

## A RESPONSE TO JOHN DWYER

First of all I would like to thank John for his bringing together in a clear and expert way the import of the study of language for christology. I will divide my response to his paper in four parts which do not indicate the length of my comments for I shall be brief. First I will synopsise his thesis so that you know to what I am responding; secondly I will indicate especially significant values in it; thirdly, I will point to what I believe are other more pressing problems in christology; and fourthly I will ask whether the study of language can help us deal with them.

First, since the goal of the paper is to show how the reflective study of language can help resolve some of the problems of traditional speculative christology, its logic really begins with those problems. Since the fifth century theology began to *objectify* the doctrine of Chalcedon. As such it tended to replace New Testament proclamation as the *source* of christology and even became its subject matter. When one did look back at the NT sources, language about Jesus too was read objectively and in a literal historical manner. Jesus himself appeared as a divided figure, not really a human being, because the relation between God and human existence was read competitively. Four essential characteristics of language generally, but especially the religious language of faith, can help us overcome these problems. First, the *existential* quality of self-communication in language gives us a metaphor for understanding God addressing us and thereby accepting us non-competitively in Jesus as an integral human being. Second, the *historicity* of all language permits us to distinguish different kinds of language, relativizes past technical meaning, and frees us to reinterpret it for our own situation. Third, the *logic of predication* allows Jesus himself to define the content of what is said about him, so that priority lands on the life and words of the historical Jesus. And fourth, the *symbolic* character of language allows us to deobjectify conciliar theology and to see speculative christology as critical human language in the service of the faith language of proclamation.

Secondly, given this understanding of the thesis of the paper, let me highlight points which are particularly valuable, although I do not mean to limit the paper's contribution to these. The suggestion that Logos in christology be interpreted symbolically as not a subsistent person but the self-revelatory aspect of God cuts through the impasse of a non-symbolic objective understanding of the Trinity. Moreover, John's portrayal of the logic of predication in christology, where Jesus defines the titles given him, opens up christology to starting with and giving a certain priority to historical Jesus research. But most importantly, I agree with Schubert Ogden that the point of christology is salvation which in this world consists in so receiving the word of God in faith that it elicits authentic existence in a Christian life. In this vein, John's paper shows that a linguistic approach to christology moves it in the direction of a word theology similar to Barth, Brunner and Bultmann even

though he goes beyond them with his attention to Jesus. With this strategy christology is brought to bear upon proclamation and preaching; it becomes intimately related to what goes on in our parishes. Christology as a discipline unfolds within the context of the word-event of faith which sustains the whole Christian community.

Thirdly, although I accept the major theses of the paper, and although it is somewhat unfair to react to what a paper does not say, let me put forward a reservation about it and questions to it in order to create some constructive dialogue. For my part I find that other problems are more urgent today than the ones he addresses. Most if not all of the christologies that I have read over the years, beginning with liberal theology, have incorporated much of the logic presented here in linguistic terminology. As far as I can see the two major problems of christology set by our current context are these; First, how are we to deal with the absolutization of Jesus in Christian faith in relation to the other religions whom we now respect as willed by God, mediators of God's revelation, and attuned to the cultures in which they exist? And secondly, what is the salvation proffered by God in Jesus within a human race that today is marked by massive political and social suffering and oppression? I take it that the women's cause is an integral part of this second problem and is especially relevant to christology. These two problems are speculative and theoretical, they require critical reason, but they also operate in the consciousnesses of the faithful and sometimes cause scandal.

Fourth and lastly, then, these two issues raise the question of whether the reflective study of language can shed some light on them. Surely the qualities of faith language that John has brought forward will be relevant. With regard to the first problem we have learned that in dealing with other religions an imperialistic approach intending conversion will not do. Most theologians call for *dialogue* which suggests minimally mutual communication through language. Can a linguistic analysis of the suppositions and grammar of this dialogue clarify the meaning of Jesus for us and for others who will not accept him in the same way as we? Can the existential, historical, and symbolic qualities of language along with its logic of predication also be applied to what our dialogue partners say, so that we learn something new about our common selves? With regard to the second area, the word of God that is Jesus is not only loving and accepting but also *prophetic*. What are the grammar and logic of the language of judgment? Within the revelation of God's self in Jesus we also find the manifestation of God's will, and it stands overagainst human will, overagainst what we are because of what we do. This is not ontological competition, but it is competition, for God's ways are not our ways. This language of prophecy, it seems to me, has everything to do with salvation and authentic existence in our world today. In sum, the question is whether and how the study of language can help us deal with these issues.

ROGER HAIGHT, S.J.

*Regis College, Toronto School of Theology*