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# The Cosmic Christ of Colossians

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THE COSMIC CHRIST OF COLOSSIANS

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology

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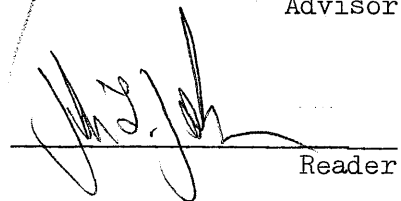
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A. R. Victor Raj

May 1981

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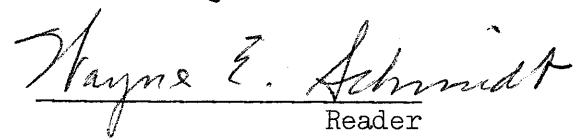
  
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## CHAPTER I

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

This study was undertaken as an attempt to evaluate and possibly correct some recent interpretations of Christ's person and work. Much of theology today has left the impression that Christianity is just another agency of good will to fight against social, political and economic injustice in the world. Accordingly, the motive behind much of contemporary theological discussions has been to challenge the church to join in what is often called the "humanization" of man.

It is our position that Christology occupies the pivotal position in any facet of Christian theology. In fact, it performs normative functions for the rest of theology. Consequently Christian theology hinges on the proper understanding of Christology. We maintain that an inadequate appreciation of Christ's person and work is at the root of the theological defections which we mentioned above.

There are perhaps two major misconceptions in the Christology of today. One body of teaching assumes that a "Christ-Principle" is present in all religions, and therefore it is not necessary to verbalize the New Testament gospel in all situations. The second is a secularized version of theology which interprets Christ as "the man for others," "the New Humanity" and "the Liberator."

Is there a Scriptural solution to the problems raised thus far? Are the propositions articulated in the New Testament sufficient for a thorough understanding and appreciation of God's concern for His creation? What are the implications of the Christ-event for our present-day existence as individuals and as Church? These questions should find their answers in our study of the Cosmic Christ as revealed in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

This study has two focal points. The first is to establish the historical context of the research. For this purpose we will center attention on the Christological issues in contemporary theological thinking as well as in some recent official church pronouncements. These analyses will indicate that a growing indifference to taking the incarnation of Jesus Christ seriously is the greatest danger in theology today.

A detailed exposition of all the pertinent statements is not within the scope of the present study. For the sake of convenience in the second chapter we will present the Christological viewpoints of some selected theologians. With a view to understanding the influence of these approaches to Christology in the life of the church we will examine the teachings of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council.

The second point on which this study will focus is to propose a Scriptural solution by which the issues raised thus far may be evaluated and corrected. For that purpose, we will provide an analysis and a synthesis of the great Christology of Paul's letter to the Colossians. We will deal specifically and only with Colossians since it contains a

"description in verses few but almost intolerably weighty of Christ and of his position in relation to the universe and the church."<sup>1</sup>

In the third chapter we will deal with the historical setting of the epistle to Colossians and analyze the key Christological statements in the letter. By way of procedure we will deal with the apostle's background in Judaism and also try to understand the nature of the Colossian heresy. Then we will proceed to conduct an exposition of Paul's description of Christ as Lord of all creation and head of the church.

In the chapter on a synthesis of Colossians 1:15-20 we will indicate that Christ is the source, the means of existence, and the goal of everything that has been created. We will also attempt to show that the church has a unique place in all of creation, and that, therefore, it is not just another agency busy with spreading a secular kind of good will. In the church the great mystery of God's eternal plan of salvation is revealed as the gospel is proclaimed and the forgiveness of sins is received.

These two focal points of our study, it is hoped, will merge into one in the fifth chapter, where we will test the conclusions of the second chapter against those of the third and fourth chapters. For that purpose we will briefly discuss some current ideologies such as secularization, humanization, the theology of liberation and indigenization which govern much of contemporary theological thinking. Then we will work toward a positive statement of the identity of Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. D. Moule, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), p. 24.

and his work of redemption. We will also analyze the biblical concept of the kingdom of God because that is the umbrella concept with which much of contemporary theology and ideology work.

With these ideas as background, we have then developed the theme of the cosmic Christ. This study is conducted on the conviction that it will help in a small way to combat also the present-day teaching of universalism which plagues particularly the so-called "Third World Theology." The task of the theologian is to narrate the mighty acts of God in Christ. Jesus Christ is the means by which God chose to reconcile the world unto Himself. It was through his cross and resurrection that God conquered sin and its consequences once and for all.

It is our position that the New Testament does not describe Jesus as the bringer of a new humanism. Rather, in the sacred writings we meet the pre-existent Son of God who became flesh to redeem humanity from eternal damnation. This redemption is appropriated to the individual in baptism by faith. He must always remember that it is God who saves man.

We will note that there are few clean choices left in theology today. The very foundation of Christian theology is being destroyed as the person and work of Jesus Christ are vehemently attacked by way of distortion and misrepresentation. We contend that the formulation of wrong Christologies which we shall attempt to evaluate and correct in this study is the result of an incorrect understanding of sin, salvation and the church.

The present study does not deal with the Christological viewpoints of "process theology," "black theology" or "the theology of hope."

These items merit separate studies in and of themselves. Furthermore, recent interpretations of sin and of salvation may be explored as independent areas of research. Much work needs to be done on the specific question of the relationship between philosophy and theology as these apply to Christology. Attention must be given also to the difficult task of setting some Scripture-based criteria for comparing different religions of the world. It is hoped that such studies will in some small way help to solve the present day confusion of God's revelation and His unique act of redemption in Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### SOME ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGY

In the present chapter we shall describe the context in which our study is undertaken. In surveying some key issues pertaining to Christology in the modern era, we intend to highlight the salient points relating to the Christological issue in the writings of important theologians and in some official church pronouncements.

A detailed exposition of all the related statements is not within the scope of this work. For convenience sake, we divide this chapter into six brief sections, beginning with an evaluation of the approach to Christology by Herman Samuel Reimarus, Gotthold Lessing, Martin Kähler, Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann. Using these findings as background, we proceed in the next two sections to examine the Christology of two representative theologians of our own time, namely, Paul Tillich and Teilhard de Chardin.

Since the danger of syncreticism, which leads to universalism, is manifestly evident in present-day attempts to engage in "dialogue" with other religions, an exposition of such dangers will be made as we study the so-called "unknown Christ" and "acknowledged Christ" in the Indian cultural context.

We will also provide an evaluation of the Christological interpretations of the World Council of Churches particularly as they are

developed for the Third World. We find this expedient because of the conscious effort to exhort the church to engage in social regeneration and in the struggle against existing power structures.

Finally, we shall attempt an interpretation of the post-Vatican II understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ in the Roman Catholic Church with special reference to the declarations of the present pontiff. Together with this we shall also analyze the Christology of Hans Kueng and Edward Schillebeeckx, both of whom maintain that Jesus was an "extraordinary man," and that He is God by "being man in a special way."

Brief Survey of the Christological Issues  
From Reimarus to Bultmann

The following theologians have been selected because, each in his own way, they represent the modern attitude of skepticism about the historical facts concerning Jesus. Also, all of them were confronted by the predicament that the Christian religion is filled with numerous apparent contrarities. They did not hesitate to designate the earthly ministry of Jesus as a failure. We shall briefly refer to some of their conclusions as they relate to Jesus' person and work.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768)

Born in Hamburg as the grandson of a Lutheran pastor and raised as the son of a student of theology, H. S. Reimarus, at a very early age, rose to the fame of an accomplished philosopher-theologian in the Wittenberg faculty. Heavily influenced by the effects of the German Aufklärung and its attempt to secularize every aspect of human life and thought, the young professor was deeply involved in the struggle between

reason and revelation, only to let the former engulf the latter. His attempts at transforming the content of biblical revelation into rational truth ended in failure.<sup>1</sup>

Reimarus concluded that the origins of Christianity were based on some fraud propagated by the apostles. He interpreted Jesus in the deistic way, as one who conformed to the principle of natural religion, which, as a cult, kept its symbols and practices as the possession strictly of its followers. Jesus exhorted people with certain moral teachings and duties to improve the nature of man. He not only taught new mysteries, but he "considered the goal of all his work as a teacher to be repentance and the preaching of an upright, active character."<sup>2</sup>

According to Reimarus, Jesus is God's Son in the sense in which David, Solomon and the people of Israel were sons of God.<sup>3</sup> Further, the historical Jesus was a zealot in his ideology, who tried to influence Judaism with revolutionary ideas. With a view to winning the support of the masses for ushering in the Messianic age of Jewish expectations, Jesus gathered the twelve and sent them out to promulgate a kingdom of

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<sup>1</sup>For a summary of biographical information and a list of major works by Reimarus several volumes are available in English such as Charles Voysey, trans., Fragments from Reimarus (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879); Ralph S. Fraser, trans., Reimarus: Fragments, ed. by Charles H. Talbert, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970); and H. S. Reimarus, The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples, introduction and trans. by George Wesley Buchanan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>H. S. Reimarus, "Concerning the Intention of Jesus and His Teaching" in Reimarus: Fragments, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-87.



heaven.<sup>4</sup> The public preaching of Jesus and his parables were all directed towards achieving this end.

Reimarus conjectured that Jesus counted on the people of Israel to proclaim him king. His cousin, John the Baptizer, had already announced him as such. This announcement was followed by the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem with the company of disciples and the multitude. However, the effort to inaugurate a worldly kingdom ended in tragedy, which was echoed at his crucifixion as he cried out against his wish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This confession "can hardly be otherwise interpreted than that God had not helped him to carry out his intention in attaining his object as he had hoped he would have done."<sup>5</sup>

The story of Jesus' resurrection and ascension was made up by the disciples, according to Reimarus. They did this on the basis of the Jewish expectation of a twofold coming of the Messiah. The disciples speedily got rid of the body of Jesus and, after fifty days of silence, began to tell everyone that Jesus would return the same way as he had left the world. The Christian community was built up in that way anticipating the return of the Messiah.

In Reimarus we see the frustration of a rationalist to understand the truth-claims of the Christian faith. His attempt was destined to fail because Jesus did not intend to be a political revolutionary. Reimarus ignored the biblical context of Jesus' mission since his sole

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

aim was to get back via historical methodology to Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus, in the reasoning of Reimarus, could not be the same as the one proclaimed by the church.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781)

The major works of Reimarus enjoyed only private circulation during his lifetime for fear that they would ruin the reputation of the family. But after his death they were published by Lessing under the title of Wolfenbüttel Fragments (1774-1778).

Lessing is known to the world more as a critic, poet and dramatist than as a theologian. In fact he explicitly rejected the appellation "theologian."<sup>6</sup> We include him in our survey principally because he promoted the ideas of Reimarus and set the stage for a purely philosophical approach to Christology in the centuries which followed. From Reimarus Lessing gained the incentive to take a fresh look at the problem of the relation between the historical origins of Christianity and the truth-claims of the Christian faith.<sup>7</sup>

According to Lessing the questionable historicity of the biblical narratives cannot jeopardize the facticity of the resurrection. For him

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<sup>6</sup>Henry E. Allison, Lessing and the Enlightenment (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 164. For a biography of Lessing, see H. B. Garland, Lessing: The Founder of Modern German Literature (London: Macmillan & Co., 1962).

<sup>7</sup>Allison, pp. 83, 96.

the Christian faith existed even before the biblical writers gave it literary form.<sup>8</sup>

Lessing pioneered the idea of abandoning the supernatural inspiration of Scripture. He read the Bible just as he would read any classic. Unlike Reimarus whose search for the historical Jesus ended in admitted failure, Lessing wanted to begin his work with a free and critical evaluation of the sources of the life of Jesus, namely, the Gospels.<sup>9</sup> He admired the privilege simply to pursue truth rather than gaining possession of it. While granting that the absolute truth is God and with God, Lessing taught that man should experience his ever-growing perfection through his constant search for truth.<sup>10</sup>

Lessing claimed to have discovered, in his own way, the rational content of the Christian religion. He understood the miracles recorded by the evangelists to have occurred and to have been helpful to the people of the first century, except that they are of no binding significance to the modern man. "But since the truth of these miracles has completely ceased to be demonstrable by miracles still happening now," Lessing denied that they could and should bind him "to the very least faith in the other teachings of Christ."<sup>11</sup>

Thus we see that the presuppositions with which Lessing attempted to do theology were not far removed from those of Reimarus. While the latter considered the life of Jesus a failure, the former concluded

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<sup>8</sup>Henry Chadwick, Lessing's Theological Writings, Selections in Translation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), pp. 17-18.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-25.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-44.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

that, although the truth claims of the Christian religion are not verifiable, they were shaped and are manifested in history. The distinction which Lessing tried to draw between the "historical" and the "religious" in Christianity prepared the ground for further theological discussion in the following century.

