

THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN IN JESUS CHRIST

Christian faith in the lordship of Jesus of Nazareth has found expression during the long history of the Christian tradition in an enormous variety of ways. Among these many and varied approaches to the mystery of Jesus, however, one symbol in particular would seem to stand out in importance above all others, the symbol of incarnation. This symbol can already be discerned at work in the New Testament even if the language as such is not biblical.¹ It is clearly decisive for the patristic and scholastic development. Even in modern times it has retained its preeminence although it has been subjected to numerous criticisms and undergone repeated revisions, especially with regard to the humanity. Should a contemporary christology, then, begin its reflection with this symbol of faith? While there has been a marked tendency in recent christologies to begin "from below," that is from the historical Jesus or the humanity of Jesus or even the human consciousness of Jesus, there seem to me to be compelling reasons for taking one's point of departure from this symbol and hence beginning "from above," that is from the side of God or what will be referred to here as the holy mystery² that is God.

By beginning with this symbol rather than the life history of Jesus I indicate my desire to expose at the outset my presuppositions about the holy mystery, presuppositions which have however been principally formed by the life history of Jesus. In this way I also signal my intention to understand christology as a hermeneutical undertaking, an attempt to interpret the meaning of this symbol of faith. In spite of the fact that the symbol has undergone repeated reinterpretation in the history of the Christian tradition and has even attained classical formulation in the notion

¹ The rise of New Testament incarnationism is well described by John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967). On the later predominance of the incarnational christology "from above," see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 33-7.

² The language of holy mystery, reminiscent of Rudolf Otto's formulations in *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), is used in order to keep in view the essentially mysterious and transcendent character of that to which the symbol points and also in order to underline the importance of religious experience in any christological discussion. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, v. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 53-4.

of hypostatic union we cannot simply assume that its meaning is clear today. The christological theories which have sought to explicate the symbol's meaning are subtle and complex and have created no small confusion and misunderstanding. Even after one has gained some insight into the technical vocabulary of past theories it still may not be possible to properly understand what is intended or to appreciate the symbol's relevance. Moreover, the fact that our thinking about God and about man as well as about the relationship between them has undergone significant development would lead us to anticipate that earlier christological positions would require review and revision today.

"The symbol," writes Paul Ricoeur, "gives rise to thought."³ The symbol of incarnation has already given rise to a great deal of thought both about God and about Jesus of Nazareth. It is still capable, I believe, of giving rise to thought. But what kind of thought? Generally we tend to think those thoughts to which we have become accustomed through tradition and habit. But the symbol is richer than our thinking, past or present. We have to listen anew to the symbol to hear what it has to say to us. Past thinking inspired by the symbol is still important to us, it can guide and instruct our listening. At the same time our new hermeneutical situation may make it possible to hear something new. How much continuity with previous thinking is demanded of us? How much discontinuity can be legitimately tolerated? Such questions have become altogether fundamental to our life in the Christian community at the present time but they have also become increasingly difficult to answer unambiguously.

In the pages which follow I should like to share with you some of the thinking to which I have been led by the symbol of incarnation. In the first place I will speak of incarnation as a symbol of the holy mystery, as a theological symbol. Secondly I want to speak of incarnation as a symbol of Jesus, as a christological and hence an anthropological symbol. Thirdly I wish to speak of incarnation as a symbol of the self, as an existential symbol. In each case I will be attempting to understand the relationship of the divine and the human in Christianity.

³Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 347ff.

I. INCARNATION: A THEOLOGICAL SYMBOL

The symbol of incarnation speaks of something that God does and hence of something that God is: God becomes incarnate, he is the incarnate One. It is God's act, God's initiative, God's graciousness that are in the foreground of the symbol. Without divine self-giving there can be no incarnation. But what does it mean to say that God becomes incarnate? What exactly is it that God does? The Christian community has always denied that incarnation implies a metamorphosis or transmutation of God into a creature so that for a time God ceases to be God.⁴ It has also generally looked unfavorably upon the kind of kenotic theories which arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggesting that God temporarily laid aside certain of his divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, in order to become genuinely human.⁵ In fact, in order to safeguard the classical attributes of divine immutability and divine impassibility the Christian tradition has, at least until modern times, denied that incarnation introduces change or alteration of any kind into God. Language permitted under the ancient rule of *communicatio idiomatum*, language indicating that God suffered or that God died, could thus not be interpreted as pointing towards new divine experiences and therefore to passibility and change. These classical assumptions have been challenged in modern theology,⁶ precisely in the light of God's revelation in Jesus, the suffering servant. The question thus arises for us today as to whether the symbol of incarnation includes within it the notions of divine experience, divine passibility or suffering, and divine alteration. Such a question reverses in part the longstanding tendency of the Christian tradition to understand incarnation in wholly activistic

⁴Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, v. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 149, puts it this way: "The Incarnation of the Logos is not metamorphosis but his total manifestation in a personal life."

⁵For the history of the kenotic motif in the Christian tradition as well as a critique of various kenotic theories in christology, see Donald Dawe, *The Form of a Servant* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963). The rejection of these earlier kenotic christologies does not necessarily mean that the kenotic motif in some other sense should not be considered. The suggestions of Tillich, Macquarrie, Robinson, and Schoonenberg with regard to a kenotic humanity are of especial interest and will be considered later in the paper.

