and our Father as well according as we are in Christ. Further, the mighty deeds of power of the Old Testament, the signs and wonders prayed for in Psalm 77 are laid aside. The powerlessness of the weakness of the cross, because it is the instrument of God's love, is more powerful than ordinary power. Once refined in this crucible, however, we apprehend God's power in the resurrection in some continuity with "power" even ordinarily understood. So, the realities of the Old Covenant are not just *gramma*, the dead letter opposed to the living spirit, but also *typos* and *skia*, type and exemplar of the realities of the New.<sup>3</sup>

As to philosophy. For the Greek there is no agent or person who is responsible for all of being. All persons, even the gods, are within being. And the philosophic life consists in conforming oneself to the exigencies of a majestic but impersonal order. But no longer. Christ is Son of the creator, and creation is in Christ. If created being reveals God and has inscribed in it principles of life and conduct, still, conforming to them we conform ourselves ultimately to the love of a Person, an Agent. And that Love could be the intelligibility of being is not suspected by the Greeks. This love may prove to be wise, but if so, it is an unseen and unheard of wisdom, not conceived by the heart of man.

This means that, pursuing the second path, more light is shed on being than on Christ, just as, in the first way, reading Christ against the Old Testament, we understand the promises better for what they are in themselves than before. As in the first way, where the deadly letter passes into spiritually understood type, so in the second, there is worked out an analogy of names.

To say, then, that there are two ways to proceed in the effort to think the Christ, the way of reflection on the Old Testament, and the way of reflection on being, is by no means to say that Christ turns out to be a function of the Old Testament, or a function of philosophy. The Old Testament, and philosophy, provide categories to think with, yes. But the categories do not remain unscathed.

Or one can think of it this way, as did the Apologists. The subject of Christology is God's Word, the Father's subsistent Son and Image, who is made flesh. The incarnation of the Word in our flesh does really give us words with which to speak him and declare him, found in the words of the Old Testament and of Greek thought that are all of them, after all, but diminished forms of the Eternal Word. So to speak, he has prepared these words for himself beforehand: in the words of Old Testament prophecy, in the creation of that speakable being that the Greeks brought to speech. But if these words are to be true of him, they will have always to be perceived in their distance from the incomparable Word of the incomprehensible God, who is the source of all prophecy, as well as the creator of being.

One can indeed say that the fundamental problem of Christology is how to speak God's Word in our human words. The problem, insoluble for us, is however first and fundamentally God's problem, and it is he who "solves" it. The trick of Christology is simply to be attentive to the way in which he has done this.

He has solved it, not only by preparing words for himself in the Old Testament and in philosophy, but also, by enlarging our capacities to perceive, so that in and through human words, we can hear the Word. This is a matter of giving us new ears, ones that can hear the Word in human words, new eyes, ones that see the Image in earthly images, because they are organs of a heart that is moved by a love that, while it surpasses understanding, also bears it up. This means that the condition of Christology is essentially something that God himself provides, namely faith, the chief exercise of which is prayer and worship.

But all this is not yet to see how the ways call to each other, need each other. First, Christ is not so much inserted into the history of Israel so as to be within it, as he defines the end of it. The eschatological prophet makes us think the end of history, the whole of it. If there is but one history, moreover, a history of the whole, and if being does not so encompass history as to provide for an infinity of eternal recurrences, then history must be commensurate with being. Eschatological thought has to become metaphysical thought.

And the other way around, too? Must metaphysics become historical? A first way to answer, with some of the ante-Nicene Fathers and Hegel, is to take the incarnation as an adequate ground upon which to assert that creation is part of the history of God himself. But then, I think, the distinction between God and the being *qua* being that is the subject of Aristotle's metaphysics collapses. Classically, the way to answer is, if successful, more difficult.

To see this, we can return to the question: How can there be a

science of an individual human being? Ordinarily there is no such science, remember, because science grasps the universal, and each life is unique. If we mean by a human person, or personality, the psychological reality constituted by acts of knowing and loving, then this is an unrepeatable reality, for the acts in question are intrinsically conditioned by place and time (a function of “materiality”). There is no science of the individual for the same reason that there is a gap between every moral principle, no matter how refined, and *this* my moral action, a gap that is bridged by prudence alone.

However, it is not that there cannot be a science of a person as such—as long as the person is not a human person. There is a science of the three-personal God; it is called theology. Because our science is suited first of all to the abstract natures of material things, this science will be for us analogous, imperfect, and strictly dependent on revelation. But just so, as a personal reality that can be the subject of a science, God has no history, either. He makes history, and he can be the agent effective of events within history. But since he is the creator of all times and places, of every condition of every action of every agent, he is himself conditioned by none of them. Therefore, unconditioned by places and times, he can be the subject of a science; his action is himself, and his prudence is the same as his wisdom.

This suggests that if there is to be a science of a person who is also a human being, that person must be divine. The human acts of Christ will belong to a divine agent. They will bespeak a wisdom of infinite intelligibility, of which we can have an analogous, imperfect, but still very fruitful understanding. Christology will be, as a science, a kind of theology.

And yes, it will have to be a kind of history as well, though not in Hegelian fashion, because the divine agency will be available only in the humanly constituted acts. What’s wanted is a new skill, the knack of finding a sort of divine and unconditioned personal intelligibility in human and humanly conditioned acts. For instance, in the obedience of Jesus to his Father and unto death, we shall intuit his prior “hearing,” and the Father’s prior “speaking,” that is eternally the begetting of the Son. In Christ’s love of us, we shall behold the Love in which Father and Son surpass themselves in the ecstasy of the Holy Spirit.

1 See St. Thomas, *In I post. anal.*, lect. 42, ##5ff.

2 See H. Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, VII (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), pp. 104ff.

3 See for the progression in St. Paul from *gramma* to *skia* Henri de Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 43.