#### Martin Kähler (1835-1912)

The contribution of Martin Kähler to the issues in modern Christology is epoch-making. His approach to rediscovering the message of the New Testament was based on his command of the philosophies of Kant, Schelling and Hegel. Educated under F. C. Bauer in Tübingen, Kähler concluded that the basis of Christian faith was not the Jesus of various historical reconstructions, but the Christ preached by the apostles. The gospels, he believed are passion narratives with long introductions, and therefore are not biographies of the crucified one.<sup>12</sup>

As the title of his famous book indicates, Kähler saw the need to distinguish between Jesus and the Christ. In his opinion, the historical (historisch) Jesus, whose life on earth we are able to narrate factually and objectively, and the historic (geschichtlich) Christ who left a significant and meaningful image in history are two different issues, even though they may stand in continuity and even identify with each other.

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Kähler, The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ, trans. by Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

Kähler saw danger in ascertaining a purely historical basis for the Christian religion. That would confine the faith in historical relativism. Instead, he maintained that the very essence of the faith was its relationship to a revelation of God in history; and the foundation of this faith was the biblical and historic Christ revealed in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup>

In Kähler's point of view, any attempt to reconstruct a biography of Jesus is a lost cause. There are no reliable and adequate sources to make possible an investigation which can measure up to the standards of modern historiography. Moreover, the obvious differences between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel diminish the apparent trustworthiness of the account of eyewitnesses. Since the New Testament does not provide adequate biographical information about Jesus, one is bound to "use as a means of research the principle of analogy with other human events - thus contradicting the whole tenor of the Gospel portrayals of Jesus."<sup>14</sup>

In the final analysis, according to Kähler, the real Christ is the Christ proclaimed and believed on. The seeming success of Jesus lay in his ability to influence his disciples and implant in them the conviction to believe in him. The disciples confessed this new-found faith which established and solidified the Christian community through the centuries. Therefore, the "real Christ is the Christ who is preached." "The Christ who is preached, however, is precisely the Christ

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<sup>13</sup>Matthew Black, A Survey of Christological Thought 1872-1972 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1972), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Kähler, p. 52.

of faith."<sup>15</sup> Consequently, any discussion about Christ must remain a confession. This was the motive behind the composition of the Gospels too, since they evolved as "kerygmatic" Gospels "proclaiming" or "heralding" Jesus as the redeemer.

In his attempts to propagate an emphasis on extra-historical considerations Kähler occupies the middle position between Reimarus and R. Bultmann.<sup>16</sup> The relationship between faith and history was Kähler's concern. The historical Jesus did not impress Kähler because he was sure that the Christ of faith could not be validated by historical methodology.

#### Albert Schweitzer (1876-1965)

Schweitzer's name is well-known to the world as an accomplished musician, theologian and medical doctor. As a theologian Schweitzer opened a new chapter in modern theology by suggesting the idea of "thoroughgoing eschatology." His greatest contribution to modern scholarship is his research on the "Life of Jesus" which first appeared in 1906 and was revised seven years later.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>16</sup>For the views of Bultmann on Christ, see p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>The first edition of Albert Schweitzer's Von Reimarus zu Wrede Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-forschung was translated into English by W. Montgomery with a more interpretive title The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975). The second edition appeared with a different title Geschichte der Leben-Jesus-Forschung, 1913.

Schweitzer devoted this work to a survey of the critical investigations into the life of Jesus by different authors. Finding all those investigations inadequate, he concluded that the rediscovery of the historical Jesus was simply impossible. Therefore, in his opinion following the example of the apostle Paul, we should not desire to know Christ "after the flesh." On the other hand, we must understand Jesus as a "spiritual power in the present," and "be prepared to find that the historical knowledge of the personality and life of Jesus will not be a help, but perhaps even an offense to religion."<sup>18</sup>

Following the position of Reimarus, Schweitzer maintained that Jesus did not explain to his contemporaries what he meant by the expression "kingdom of God."<sup>19</sup> There was no need for an explanation since Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience. That being the case, we are required to understand his message of the kingdom in the Jewish sense. The plot that Jesus would be the ruler of this kingdom was kept a secret, known only to him and his disciples.

However, this plot met with failure because Peter confessed it to the Twelve and Judas stealthily told it to the High Priest. Finally, Jesus himself admitted the charge.<sup>20</sup> As Stephen Neill surmises, Schweitzer implies that "from start to finish Jesus had been mistaken about himself, about his proclamation, and about the purpose of God -

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<sup>18</sup> Schweitzer, Quest, pp. 400-401.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 394-97.

and was great enough to face with unclouded consciousness the realization of his mistake."<sup>21</sup>

It is along these lines that Schweitzer developed the concept of "thoroughgoing eschatology."<sup>22</sup> According to this theory, Jesus conceived of himself as the Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus had come anticipating that the people of his time were living in the last hour of the world. Moreover, he considered himself to be instrumental in bringing about the end of the present order of things, whereby the kingdom of God would be established on earth. But Jesus was mistaken.<sup>23</sup>

In a word, Schweitzer, in part, followed Kähler's line of thought and insisted that history can neither prove nor disprove the facticity of Jesus. Unlike the Jesus presented in the Gospels, Jesus Christ is a spiritual power in the present and we must appropriate him through personal experience.

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<sup>21</sup>Stephen Neill, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 198.

<sup>22</sup>The term konsequente eschatologie ("consistent" or "thoroughgoing" eschatology) is used by Johannes Weiss also in his book Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). However, while Schweitzer uses the expression to denote the whole public work of Jesus, Weiss relates it only to the preaching of Jesus. p. 31.

<sup>23</sup>Schweitzer, The Quest, p. 337. Also see Neill, p. 195-98. Neill points out that Schweitzer was mistaken to use the term "eschatology" for what is described in the Gospel as "apocalyptic." Neill defines eschatology as "that which has to do with the last things; and traditionally the last things are death, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life."



## Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)

The contribution of Bultmann to New Testament scholarship marks the summit of the modern quests for the historical Jesus. Bultmann concluded that a scientific discovery of the life of Jesus is impossible since the New Testament documents provide only a "mythological" picture of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, it is not his concern to investigate the historicity of Jesus. Instead, he emphasizes the significance of the "Christ event," as one which the modern man must appropriate for himself existentially.

Bultmann uses the word "mythology" in the sense of an "imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life. It is a mode of expression which makes it easy to understand the cultus as an action in which material means are used to convey immaterial power."<sup>24</sup> The New Testament writers resort to the language of myth in order to convey the meaning of existence intelligently.

Admittedly, Bultmann's theology was influenced by his Marburg colleague, the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger. Bultmann operated on the premise that the New Testament presents the message of Jesus in the language of mythology. Accordingly, for the modern man to accept that message in its literal form would require a "sacrifice of the intellect." "It would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in Kerygma and Myth, ed. by H. W. Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 10, n. 2.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

Therefore, according to Bultmann, theology must engage in the task of "demythologizing" the message of the Bible, namely, that of "stripping the kerygma from its mythological framework."<sup>26</sup>

For the above reasons Bultmann appears to be very skeptical about the historical person of Christ. According to him we know very little history about the life and person of Jesus. What we have in the New Testament is an account "which was mythologized from the very beginnings of earliest Christianity."<sup>27</sup> At the same time, however, unlike Kähler, who distinguished between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith as subjects of investigation, Bultmann grants that Jesus was a figure of history whose life ended in the tragedy of the crucifixion. Moreover, Bultmann recognized that "the New Testament claims that this Jesus of history, whose father and mother were well-known . . . is at the same time the pre-existent Son of God."<sup>28</sup>

Bultmann contends that the Christ of the New Testament is the Christ of the Kerygma, that is, the Christ who was and is proclaimed. At the time of his earthly ministry "the proclaimed was at the same time present as the proclaimer."<sup>29</sup> Also, proclamation must be continued even into the future since a "salvation-occurrence is nowhere present except

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>R. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1958), p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," p. 34.

<sup>29</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, 2 vols., trans. by K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribners, 1951), 1:33.

in the proclaiming, accosting, demanding and promising Word of preaching."<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, a salvation-occurrence continues to take place in the proclamation of the Word.

What Bultmann observes as salvation-occurrence is the event of Jesus' crucifixion. Modern man is able to understand the significance of the crucifixion only when he listens to what God tells him today through that event. Moreover, the crucifixion of Christ (or his incarnation or resurrection) is an event which is not limited to the past. It is implanted in each individual as he is confronted by the kerygma which in turn creates in him an existential self-awareness.<sup>31</sup>

In short, Bultmann emphasizes the kerygma of and about Jesus so much so that the historical Jesus is not of much significance to him. The person and work of the Jesus of Nazareth are but a sign for future generations, calling for a personal decision. In fact, Jesus in his person "embodies the demand for a decision. . . . He is the summons to decision."<sup>32</sup> Thus Christ is the means by which God chose to speak to the inner being of man.

By way of the above considerations Bultmann developed an eschatology of his own. It is characterized by his adoration of the modern man and his reverence of the present. For, as Bultmann concludes, "the meaning of history lies always in the present," and "in every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment. You must

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

awaken it."<sup>33</sup> The Jesus of history lived his life with an eschatological awareness of the future, although he could not see the end of the world. Modern man must live in similar awareness, even if he knows full well that the end of the world does not lie just ahead.

In this section we have made a brief survey of several approaches to issues in Christology during the last two centuries. Obviously, these approaches came as the result of a radical shift from the traditionally acknowledged norms of Christian theological thinking to the critical considerations aroused by the Enlightenment. Each theologian drew his own conclusions in attempting to rephrase Christology on the basis of his specific presuppositions. These conclusions led to further issues which we shall now discuss.

#### The Protean Christology of Paul J. Tillich

In Paul Tillich we encounter a typical representative of modern dialectical theology. Dialectical theology is originally intent on demanding a faith relationship between man and God; for, as it maintains, man's attempts to reason out the mysteries of God end in failure. Tillich, however, maintained that "the tools of theology are rational, dialectical, and paradoxical: they are not mysterious in speaking of the divine mystery."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology: the Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 155.

<sup>34</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2:91. (Hereafter this will be abbreviated "S.T."). Volume 1 appeared in 1953 and Volume 3 in 1961.

According to Tillich, "doing theology" requires a "method of correlation" and, therefore, the successful theologian must employ both theology and philosophy as his tools.<sup>35</sup> A student of Martin Kähler and a colleague of Martin Heidegger, Tillich was deeply influenced by existentialism. Against this background Tillich maintained that the theologian must be committed to the task of addressing himself to the concrete situation of modern man. His own attempts to solve the issues of human life resulted in a "system" which is more philosophical than theological.

For Tillich God is the ultimate reality. He is "Being Itself," or the "Ground of Being." This "Ground of Being" is manifested in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> Christ is a symbol which is used to express an aspect of the Christian understanding of revelation. The Christian community considers this revelation as normative and final. Symbol and myth must be understood as the language of religion.

Tillich's treatment of the person and work of Christ is methodologically not different from any other part of his system. He prepares the ground for Christology by establishing his own doctrine of the Trinity. Even here Tillich apparently formulates a "theology from below," when he says,

The questions arising out of man's finitude are answered by the doctrine of God and the symbols used in it. The questions arising out of man's estrangement are answered by the doctrine of Christ and the symbols applied to it. The questions arising out of the ambiguities of life are answered by the doctrine of the Spirit and its symbols.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 1:1-67.    <sup>36</sup>Ibid., 3:285.    <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 3:286.

Jesus appeared in the world as the New Being. His appearance was necessitated by man's existential estrangement; for when man becomes aware of this estrangement he begins to experience his finitude and is led to despair. A man who exists is, by definition, estranged from the Ground of Being, from other beings and from himself, because God is more than essence and existence.<sup>38</sup> The coming of Christ disclosed the "essential God-manhood," which is the ideal for mankind.

Tillich defines essential God-manhood by saying that "there is one man in whom God found his image undistorted, and who stands for all mankind - the one who for this reason, is called the Son or the Christ."<sup>39</sup> That is to say, in Jesus Christ the essential being of men is ideally present. The fact that this Christ is also the new Being brings man the message of his salvation.