⁶Some type of divine passibility or divine becoming is affirmed by theologians as diverse in their presuppositions as Rahner, Schoonenberg, Dunne, Cobb, Ogden, Williams, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Bonhoeffer, Kaufman, and Kitamori. My own reflections on the issue may be found in "Patience: Human and Divine," *Cross Currents* 24, 4 (Winter, 1975), pp. 409-22, 443.

terms. Incarnation would thus imply not only that God does something but also that he undergoes something, the divine saving action being matched by a divine saving suffering. The redemptive value attached to suffering love in the life history of Jesus and of his disciples would thus be ultimately grounded in the suffering love of God himself and would also serve to point up dramatically the kind of identification with the creatures through compassionate love that the symbol of incarnation seems to imply.

If incarnation is neither metamorphosis nor kenosis, what then is it—what does the symbol mean? If we include, as I believe we should today, some notion of divine suffering, then the symbol seems to me to point principally to the creaturely, and more specifically, human embodiment of the divine presence, the divine action, the divine suffering, and the divine revelation. In other words the symbol of incarnation points to the immanence of the holy mystery in the world of the creatures, but particularly in the world of man, as saving presence, action, suffering, and revelation. In thus broadening the meaning of the language of incarnation it consequently becomes impossible to restrict the symbol's application to one, single historical instance.

Such a point of view shares some common ground with the position argued by Gregory Baum⁷ that there is a saving mystery present and at work throughout the whole of life and in the lives of all men. As Baum contends, such a position is not untraditional even if it has often enjoyed only a marginal status within the community of faith. It is a position which emphasizes the radical theocentrism of the Christian gospel, the universal salvific will and presence of God, and the continuity of the Christian tradition with other traditions, both religious and secular. Its tendency to relativize⁸ the lines of mediation and ministry of the holy mystery has seemed and will seem to many Christians subversive of the

⁷Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). My own position, however, places greater emphasis on the personal character of the mystery than Baum seems to do and also incorporates the theme of divine suffering which he is apparently opposed to. See Gregory Baum, "Toward a New Catholic Theism," *The Ecumenist* 8, 4 (May-June, 1970), pp. 60-1.

⁸To relativize means simply to set something into relationship with others. In the past, attempts to set the Christian revelation into relationship with other traditions on the basis of a distinction between the natural and the supernatural frequently led to negative and disparaging results. Here we are simply seeking to set the Christian tradition and particularly the Christ into a positive and affirmative relationship with others which will still allow for needed distinctions and differentiations. On this point see Gregory Baum's "Introduction" to Rosemary Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 16-8.

absoluteness and uniqueness claimed for the Christian revelation and hence threatening of Christian identity. Such concerns will have to be accommodated in new ways today, it seems to me, ways appropriate to the new ecumenical situation into which we have entered.

In raising these issues, I am simply asking whether the symbol of incarnation is to be construed as referring to a typical characteristic of the God who reveals himself definitively in Jesus of Nazareth. Does the God incarnate in Jesus *characteristically* seek incarnational visibility and agency throughout history? May we legitimately speak of his many "incarnations" through which his saving presence, action, suffering, and revelation come effectively into human life and transform it?⁹ Is the God believed in and worshipped by Christians a radically incarnational God? If we are inclined to answer these questions affirmatively, then the scope of christological reflection is immeasurably enlarged to encompass the many human saviors through whom the holy mystery has worked and through whom it continues to work, the many "incarnations" of God. Within a Christian perspective, the task of christology will therefore be to set these saviors and Christ-figures into relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.¹⁰ God's incarnation in Jesus is located within a history of incarnation, the Savior belongs to a saving history, the holy mystery which is present and at work in and through Jesus is a mystery which has already been savingly present and active elsewhere throughout history. Jesus does not speak of what men have never known in their own lives.

⁹My question is similar in spirit to the proposal of John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), that the incarnation(s) of the divine Logos be thought of in terms of a vast historical process of creative transformations.

¹⁰This suggestion is set in parallel with Gregory Baum's understanding of ecclesiology in *Man Becoming*, pp. 68-9, as "the critical study, based on divine revelation, of what happens in human society. . . . The marvelous things that happened in Israel and finally in Jesus Christ enable us to detect the patterns which, thanks to God's mercy, are available in all human communities." If ecclesiology were understood to be a critical study of the divine redemptive process at work in and through communities (with a focal concern for the Christian community in relation to other communities), then christology might appropriately be understood to be a critical study of the redemptive process in and through healing or saving individuals (with a focal concern for the figure of Jesus, the Healer or Savior, in relation to other such figures. One of the more interesting recent attempts to implement such a proposal is John Dunne's *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972). John B. Cobb, Jr.'s *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967) also opens up suggestive possibilities in the same direction.

He speaks of what they know, however obscurely, brokenly, and fragmentarily, but he speaks of it in a new way, which in turn opens up new possibilities of relating to this mystery.¹¹ The Word which becomes flesh in Jesus has been spoken before and heard before. It is spoken today and heard today. It is the Word which "enlightens every man who comes into the world" (Jn 1:9).

