

CHRISTOLOGY

- Topic: Thinking about Christ: Theologians Talk about Their Work
Convener: Tatha Wiley, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities
Moderator: Elena Procario-Foley, Iona College
Presenters: William Loewe, The Catholic University of America
Lisa Sowle Cahill, Boston College
Robert Lassalle-Klein, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
Thomas West, College of St. Catherine in Minnesota
Roger Haight, Weston School of Theology

Contributors to the volume *Thinking about Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning* (Continuum, 2003) and Thomas West (*Jesus and the Quest for Meaning*, Fortress, 2001) gathered to discuss the development of their Christological thought. Tatha Wiley, editor of *Thinking about Christ*, posed the following questions for the Christology Group: What distinguishes your own Christological journey? What would you pinpoint as a significant feature of your changes in thinking about Christology and/or the continuity in your views? What objectives must a contemporary Christology meet?

William Loewe suggested that his own Christological journey has been the work of bridging the religious worldview of his Irish-Catholic maternal grandparents and the fully assimilated scientific worldview of his German-Jewish paternal grandparents. When first teaching Christology to undergraduates, Loewe divided the course into three parts: the Bible and the question of the first naivete, the historical Jesus, and the Resurrection. The work of Bruce Vawter and Gunther Bornkamm influenced this approach. During the same period, Loewe conducted a graduate course on Chalcedon employing the work of Alois Grillmeier. Loewe explained that he came to the realization that he was thinking and teaching in a Schoonenberg/Haight God-is-present-in-Jesus mode but that model was not expressing as much as classical Christology. The problem for Loewe, then, is verifying the truth of the classical doctrine while tying it to the action of the Holy Spirit. Loewe suggested that the final goal of Christology involves answering the question, "How do you mediate the redemptive significance of Jesus into your cultural context?" Loewe noted that Christology needs a genetic, critical, and dialectical account of the tradition.

Lisa Sowle Cahill explained that her task was to consider the challenges that ethics and spirituality pose for Christology. Cahill observed that since the nineteenth century, the Social Gospel Movement, Liberation Theology, and the Social Justice Papal Encyclical tradition overshadowed the high descending model of Christology. The "touch point" of the development is the preaching of the inclusive Kingdom of God by Jesus. For Cahill, an ethics of social revolution and a spirituality of imitation of the historical Jesus accompany the emphasis on the inclusive Kingdom. Within the context of globalization, Cahill questioned if such a development promoted a new hegemony. Consequently, Cahill suggested

a retrieval of Nicea, Chalcedon, Logos Christology, and a theology of the Cross. The Nicean faith in the true divinity of Jesus as Christ assures us that with this faith we are saved from the despair of crises such as genocide. Cahill pointed to Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *God for Us* as an example of a renewed approach to Nicea. Chalcedon's affirmation that in Jesus humanity is united to divinity gives us hope for transformation and salvation from sin. Cahill recommended the work of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Elizabeth Johnson when suggesting that Logos Christology can correct an overemphasis on the maleness of Jesus as a condition of salvation. Cahill concluded with a reflection on a theology of the cross that highlights God's solidarity with the human condition.

Robert Lassalle-Klein stated that his purpose was to introduce readers to the Christological weight of the *mestizo Jesus* discovered by Virgilio Elizondo at the Mexico-Texas border, and to the *crucified people* as the root metaphor for the suffering, yet hope-filled faith of the church of El Salvador. He argued that Elizondo wants to show how *mestizo Jesus* functions as a powerful and realistic theodicy for many U.S. Latino/a Christians. Similarly, he highlighted Sobrino's contention that Salvadorans find the basic analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and their own sufferings to be liberating and empowering. He argues that the key to the power of each image is the experience that they bring followers of Jesus Christ closer to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Lassalle-Klein asked: Do these images of Jesus achieve what they claim? Do they, in fact, bring believers closer to the historical Jesus, or to the "real" Jesus? Do they, at least, fit with what we have learned in the last thirty years from archeology and other research about Jesus? Finally, how do they cohere with what the tradition says about Jesus? Lassalle-Klein noted that those interested in raising to the level of formal Christological concepts some of the images of Jesus emerging from the popular religious experience of communities under siege around the globe will require this sort of reconstructive work.

Thomas West admitted changing his Christology in response to hearing how his students understood the classical high Christology. In their minds, the Son of God is the eternal, second person of the Trinity, a distinct, self-conscious person with his own distinct will and intellect, but which will and intellect he shares in some mysterious way with the other two persons. The Son becomes incarnate and the human nature assumed has human will and intellect, but his personal act-center is not human, but rather the personal act-center of the eternal Son who is God. West finds this model of Jesus wanting because it assumes a view of Trinity bound to the social analogy: we have three distinct persons who are somehow one. This gets perilously close to tritheism. Secondly, many students retroject into the Trinity the human Jesus implying that the Son could not really have become fully human. For West, then, whoever the Son becomes in Jesus cannot be this Son-person in a way that contradicts the way a human being becomes a person. Consequently, West reconceived the Trinity along Rahnerian lines so that the second person is not seen as a distinct, self-conscious person in a preincarnational I-thou relationship with the Father/Mother and Holy Spirit. The

Rahnerian reconstruction leads West to conclude that Jesus both definitively expresses and secures the personal act-center that is his Sonship. For West this is a way of understanding the person of Jesus that does justice to the way a human person becomes a person.

Roger Haight presented the outline of an orthodox pluralist Christology. He defined a pluralist Christology as one that affirms Jesus as the Christ in a way that does not construe Christianity as the one and only true faith and way of salvation, uniquely superior to all others. An orthodox Christology is one that meets the criteria of being faithful to the normative teaching of the New Testament and the classical Christological councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. Haight's intent was to offer a positive, constructive pluralist Christology that is orthodox. His outline included remarks on foundational considerations (for example, plurality of New Testament Christologies), the logic of Christology (from soteriology to the dialectical character of orthodox Christology), and the new expanded horizon for interpreting Jesus today (for example, a new vision of the universe and interdependence of all peoples). Haight concludes that the conviction that Christianity is not absolute, but that other religions contain salvific truth not formally contained in Christianity, is entailed in the teaching of Jesus. Because this Christology affirms the humanity and in a noncompetitive way the true divinity of Jesus, it is orthodox in preserving the basic experience and conviction of Christians.

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COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Seeking Egyptian Gold:
A Theological Response to Ūântideva's *Bodhicaryâvatâra*
Convener: Paul J. Griffiths, University of Illinois at Chicago
Moderator: Paul J. Griffiths, University of Illinois at Chicago
Presenter: Terrence W. Tilley, University of Dayton
Respondent: Daniel Arnold, McGill University, Montréal

This session was the second part of a two-year project designed to address a particular Buddhist text (named above), and to ask what significance it might have for Catholic theology—moral, systematic, pastoral, and so forth. The session's title mentions a patristic trope (taken from Exodus 3 and 12) for the enterprise of reading alien texts. The text—a Sanskrit work composed in India in the eighth century—had been made available in English translation to participants beforehand. The first half of the text had been discussed in 2002; the second half was discussed in 2003.