Tillich finds the term "incarnation" open to misunderstanding when it is used to depict the event of Christ becoming man. He suspects that there is a magical, and therefore superstitious, touch to that expression since other religions also employ it for different manifestations of the deity. Moreover, Tillich considers the statement "God has become man" "nonsensical" because for him

it is a combination of words which make sense only if it is not meant to mean what the words say. The word "God points to ultimate reality, and . . . the only thing God cannot do is to cease to be God. But that is just what the assertion that "God has become man" means.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 2:44-45.

<sup>39</sup>Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Scribners', 1963), p. 76.

<sup>40</sup>S.T., 2:94.

Similarly, Tillich also finds it difficult to apply the term "divine nature" meaningfully to Christ. Instead he prefers to replace it by concepts such as "eternal God-man-unity" or "eternal God-manhood."<sup>41</sup> While rejecting the idea that the divine and the human nature are united in Jesus Christ, Tillich proposes that "in Jesus as the Christ the eternal unity of God and man has become historical reality."<sup>42</sup> This is seemingly an inconsistency. Nevertheless, Tillich feels obligated to resort to this kind of language in the hope of providing a dynamic character to the Christian faith.

We have noted that Tillich considers God as the ultimate or as "Being Itself." In contrast to man, who is just a being, God is the ground of everything that has being. God is, according to Tillich, beyond essence and existence. However, Tillich maintains that Christ is not beyond essence as the Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>43</sup> Evidently, Tillich is not willing to ascribe true deity to Christ without certain reservations.

From Tillich's point of view faith in Jesus as the Christ is fundamental to Christianity. Christianity is built on the foundation of this faith which has kept the church alive throughout the centuries. Tillich addresses himself to the two aspects of this confession, namely, the fact which is called Jesus of Nazareth and the reception of that fact by those who receive him as the Christ. In his words, "the receptive side of the Christian event is as important as the factual side."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 2:148.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 2:99.

However, even though Tillich emphasizes the confessional foundation of the person of Christ, he apparently avoids the specific question of the historicity of Jesus. For he contends that faith should not be built on something so uncertain that someday historical research might be able to disprove it.<sup>45</sup> Here we notice how heavily influenced Tillich is by the researchers of the "historical Jesus," including his teacher Martin Kähler.

Thus we must conclude that what Tillich works out in his system is very distinct from the normal systematic appreciation of Christ's person and work. Following his own philosophical guidelines Tillich finds in Jesus the ideal God-manhood which everyone should seek to follow. Evidently Tillich maintains that it is not the person of Christ but the "Christ Principle" which is manifested in the Jesus of Nazareth that brings newness to all of creation.

As long as Tillich is able to keep the above observations about Christ as his points of reference, he can accept the principles of other religions as equal to the truth claims of Christianity. According to him the rather exclusive nature of modern Christianity was not part of its original fabric. He says, "Early Christianity did not consider itself as a radically exclusive, but as the all-inclusive religion, in the sense of the saying 'All that is true anywhere in the world belongs to us, the Christians.'"<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 2:113-14.

<sup>46</sup>Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 35.



In a similar vein Tillich also leaves open the possibility that God has manifested Himself in various ways to different people. This is true both before and after the "event of Jesus as the Christ" took place. Tillich says,

Jesus is the Christ for us, namely, for those who participate in the historical continuum which he determines in its meaning. This existential limitation does not qualitatively limit his significance, but it leaves open other ways of divine self-manifestations before and after our historical continuum.<sup>47</sup>

In a word, we must grant that what Tillich ventures in his Systematic Theology is radically 'heroic.' However, it must be pointed out that by undertaking such a task Tillich has not made the communication of God's saving act in Jesus Christ any easier. Tillich may have succeeded in adapting the language of contemporary philosophy in order to interpret God and Christ for modern man. But, unfortunately, his conclusions are not consistent with the concept of God's unique revelation in Christ.

Tillich's theology is an exhibit of modern-day universalism. He mixes philosophy with theology and arrives at conclusions which are alien to basic Biblical propositions. We are justified in designating his approach to Christology as both protean and procrustean.

The Cosmic Christology of Teilhard de Chardin  
(1881-1955)

If Tillich's burden was to make Christology relevant to the modern philosophical mind, Teilhard's concern was to relate Christ to technology and evolutionary science. To that effect Teilhard sincerely

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<sup>47</sup>S.T., 2:101.

wished to appeal to the most progressive minds of the scientific era by trying to use their language. A Jesuit priest by calling and a paleontologist and archeologist by profession, Teilhard focused his attention on attempting a synthesis of science and mysticism.

The mixing of the above two categories, science and mysticism, has not helped Teilhard to develop a system of theology. Accordingly, he does not expand on a specific Christology of his own but presents only a 'cosmology centered in Christ.'<sup>48</sup>

Teilhard seeks to affirm a fundamental and substantial unity for the universe. By making use of certain Johannine and Pauline terms he argues that everything holds together in Christ. The "union" of the universe with Christ forms an integral part of Teilhard's thinking. Thus he maintains that "God Himself, in a rigorously real sense, exists only through a process of self-unification."<sup>49</sup>

The unity of the universe is the basic criterion for Teilhard's Christology, too. In fact, he considers Christ to be the unifier of the cosmos in a very dynamic way. Christ is the cosmic center and milieu and the soul of the universe. The "emanations" proceeding from this

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<sup>48</sup> Several studies on Teilhard's theology are available. For example: Robert Hale, Christ and the Universe. Teilhard de Chardin and the Cosmos (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972); George A. Maloney, The Cosmic Christ; from Paul to Teilhard (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Eulalis R. Baltazar, Teilhard and the Supernatural (Baltimore-Doublin: Helicon, 1966), and others.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted by Robert Hale, p. 71.

center penetrate matter itself and keep the creation activity going even today.<sup>50</sup>

Teilhard's Christology is intimately connected with his evolutionary world view. He anticipates a certain maturity for creation which will evolve out of a growth from within. Christ causes this growth and hence the universe has a Christic dimension to it. Christianity can lead the universe to its designated maturity since it alone is the religion of the future.<sup>51</sup>

In Teilhard's opinion Christ binds the universe to himself in an intrinsic manner, in a physical, ontological sense. In fact Christ, as the unifier of the universe, is involved in each act of creation which is a continuous process. This process Teilhard defines as the "act of forming and consummating Christ."<sup>52</sup>

Christ is the converging point of all evolution. In the language of science, Christ is the "Omega point." While Christ is perfect humanity, he is also actively involved in consummating the fullness of true humanity. The Christ who appeared in history as Jesus of Nazareth is at the same time the converging point of all evolution. Each individual object, in the process of reaching its full perfection, will be finally united at the Omega point.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior of Life (New York: Harper & Row publishers, 1960), pp. 25-30.

<sup>51</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 296-99.

<sup>52</sup>Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 123.

<sup>53</sup>Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, p. 294.

It is this kind of optimism about the future which reveals Teilhard's mysticism. He is convinced that at last faith will triumph over the world. When this happens the individual microcosms will be freed from their respective isolated states and will be converged in Christ through the outpouring of love. Each individual should actively cooperate with his Maker to help the universe move towards that Omega point, which is the point of perfection.<sup>54</sup>

According to Teilhard, the movement of the universe to its Omega point is parallel to that of a "mystical transfiguration." However, "the only subject ultimately capable of mystical transfiguration is the whole group of mankind forming a single body and a single soul in charity."<sup>55</sup> Also, this transfiguration "will give existence its true value and happiness since it will help the individual lose himself in another greater than himself."<sup>56</sup>

We have alluded to the Teilhardian tendency to use Scripture references for establishing a cosmic Christology. Teilhard uses the Bible to assert that humanity faces the tension between a deep love of God and fervent love for the world. However, his mystical thinking demands from his readers a greater commitment for self-development and stimulates them to detach themselves from the things of this world.<sup>57</sup> To do this, Teilhard proposes a "mystique of action," which, when strictly

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<sup>54</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, pp. 121-22.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>56</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Letters from a Traveller, trans. by B. Wall et al (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 264.

<sup>57</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 21.

followed, will help modern man to resolve the present dilemma of living in two worlds.

Clearly evident in Teilhard's writings is a conscious effort to resolve the dualism between the temporal and the eternal, the earthly and the heavenly. Teilhard believes that, although there may be different levels of human understanding like science, philosophy, theology and mysticism, in the end all of them point to one "Christogenesis." This is, for him, the motive behind the Incarnation in which Christ was manifested as the center of the universe.<sup>58</sup>

Following the idea of Christogenesis, Teilhard proposes a procedure of Christification. Christification is the means by which each individual will be able to become an integral part of Christ's "mystical" body. That is to say, through this process an incarnation of Christ takes place potentially. Humanity is involved in this incarnation of Christ since it 'makes' and 'undergoes' Christ in all things.<sup>59</sup> In this connection it is possible to say that Teilhard's synthesis contains implicitly shades of the modern process thought.<sup>60</sup>

It appears that Teilhard chooses the language of mysticism in order to bring words of comfort primarily to the individual. Teilhard admits that mysticism is one step higher than philosophy. However, he seems to be lost in the wilderness of mystical thinking when he says

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<sup>58</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, pp. 283-84

<sup>59</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Baltazar, p. 90.

our salvation is not pursued or achieved except in solidarity with the justification of the whole body of the elect. In a real sense only one man will be saved: Christ.<sup>61</sup>

On the basis of the assumption that at last humanity will reach a "collective maturity" Teilhard also develops a teaching on eschatology. He maintains that the heavenly bliss is a state of being in which humanity will be able to contemplate God. In heaven each one of the elect will see God face to face. At the same time, this vision is possible only "through the eyes of Christ" who is "the Head and living summary of humanity."<sup>62</sup>

Finally we should note that Teilhard's Christology demonstrates an improper use of Scriptural references. Teilhard selects quotations from the Bible which suit his already-formulated propositions. For example, he anticipates a "super-mankind" for humanity. The evolution of a super-mankind is possible through a process of "super-socialization" which in turn necessitates a "super-personalization." "Since only the forces of love have the property of personalizing by uniting," in the final analysis, "amorization" is most expedient.<sup>63</sup> Interestingly enough, Teilhard is able to find several verses from Scripture which back these propositions.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Science and Christ, trans. by Rene Hague (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1965), passim.

<sup>64</sup>For example: 1 Cor. 15:28, "God shall be all in all"; Col. 2:19, "He it is who fills all things." Other texts are: Col. 1:16, 17; 3:11 and Eph. 4:9.

We have noted earlier that, according to Paul Tillich, "incarnation" is a nonsensical term for modern man.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand Teilhard believes that the incarnational activity of God is still going on in the universe. The goal of this continuous action is the "mysterious pleroma, in which the substantial One and the created many fuse without confusion in a whole which, without adding anything essential to God, will nevertheless be a sort of triumph and generalization of being."<sup>66</sup>

Thus for Teilhard Christ is no longer the Savior of individuals only, but the "ultimate Mover of anthropogenesis." Christ is "the ultimate summit of an evolution definitely recognized as a movement of convergence."<sup>67</sup> The entire universe is the cosmic body of Christ, since it is organically Christic in its constitution. As Teilhard himself spells out his objective, "my road ahead seems clearly marked out: it is a matter not of super-imposing Christ on the world but of pan-Christianizing the universe."<sup>68</sup>

The above observations lead us to conclude that Teilhard's treatment of either Johannine or the Pauline thought is only superficial. In the Pauline epistles, for example, even when the imagery of the body is used, the idea expressed is that of a relationship. Paul does not present the thought of assimilation, but of association. He does not speak of convergence, but of incorporation. According to Paul salvation

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<sup>65</sup>Supra, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup>Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 100.

<sup>67</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Christianity and Evolution, trans. by Rene Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 243.

<sup>68</sup>Hale, p. 77.

is offered in Christ to each individual personally. The community of such individuals, the church, is maintained in the unity of the Spirit, and that is different from what Teilhard visualizes as the mystical union.

Among all the things he wrote about it is Teilhard's Christology which has been the subject of much critical scrutiny. Even Teilhard himself admits that his thoughts about Christ were not necessarily adequate or complete.<sup>69</sup> In Teilhard are disclosed the weaknesses of attempts to combine science and mysticism with a view to translating the Christian faith into modern categories. The result is an accumulation of things which are alien to the basic presuppositions of both science and Christianity.

#### The "Unknown Christ"--"Acknowledged Christ" Dialectics

Under the title Unknown Christ - Acknowledged Christ Dialectics, we will examine some recent attempts to formulate Christology from an Indian perspective, and we will also attempt to point out the problems in communicating the Gospel to a Hindu audience. At the outset we must note that we encounter in most Indian theological writings a radical change in methodology. For example, in the publications of Raymond Panikkar and M. M. Thomas we do not have a systematic presentation of the Christology as doctrine. However, such a doctrine does emerge out of their attempts to engage in dialogue with the people of other faiths, particularly of those of the Hindu way of life.

