

CHRISTOLOGY AND THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

The theme of this paper is that the principal task of Christology today is to uncover those dimensions of human experience in which talk about Christ is meaningful. The Christological problem is thus one aspect of the larger problem of God. One thing learned from the meteoric rise of the "death of God" movement is the futility of speaking about God in language no longer understood by the average man. A similar difficulty is now being faced by theologians in attempting to articulate the significance of the divine and human as these exist in Christ. Nor does the sore spot lie in the correct interpretation of what the New Testament and tradition say about Jesus (though this must obviously not be neglected); it lies rather in the relationship of this primary data to the American cultural experience. This experience just now is a painful one, but unless it becomes an integral part of Christological inquiry there is danger that the inquiry itself, however seriously pursued historically, will be of no consequence whatsoever either to American theology or to the American Christian.

The basic presupposition of what we have just said is that God, and therefore his Christ, can only be known in relation to a particular world in which men live. Any self-revelation on his part which lies outside a given sphere of human experience simply cannot be heard. Hence what makes our knowledge of Christ what it is are the specific cultural factors which make our world what it is, for changes in one's human experience inevitably have their effect on one's religious experience. This conviction, it should be noted, is not an effort merely to accommodate religious affirmations to current psychological reality structures or to make public opinion the ultimate criterion of whether or not to accept a datum of faith; it is rather an effort to question anew the biblical witness to Christ which arises from our peculiar difficulty in speaking about him in our contemporary world. The questions we ask simply could not be asked by a former generation of Christians, because they were living in their

world, not ours. Nor can the Scriptures satisfy our questioning immediately, since their message was directed to men whose inquiry was quite different.

The Gospel does not answer questions that are not asked. . . . Every generation asks the Gospel its own questions from the context of its own life. . . . The answer the Gospel gives us will therefore be new, but at the same time also *evangelical*. This presupposes that we should be ready . . . to change, extend or correct our questioning in the light of Scripture and biblical interpretation given during the Church's whole history.¹

How, then, is faith in Christ to function and be expressed in contemporary culture without becoming identified with it? Can this culture be the occasion of a new experience of Christ coming to birth in harmony with the forces of social and psychological change? The answers we give here will obviously be partial and tentative. They will center themselves around three considerations: the social upheaval in America today, the Christ experience arising from it, and the direction of future Christological inquiry in function of this experience.

I

There seems to be general agreement that what is now taking place in man is not the normal cultural change to be expected in any given society. In *The Foreseeable Future*, Nobel prize physicist Sir George Thompson says that to understand man's present experience we have to think in terms of an event such as the invention of agriculture in the neolithic age. Alvin Toffler speaks of the phenomenon as a mass neurosis and has christened it "future shock": an acute sense of stress and disorientation induced by the experience of too much change in too short a time. Man is being asked to adapt psychically to events he does not yet understand, and his ability to do so is being taxed beyond healthy limits. Above all he experiences

¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Theology of Renewal Talks about God," in *Theology of Renewal*, ed. by L. K. Shook (2 vols.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), I, 95-96.

the fear that he is not going to adapt at all: the premature arrival of the future frightens him precisely because it is premature and he himself unprepared. Accustomed for centuries to measure change in terms of institutional development and economic growth, man is now being forced for the first time to evaluate his history in terms of what is going on inside him. This accelerated psychological change Erik Erikson has characterized as an identity crisis. "The traditional sources of identity strength—economic, racial, national, religious, occupational—are all in the process of allying themselves with a new world-image in which the vision of an anticipated future and, in fact, of a future in a permanent state of planning will take over much of the power of tradition."²