In this regard it is necessary to say something about the Christian symbol of trinity which is inescapably linked with that of incarnation. Recent trinitarian reflection has been marked by a recovery of the trinity doctrine as "economic" symbol, as symbol of God's relatedness to the world of his creatures. A consequent reticence with respect to the immanent trinitarian relations has also been observable. In addition there has been a growing awareness that the traditional language of "persons" has become misleading to a modern audience, suggesting as it does three distinct centers of self-consciousness and self-determination and opening the way to a tritheistic misunderstanding of the symbol.¹² The term "person," it would seem today, should only be applied to God once¹³ and in the clear recognition that it is used analogously.¹⁴ In place of the traditional language of "persons" various forms of modal language seem to be more in favor at present. In line with such usage I should like to tentatively suggest the language of modes of presence. The trinitarian symbol points to modes of

¹¹Cf. John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Whiteheadian Christology," *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. by Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr., and Gene Reeves (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 396: "The God whom Jesus revealed was the God already known by those to whom he spoke. Hence it is not meaningful to think of his revelation of God as something wholly new. But his teaching about God, both explicit and implicit, altered the balance and weighting of the ideas already held about God in such a way as to change the total understanding."

¹²By way of contrast, a vigorous defense of the persons-in-community model of trinity has recently been made by Joseph Bracken, "The Holy Trinity as a Community of Divine Persons, I and II," *The Heythrop Journal* 15, 2 (April, 1974), pp. 166-82; 15, 3 (July, 1974), pp. 257-70.

¹³Christopher Mooney, *Man Without Tears* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 128-9, remarks in this regard: "Our use of 'person' can find only one in God, since for us the word refers to a personal center of action with a finite self-consciousness and freedom."

¹⁴Gerard Sloyan makes the point clearly and sharply: "'Person' is a human term, representing what we know about the free and responsible if entirely mystifying beings that we ourselves are. Used with respect to God, it is analogous. Like anything we say of God, it is couched in unknowing and arrived at chiefly through removing the limitations that attend a human or creaturely conception. We are right, therefore, to say of God that he is 'person' but only so long as we realize that we are speaking analogously." "Some Problems in Modern Christology," *A World More Human, A Church More Christian*, ed. by George Devine (Staten Island: Alba House, 1973), p. 47.

presence to the self, namely of God to himself, and to modes of presence to the other, namely of God to the creatures. In the context of the symbol of incarnation I should wish to place the emphasis on the modes of presence to the other, that is of God to the creatures. In this way the symbol is once again rooted in faith experience and is made to speak of the living God's relationship to the world.¹⁵ Speculative elements are kept to a minimum and remain marginal although they are not precluded.

To speak of the modes of presence of this "personal" mystery to the creatures still does not go far enough, however. For these modes of "personal" presence are also modes or ways of action. The holy mystery is energy and power, the very energy of letting-be as John Macquarrie has characterized it; the holy mystery is creatively present, redemptively present, and unitively present.¹⁶ These three are one and inseparable. The trinitarian symbol speaks of the ways in which the holy mystery is present and at work throughout human history and rather more obscurely throughout the whole history of nature as well. The trinitarian symbol serves to link the God present and at work in Jesus with the God already present and at work through Word and Spirit in the creation and in the salvational history of Israel. This is not a new God we are dealing with here, nor a new Word; it is the same God and the same Word newly present and newly active. The deliberate connections which the Christian community made with a prior divine history within Israel have to be also made today to other cultural and religious traditions in which the holy mystery has already established its presence and revealed itself through the saving transformation of human life. The holy mystery revealed in Jesus transcends any piece of history and is present in them all but not in the same way. Christian identity, rooted in and sustained by the revelation of the holy mystery in Jesus, is an inclusive identity which reverences and celebrates the mystery's presence and activity through the whole of human history.

In its theological meaning, the symbol of incarnation says that God belongs to the world of his creatures, and particularly to the world of men. It says that there is a holy mystery savingly present and at work within and throughout the history of the world to bring about the transformation of life in Word and Spirit.

¹⁵This point has been lucidly argued by Gregory Baum in *Man Becoming* and also in *Faith and Doctrine* (Paramus, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1969).

¹⁶Cf. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), ch. 9.

II. INCARNATION: A CHRISTOLOGICAL SYMBOL

As a theological symbol, incarnation speaks of God's presence and initiative, of God's saving graciousness, of what Rahner has termed God's self-communication. The burden of the first section of this paper has been that God's self-communication in Jesus is in continuity with his self-communication elsewhere in human history. But incarnation is also a christological and hence anthropological symbol, a symbol of man's relationship to this holy mystery. From a christological point of view the symbol may be narrowed down in meaning to two principal factors: (1) a special call, mission, or vocation from God to be a peculiar instrument, symbol, sign, or sacrament of the mystery's saving presence and work—in short, a special initiative on the part of God giving rise to a special mediational and ministerial role in relation to the mystery; (2) the human acceptance of such a call or ministry which allows the mystery to make itself present in a special way. There are clearly some men and some women, the saviors and healers among us, who represent the mystery's presence and action in the human community in an especially explicit and significant way. For Christians there is One who does so supremely and definitively. Nevertheless he stands in continuity as a brother with these others, illuminating their work and calling it into question simultaneously. He is the revealer and the judge. In this second section of the paper I should like to focus on the meaning of the symbol of incarnation in relation to this One, Jesus of Nazareth. For the Christian community the symbol of incarnation finds its chief exemplification in him,¹⁷ although, as I have already tried to argue, it need not find its only exemplification there. In him the holy saving mystery is definitively present, acts and suffers definitively and definitively reveals its character as holy love and its purposes of salvation;¹⁸ in him the mystery is definitively identified. In him the unparalleled vocation to be the mystery's definitive instrument and representative is accepted without compromise. Each of these

¹⁷Cf. Mooney, *Man Without Tears*, p. 126: "Jesus needs to be seen today as the supreme exemplification and model of the God-man relationship, the one who precisely in his humanity was able to transcend our world and become the transparent source of God's activity and presence among us."