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<sup>69</sup>For a critical evaluation see Oliver Rabut, Teilhard de Chardin: A Critical Study (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961).



When India became part of the British Empire, Christian missionaries assumed that educating the masses would be an effective way of bringing the gospel to that largely Hindu nation. Although this method did result in the conversion of some Hindus to Christianity, the implementation of western education also caused a significant Hindu revival, since high caste Hindus were the persons to benefit most from the English ideas. Through their English education, many Indians saw Hinduism as a quite remarkable stage in human development and not just the vestige of an illiterate paganism. For example, a great Indian thinker like Mahatma Gandhi, the father of independent India, could relate Christianity to Hinduism in a way that "begins with a ready acceptance of the God in Christianity, goes on to frank criticism of the extravagances of the Christian claims, and concludes that Hinduism is adequate and satisfactory for the Indian people."<sup>70</sup>

As a consequence of new Hindu self-awareness so expressed in such a statement, some Christian leaders began to search for more effective means to relate the gospel to the followers of resurgent Hinduism. The result was a summons to Christians to engage in dialogue with non-Christians. Dialogue, according to P. D. Devanandan, a pioneer in this approach, is a conversation which is a "frank endeavor to understand, in as far as that is possible, exactly where and how we differ from one another, although we may use the same religious terms such as grace, forgiveness, sin, incarnation and so forth."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>P. D. Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1964), p. 96.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

Dialogue, Devanandan asserts, fundamentally should allow those who engage in it the freedom to disagree with one another. In fact, all genuine and fruitful dialogue will "start with the understanding that we agree to disagree."<sup>72</sup> However, it is interesting to observe that in recent times the meaning of dialogue seems to have changed considerably. Marcus Braybrooke observes, "the purpose of (modern) dialogue is a common search for truth. Dialogue is distinct from proclamation, although it may sometimes give occasion for it."<sup>73</sup>

Inasmuch as Christianity proclaims that the truth is revealed in Jesus Christ, Christians by definition cannot join hands with those who are in search of truth. Christianity has nothing to offer the world except Christ himself as the Truth. Once this fact is ignored, dialogue "can lead to the hope that religions will eventually grow together with Christ as their center."<sup>74</sup> That being the case, it becomes virtually impossible to improve on Devanandan's definition of dialogue from a Christian perspective.<sup>75</sup>

However, most contemporary promoters of dialogue understand their task in terms of a common search for truth. They begin with the assumption that there is some truth on every side. The criteria established to arrive at a common base can be dangerous to the truth claims of Christianity. When a student of comparative religion like Raymond

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Marcus Braybrooke, The Undiscovered Christ (Madras: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society by Christian Literature Society, 1973), p. 30. This will be referred to as CISRS-CLS.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Devanandan, p. 141.

Panikkar notes the obligation to "somehow incorporate Hinduism into the universal economy of salvation by God through Christ, of which Christianity is the summit," the unique salvation through God's action in Christ which Christianity proclaims is seriously undermined.<sup>76</sup> If we should accept Panikkar's view of incorporating Hinduism into Christianity, then we should also be able to discover in the positive aspects of other religions the "footprints of God's redemption!"<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, while granting that God's redemption is for allmankind, people cannot understand or appreciate the magnitude of this redemption apart from Christ. It is in Christ that we hear the Word of the Truth, the gospel of our salvation. Again, it is those who believe in Christ who are sealed with the Holy Spirit who is called the down-payment ( ἀρραβών ) of our inheritance of eternal life (Eph. 1:13-14).

Panikkar, it may be noted, was brought up in a Hindu-Catholic environment, since he was born of a Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother. That in itself, above and beyond his scholarly skills, may explain his compromising attitude towards other religions. In fact, Panikkar argues that "the Christian attitude (toward other faiths) is not ultimately one of bringing Christ in, but of bringing him forth, of discovering Christ."<sup>78</sup> This is the substance of Panikkar's thesis.

One notices on occasion certain echoes of Paul Tillich in Panikkar's writings, but these may be accidental. Panikkar sees that in Hinduism Christ is presented in a concealed or cryptic manner. In the

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<sup>76</sup> Raymond Panikkar, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1964), p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

Hindu religion, Christ "has still to grow up and be recognized. Moreover he still has to be crucified there."<sup>79</sup> "Christ is there in Hinduism, but Hinduism is not yet his spouse."<sup>80</sup>

Such views would later lead Panikkar to propose that there is present at the center of every religion the same "Christ-principle:"

Panikkar deals with questions relating to the universality of this Christ-principle in a later volume called The Trinity and World Religions.<sup>81</sup> The book proposes that "Christ" is a very ambiguous term. Christ, Panikkar says, cannot be the exclusive possession of Christians. On the contrary, he is the only link "between the created and the uncreated, the relative and the absolute, the temporal and the eternal, earth and heaven."<sup>82</sup> Panikkar does not identify this Christ with the Jesus of Nazareth. On the other hand, he claims that "even from right within the Christian faith such an identification has never been asserted."<sup>83</sup> Although at times Panikkar speaks about the relevance of the fulness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ to all people, he seems to be fully convinced that it would be "immoral" to bring doubts to any non-Christian who finds his own faith satisfying.<sup>84</sup>

Panikkar's attempt to "discover" Christ in Hinduism clearly has no basis in Scripture. His intellectual exercises do not make the communication of the gospel to the Hindus any easier. In a word, what we confront here is the kind of religious accommodationism which operates

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>R. Panikkar, The Trinity and World Religions (Madras: CISRS-CLS, 1970).

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

on the assumption that all people enjoy the love of God fully regardless of what they believe.

Several points can be made in response to Panikkar's hypotheses. First of all, it is against the accepted principles of the comparative study of religions to try to "incorporate" Hinduism into Christianity. The task of the student of comparative religion is not one of incorporating but of comparing the different aspects of religions. Moreover, it is impossible to compare Hinduism and Christianity. For Hinduism is built on certain religious principles and practices; but the foundation of Christianity is a Person, the God-Man Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Panikkar almost repeats the error of Teilhard when he proposes that the religions of the world are in an evolutionary process in which Christianity is the summit. The proposal that Christ must be crucified especially for the Hindus is against the teaching of the Bible. Christ will not be crucified at different times for different people. Rather, God's eternal plan of redemption for all people was completed once-for-all ( *ἐφάπαξ* ) in Christ since he was offered to bear the sins of all (Heb. 9:28). Apparently, Panikkar is able to discuss God's love for man apart from Christ and the crucifixion. While it is true that God loves all people regardless of their faith in Him, it is only in and through Christ that a person is brought into a full saving relationship with God.

A third problem evident in Panikkar's approach is his desire to "discover" Christ in other religions. This wish, though it may be sincere, cannot be fulfilled because we cannot bring Christ forth from a locale where he is not present! Indeed the task of the church is to

bring Christ in to the people who do not have him. First they must hear him and then they may believe in him.

Finally we must note that it is not the term "Christ" which is "ambiguous" but Panikkar's own proposal to find the "Christ-principle" at the center of all religions. Incidentally, he does not define this term, but considers it to be equal to "Logos" or "Lord." One has to use speculative philosophy in order to agree with Panikkar on this point. The Christ-principle, as the words imply, cannot have any theological significance apart from the Christ-event. Accordingly any attempt to search for this principle in other religions is destined to end in failure.

The promoters of dialogue believe that certain points of contact must be established between parties before any meaningful dialogue can begin. Those who view dialogue as a common search for truth maintain that these points of contact should be discovered at the religious level. Their purpose is to integrate the spiritual values of local religions into the life of the church. At the same time others think that there are enough realities in life which are commonly shared by all people, even if they have different religious orientations. Hence Bishop Newbigin observes that "the real point of contact between Christian and non-Christian faiths is not in the religion of the non-Christian, but in his humanity."<sup>85</sup>

If Newbigin's observation is accepted, then it follows that conversion could be a natural outcome of dialogue. Contrary to this viewpoint others, like Dr. Stanley J. Samartha, who edits the volumes on

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<sup>85</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, A Faith For This One World? (London, SPCK, 1961), p. 65.

interfaith dialogues for the World Council of Churches, propose that it must be possible for a non-Christian to develop an attitude toward Christ of "commitment without conversion."<sup>86</sup> This new trend within ecumenical circles advocates that in societies with a small Christian community, such as that in India, there may still be others who "secretly" believe in Christ. Such people refrain from making a public confession of their faith in Christ because of family ties, social-economic pressures, or a hesitation to break away from the traditions in which they were brought up.

Samartha believes that there is an "amazingly persistent response of Hindus to Jesus Christ in spite of the avowed self-sufficiency of modern Hinduism."<sup>87</sup> Some of these responses are narrated by M. M. Thomas in The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance.<sup>88</sup> In that book Thomas discusses how the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement understood the person and message of Jesus Christ. The study points out that the acknowledgment of Christ in India, whether by Hindu leaders or Christian men, is only partial and very inadequate.<sup>89</sup>

Thomas maintains that the most effective way of formulating Christology for India is by applying the categories of secular humanism.

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<sup>86</sup> Stanley J. Samartha, The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ, Interreligious Dialogue Series (Madras: CISRS-CLS, 1974), No. 6, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> M. M. Thomas, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance. Confessing the Faith in India, Series No. 5 (Madras: CISRS-CLS, 1970).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. xiv .

In his opinion theology is "the intellectual articulation of men's faith in God or in a structure of meaning and sacredness which is seen as his ultimate destiny."<sup>90</sup> This statement seems to indicate that man is at the center of Thomas' theology. It also ignores the fact that theology in the Christian sense must be the articulation of what God has done in Christ for man.

Man and society are the two key elements in the writings of Thomas. Therefore in his opinion theology must change as much as man and his situation in life change. Furthermore, he advocates that the message of the Bible must be "translated" and "updated" in terms of the language and categories of modern secular man.<sup>91</sup>

We do not reject the idea that theology should speak to man's concrete and current situation in life. In fact, that is the task of the theologian in every age. At the same time, it may be pointed out that there is nothing more concrete in life than human existence. Different ideologies may come and disappear as fast as they arose. Man in every age faces the situation in which he has to look beyond himself to find true meaning in life. Unfortunately this attitude to life is missing in the thought of Thomas.

Thomas himself admits that he is no theologian, either by training or by inclination. That may be one reason why his theological

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<sup>90</sup>M. M. Thomas, The Secular Ideologies of India and The Secular Meaning of Christ, Confessing the Faith in India, Series No. 12 (Madras: CISRS-CLS, 1976), p. 193.

<sup>91</sup>M. M. Thomas, Salvation and Humanisation, Some Crucial Issues of the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India, Indian Christian Thought, Series No. 11 (Madras: CISRS-CLS, 1971), pp. 46-47.



thinking appears heavily influenced by secular ideologies like Marxism and humanism. For him "the kingdoms of this world are the raw material for the kingdom of God."<sup>92</sup> This statement suggests that Thomas is anticipating the utopia of a classless society, which, according to him, would be established through the work of the church on earth.

It is possible that new themes emerge in theology as the situations of people change. Nevertheless, the basic tenets of Christian theology cannot change, since they speak about the accomplished acts of the unchanging God. Also, the message of the church to the world need not change, because the underlying cause of the problems of people remains the same. Unfortunately, as much as Thomas attempts to translate and update the categories of the Bible to suit contemporary man, he moves away from the true solution to man's problems - the message of having been liberated from sin and its consequences.

The above discussions illustrate that Christian theology in India is involved in a deep struggle for finding its own identity. We see that Panikkar represents one aspect of this struggle by relating the gospel to the people from a Hindu background. Thomas represents another aspect of this struggle in his attempt to interpret the Christian message from a secularly humanistic point of view. In both instances we see that the radical change in methodology, though perhaps with good intent, deprives the gospel of its true identity.

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<sup>92</sup>Thomas, Secular Ideologies, p. 202.

The Christology of the World Council  
of Churches (WCC)

The World Council of Churches today stands as the symbol of ecumenism and church union, it is said.<sup>93</sup> The Council was first conceived on the assumption that the divisions within Christendom are the greatest stumbling block for the effective proclamation of the Gospel. Since the scope of the Council is extensive, its Christology keeps expanding on the basis of the changing world situation. In what follows we will examine how much the understanding of the Council about the person and work of Christ has changed through its many years of existence. We must also note the reasons for those changes, radical as some of them were.