Erikson sees two principal ideological orientations basic to the formation of future identities, the technological and the humanist, and even the great politico-economic alternatives will, he believes, be subordinated to these. The cultural consolidation along technological and scientific lines has already been taking place for some time, according to Erikson, but is being opposed more and more by a humanist orientation, which insists that beyond the technological there is a much wider range of human values and possibilities now in danger of being lost. The technologists and the humanists seem to live in separate ecologies and almost to belong to different species: they oppose and repel each other; the acceptance of even part of one could result in an ideological slide in the other's whole cluster of images, aspirations, hopes, fears and hates. Erikson sees this polarity to be most important in fostering a dynamic interplay between the technological and humanist identity, leading, he is convinced, to radically new modes of thought and daring innovations in both culture and society.³

Nevertheless, what hovers in the background of the general upheaval in American society today is the spectre of a dehumanized world, even though the immediate source of trouble may be the dissatisfaction of youth, or the protests of the Black community, or resistance to the Vietnam war, or the alarm over environmental

² Erik H. Erikson, "Memorandum on Youth," in *Toward the Year 2000*, *Daedalus*, 96 (1967), 864.

³ *Ibid.*, 864-868.

breakdown. In each case what is being experienced is the threat of the impersonal against persons. Technology is often made the scapegoat here, but in reality the difficulty lies not so much in technology as in its unquestioned supremacy in so many lives, and the seeming insensitivity of large numbers to the rights and emotional needs of their fellow men. "Judgments of skill, competence, and effectiveness have replaced usefulness, beauty and relevance to human needs as criteria of worth; instrumental values have replaced final purposes; and cognitive skills have replaced virtuous character as standards of human value."⁴ The problem is therefore not machines but over-identification with them, symbolized most strikingly perhaps by the astronaut, the mechanical man, whose computer-guided efficiency makes him as interchangeable as any part of the mechanism he pilots aloft. Integral to this symbol is the rule of will, calculation and control, and absent from it are any of the desires of youth today for interpersonal feelings, fantasy, spontaneity, and play. The possibilities we now possess of genetic control merely confirm youth in the conviction voiced by C. S. Lewis that man's power over nature is really the power of some men over other men, with nature as their instrument. Such manipulation is inhuman, whether this takes place in the ghettos of America or in the hamlets of Vietnam, and the recognition of this fact has caused a deep restlessness in the American soul.

Gibson Winter has remarked with perceptive accuracy that the two ideological orientations we have been discussing, the technological and the humanist, have resulted in a paradox of disorder: the tight participatory network created by technology tends to produce greater rather than lesser alienation and estrangement, since the desire to participate is not yet strong enough to accept the new social reality before us. The participatory consciousness is nevertheless accompanied by a profound search for a new sensitivity, of which drugs and rock festivals are only symptoms.⁵ Nowhere is this clearer than in the elaboration of a less legalistic and more personalized ethics. Young people have in fact a profound experience of the

⁴ Kenneth Keniston, *The Uncommitted* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965), 422.

⁵ Gibson Winter, *Being Free* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 94.

moral imperative. They do not conceive of moral obligation only in legal terms; they feel personally obliged to *do* something about murdered civilians in Vietnam and injustice to Black Americans. These Black Americans in turn are themselves a catalyst in the present divided consciousness, since their rage and protest arise from their honest rejection of conditions in society which they see and evaluate as irrational. "In Black visibility the American system meets a transcendent judgment from within. At the heart of American urbanization arises a power which cannot be managed, controlled, put in its place, assimilated to the system."⁶ Black visibility makes it problematic indeed whether the humanizing tendency will actually triumph, and whether participation will indeed emerge as the creative principle converting an oppressive into a liberated society.