¹⁸That the holy mystery is revealed definitively as holy Love in Jesus is argued by John Carmody, "Towards a Comparative Christology," *Horizons* 1, 1 (Fall, 1974), pp. 15-34. The reference to Jesus' revelation of God's character and purpose echoes David Griffin, *Process Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973).

statements, except one, refers to the divine mystery in Jesus, to God's incarnational initiative. Each of these statements, except one, refers to God's sacramentalizing and instrumentalizing of this human life for his salvational purposes. At every point, except one, the emphasis falls on the divine, once again pointing up the radical theocentrism of Christian faith in general and christological reflection in particular. Such theocentrism in the christological tradition seems to me eminently in keeping with the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' own preaching and ministry.¹⁹

The one exception to each and all of these statements lies in the reference to the human acceptance of Jesus. The symbol of incarnation points not only to God's self-communication as forgiving love but also to man's acceptance. Incarnation in its fullest sense involves neither simply the one nor the other but the coincidence of the two.²⁰ Incarnation is the coming together of God and man through God's incarnating initiative and man's accepting response for the purpose of definitively mediating the claim of God's Rule of Love within human history. Just as God's initiative in Jesus is part of a larger history of his self-communication so too Jesus' acceptance is part of a larger history of human response which both prepares the way for Jesus' acceptance and which is in part contradicted by Jesus' obedience. Jesus' human freedom is both rooted in and transcends the history of human freedom which precedes him.

It seems to me that the issue of Jesus' human freedom as the key to his humanity has been underdeveloped in recent chris-

¹⁹On this point Ernest R. Martinez, "The Identity of Jesus in Mark," *Communio* 1, 4 (Winter, 1974), p. 342, remarks appositely: "Jesus did not proclaim himself—his whole life was a proclamation of the Father, and the coming of the Kingdom of God his Father. Faith in God the Father who saves is what Jesus proclaimed and this shines through all the expressions of his teaching. After Jesus' resurrection the early Church did not change this emphasis—the disciples proclaimed the God who has raised up Jesus." In this same issue of *Communio* Klaus Reinhardt, "In What Way is Jesus Unique?" pp. 343-64, offers a helpful critical survey of recent European christologies with similarities to the one being presented here.

²⁰Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, v. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 176 makes the point in this way: "This Saviour, who represents the climax of this self-communication, must therefore be at the same time God's absolute pledge by self-communication to the spiritual creature as a whole and the acceptance of this self-communication by this Saviour; only then is there an utterly irrevocable self-communication on both sides, and only thus is it present in the world in a historically communicative manner." My own reflections on this formula may be found in "The Incarnation: God's Giving and Man's Receiving," *Horizons* 1, 1 (Fall, 1974), pp. 1-14.

tological discussions among Catholics. A great deal of very fruitful work has been done on Jesus' human consciousness, a question which is of course closely linked to the issue of Jesus' human freedom.²¹ However closer and more explicit attention needs to be given to Jesus' freedom and the inevitably connected issue of his sinlessness. A considerable number of important theologians, principally but not exclusively within the Protestant tradition, no longer wish to speak of Jesus' sinlessness in terms of impeccability and hence as a structural given of his humanity in virtue of hypostatic union. Rather they prefer to view it as a hard won attainment and ethical achievement of his human life history. Jesus, for these theologians, *could* have sinned, but he *did not*. Gerard Sloyan puts the issue quite sharply: "Although not in fact a sinner, he was able to sin. If the Scriptural statement that he was tempted even as we are does not mean this, it means nothing."²² Jesus' freedom is thus to be understood in terms of a genuine alternativism. In making such an assumption about Jesus' human freedom we of course condition the incarnation in part upon that freedom. Incarnation is not simply an act of God but is rather a cooperative act of God and man. The incarnation becomes involved in that paradox of destiny and freedom of which Tillich has spoken.²³ God's incarnational initiative, even in Jesus, partakes of the risk and ambiguity which seem to characterize all of human existence. Consequently the victory of God against the demonic powers at work in human life is all the greater and all the more humanly significant.

If the human acceptance of Jesus is made an ingredient in the divine act of incarnation then we seem to require some sort of processive understanding of the incarnation.²⁴ God *becomes*

²¹The work of Rahner, Lonergan, and Brown is already well known in this area. Piet Schoonenberg treats the question in *The Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 123-35. Frederick Crowe has also recently explored the question at some length in "The Mind of Jesus," *Communio* 1, 4 (Winter, 1974), pp. 365-84, and "Eschaton and Worldly Mission in the Mind and Heart of Jesus," *The Eschaton: A Community of Love*, ed. by Joseph Papin (Villanova, Penn.: Villanova University Press, 1972), pp. 105-44.