According to its constitution, the World Council of Churches is "a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior."<sup>94</sup> The constitution also states that a primary function of the Council is to continue the work of the 'Life and Work' and "Faith and Order" movements.<sup>95</sup> The movement last mentioned became the organ which discussed and decided the doctrinal issues of the Council.

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<sup>93</sup>For a concise description of the different stages in the formation of the WCC see F. E. Meyer, in collaboration with Richard Z. Meyer, "The World Council of Churches: A Theological Appraisal," Concordia Theological Monthly, 24, (March 1953):161-76.

<sup>94</sup>"The Constitution of the World Council of Churches" in The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Amsterdam, August 22nd to September 4, 1948, ed. by W. A. Visser't Hooft (London, SCM Press, 1949), p. 197.

<sup>95</sup>The Council for Life and Work first met in Stockholm, 1925, as an interdenominational agency with a view to finding solutions to "the contemporary social and international problems," while the World Conference (later Commission) on Faith and Order was formed through the initiative of the Protestant Episcopal Church to hold a conference to

The first assembly of the WCC, held in Amsterdam in 1948, unani-  
mously agreed on the fact that all one needs to know concerning God's  
purpose for the world is already revealed in Christ. The assembly also  
concluded that it was God's will that the gospel should be proclaimed to  
all men everywhere.<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, the acknowledgment of God's revela-  
tion in Christ together with the commitment to share that revelation  
with the people of the world became the "common ground" for different  
church bodies to get involved in discussions on church union.

Starting with the common ground, that is, accepting Jesus Christ  
as God and Savior, the assembly was determined somehow to bring the  
churches together for the purpose of jointly facing the problems of the  
world. Furthermore, it resolved to promote an ecumenical consciousness  
in all Christendom, including especially the laity. Its activities were  
focused on establishing a world-community which would transcend racial  
and national origins.

The Amsterdam Assembly also pointed out the importance for man  
to obey the command of our Lord that we pray that God's kingdom may come  
and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Assembly said that  
obeying that command "requires that we seek in every age to overcome the  
specific disorders which aggravate the perennial evil in human society,  
and that we search out means of securing their elimination or control."<sup>97</sup>

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consider questions concerning Faith and Order in the different churches.  
For a detailed survey of the development of these movements see Conrad  
Simonson, The Christology of the Faith and Order Movement (Leiden/Koln:  
E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 1-19.

<sup>96</sup> The First Assembly of the WCC, p. 64.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

This statement is apparently in keeping with the theme of the Assembly, namely, "Man's Disorder and God's Design."

Interestingly enough, the call for church unity was transformed into a call for united action to remedy the disorders of society. Evidently the Assembly was formulating a "functional Christology" which called for a new interpretation of the redemptive significance of Christ. Consequently thoughts about forgiveness of sins and the expediency of verbalizing the gospel did not persist beyond the common ground level. Nevertheless, the Assembly insisted that the organizational disunity among different church bodies and the "poverty of fellowship" among churches hindered the effective proclamation of the gospel.

We shall raise two objections to the idea of a unified community in the WCC sense. First, the kind of unity sought by the Council lacks Scriptural warrant. The unity for which Christ prayed is of a spiritual nature, where the believers are united in him regardless of their external institutional differences. In Pauline terms this unity is bestowed and nurtured by the Spirit. Moreover, it is founded on one Lord, one faith and one baptism, and it is focused on maturing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:45. See also 4:13-14).

Secondly, when men pray for the coming of God's kingdom it does not imply that the church can someday establish such a kingdom on earth by overthrowing all evil and social injustice. The kingdom of God is not a worldly entity which will provide equality for all people. The proof of its presence is not in a classless society, but in the use of the means of grace and the people who possess righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). It is present in the world today

by Word and Sacrament as leaven. It will manifest itself fully at the second coming of Christ, which will also mark the judgment of this world.

The second assembly of the WCC which met at Evanston in 1954 focused on the theme "Christ - The Hope of the World."<sup>98</sup> This theme is evidently an echo of the discussions on eschatology which had been in the forefront of theology especially since World War II.

The advisory commission of the Evanston assembly reported that the meaning of the church's existence in every age and clime was to testify to the world concerning its hope, namely Jesus Christ.<sup>99</sup> By using the term "world" the assembly was pointing to the unity of mankind. The conviction that Christ is the hope of the world points out the concentration of the assembly on Christology.

It is not the purpose of the WCC to formulate any dogma for its participating churches. That may be the reason why the council and its related organizations do not use very specific terminology when they discuss issues of high theological import. As a case in point, the second assembly did not formulate a Christology for today's world. Instead, it reflected a "worldly Christology." In the words of Conrad Simonson, "The issue that was never properly joined (in the second assembly) was not what it meant for Christ to be the hope of the world, but what Christ meant for the world."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>For a report on the Assembly see W. A. Visser't Hooft, ed., The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955).

<sup>99</sup>Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme of the Assembly (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 40.

<sup>100</sup>Simonson, p. 82.

The second assembly, following the first, was intent on church unity. Again, its advisory commission asserted, in no uncertain terms, that bringing unity among men was the mission of the church. It said, "The mission of the Church aims at gathering all men into unity. The disunity of the churches contradicts that purpose."<sup>101</sup> That is to say, uniting the churches is a necessary step to obtain the unity of the people of the world. In the final analysis, it appears that the WCC seeks the unity of the churches, in the name of Christ, to eradicate all social inequalities and provide a better social, economic and political life for the people. It sees Christ in the hungry, the poor and the oppressed.

In Evanston already it was recognized that Jesus Christ was the beginning, center and goal of the world. Accordingly the Christology of the assembly assumed "cosmic" proportions, although in a cryptic manner. That was completely unmasked seven years later in the third assembly of the WCC at New Delhi.

New Delhi, the site of the third assembly, was perhaps a relevant place to discuss the theme "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World." The capital of a developing nation, dominated by syncretic and socialist ideologies, represented virtually every problem of the third world. Also, the conglomeration of denominations, ranging from the Orthodox to the modern Pentacostal groups represented in India, made its capital a fitting location for ecumenical dialogues.

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<sup>101</sup> Report of the Advisory Commission, p. 21.

In terms of its Christology also the New Delhi assembly marks a turning point in the history of the WCC. The keynote speaker, Professor Joseph Sittler of the University of Chicago called for a Christology as large as the expanding cosmos of man.<sup>102</sup> He based his address on Colossians 1:15-20. Sittler was able to find a connection between τὰ πάντα of the Colossian hymn and his key idea, "called to unity." He argued that nature, too, is included in God's redemptive work because principalities and powers are at work in it.

Sittler stated that in today's world "it is not likely that witness to a light that does not enfold and illumine the world as nature will even be comprehensible."<sup>103</sup> This viewpoint implies that if all things have their being in Christ and are redeemed by him, then nature must not be left out of God's gracious act. In the Colossian hymn Sittler found a unity of the church embracing not only humanity but all of creation. Therefore, in his opinion, the church must set out to save the "threatened earth" from destruction. One wonders if Sittler was not formulating a "Christology of ecology" in his speech.

Sittler said that man is tempted to reduce God's redemption to "an 'angelic' escape from the cosmos of natural and historical fact." We should not succumb to this temptation since it entails a complete denial of man's physical nature and his place in nature, he added. "Unless the reference and power of the redemptive act included the whole of

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<sup>102</sup> Joseph Sittler's address is printed in The Ecumenical Review 14 (January, 1962):177-87.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

man's experience and environment straight out to its farthest horizon, then redemption is incomplete."<sup>104</sup>

Sittler blasted traditional Christology for being limited to "a Christology of the moral soul" and "a Christology of history." He proposed to add "the Christology of nature" as a third dimension to the traditional understanding of Christ. He emphasized that the New Testament demanded such an addition.

It was no accident that the delegates to the third assembly did not quite understand what Professor Sittler was proposing; neither did his statements significantly influence the documents of the assembly. Nevertheless, his call to view mankind and nature as one essential unity continues to have a lasting effect on the proceedings of the WCC since New Delhi.

The fourth assembly of the WCC was a sequel to the third in many respects. The three-dimensional Christology which Sittler visualized seven years before was reflected much at Uppsala. Amidst calamities such as student unrest, social revolts and wars in the sixties, the Assembly felt that the world was growing into a global village. In fact, one of the reports read, "We live in a new world of exciting prospects. For the first time in history, we can see the oneness of mankind as a reality."<sup>105</sup>

Uppsala proposed that the churches should become more open to the world's needs. Moreover, it presupposed the emergence of a single

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>105</sup>The Uppsala Report, Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Geneva: WCC, 1968), p. 45.



secular culture for the entire world. The assembly said that this secular culture is "a fact which underlies the essential truth of human nature as of one blood, in equal right and dignity through every diversity of race and kind."<sup>106</sup> Little wonder that the Christology which Uppsala advocated converged on man.

Professor Hendrikus Berkhof, the Dutch theologian who at Uppsala presented a paper on "The Finality of Jesus Christ," expressed the view that anyone who calls Jesus "Lord," or "the Hope" or "Light" of the world has called him "Final."<sup>107</sup> He was attempting to relate his paper to the over-all theme of the assembly, "Behold, I Make All Things New."

According to Berkhof, the proof of the finality of Christ is his resurrection. At the same time, he maintained that modern man cannot believe the resurrection of Christ as "real" unless he changes his concept of reality into that of the disciples. The disciples believed that Christ rose from the dead since he appeared to them after his death. In a word, it is not Berkhof's concern to state whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. He interprets the resurrection as "not a return to life, but the birth of a new humanity."<sup>108</sup>

The above statement certainly marked a turning point in the history of the Council. As a case in point, its Mandate for Mission began with the words, "We belong to a humanity that cries passionately and articulately for a fully human life."<sup>109</sup> Uppsala declared that Jesus Christ is the bearer of this hoped-for new humanity, and in him we see what man is meant to be.

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., pp. 306-307.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

By way of review, it is now clear that, although discussions about church unity first began on the confessional basis that Jesus Christ is God and Savior, the real purpose of the unity which was sought was to turn Christendom into another revolutionary movement for social, economic and political change. For that same reason, the World Council has been willing to change its Christology according to the signs of the times. This fact was clearly spelled out in the Council's commission on World Missions and Evangelism in Bangkok and its fifth assembly in Nairobi.

The Bangkok meeting in 1972 and 1973 discussed the theme "Salvation Today."<sup>110</sup> The commission formulated several new expressions such as "mission in context," "holistic evangelism," "conscientization" and so on.<sup>111</sup> We maintain that the invention of these words is a deliberate attempt to present the revised Christology of the WCC.

The commission sought "new" and "creative" ways of communicating the message of salvation to the people of the world. It said that these new ways "imply a sharing of new life rather than of abstract statements on salvation."<sup>112</sup> This was also a call to redefine the message of the church as the situation of the listener demanded it. In a word, the commission resolved that the church must quit the habit of missionary preaching and show its missionary presence by supporting revolutionary movements such as liberation theology with its conscientization of the poor and the oppressed.

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<sup>110</sup>The proceedings of the commission are available in Bangkok Assembly, 1973, Minutes and Report (Geneva: WCC, 1973).

<sup>111</sup>We shall discuss these issues in some detail in Chapter V.

<sup>112</sup>Bangkok Assembly, p. 18.

According to the commission, nothing is more important than meeting people's social needs. That is preaching the gospel. Consequently evangelism is relegated to the level of social action. Moreover, it is considered immoral to preach the gospel before addressing the issues of social injustice.<sup>113</sup>

Following the Bangkok conference on World Mission and Evangelism, the fifth assembly of the WCC which met in Nairobi, placed much emphasis on confessing Christ today. The central thought at Nairobi was "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites." Under that title the assembly took the liberty to discuss the problems of racism, sexism, youth, politics, economics and the like.<sup>114</sup>

It was suggested that the Christian faith must become a dynamic force within the community in order to resist the oppression of "dehumanizing" structures, including some governments. "In this way," the suggestion went on, "confessing Christ is liberated from mere verbalism which renders the life and ministry of the church stagnant, introverted and contentious."<sup>115</sup>

The WCC strongly advocates the "contextualization" of the gospel: that is, the notion that the message presented to a people must be determined by or conform to their particular social, political and economic

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<sup>113</sup>For example, Bishop Arias in his report on Committee B stated that "the thrust of evangelism within the WCC structures, cannot be confined to one particular task." Ibid., pp. 155-56.