What is to be said of this cultural upheaval we have been describing? One thing is clear, I think, and that is that we are witnessing an extraordinary manifestation of that perennial desire in the heart of man for self-transcendence. Peculiar, however, to our own crisis of change is a loss of nerve. For larger and larger numbers the arrival of the future has been accelerated to an alarming degree, and growing technological control appears to be either an invitation to self-destruction or a headlong return to the regimentation of the anthill. Gilbert Chesterton once said that alligators have no difficulty being alligators, but men always seem to have had difficulty in trying to be men. The present tension between the humanist and technological is precisely a tension between two different modes of being man, both of which hold promise of future triumph as well as future disaster. Hence Erikson's insistence that they must be kept in tension, so that one set of emphases will tend to counteract the dangers inherent in the other. This tension, moreover, to the extent that it manifests a desire for self-transcendence, must be recognized as a tension between two faith commitments. The struggle of the humanist is to overcome not technology so much as the *deity* of technology, something he sees threatening the dignity of the person and his desire for community.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

The commitment of technological man is no less one of faith, though in the last decade that faith has been badly shaken by the realization that man's knowledge is greater than his wisdom to manage it, and that his exploitation of the world may mean that our race will eventually commit suicide.⁷ Nor is it an accident that Charles Reich, in calling for a change of consciousness in America, uses all the terminology of religious conversion. For the crisis man faces is in its deepest sense religious. From a Christian point of view it is in fact Christological, and this brings us now to speak of the Christ experience emerging from within America's cultural shock.

II

Historically what has generated fresh departures in the understanding of Christian revelation has not been the abstract preference for pluralism in theology, but insight into a given human situation that generates the passion to elucidate and communicate. "Vital theology does not emerge when a new generation takes up the leftovers from the problem supply. It is and always has been born out of the agony of faith and understanding precipitated by crisis."⁸ Up to now what we have suggested is that our own crisis is inextricably bound up with a new search for a transcendent meaning for man. "The more the years pass," wrote Teilhard de Chardin in 1950, "the more I recognize in myself and around me the great secret preoccupation of modern man: it is much less to dispute possession of the world than to find some means to escape from it. The anguish of feeling, inside this bubble of the cosmos, not just spatially but ontologically shut in!"⁹ In the Christian context, however, any new experience of a transcendent meaning for man must immediately open the way to a new experience of Christ. If it is genuine, this experience will in turn reflect that of

⁷ Contrast this anxiety among scientists today with the serene optimism attributed to them ten years ago by C. P. Snow in *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1959).

⁸ Leander E. Keck and James E. Sellers, "Theological Ethics in an American Crisis," *Interpretation*, XXIV (1970), 479.

⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Coeur de la matière*, an unpublished essay, 32.

the New Testament, namely of a Christ who promises and actually accomplishes something new, who justifies sinners, upsets all rigid schemes of order, unsettles the self-satisfied, and guarantees a future to the oppressed. Hence I suggest that the direction in which Christology should be moving today can be glimpsed by a closer examination of the Christ experience present in three interrelated areas in modern American life, those of youth culture, ecology, and Black liberation. Let us briefly look at each of these, noting as we do that none of them has any significant relationship to religion in the institutional sense.

What one notices in the first area is the link now being forged between prayer, celebration and play, a link frequently identified with the person of Christ. Certainly young people, in revolting against a secular and materialistic society, are looking for religious meaning in life, whether this be through mysticism or through ritual. The rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* is a striking example of this current reaction to an overcerebralized Christology. Whatever one's personal taste regarding the music, the lyrics can in fact become genuine prayer as well as an expression of groping faith: "Jesus Christ, who are you? What have you sacrificed? Jesus Christ superstar, do you think you're what they say you are? . . . We all know you are news—but are you king? king of the Jews?" Or consider the extraordinary line in Jesus' Gethsemane prayer to the Father: "Show me there's a reason for your wanting me to die. You're far too keen on where and how and not so hot on why." The mysterious magnetism of Jesus is perhaps best revealed in the identical reactions to him of Mary Magdelene and Judas. "I don't know why he moves me. He's a man, he's just a man." To this Mary adds: "He scares me so. I want him so. I love him so." While Judas adds a question: "When he's cold and dead will he let me be? Does he love me too? Does he care for me?" Young people likewise perceive more clearly than their elders that, as Harvey Cox has pointed out, there is something of the harlequin in Jesus. This approach carries a religious significance hardly appreciated by the institutional church. Yet to the extent that it is meaningful, one's relationship to Jesus does take on, as Cox suggests, the character of conscious play and comic equivocation. "Only by assuming a