²²Gerard Sloyan, "Some Problems in Modern Christology," p. 50. Schoonenberg, *The Christ*, pp. 142-6, has argued the same position. Among Protestant authors Tillich, Macquarrie, Pittenger, Knox, Kaufman, Cobb, Pannenberg, and Robinson have taken the same or similar positions.

²³Cf. *Systematic Theology*, v. 2, p. 149. Some years ago D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948) made a rather impressive and influential attempt to construct a christology precisely on the basis of the paradox of divine grace and human freedom.

²⁴The notion of a process incarnation has been suggested by John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, pp. 276-9. Cf. Sloyan, "Some Problems in Mod-

incarnate in the One who *becomes* his incarnational embodiment and human sacrament. Jesus' life history represents the process by means of which God refines his instrument and by means of which that instrument becomes more responsive to and available for the divine revelation. Jesus' life history represents the process through which he becomes in functional fact the image of God in human history. Acceptance in human life is never once-and-for-all, except in death, and consequently there must be a history of ever-renewed acceptance extending over a lifetime and culminating in death. In this way we are enabled to incorporate the total life history of Jesus, and particularly the ministry and death, into God's incarnational act in a more meaningful way.²⁵ The incarnation therefore climaxes in the death and resurrection of Jesus which seal his acceptance. The moment of incarnation can no longer be identified with the moment of the virginal conception.²⁶ The conception and birth of Jesus represent the beginnings of the incarnational process but do not constitute an already completed incarnational structure which would of course require no human acceptance on the part of Jesus and would reduce incarnation wholly to a divine act.

Many of the emphases in this understanding of the incarnation have evidently adoptionist overtones. It is my conviction, shared by a number of contemporary theologians, that the traditional understanding of the incarnational symbol must be modified today by the reincorporation of elements from the adoptionist christology of the earliest Christian community.²⁷ This adoptionist

ern Christology," p. 46: "Theologians like Rahner and Schoonenberg, and religious thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin, see in Christ risen and to come the ultimate in human self-transcendence, a point reached by him not at once but in stages of development through his human history. As glorified, he is what God eternally would have humanity to be."

²⁵A concern to reincorporate the mysteries of the life of Jesus into dogmatic christology has characterized the work of Rahner and is likewise evident in Macquarrie. Francis Fiorenza discussed the issue at length at last year's Convention in "Critical Social Theory and Christology: Toward an Understanding of Atonement and Redemption as Emancipatory Solidarity," *CTSA Proceedings* 30 (1975), 63-110.

²⁶Cf. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 276.

²⁷Tillich, for example, says: "Both the incarnational and the adoptionist Christologies have biblical roots and, for this and other reasons, a genuine standing in Christian thought. But, beyond this, one must say that neither of them can be carried out without the other." *Systematic Theology*, v. 2, pp. 148-9. Cf. Gordon Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 192-201. John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, deals at length with the tensions between these two approaches. Mark Schoof has made a similar observation respecting Schoonenberg's position: "It

christology possessed a fine sense of Jesus' humanity, especially with respect to the importance of his human freedom in the salvational process. Adoptionist christology originally also assigned an importance to the resurrection which later incarnationism lost sight of but which we apparently feel the need to regain once again. Adoptionist christology is not adequate by itself, as the tradition indicates, but neither is it a mere historical curiosity without contemporary pertinence for Christian faith.²⁸

Such a christology naturally assumes that Jesus was a human person even though the classical christology was reluctant to employ this language.²⁹ It seems quite impossible today to affirm on the one hand that Jesus was fully and thoroughly human but on the other to deny that he was a human person. It would seem moreover that all the essential ingredients of the modern notion of person were contained in the traditional understanding of Jesus' human nature.

While it is necessary today to affirm that Jesus was a human person, such an affirmation does not in fact take us very far. We are not "interested" in Jesus simply because he was a center of human self-consciousness and self-determination like ourselves.

seems clear to Schoonenberg that, for example, after the one-sided emphasis in Christian doctrine on the incarnation-Christology of the New Testament, we should now try to incorporate adoption-Christology, which is also a datum of Scripture, into our Christological interpretation. In this way, the idea of a development of Christian doctrine by way of a gradual unfolding of the original revelation is evidently abandoned. The historical process is far more complicated and can be explained more adequately by means of the idea of a model of interpretation, which is adapted to a specific cultural situation and has to be replaced if this context changes." "Dutch Catholic Theology: A New Approach to Christology," *Cross Currents* 22, 4 (Winter, 1973), p. 423.

²⁸Cf. Rahner who remarks: "Let us take so central an assertion of the Scriptures as the statement that Jesus is the Messiah and as such has become Lord in the course of his life, death and resurrection. Is it agreed that this assertion has simply been made obsolete by the doctrine of metaphysical Sonship, as we recognize it and express it in the Chalcedonian declaration, and that its only real interest for us now is historical, as a first formulation, important merely because Jesus found it useful for the Jews? Is the Christology of the Acts of the Apostles, which begins from below, with the human experience of Jesus, merely primitive? Or has it something special to say to us which classical Christology does not say with the same clarity?" *Theological Investigations*, v. 1, trans. by Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 155.