<sup>114</sup>Work Book for the Fifth Assembly of the WCC (Geneva: WCC, 1975), p. 22.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

context in life. Dr. Robert McAfee Brown, the main speaker of the fifth assembly, presented the following guidelines:

Relating his address to the Kenyan situation Professor Brown indicated that "Christ the Liberator" is the message to a people like those of Kenya who were underoppressive social structures. He announced, ". . . for this time and this place the claim of Jesus to bring freedom and the cry of the oppressed peoples for freedom, converge and cannot be separated."<sup>116</sup>

Dr. Brown's address, to be sure, represents the gradual change which has taken place in the WCC interpretation of Christ's person and work. We noted at the beginning of our survey that the original motto of the Council was to bring together those churches which accepted Jesus Christ as God and Savior. But through its few years of existence the same Council has become brave enough to construct different "Christologies" which are based on mere secular ideologies. Apparently the Council has placed man and his needs at a higher level than God and His plan for mankind.

Our purpose in this section was to present a synopsis of the Christology of the WCC. In what we described above we saw how the understanding about Christ changed as new ideologies emerged in the world situation. Man and his environment were the criteria on which the WCC determined the meaning of Christ's person and work. Each assembly of the Council invented a Christology which would be acceptable to modern secular man. In a nutshell, the WCC, whether consciously or unconsciously,

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<sup>116</sup> Kenneth Slack, Nairobi Narrative (London: SCM, 1976), p. 29.

did what Professor Sittler wanted it to do. It became an ally of Marxist ideology. It claimed to champion a vision which was "truer, vaster and tougher than the Marxist vision."

The Christology of the Roman Catholic  
Church Since Vatican II

Two popes were needed to complete the Second Vatican Council. The Council began in 1962 after three years of preparation by Pope John XXIII. As pope he was determined to renew and reform the Church. His reforms focused primarily on two issues: a reconsideration of the faith and life of the church in view of the world's needs, and an openness to participate in ecumenical discussions with other churches.

Pope John lived only long enough to see the first session of the council. His successor, Paul VI, convened three other sessions and completed the council. Paul VI lacked some of the charisma of his predecessor. Nevertheless, he was motivated to continue the renewal within the church and to maintain an ecumenical attitude to those outside. The pope set four objectives for Vatican II; namely, a) the self-awareness of the church; b) its renewal; c) bringing together all Christians in unity; d) and the dialogue of the church with the contemporary world.<sup>117</sup>

Vatican II produced two primarily theological documents: the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, and the Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation.<sup>118</sup> We give special attention to these documents as they represent the Vatican's new approach to Christology.

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<sup>117</sup>Hans Küng et al., eds., Council Speeches of Vatican II (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1964), p. 22.

<sup>118</sup>Austin P. Flannery, ed., Documents of Vatican II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 350-433, 750-765.

The Christology of the Roman Catholic Church in principle is based on Scripture as well as tradition. While the Catholic Church accepts the biblical revelation, it does not hesitate to curb Scripture if it should contradict tradition. Moreover, it promotes a "unified spirituality" among all people in anticipation of a peaceful co-existence of mankind. Interestingly enough, much of Catholic theology is built on concepts like "love" and "unity." When abstract ideas become the norm of theology, theological statements may lose their Scriptural basis.

Perhaps moved by the spirit of ecumenism, Vatican II did not say that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church. However, it did say that the church was necessary for salvation. It also affirmed that those people could not be saved who refused to enter or remain in the catholic church even though they knew that it was founded by God as necessary for salvation.<sup>119</sup>

While maintaining that Christ constituted the church as the source of salvation for the whole world, the Council appeared to be very sympathetic towards those outside the church. It resolved that "those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation."<sup>120</sup>

Karl Rahner, who deeply influenced the theology of Vatican II, calls these outsiders "anonymous Christians." According to Rahner,

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 367.

anyone who does not say, "There is no God," is a believer. Moreover, those who express their faith in God through their actions are already in the grace of God, who wills the salvation of all men. These anonymous Christians, in his opinion, remain such on account of the limitations imposed on them by their particular "unfavorable historical environment."<sup>121</sup>

Contrary to this viewpoint we must state that man's sincerity in his faith does not necessarily lead him to the truth. In today's world there may still be people who have not heard the name of Jesus Christ. However, that does not imply that there are different ways of salvation for different people. The God who will have all men to be saved also makes it clear that salvation for all is given only in and through His Son. Neither a sincere heart nor the will to do good can bridge the chasm between the holy God and sinful man. Humanity is reconciled to God only in Christ.

We noted that Vatican II did not want to confine salvation to Christ alone. Incidentally, its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation states that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the magisterium of the church, all contribute effectively to salvation.<sup>122</sup> By this statement the Roman Catholic Church once again discloses its tendency to shift from a Christ-centered theology to a church-centered system.

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<sup>121</sup>Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations VI: Concerning Vatican II, trans. by Karl H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1974), pp. 390-95.

<sup>122</sup>Documents of Vatican II, p. 756.

Any revelation which does not testify to God's plan of redemption in Christ must be considered inadequate and incomplete. True and complete revelation pertains to salvation, which is beyond the grasp of human reason. For that reason the natural knowledge of God, or as Vatican II puts it, the knowledge of God "from the created world by the natural light of human reason," can not be knowledge unto salvation.<sup>123</sup>

In passing, we must observe that, according to Vatican II, the traditions of the church and Scripture together make up "a single deposit of the Word of God." In other words, "the church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truth from the holy Scripture alone."<sup>124</sup> Instead, it subjects the understanding of Scripture to the judgment of the church. Since it believes that the tradition which came from the apostles makes "progress" in the church, it invests the pope with the authority to make the final decision on everything.

Pope John Paul II, the present pontiff has committed himself to be faithful to the decisions of the Second Vatican Council. As his name indicates, which was first chosen by his immediate predecessor whose pontificate was short-lived, the pope tries to combine in his ministry the ideas of both John XXIII and Paul VI. In fact, hardly any of his addresses concludes without referring to at least one of these former popes.

The former Polish Cardinal is an accomplished linguist and philosopher. His philosophy is heavily influenced by phenomenological perceptions. With that frame of reference he develops his thoughts on

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 752.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 755.



Christian ethics, too. In his major philosophical work, The Acting Person, he arrives at the conclusion that man who has conquered many mysteries of nature himself remains a mystery.<sup>125</sup> Also, he considers himself to be of help in solving the existential problems of the world.

His philosophical ideas did not change even after he was enthroned as pope. For example, at the assembly of the Latin American bishops in Puebla, Mexico, the pope repeated his inaugural vow that it was his duty to evangelize all of humanity. He challenged his hearers to open wide the doors for Christ, and to open to Christ's saving power the boundaries of state, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development.<sup>126</sup>

The pope criticized those who understood Christ as a political activist or a revolutionary. On the other hand, he pointed out the need to formulate a "solid Christology" in order to maintain the doctrinal purity of the church. According to him the core of the Christian message was to "announce the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom, the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God."<sup>127</sup>

One notices at times that the thoughts of the pope are not completely different from the thoughts of those who are subject to his authority. The difference is that, according to the pope, authentic human liberation and the humanization of systems and structures must

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<sup>125</sup>Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla), The Acting Person, trans. by Andrzej Potocki, *Analecta Husserliana*, (Dordrecht, Boston, London: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979).

<sup>126</sup>John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, eds., Puebla and Beyond, trans. by John Drury (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 61.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

take place through the Church. That is, he builds his case on an ecclesiology well grounded on Vatican II while others emphasize the society at large of which the church is a part.

In a recent address to Brazilian workers the Pope painted the picture of Jesus as a brother, especially of the poor. He stated that the kingdom of God was with those who were rich in faith, hope and charity. Also, he challenged the people to change São Paulo into a "fully human city by applying the message of salvation." "This message," the pope said, ". . . is a message of love and brotherhood, a message of justice and solidarity, in the first place to the neediest. In a word, it is a message of peace and of a just social order."<sup>128</sup>

Thus we see that the pope truly represents Catholic theology in general. His philosophical framework dominates his theology. Consequently his message to the world is based on his understanding of "humaneness" and "participation" as they are illustrated in his Acting Person.<sup>129</sup> In a manner similar to the World Council of Churches the pope promotes an ideology based on human dignity, often ignoring the fact that man after the fall is by nature sinful and unclean.

The same pope has, however, called into question the theology of two leading Catholic thinkers who shaped the Second Vatican Council. The Swiss theologian Hans Küng was censured and had to forego his professional

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<sup>128</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Collaborators of God," Address to Brazilian Workers, Catholic Mind 78 (1980):54.

<sup>129</sup> For an appraisal of the Pope's thoughts see Martin H. Scharlemann, "Some Thoughts on Papal Thinking," Concordia Journal 6 (1980):4-8.

chair as professor of Catholic theology at Tübingen. The Belgian Edward Schillebeeckx was summoned to come to explain his Christology.

From the beginning of his career as a historical theologian Küng has been blaming the problems of the Roman Catholic Church on its institutional rigidity. The authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic system and the notion that salvation is available through the Catholic church have been the most disturbing for Küng. In fact, most of his writings are addressed to these issues. In an earlier work in the form of letters he invited the magisterium to realize that non-Catholics, too, are saved on the basis of their faith in Christ. Those letters also indicated that even people who do not belong to any church could find their salvation in Christ.<sup>130</sup>

Küng's antagonism towards the church has made him suspicious also of the message it proclaims. It often appears that he has no difficulty in subscribing to Jesus of Nazareth, his ministry and death. Nevertheless, he believes that the message of the New Testament is something which was developed by the community of the post-Easter period. He is also convinced that the significance of this message is a matter of one's own faith.

It is in this light that we should understand Küng's concept of "justification by faith." As a historical theologian he insists that the message of Jesus had already undergone a transition before it became the message of the early church. He suspects whether the modern man can regard this transition as 'historically legitimate.' Furthermore he

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<sup>130</sup>Hans Küng, That the World May Believe, trans. by Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

maintains that "the decisive factor in this transition - the significance for salvation of the cross and the resurrection of the crucified Christ - can only be recognized in faith."<sup>131</sup>

According to Küng, faith in Christ is faith in the one who is proclaimed. It follows that, in his opinion, the Christian believes not in the Bible but in Him whom it attests; not in the tradition, but in Him whom it conveys; not in the church, but in Him whom it proclaims. He insists that the object of faith is "God Himself as He has spoken and acted for believers through Jesus Christ."<sup>132</sup> For him personally all channels, including Scripture, which convey this message, are expressions of faith.

Küng wants to free his theology from the shackles of the church's administration. It also appears that some of the propositions which he deduces from his way of thinking are foreign to the foundations of Christian faith. He operates on the assumption that true faith can be maintained even through untrue propositions.

Edward Schillebeeckx, a Roman Catholic dogmatician, has set as his goal the discovery of the impact on theology of the Jesus of history. Like Küng he is mindful of the historical character of the Biblical accounts; but he does so only to serve his own purpose. He believes that the various narratives in the Bible are characterized by the struggle of the earliest Christian community to express biblical truths in the

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<sup>131</sup>Hans Küng, The Church (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p. 79.

<sup>132</sup>Hans Küng, The Church-Maintained in Truth, A Theological Meditation (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 44-45.

language of the time. Therefore he sets out by using today's language to write a Christology which would apply to the present.

Schillebeeckx's exhaustive work on Christology has so far resulted in two large volumes.<sup>133</sup> Interestingly enough, while introducing the second volume he expresses the hope that perhaps the two volumes together will be helpful "to make a beginning on what is called Christology." In fact, the third volume is already in the making. Nevertheless, his published work has been enough to be questioned by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Schillebeeckx develops his Christology presumably to suit contemporary man. For that very reason man becomes his focal point whenever he begins to apply to modern life the results of his particular exegesis, consisting of the attempt to get to the historical Jesus by using the methods of form, redaction and tradition criticism. He does not admit this shift to be an error. Moreover, he expects his work to serve a "pastoral" function.

Schillebeeckx states that "the mystery of salvation is concretely and actively present whenever man experiences his own existence."<sup>134</sup> According to him this mystery is revealed to people even before the word of the Gospel is brought to them. In fact, he hopes that on the day of Judgment almost everyone will be standing at the right hand of God.

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<sup>133</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology, trans. by Herbert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); Christ: Experience of Jesus as Lord, trans. by John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980). The same volume was published by the SCM Press, London, with the title, Christ: The Experience in the Modern World.

<sup>134</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, The Mission of the Church, trans. by N. D. Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 75.