playful attitude toward our religious tradition can we possibly make any sense out of it. . . . Christ the clown signifies our playful appreciation of the past and our comic refusal to accept the spectre of inevitability in the future."¹⁰ This same blend of celebration, prayer and play has also become an integral part of Eucharistic liturgy as this is understood by youth today. They are indeed searching for Christ, but the Christ they find is someone very human. They see his total acceptance of life, his willingness to plunge into a destiny at once mysterious, ironic, and hopeful, as proof that risk is needed to be fully human, that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness stronger than human strength."¹¹

A second area of concern today, that of ecology, would at first sight seem hardly to contain a Christ experience. Yet the environmental crisis has raised the whole question of the trustworthiness of the life-process in which man is involved. This question is very much open at present and the answer genuinely in doubt, for it is not at all evident that man intends to use responsibly the resources of nature around him. Indeed, descriptions of inevitable disaster from our present treatment of the environment can be grounds for depression and despair rather than for action. Christianity, moreover, has clearly played a part in all this, in so far as it has fostered an "otherworldly" outlook in man himself and promoted at the same time the lordship theory over nature, according to which man is free to do whatever he likes. Even the current Christian interest in festivity and celebration just discussed is focused much more on man and his interiority than upon his responsibility for the world of nature. Hence the religious grounding for man's outlook has to be completely rethought. If it is not, it is extremely unlikely that man will have an ethical drive strong enough to *act* in the present crisis, or sufficient hope to be convinced that he is not acting alone. For the problem is not what man must do, but whether he will have the asceticism actually to do it. Technology can easily be

¹⁰ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 142. See also the book of Robert E. Neale, *In Praise of Play* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

¹¹ 1 Cor 1:25.

employed to deal effectively with the ecological disaster, but the sacrifice that this will demand in money, loss of comfort, changes in living standards, such sacrifices are very far from the current American mind. An extraordinarily strong motivation is needed to change this mind, and such motivation similarly has to be ethical and religious. In Christian terms this means rethinking the role of asceticism in Christian life, and especially the image of Christ as one who lived for others. It means that Christians must experience a new call of Christ to sacrifice present happiness for the future good of the species, since it was for this species that Jesus died on the cross.¹²

Finally, man's thoughtless violation of his environment must inevitably force us to face more sharply the deeper question of his thoughtless violation of other men. Just now the phenomenon known as Black theology is recasting the whole problem of Christ by seeing this violation with blinding clarity and by insisting that moral outrage has its ultimate warrant in Christian revelation. James Cone writes:

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate One takes upon himself the oppressed condition so that all men may be what God created them to be. He is the Liberator par excellence, who reveals not only who God is and what he is doing, but also who we are and what we must do about human oppression. It is not possible to encounter this man and still remain content with human captivity.¹³

To assess theologically the divine presence in America, then, means to analyze the struggle for Black liberation, since Black theology believes that Christ himself is participating in this struggle. The question being asked is whether there is any Valuer of human action, any ultimate Judge independent of the white man's value structure of prestige and success. In the New Testament the significance of the liberation practiced by Jesus is that he ties it to a reality other

¹² See on this question Philip Hefner, "The Relocation of the God-Question," *Lutheran Quarterly*, XXI (1969), 327-341; John B. Cobb, Jr. "The Population Explosion and the Rights of the Subhuman World," *IDOC International*, September 12, 1970, 40-62.