²⁹Speaking to the Convention in 1971, Christopher Mooney observed: "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." "Christology and the Contemporary American Experience," *CTSA Proceedings* 26 (1971), p. 51. The same kind of affirmation has repeatedly been made by Rahner, Schoonenberg and many others.

We are "interested" in him because of the kind of human person he was. We are "interested" in him because of the kind of human person he was owing to his unique relationship to the holy mystery, the kind of human person he was as the unique embodiment of God's forgiving love. In him we see what it is like for the holy mystery to move to the very center of a human life so that it gives definition to everything else. In him we see what it means for man to seek first the Kingdom of God. In him we see what it means for a man to become identified with the "interests" of God in the world so that he is able to speak with unique authority of God's character and purpose. When we seek after Jesus' identity, when we ask: who is this Jesus of Nazareth, we find that identity in his relationship to the holy mystery rather than in his relationship to himself or to the things of the world.³⁰ He does not belong to himself but to another. He does not exist in and for himself in any self-aggrandizing way but rather he exists for another, for the holy mystery. He is the one who has emptied himself for the sake of the other.³¹ He is what that holy mystery is to the extent that it is translatable into human terms.³² He is the image of God, the one

³⁰Francis Fiorenza, "Critical Social Theory and Christology," p. 104, makes a similar point: "Despite the diversity of various New Testament writings, the gospels understand and confess Jesus' life-praxis (his preaching, teaching, deeds, etc.) as manifesting a two-fold solidarity. He is one with the Father and he solidarizes the religious, moral, social, and civil outcasts of his society. This double solidarity is revealed in his proclamation of the will of the Father and his preaching of the Kingdom of God as well as in his forgiving of sins, performing exorcisms, and miraculous healings. This double solidarity constitutes the self-identity of Jesus. It brings to expression who Jesus is in himself."

³¹This kenotic language is used specifically in reference to the humanity of Jesus in agreement with the suggestions of Tillich, Macquarrie, Robinson, and Schoonenberg. It also reflects the conceptuality of "passing over" to God developed by John Dunne in *The Way of All the Earth*. It does not imply "an impersonal humanity" as the theory of enhypostatic union is often interpreted to imply and yet it says something similar in a different conceptual framework without doing violence to the genuine humanness of Jesus. It says that this man belongs to the mystery rather than to himself (but only through his own human acceptance) and that he exists as the kind of person he is only in and because of his relationship to that mystery. The appropriate understanding of the kenotic way is suggested in Luke's Gospel: "Any man who seeks to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life shall retain it" (Luke 17:33). Cf. the suggestive article of Jean-Marc Laporte, "Kenosis: Old and New," *The Ecumenist* 12, 2 (January-February, 1974), pp. 17-21.

³²Gerard Sloyan, "Some Problems in Modern Christology," pp. 47-8, makes the same point: "When we say that Jesus Christ was a person, a human person, we are both faithful to Scripture and using the term properly, not analogously. He was one person and not two, not a divine person and a human person. He was, however, a human person whose human nature was the special possession of the one divine person-nature, a man in intimate conjunction with God. By being so possessed, by

who does what God is doing³³ and is what God is.

The relationship between Jesus and the holy mystery is different from that of other men not only owing to the unique quality of Jesus' response but also to the unique vocational initiative of God in his regard.³⁴ However such a unique mediational ministry on behalf of the holy mystery (along with the unique mode of divine presence which that implies) does not separate Jesus from other men but rather establishes his solidarity with them for this is a ministry initiated by God and accepted by Jesus precisely on their behalf. His ministry does not however cancel out or make superfluous mediational ministries within other cultural or religious contexts. It is in fact increasingly important for christology to set the ministry of Jesus into meaningful relationship with these others.

I have tried to argue in this second section that the symbol of incarnation is a christological and hence anthropological symbol as well as a theological symbol. Today we think of man as a product of the evolutionary process, as an historical and social being, as a personal center of self-awareness and self-determination, and as one who has a responsibility to cooperate in his own self-creation, the making of the social world, and in furthering the divine work of salvation. These insights need to be incorporated into a contemporary christology. In doing so we underline the essential continuity between Jesus and ourselves without ignoring the significant discontinuity both in terms of his own mission and ministry and his own definitive realization of the divine/human relationship. It seems vitally important to a contemporary christology that the

being in such a union, this man Jesus lived a life that was the human life of God. He was one, not two; yet all that could be said of man could be said of him and all that could be said of God could be said of him. The union made him God's Son." Cf. Piet Schoonenberg, "God's Presence in Jesus: An Exchange of Viewpoints," *Theology Digest* 19, 1 (Spring, 1971), pp. 29-38, where he suggests the substitution of the term godliness for the traditional language of the divinity of Jesus. This seems to be in line with his preference in *The Christ* for language which speaks of Jesus as a divine-human person, namely one who because of the kind of human person he is is also the image of God, what man was intended to be from the beginning and is still intended to be.