He formulates his hypothesis on the premise that "God loves everyone." Consequently he believes that all the aspects of Christian doctrine such as God, Christ, Church, Sacraments, and so forth, are a thematic reflection of God's love for everyone. Furthermore, the only adequate response of man to this love is a "radical" love for our fellowmen.<sup>135</sup>

Like most of the scholars we discussed in the present chapter, Schillebeeckx attempts to develop a "Christology from below." This fact becomes even more clear when we consider his definition of salvation. He says, "Christian salvation, in order to be salvational, must be universal and total. Consequently, salvation, in the sense of that which makes whole, should entail as a minimum requirement that no one group be whole at the expense of another one. This does not imply that Christian salvation can be reduced to the making of a universally human just society. It does imply, however, that the making of such a society is a minimum ingredient of Christian salvation."<sup>136</sup>

In conclusion we note that developments in the Catholic Church since Vatican II have resulted in the notion that people may be saved without any direct knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church officially maintains that even non-Christian religions "reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men."<sup>137</sup> This statement entails the belief

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>136</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, "Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man," Toward Vatican III, ed. by David Tracy et al., (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 41.

<sup>137</sup>Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, 28 October, 1965, in Flannery, p. 739.

that simple natural knowledge of God will bring salvation to those who do not know the Gospel.

Evidently the Christological statements of the Roman Catholic Church are ambiguous and sometimes misleading. The Catholic Church often ignores the necessary distinction between God's goodness and His grace. Moreover, in its attempts to see the grace of God at work in secular structures as well as non-Christian religions, the Catholic mind runs the risk of depriving of its definitiveness the grace manifested in Jesus Christ. This is the consequence of the Vatican's attitude to let man-made traditions rank higher than Holy Scriptures. The Christology of the Roman Catholic Church is a clear case in which the notions of human solidarity and brotherhood dominate the biblical teaching on Salvation.

#### Summary

In the present chapter we have attempted to explain the scope of the Christological problem in the present day. We have briefly surveyed the Christologies of representative theologians and organizations with a view to providing the context for our study of the cosmic Christ.

Our review of the materials from different individuals suggested that all of them were using their own methods to interpret the person and work of Christ. Some thought of Jesus as a political Messiah while other denied his historicity. When some interpreted Christ as a spiritual power which was present in each existential situation others denied his resurrection. Some others understood him as a 'principle' only.

We have also noted the view of some theologians that Christology must be presented to different people in different ways. Following this

viewpoint they were attempting to formulate Christologies by using concepts from philosophy, science, technology and non-Christian religions. Some of them were trying to "find" Christ in other religions, instead of presenting him as Savior to those who follow other faiths.

We have seen that modern theological liberalism advocates a "functional" approach to Christology. We pointed out that the World Council of Churches did not have a definitive statement on Christology. On the other hand, the Council kept urging Christians to get involved in such activities as would allegedly help to overcome class and race hatreds as well as social and political oppression.

In the final analysis, we have concluded that contemporary Christology is not worthy to be called Christology because it is shaped more by socialism and humanism than by the clear Scriptural propositions. Our study in the following chapters will serve both as a corrective and as a positive statement of the true identity of Jesus Christ and His work of redemption.



## CHAPTER III

### AN ANALYSIS OF COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

#### Introduction

In this chapter we propose a scriptural solution by which the issues raised previously may be evaluated. An exposition of the Christological statements in the Epistle to the Colossians will help accomplish this purpose. The following procedure will be followed in order to evaluate this position.

In the first part of the present chapter we shall investigate the historical context in which the letter was written. Three major items are involved: an examination of the different suggestions for a plausible date of its writing; a careful scrutiny of the different aspects of the so-called Colossian heresy; and, perhaps, the most important of all, Paul's background in Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, we shall analyze Col. 1:15-20. The vast amount of divergent opinion regarding the form and content of this classic section makes it most difficult to reach definitive conclusions. Is it possibly an extant form of an early Christian confession? Or, was it part of an early Christian liturgy? Or, further, was this portion borrowed from some pre-Christian source such as Gnosticism? In offering our own answers to these questions we will provide an interpretation of the key phrases involved and highlight particularly the significance of some

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<sup>1</sup>In terms of authorship our stance is the traditional view that the apostle Paul wrote Colossians. For other opinions see subsequent discussion.

distinctive words in this section. A summary of the findings will be provided at the end.

### Historical Setting

The city of Colossae was situated on the bank of the Lycus River, a tributary of the Meander, in the neighborhood of Laodicea and Hierapolis. In fact, in ancient days travellers could visit the three cities in a single day.<sup>2</sup> Colossae gained significance as the link between the East and the West, since the city was located on the great trade route from Ephesus to the East. Weaving and Dyeing were possibly the two trades which made this urban area rise to some importance. However, during the early years of the first Christian century the city was reduced to the status of a "small town."<sup>3</sup>

There is no clear indication either in Colossians or in the book of Acts that Paul had paid a visit to Colossae before he wrote to the Christians there. Nevertheless the whole fabric of the epistle demonstrates that the apostle had developed a very personal relationship with the saints of that city. Moreover, some of the leading personalities of the congregation at Colossae were known to Paul and his associates.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974 Reprint), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>The Geography of Strabo with an English translation by H. L. Jones, 8 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1928), 5:505, 511.

<sup>4</sup>The concluding section of the letter (4:10-18) is reflective of greetings sent from one "family" to another. The liberal use of personal names, presumably familiar to both sides, suggests a situation as if Paul had met them personally. The most likely occasion for this must be deduced from Acts 19:10, which states that Paul's two-year ministry at Ephesus paved the way for all the residents of Asia to hear the Word of the Lord. Again, there were people at Colossae who had not seen Paul (2:1).

How was "the word of the truth of the gospel" brought to this Lycus Valley community? That Epaphras first brought the gospel to Colossae seems clear. Epaphras originally hailed from Colossae (4:12) and was dear both to the Christian community there and to the apostle (4:13). He was worthy of much praise as a faithful slave of Christ and a dependable cohort of Paul (1:7). While the letter was being read, Epaphras stayed with Paul interceding for the Christians at Colossae.

In any case, the bearer of the epistle to its destination was Tychicus (4:7-9). Also a native of the Asian province, Tychicus had accompanied Paul during his third missionary journey. He merited the honor of being called a beloved brother, a faithful servant and fellow-slave in Christ, titles attributed to very few other companions of Paul. Tychicus had been commissioned to share with the faithful brethren at Colossae words of encouragement. Such assurance was expedient particularly because of the possible concern the Christians at Colossae might have had regarding Paul and his co-workers while they were in prison.

Now Tychicus was accompanied by a certain Onesimus, another one of Paul's faithful and dear brothers (4:9). Like Epaphras, Onesimus also was from the Colossian community. It is very likely that this was the same run-away slave for whose restoration Paul wrote the letter to Philemon.<sup>5</sup> If so, then Onesimus had offended his master by some wrongdoing, and had run for refuge elsewhere. As he was traveling he accidentally caught the attention of Paul, was brought to faith in Christ,

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<sup>5</sup>For a not so complimentary description on Onesimus, Lightfoot, pp. 311-15.

and thereby became a spiritual child of the apostle (Philemon 10). Paul sent him back to his master along with Tychicus together with a letter of recommendation.

The details of the occasion and purpose of the letter to Philemon need not concern us here.<sup>6</sup> The internal evidence from Colossians as well as from the letter to Philemon suggests that both were composed at the same time from the same place. Paul was in prison with the same group of people while he wrote both letters (Col. 4:10-13. See also Philemon 23-24).

Although there are indications within the letter itself that Paul was in prison as he was writing Colossians (1:24; 4:18), there is not even a hint as to the exact location of the imprisonment. The traditional view of equating this with a Roman imprisonment which lasted for at least two years (Acts 28:16, 30) remained unquestioned for many years. In Rome Paul was allowed freedom to stay by himself with a soldier guarding him. Such an occasion must have made the writing of a masterpiece as splendid as Colossians more feasible. However, in recent times, other locations for the composition of the letter have been suggested. In the early part of the century, scholars like Adolf Deissmann and George Duncan have argued for an Ephesian origin of Colossians. Deissmann dismisses the whole issue as a common sense opinion as he states, "The

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<sup>6</sup>The generally accepted view is that the letter is a plea for Onesimus' restoration by Philémon. But in 1935 John Knox proposed the hypothesis that Paul sought freedom for Onesimus for the purpose of missionary activities. Even after almost twenty-five years of scholarly debate on this issue Professor Knox insists upon his position and claims that his critics are evading the "cumulative effect of the argument." See John Knox, Philemon Among the Letters of Paul, A New View of Its Place and Importance, rev. ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959).

careful reader of St. Paul's letters will easily find evidences of an imprisonment of Paul at Ephesus."<sup>7</sup> Duncan also concludes a detailed discussion on the problem by maintaining that Colossians (and Philemon) are to be dated towards the end of the Ephesian ministry of Paul (A.D. 55). Against a Roman imprisonment Duncan asserts that it must have been more probable for Onesimus to seek refuge in nearby Ephesus than in far-away Rome.<sup>8</sup>

Another proposition which has gained some scholarly acceptance is that of a Caesarean imprisonment. With enough supportive evidence from antiquity to establish the destruction of the city of Colossae between A.D. 61 and 62, Bo Reicke finds it inevitable to conclude that Colossians was sent from Caesarea about A. D, 59.<sup>9</sup> The rationale behind a similar conjecture from W. G. Kümmel also is rather convincing. But the very cautious Kümmel envisages the comparatively small size of Caesarea as being less viable for the many companions of Paul to engage in the mission endeavor. "Thus various factors support the composition of Colossians in Caesarea, but composition in Rome is also not excluded."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, trans. by L. R. M. Strachen (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), p. 237.

<sup>8</sup>George S. Duncan, St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry, A Reconstruction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), pp. 72-73.

<sup>9</sup>Bo Reicke, "The Historical Setting of Colossians," Review and Expositor 70 (1973):428-38. According to Tacitus an earthquake struck Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colossae in A. D. 61. But, the Chronicle of Eusebius, composed almost 200 years later testifies that the catastrophe destroyed the tri-cities in 62. See Eusebius, Chronicle, ed. by R. Helm, 1:21-22, p. 183.

<sup>10</sup>W. G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, 14th rev. ed., trans. by A. J. Mattill, Jr., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 245.

Those who deny that Paul wrote our letter while he was imprisoned in Rome do so mainly because Rome was too far away from Colossae. Accordingly, they maintain that Onesimus could not have come to Rome. They ask, "Is it not unlikely that a runaway slave would flee to a far away metropolis rather than find a hiding place in one of the neighboring towns with which he was more familiar?" At the same time, as C. F. D. Moule observes, "Travel between Rome and the East was frequent and not so formidable a task as to make the communications implied by the captivity epistles impossible. A runaway slave might well make for Rome on the principle that the metropolis of the empire is the easiest place in which to hide."<sup>11</sup> Under any circumstances, the hypothesis for an Ephesian imprisonment remains at best only a logical deduction, since it lacks direct New Testament evidence.

All the discussions so far envision the impossibility of an unbiased opinion concerning the exact place of composition of Colossians. However, there can be little doubt about one fact: the writer of the letter was in prison. But who was the writer? If we should say that the apostle Paul did not write our epistle, then the exact place of his imprisonment need not concern us. Uncertainty regarding the Pauline authorship of Colossians was first raised as late as the nineteenth century. Since that time scholarly opinion on the matter has shifted back and forth.<sup>12</sup> The language and literary style of the epistle, some argue,

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<sup>11</sup>C. F. D. Moule, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup>For a summary of the issues and related names see Kümmel, pp. 240-44.

is not typically Pauline. Further, the issues addressed represent more the religious heartbeat of the second century by virtue of their possible relationship to Gnosticism.<sup>13</sup>

It may be noted in passing that Rudolf Bultmann and his followers are the most recent to argue against the Pauline authorship.<sup>14</sup> The Bultmann School operates on the assumption that a Pauline School published Colossians under the apostle's name. The other New Testament writings included in this category are 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles. The striking similarity between Ephesians and Colossians in terms of style and content is used as the basis to prove that neither is Pauline. Incidentally one should only take note of what Deissmann observed at the turn of the century:

In these two letters there were no special problems of church life to discuss, and so St. Paul could here give vent to solemn utterances, which even in point of style are striking for their grave and as it were priestly earnestness.<sup>15</sup>

The relatively infrequent use of authentic Paulinisms in Colossians is an issue which cannot be ignored and needs careful examination. Apart from the thirty-three expressions unique to the relatively smaller member of the present Pauline corpus, the letter contains at least fifteen words which are used by the New Testament writers other than Paul. Characteristic Pauline terms such as justification, salvation and revelation are missing in Colossians.