¹³ James H. Cone, "Black Consciousness and Black Church," *Christianity and Crisis*, XXX (1970), 246.

than man. It may even be said that "strictly speaking there is no revelation of hiddenness taking place in him, but acknowledgment of that Valuer who is always unconcealed to man as Judge and Liberator, and who does not play hide-and-seek with him. The hiding is done by man."¹⁴

The three areas we have just discussed, that of youth culture, ecology, and Black liberation, raise the question of their common denominator. I suggest that the Christ experience in each is one of hope, that act which links the present both to the historical Jesus and to the future fulfillment of his promises. The Christ of risk, the Christ of asceticism, the Christ of liberation, these three also manifest the conviction that hope is not simply waiting. In fact the Christ experience today underlines the futility of waiting, for if man cannot escape from the forces which tend to dehumanize him, then life is indeed absurd. The utopian outlook thus becomes a necessary part of the reality of Christian faith, in so far as a capacity for utopia is inherent in man's nature. This hope, however, is not a wish for what is imaginable; it is an effort to give historical reality to what is believed through faith *to be real*.¹⁵ Nowhere is this more clear than in the liturgical celebration of the Christian mystery. All the thirst of modern man for transcendent meaning is satisfied through the symbolic signing both of Christ's presence and his absence. In speech, gesture and song we proclaim that the eschatological Kingdom is now present in mystery. The Christian who searches for Christ through the aspirations of youth, through a reverence for nature, through the struggle of Blacks, such a Christian not only holds in tension the humanist and the technological orientations in our culture; he also fosters a new tension between politics and Christian eschatology. A situation is thus slowly being created in America in which the moral teaching of the New Testament can operate more fruitfully. Needless to say, it is the task of theologians to express this Christ experience in a more practical and realistic Christology than the one we now possess.

¹⁴ Frederick Herzog, "Theology of Liberation," *Continuum*, VII (1970), 519.

¹⁵ See the perceptive article by Michel Demaison, "Les Sentiers de l'Utopie Chrétienne," *Lumière et Vie*, XVIII (1969), 87-110, especially 104-109.

III

The direction being taken by the contemporary Christ experience in America inevitably raises the question of the direction to be taken by any systematic reflection upon that experience. And this brings us to the formulation of Chalcedon, since all the Christological themes over the centuries have taken this as their starting point. The doctrine of Christ in the Catholic Church has in fact undergone practically no development since then, although the Second Vatican Council attempts to give it special relevance, as in *Gaudium et Spes*, by linking Jesus through the Incarnation to the whole of human history as well as to the whole of salvation history. It has been pointed out often enough, moreover, that the Christological questions of the New Testament were not those of Chalcedon, that they centered upon an "economic Christology" and emphasized rather the temporal mission of Christ and his work as redeemer.¹⁶ This is frequently adduced as a reason to return to a more functional Christology and to deemphasize any use of non-historical philosophical categories. However laudable such an objective may be, the point I wish to make here is that the current Christological question is precisely that of Chalcedon: who is Christ? The whole significance of the Christian message of salvation today hinges upon some meaningful explanation of the relationship of God to Jesus of Nazareth. Hence the difficulty does not at all lie in the intent of Chalcedon to articulate in a fully reflective way the functional pronouncements of Scripture; but rather in the fact that the words and formulas of that age have, through their constant repetition, become virtually meaningless in our own time. Let us see why this is so and what may be done about it.

Chalcedon began with the New Testament confession that the historical Jesus of Nazareth, known and experienced as true man, is true God; that there is not a duality of Godhead and manhood in Jesus but that both are the reality of one and the same Son of God. The formula used, that of two natures but one person, still contains

¹⁶ See for example Yves Congar, "Le moment 'économique' et le moment 'ontologique' dans la Sacra Doctrina," *Mélanges Offerts M.-D. Chenu* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 135-187.

many obscurities connected with its origin, and Catholic theologians since then have concentrated their energies mainly in trying to clarify these, as well as in seeking to make the formula intelligible by refining the terms still further and incorporating them into one or other rarefied system of scholastic philosophy. The popular impression from all this was that we did not really have a man in Jesus at all but merely a human "nature," which through the "hypostatic union" was manipulated by God like some passive marionette.¹⁷ That not much damage was thereby done to Christian faith is due mainly to the fact that the humanity of Christ was constantly attracting attention through the sentimentality of popular Catholic piety, best illustrated by devotion to the Sacred Heart. In recent years, however, the widespread acquaintance with Scripture and the results of biblical criticism have resulted in a tendency of the average Christian to reject the whole Chalcedonian formula as unintelligible. For in the New Testament it is crystal clear that Jesus is a man in the fullest sense, and that, by being the man he was, he made God present to men in a unique way. Thus the more that is learned about the true manhood of Jesus and his self-consciousness, the greater difficulty there is in confessing his divinity in a formula which appears to render that manhood incomplete.