³³The expression is John Dunne's, *The Way of All the Earth*, pp. 84ff. Cf. Jn 5:19-23; 10:28-38; 14:12. The same expression is used by Robert C. Ware, "Christology in Historical Perspective," *The Heythrop Journal* 15, 1 (January, 1974), p. 64: "Jesus' equality with God is founded in his 'doing what God is doing.'" Ware is discussing Schoonenberg's position at this point.

³⁴This way of putting the matter is influenced by recent discussions among process theologians. See particularly the work of Cobb (cited in n. 11), Griffin (cited in n. 18) and Lewis Ford, "The Possibilities for Process Christology," *Encounter* 35, 4 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 281-94.

humanity of Jesus not only be affirmed but that it be made credible in terms intelligible to ourselves. Jesus is the one who faithfully received the divine giving,³⁵ making himself fully available to be the instrument and symbol in human history of God's saving presence, action, suffering, and revelation. In so doing he points toward the presence, action, suffering, and revelation of that same mystery in our own lives and in the lives of all other men.³⁶ In so doing he also points towards the possibilities of life resident in our own humanity. But unless he stands solidly on the ground where we stand, unless he is truly rooted in the human situation we know, he can hardly point the way.³⁷ Unless he is one of us, consubstantial with us in a genuine modern sense, he can lay no compelling claim upon us. In the reality of his humanity lies the possibility of our discipleship.

III. INCARNATION—AN EXISTENTIAL SYMBOL

Thus far I have spoken of the symbol of incarnation as a symbol which gives rise to thought about the kind of God Christians believe in—a God who dwells among men, an incarnational God. I have also spoken of incarnation as a symbol which gives rise to thought about man, particularly one man, Jesus of Nazareth, with whom this symbol is definitively identified within the Christian community. I should now like to speak of the incarnation as a symbol which gives rise to thought about oneself. Jesus is the revelation of both God and man. He is therefore the revelation of the self to itself.

He reveals to the self the nature and purposes of that holy mystery which is present and at work within the self, a mystery therefore with which we deal at first hand. Jesus' ministry arises out of his own experience of and response to this mystery and is directed to awakening in others a firsthand experience of this mystery in themselves. Jesus as sacramental sign not only makes the mystery really present among us he also points away from himself to the mystery in ourselves. We might say that Jesus is the *mystes*, the initiated One, the mystic, who knows the secrets of the holy *mysterium* that is God out of his own piety and experience

³⁵For this formulation see my "Incarnation: God's Giving and Man's Receiving."

³⁶Cf. Seely Beggiani, "The Meaning of Christ's Redemption," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 166, 10 (December, 1972), pp. 698-707.

³⁷Cf. Donald P. Gray, "Like Us in All Things, Except . . .," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 168, 7 (September, 1974), pp. 435-47.

and who becomes *mystagogos*, the One who instructs others in the secrets of the mystery and leads them personally into the mystery which is in them. Jesus shares with us the holy mystery which already belongs to us, but of which we are generally so little aware and towards which we are so little responsive. By receiving the divine mystery of light and life so fully into his own life history he opens the way for others in the power of his Spirit to receive the same mystery themselves and to be transformed. Jesus is both revealer and judge. He reveals the good news of the holy mystery's presence, he reveals the possibilities of life which are the mystery's gift to us; he judges our want of faith in the mystery and our failure to receive what is given. He lays the claim of the holy mystery upon us, the claim of the deepest possibilities of our humanity. His ministry is a grace in our midst but it also summons to a task. Jesus has enacted on our behalf the essential meaning of man's relationship to the holy mystery that is God but it must be re-enacted by us on our own behalf and in our own way for it to become salvation. The mystery of destiny and freedom which I have already pointed towards in Jesus reappears, not surprisingly, in the journey of the self.³⁸

In a very real sense the meaning of salvation lies in the *imitatio Christi*. The concern for a genuinely contemporary *imitatio Christi* is a very vital one in contemporary christologies and is certainly one of the reasons why there is such an insistence on the consubstantiality of Jesus with us. Nevertheless the fact that Jesus' relationship to the mystery is different from our own not only in degree but also in kind and that he has a peculiar mediational and ministerial function means that such an "imitatio" has to be thought out with care. John B. Cobb, Jr., expresses the difficulty quite pointedly: "There is no indication that God provides all of us with the peculiar aim or possibility with which he endowed Jesus. Jesus was fully human, but that does not mean that what he was called to be and to become is what I am called to be or to become. Perhaps I am even called to be a theologian, and that is something very different from Jesus. In a much more abstract sense one may speak of Christian discipleship as imitation. If we assume that Jesus was obedient to God's call in his situation, we

³⁸Cf. Sloyan, "Some Problems in Modern Christology," p. 50: "A Christology for our times will be the basis of a soteriology that is accomplished by the personal appropriation in faith of Jesus' saving words. Any theory of God's action which saves apart from human understanding and free acceptance of his overtures is useless in our age."

can try to imitate him by being obedient to God's very different call to us in our very different situation. Also, if Jesus shows us fundamentally what it means to live from God and for God, we can seek to find what it means in our situation to live from God and for God. But it is important to recognize that the structure of existence embodied in Jesus is not ours and that hence the translation into our situation is a very radical one."³⁹