Hence the immense irony of the current Christological situation. The Christ experience in America is a groping for a transcendence in Jesus which will strengthen and be a model for our own efforts to transcend the cultural situation in which we find ourselves. Yet the strong emphasis of Chalcedon upon transcendence is a block rather than help, because the transcendence it enunciates seems like a transcendence of God from some other world and not a transcendence of man in our own. What has to be done, therefore, is to re-present the formula of Chalcedon in such a way that the New

¹⁷ This mode of thinking well represents the Monothelism condemned by the Third Council of Constantinople. Karl Rahner has exposed at some length the mythological character of much contemporary understanding of Chalcedon in his "Current Problems in Christology," *Theological Investigations*, I (Baltimore: Helicon 1961), 149-200.

Testament stress upon the full manhood of Jesus is not only emphasized but given principal place in enunciating the mystery. Edward Schillebeeckx writes:

Since 1953 I have firmly opposed the formulation "Christ is God and man," and also the confusing expression "the man Jesus is God." . . . The proper formula would be "Jesus Christ is the Son of God *in humanity*." . . . The divinity must be perceptible in his humanity itself: "he who sees me, sees the Father." . . . Expressions such as "Jesus besides being man is also God" evacuate the deepest meaning of the Incarnation. . . . The mystery lies neither beyond nor beneath the man Jesus, but in his being-man itself. . . . The divine, remaining what it is, is perceived in the measure of the human. . . . Thus we do not have present a man, Jesus, in whom is realized the presence of God which is *distinct* from him. The man-Jesus himself *is* the presence of God.¹⁸

This re-presentation of Chalcedon will, I suggest, be greatly facilitated by further theological investigation into three areas until recently very much ignored. The first concerns the personality of Christ. As used by Chalcedon, the term "person" is vastly confusing to modern ears, since it refers not to a personal center of action, with a finite self-consciousness and freedom, but to the *hypostasis* of the Son, a word later understood in the very technical sense of Trinitarian theology as one of the three modes by which God subsists. In the development of this theology the divine "persons" have no individual consciousness and freedom but realize in a relative way the consciousness and freedom common to all three. The Christological consequence of this is that if Jesus clearly did have individual consciousness and freedom as man, this is not the individual consciousness and freedom of the Son as *hypostasis*. "Jesus does not," says Schillebeeckx, paraphrasing St. Thomas, "possess human nature *minus* the human person; rather the human person is identically the person of the divine Word; there is no

¹⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx "Persoonlijke openbaringsgestalte van de Vader," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, VI (1966), 276-277. This very rich article has been quoted at length in Robert North, "Soul-Body Unity and God-Man Unity," *Theological Studies*, XXX (1969), 27-60.

question here of one plus one making two."¹⁹ Nor, we might add, is there any reason for not speaking freely of the human person of Jesus in our modern sense. The reasons are rather all on the side of stopping use of the term "person" in the heuristic sense in which Chalcedon used it, to signify what there are three of in the Trinity. How this is to be done is not yet clear, but one absolutely necessary step is to push as far as it will go the present effort to explain the knowledge of Christ and the development of his human self-consciousness.²⁰ For the proper subjectivity of Jesus is a human subjectivity and the mystery of the hypostatic union consists precisely in the fact that this human subjectivity belongs to God.

This brings us to a second problem area opened up recently, especially by the work of Piet Schoonenberg, namely whether our faith requires us to speak of the Son's pre-existence independently of the Incarnation.²¹ The whole concept of pre-existence, according to Schoonenberg, entered into the Christian tradition from Origen, was subjoined as an anathema to the Nicene Creed, and eventually was adopted by Constantinople. All these formulas, however, leave open some possibility that the existence of God as Son is to be understood in relation to his eventual Incarnation.²² The same is true of the New Testament texts, none of which is concerned with intra-trinitarian relations but only with describing what Christ is now and what he now does for us.²³ Schoonenberg himself, however, cannot decide whether it is better to conceive a Word who exists

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.*, 278, referring to *S.T.*, III, 3, a.1, ad 2, and *Questio disputata de Unione Verbi* 2, ad 2. Quoted by North, *art. cit.*, 41.

²⁰ On this subject see Raymond E. Brown, *Jesus, God and Man* (Milwaukee: Bruce 1967), 39-59; Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," *Theological Investigations*, V (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 193-215.

²¹ Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 74-105. See summary of his views made from an earlier Dutch article in North, *art. cit.*, 49-54.

²² The relevant texts are to be found in Denzinger-Schönmetzer, 125, 126 and 150.

²³ Schoonenberg, *op. cit.*, 80-83. See also his treatment of *kenosis* in *ibid.*, 76-78, and in "He Emptied Himself," in *Who is Jesus of Nazareth?* ed. by Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Paulist, 1966), 47-66.

from all eternity but is directed to becoming flesh, or a Word who exists only through becoming flesh, a *Verbum incarnandum* or a *Verbum incarnatum*. The choice hinges, it should be noted, upon how one deals with the correlative question of change in God. For Schoonenberg the relations of God to creatures are real, so that there are real change and becoming in God, not in the way a created being grows, evolves or increases, but by God's giving, bestowing, creating.²⁴ The same is true, it might be added, in Teilhard de Chardin's theory of creative union, according to which God completes himself in and through his continuous creative act, and is not fully "pleromized" in Christ until the evolutionary process comes to an end.²⁵ In any case, the way we think about Christ is inextricably linked with the way we think about God, and if we have scarcely begun to think about the Father in relation to historical change, it is not at all surprising that we should have difficulty thinking this way about the Son.

Finally, there is a third area which should greatly affect the re-presentation of Chalcedon. This concerns the development of a Christology of ascent as opposed to one of descent. For it cannot be said that we derive the uniqueness of God's presence in Jesus from the definition of "hypostatic union." This would be, as Edward Schillebeeckx has pointed out, to stand the history of revelation on its head. Rather it was the experience of Jesus' uniqueness which, even in the New Testament itself, was eventually transformed in a doctrine of Incarnation. In exactly the same way did the Church grope through several centuries toward her hypostatic formula by trying to express the full implications of Jesus' unique mode of being man. Unless this formula had been found, Jesus' uniqueness would have remained meaningless for Christians of the fifth century. "*Homoousios*" was in fact the best word they could find to express the fact that his relationship to the Father was absolutely unique, unlike that of any other religious leader who has brought men closer to God. Is it indeed possible for us to find another formula? We shall never know unless we start where the first Christians started, and

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, 83-86.

²⁵ On Teilhard's theory see Christopher F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 169-178.

speak of the man Jesus according to the human expressions by which he revealed his uniqueness to those who knew him in Palestine.²⁶ Nor should we underestimate the contribution here of Paul Tillich, however difficult it may be to reconcile his overall position with Chalcedon. For he saw the great paradox of the Christian message precisely in this uniqueness of Jesus, "that in *one* personal life essential manhood has appeared under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them." This essential man, by his very nature, represents "the original image of God embodied in man," and so constitutes a "God-manhood."²⁷ Working out such a Christology of ascent, whether one is helped by Tillich or not, will keep us from scandalizing the modern mind by presenting Jesus as simply the obedient executor of a pre-established plan, whose successful outcome he knew to be assured and which therefore involved no risk, no hesitation, no anguish. We will not, in other words, take away the capacity of Jesus to hope within the darkness of his own conflict with the authorities.²⁸ Our contemporary Christ experience is precisely an invitation to take this historical struggle seriously, and the difficulty with traditional Christology is that it does not. By beginning with Chalcedon and deducing from a completely static formula the interior attitudes of Jesus, it renders these attitudes static too, without development, change, or growth. This procedure modern man will not accept, and it must consequently be rejected by any Christology which claims to speak to him.