The point of christology, as Schubert Ogden has recently and trenchantly reminded us, is essentially existential (or soteriological, if you prefer).⁴⁰ Unfortunately christology is one of those areas which has been most seriously distorted by the tendency to doctrinal objectivation in the history of theology. The symbol of incarnation for most Christians does give rise to thought about Jesus but it has ceased to give rise to thought about themselves, about the presence of the mystery in themselves and about their own possibilities of mediating and ministering to the mystery. The symbol of incarnation is saving truth possessing the power to transform consciousness and give rise to a new self-understanding, a new way of life. The meaning of the symbol has to be exposed today in such a way that the numinous power of the symbol may once again become available.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In this paper I have attempted to share with you some of the thoughts to which the symbol of incarnation gives rise in me in light of recent discussion in christology. It is a christology, one possibility among others.⁴¹ It is clearly tentative and experimental and will

³⁹John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Whiteheadian Christology," p. 397. C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1933), p. 236, grasped this point with great insight: "Are we to understand the 'imitation of Christ' in the sense that we should copy his life and, if I may use the expression, ape his stigmata; or in the deeper sense that we are to live our own proper lives as truly as he lived his in all its implications? It is no easy matter to live a life that is modelled on Christ's, but it is unspeakably harder to live one's own life as truly as Christ lived his. Anyone who did this would run counter to the forces of the past, and though he might thus be fulfilling his destiny, would none the less be misjudged, derided, tortured and crucified. He would be a kind of mad Bolshevik who deserved the cross. We therefore prefer the historically sanctioned imitation of Christ which is transfigured by holiness."

⁴⁰Schubert Ogden, "The Point of Christology," *The Journal of Religion* 55, 4 (October, 1975), pp. 375-95.

⁴¹It would be possible, and indeed it is important, to go further than I have attempted to in this brief paper to speak of the symbol in its social and eschatological implications in the manner of Teilhard de Chardin and the theologians of hope. In restricting myself to a more limited existential point of view I have necessarily

undoubtedly be found wanting in some, perhaps many, respects. It is a christology which, like many others today, seeks to take seriously the humanity of Jesus, the universal saving will of God, the incipient dialogue between the Christian tradition and the great world religions as well as the modern traditions of humanism. On the other hand it has attempted to remain in touch with and be guided by the Christian tradition, particularly in its biblical roots. It has generally avoided the kind of subtle and careful metaphysical speculation which has characterized christological work in the past. This is not, however, a repudiation of such efforts but simply an admission on my own part that I feel the necessity of beginning elsewhere. Nonetheless it does seem important to me that the theological community seek to articulate a christology which is pastorally and catechetically viable, one which has been purified as far as possible of arcane language, abstruse conceptualization, and merely academic squabbles.⁴²

On virtually all sides today within the Catholic community there seems to be an awareness that traditional christological thinking is in crisis and requires renewal. There is little agreement, however, on how this is to be carried out in the light of the dogmatic definitions of the past.⁴³ I have chosen a particular line of

paid most attention to the possible implications of a christology for spirituality and related psychological traditions. I am of the opinion that such an approach can be developed fruitfully so as to spell out its social entailments but it is also quite possible that it would be more profitable to reflect on christology from a different vantage point if the social, political, and eschatological implications are to predominate. Differing christologies are probably required today to speak to differing "interests." My "interest" has lain primarily in the direction of the healing of the self through right relationship with the holy mystery but this is inseparable from ministering to the mystery on behalf of others. The priorities of the paper do not appear to be uncongenial to Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom and the emphasis of his own ministry. In a very broad way this is a christology which seeks to incorporate insights from out of the mystical tradition and to speak on behalf of a variety of theologies which are sensitive to this tradition. This type of christologizing is one way at least for the Christian tradition to reach out in fellowship to the world religions at this particular historical moment.

⁴²Mark Schoof, "Dutch Catholic Theology: A New Approach to Christology," p. 426, remarks in this regard: "Especially in Catholic theology, the regard for exact formulations and minute points of doctrine has traditionally been almost an obsession. And a theologian who has to pursue specialized historical and exegetical research in relation to his subject, is almost imperceptibly forced into a jungle of academic problems from which it is hard to escape. But should we not at least hope for considerably less attention to abstruse technicalities, and also for a less cautious approach to the direct or indirect demands of formal authority?" Cf. Robert Ware, "Christology in Historical Perspective," pp. 65-6.

⁴³I have made no effort to explicitly engage the declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of March 8, 1972, dealing with what are termed certain

approach here which not only has representatives within the Catholic theological community but which coheres with emphases to be found in some recent Protestant christologies as well. The creation of an ecumenically sensitive christology appears to me to be among the most urgent of tasks confronting Catholic christology today. But perhaps of even greater importance is the need to work out a christology which speaks intelligibly and credibly to men and women of today about the relation of the divine and human in Jesus of Nazareth and the significance of that for their lives.

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recent errors regarding the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity, the text for which may be found in *The Catholic Mind* 70, 1264 (June, 1972), pp. 61-4. The document simply reiterates traditional positions without providing us with any light on how we might proceed to "more fully expound in up to date terminology" these mysteries. My paper is clearly written in a spirit different from that of the declaration and from a different conceptual standpoint. It is intended as an exploratory essay in the direction of a renewed christology appropriate to our times.