IV

We have argued in this paper that the upheaval in American society is conditioning the direction of our Christ experience, and that this in turn should condition the direction of our Christological

²⁶ Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.*, 279, 283; North, *art. cit.*, 42, 55.

²⁷ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967), 94.

²⁸ See Christian Duquoc, "The Hope of Jesus," *Dimensions of Spirituality*, ed. by Christian Duquoc (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 21-30. Duquoc points out the interesting fact that under the word "hope" none of the biblical dictionaries speaks of the attitude of Jesus himself. Either they point out the eschatological content of his preaching or they emphasize his resurrection as the foundation of our own hope.

inquiry. Two conclusions may be drawn from what has been said. The first is that the Christology to emerge in the future will, like the Christ experience itself, be concerned with the phenomenon of commitment in Jesus' person and life. Perhaps no other characteristic so manifests the uniqueness of his love or the strength of his hope, virtues very much needed by men threatened with loss of nerve and the premature arrival of the future. Such men are desperately searching for an intelligible human life to which they can give themselves, and they have nothing at all in common with that other type of person whom Philip Rieff calls "therapeutic" man, who, as an antidote to social upheaval, cultivates a refined hedonism and a massive indifference to his fellow men. According to Rieff, the therapeutic not only avoids moral demands made upon him by others, but tries to do away completely with what he feels to be "the tyranny of moral passion as the inner dynamic of social order."²⁹ Rieff believes that *this* is the man of the future and that his triumph will do away with the present waste of energy taking place through love and hatred, hope and despair. "That a sense of well-being has become the end, rather than the by-product of striving after some superior communal end, announces a fundamental change of focus in the entire cast of our culture."³⁰ Whatever is to be said of this therapeutic experience, it is at the antipodes of the contemporary Christ experience, which is one of liberation, asceticism, celebration and hope. Which experience will eventually triumph in America? Our future hinges upon the answer, since the two mentalities are going to find very different solutions to questions of environment, racial justice, peace, and the distribution of wealth.

The second conclusion is that the contemporary world is much more concerned with anthropology than with theology, and that it is far more important, as Abraham Heschel has said in characterizing the Bible, to have an anthropology for God than to have a theology for man. This same point has been made by Karl Rahner. Doctrines have been traditionally formulated, he notes, in terms of the theoretical intellect, whereas the need today is precisely a reformulation in

²⁹ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 243.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

terms of the practical intellect so that a given doctrine can be translated into a principle of action.³¹ Hence the self-transcendence obscurely sought for in man's present efforts to escape dehumanization must clearly be recognized as a transcendence for *man*, and we must learn to speak of Jesus in such a way that his uniqueness is seen to reside in what God has accomplished in him as *man*. Christology must thus become much less a philosophical science and much more an historical one: how to speak of who Christ is must be discovered from an analysis not of categories such as nature and person, but of categories derived from our own historical experience and that of Jesus himself, perhaps even categories still to be discovered in the natural and social sciences. The Chalcedonian formula must therefore be considered a beginning and not an end.³² That it has never seriously been questioned before is, I think, simply a reflection in Christianity of the fact that the degree of cultural change now taking place in man is of a magnitude never before experienced in his history.

CHRISTOPHER F. MOONEY, S. J.
Woodstock College
New York

³¹ William V. Dych, "Karl Rahner—An Interview," *America*, October 31, 1970, 358.

³² See the remarks of Karl Rahner in "Chalkedon—End oder Anfang?" *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, ed. by A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, III (Würzburg: Echter, 1954), 3-49.