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<sup>13</sup>On this see subsequent discussion on the "Colossian Heresy."

<sup>14</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament II, trans. by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 175-80.

<sup>15</sup>Adolf Deissmann, St. Paul, A Study in Social and Religious History, trans. by L. R. M. Strachen (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), p. 109.

Even those scholars who uphold Colossians to be genuinely Pauline have noticed its remarkably different style. For example, Kümmel points out, "The style is cumbersome, verbose, and surfeited to opacity with subordinated clauses, participial and infinitive constructions or substantives with "Ev (for example, 1:9-20 [one sentence!]: 2:9-15."<sup>16</sup> Such stylistic peculiarities are better explained as only natural once we agree that the new generation of believers at Colossae was facing certain theological problems which were unparalleled elsewhere in the New Testament Church. Paul was responding to such issues in a language best equipped to suit the occasion.

Attributing our epistle to a later Pauline school also will not solve the problem.<sup>17</sup> Just as there are striking similarities between Ephesians and Colossians there are also marked differences between those epistles and the pastoral epistles. If the argument for a later Pauline school should continue, then we should also hypothesize that there were schools within the Pauline school. As John A. T. Robinson asks,

Which is more likely, that an imitator of Paul in the first century composed a writing ninety or ninety-five percent in accordance with Paul's style or that Paul himself wrote a letter diverging five or ten percent from his usual style?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Kümmel, p. 241.

<sup>17</sup>For a recent example, Eduard Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon, trans. by William R. Poehlmann and R. J. Kanis, ed. by Helmut Koester, Hermeneia Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 177-183. Lohse suggests a date around A.D. 80 for the epistle. Accordingly a "theologian" from the "Pauline School" composed the letter to combat the philosophers of Asia Minor. Not ignoring the earthquake of 60-61 Lohse points out that the concern of the writer of Colossians was to "paint a typical picture of the life of a Christian community."

<sup>18</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Redating the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 63.



The above examples show that the attempts by some scholars to exclude Colossians from the Pauline corpus and by some others to suggest an imprisonment for Paul either at Ephesus or at Caesarea have not disproved the traditional position in spite of the cogency and seemingly convincing nature of the respective arguments. Since we surmise that Paul wrote Colossians from Rome, the date of its composition may approximately be fixed between A.D. 58 and 60.<sup>19</sup> This is acceptable even if Colossae was destroyed in A.D. 61.

Now we shall consider the question about the exact nature of the Colossian error.

#### The Aspects of the Colossian Heresy

The question of the precise nature of the Colossian heresy will remain unsettled as long as attempts are made to interpret it from different points of view. As it shall soon be made clear, there is practically no single way to explain all the elements involved here. Therefore, any attempt to put the different aspects of the so-called "Colossian error" under one umbrella will be dangerously misleading. In this section we shall make reference to some modern perspectives on the issue with a view to scrutinizing them by statements from the letter itself.

The readers of our letter are being warned not to be carried away by a certain "philosophy" ( **φιλοσοφία** ) which works after the manner of man-made tradition (2:8). This is the only place in the New

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<sup>19</sup>The traditional view is that Paul was among those executed during the persecution of Christians in Rome (A.D. 64). For example, F. F. Bruce, The Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 441-43.

Testament where reference is made to philosophy without any specific definition or description. In this connection, we might refer to Paul's encounter on the Areopagus with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:16-34): The difference being that in the latter case Paul was confronted by people from two different and already established schools of philosophy in the city of Athens which was, for a time, the capital of the intellectual world of that day. Further, Epicurus and Zeno, the founders respectively of both schools, have had their place in recorded history. The philosophy at Colossae can meet few of these requirements.

However, some characteristic tenets of this heresy may be deduced from the letter itself. It had a fairly well balanced understanding of the supernatural and the earthy, the higher and the lower realms of the universe. There was a certain teaching about the "elemental spirits of the universe." Whatever that teaching was, the apostle wants the people to shun that completely (2:8). Along with such human tradition, the "puritan" ethic of a seemingly devout manner of "religious" life should be eliminated (2:20-23).

The word "elements" (στοιχεῖα) points basically to an accepted pattern of things arranged in a row, like letters in the alphabet. It follows, then, that the word carries with it the derived sense of "rudiments or basic principles" (of nature). Commenting on the possible transition in the meaning of the term, Ralph Martin suggests that "the final stage of this development is reached when the stars themselves are dignified with being not only dwelling places of the gods but divine in their own right, and so requiring to be venerated."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ralph D. Martin, Colossians, The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), p. 13.

With this understanding the worship of angels would fall in place. A mind-set which can elevate mundane things to the spiritual realm can also engage in the worship of angels with no difficulty. True, Judaism perpetuated the idea of angels watching over individual human beings. But the situation at Colossae alludes to the pernicious affair of worshipping angels. In this regard, perhaps, the community at Colossae misconstrued the widely accepted Judaic understanding of the celestial beings. As Gerhard Kittel points out, what the pagans called "gods" could, at least in part, have been some of the guardian angels allegedly controlling the destiny of the nations.<sup>21</sup>

In order for any kind of philosophy to be religious, it must carry with it certain rituals, rites and regulations. The case of the Colossian heresy could have been no different. The Christians there were under pressure to stay away from certain kinds of meat and drink (2:16). Along with such dietary regulations they were to observe special days like the "new moon" and Sabbath. Also there were people who were overly enthusiastic about (or deprived of!) certain ethereal visionary experiences.<sup>22</sup>

In analyzing the various attempts to define the Colossian heresy, it may be helpful to ask whether all of the suggested theories might be summarized and classified under one general theme. It must be observed

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<sup>21</sup>Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 9 vols. Eng. trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964-74), s.v. ἄγγελος 1:86. Hereinafter referred to as TDNT.

<sup>22</sup>The negation μή (οὐκ) at 2:18 is conceivably a later addition as support for it is shown by the Vulgate, Syriac Peshita, several church fathers and so on.

at the outset that most scholars who have attempted to do so have also left loopholes indicating the inconclusiveness of their respective cases.

While granting the mixture of elements from various ideologies at Colossae much of European scholarship tends to maintain that Gnosticism is the basis for all this confusion. Eduard Lohse represents that position when he states, "Their teaching . . ., because of the emphasis placed on knowledge as well as its world-negating character, can be termed Gnostic or, if a more cautious designation is desired, pre-Gnostic. A Gnostic understanding of the world is also exhibited in the desire to be filled with divine power as well as in the boastful arrogance of those who think they have experienced such fullness and possess wisdom and knowledge."<sup>23</sup>

Little remains to be said concerning the accepted relationship between Gnosticism and Christianity. Although, as a rule, the fathers of the early church alluded to Gnosticism as a post-Christian phenomenon, the nineteenth century "History of Religions" school began to undo that position by suggesting a pre-Christian origin for it. Thus students of the above school have drawn parallels between portions of the New Testament writings and certain allegedly Gnostic materials, thereby trying to establish the indebtedness of the former to the latter.

In point of fact it should be noted that, in spite of the findings from the Dead Sea, "Gnosticism" remains a word which later scholars ascribed to a system of beliefs which its first adherents left unnamed.

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<sup>23</sup>Lohse, p. 129.

The exact nature and function of Gnosticism will perhaps remain an unsolved riddle. In fact, R. M. Grant points out that the apparent similarities in terms of the teachings of Christianity and Gnosticism -- as for example, the concept of a redeemer -- should be understood as the latter owing to the former. According to Grant, Gnosticism "seems to have arisen out of a mixture of Hellenistic, Jewish, Oriental and Christian factors, combined in an atmosphere of intense other-worldliness and imaginative myth-making."<sup>24</sup>

G. Quispel proposes a different approach to our problem. After examining some of the commonly accepted Gnostic literature such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Hymn of the Pearl, and so forth, the professor of early church history conjectures that Gnosticism evolved from Judaism: "Gnosticism is not a late chapter of the history of Greek philosophy and therefore a Christian heresy, an acute Hellenization of the Christian religion. Nor is it a fossilized survival of old Iranian or even Indian religious concepts, and certainly it is not derived from a presupposed, consistent Iranian myth of the Saved Savior. It is rather a religion of its own, with its own phenomenological structure, characterized by the mythical expression of self-experience through the revelation of the 'Word,' or, in other words, by an awareness of a tragic split within the Deity itself. And as such it owes not a little to Judaism."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Robert M. Grant, Gnosticism, a Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 18. Note the subtitle.

<sup>25</sup> G. Quispel, "Gnosticism and the New Testament" in The Bible in Modern Scholarship. Papers read at the 100th meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature on December 28, 30, 1964 at New York City. Ed. by Philip Hyatt (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965).

As the conclusion to a detailed study of the various factors involving the historical background of the Gnostic materials available so far, Edwin Yamauchi asserts that "in the case of the New Testament texts we have no Gnostic texts which are older."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, he illustrates that all the arguments designed to prove an authentic pre-Christian Gnosticism are ambiguous and therefore refutable. If such inferences are right, then we should acknowledge also that the heresies refuted in the New Testament are not fully Gnostic in nature. The same conclusion applies to the Colossian heresy.

Earlier, towards the end of the century preceding ours, Bishop Lightfoot had conceded that the Colossian error was what might be called Essene Judaism. Presumably a certain Gnostic slur was cast upon the theological speculations of the Essenes. Yet the bishop was very much aware of the delicacy involved in branding the Colossian error as Gnosticism per se. With a view to avoiding all possible misinterpretations in this connection, Lightfoot cautioned "that we here employ the term to express the simplest and most elementary conceptions of this tendency of thought, and we do not postulate its use as a distinct designation of any sect or sects at this early date."<sup>27</sup>

Our discussion shows that the propositions used to formulate a Gnostic origin for defections in the early church are flexible. Whether Gnosticism emerged from Judaism or oriental mysticism, or whether it existed prior to Christianity, are all matters of conjecture.

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<sup>26</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 186.

<sup>27</sup> Lightfoot, p. 113.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that contemporary theology is accustomed to identifying most early Christian heresies as "Gnostic."

Finally, as our purpose is to understand the nature of the Colossian heresy, we shall focus on two very thoughtful remarks from two representative theologians. The first is a footnote to a discussion on the origin and nature of diversification in the history of early Christianity. Commenting specifically on our subject matter Helmut Koester states that

the heresy of Colossae was perhaps a more limited local phenomenon than is generally assumed. Its roots lie in the particular form of Jewish syncretism which was prevalent in Lydia and Phrygia at that time.<sup>28</sup>

The second remark is equally suggestive of the fact that the heresy was limited to the community at Colossae at least at the time of its inception. Considering both the contextual and the internal evidence allowed in the epistle, Scharlemann suggests that

the letter to the Colossians makes clear that the apostle was dealing with what might be called some kind of incipient Gnosticism. The Colossian philosophy contained in embryonic form what later became a very complex system of thought and doctrine.<sup>29</sup>

#### Paul's Background in Judaism

Undoubtedly Paul belonged to the mainstream of first century Judaism. A very skillful knowledge of Judaism is evident in his writings. Both the book of Acts and Paul's own extant writings substantiate the fact that he was thoroughly acquainted with the basic tenets of Judaism.

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<sup>28</sup>H. Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoroi," in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, Trajectories Through Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 145.

<sup>29</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Scope of the Redemptive Task," Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (1965):292.

Evidently Paul was brought up in the rich Old Testament heritage which helped him develop the unique style apparent in his epistles. Trained under Rabbi Gamaliel, Paul had strong connections with the synagogue. Moreover, he was a practicing Jew who upheld the law as understood by Judaism with utmost reverence and zeal.

Both in the New Testament and in the history of the church Paul occupies a position which is next only to the Lord. The available studies pertaining to the life and thought of this "apostle to the Gentiles" surpass the imagination. Yet

to define what went into the making of a Paul is infinitely harder. In Paul Athens and Jerusalem are strangely mixed, not because he was a Tarsian . . . but because the Judaism within which he grew up, even in Jerusalem, was largely Hellenized, and the Hellenism he encountered in his travels largely Judaized.<sup>30</sup>

By birth and by education Paul had both inherited and developed three distinct characteristics: he was a Roman citizen, a Rabbinic Jew and he was exceptionally zealous of his faith. The choice blending of these qualifications prepared Paul later in his life to become "all things to all men" for the sake of the gospel.

That Paul was a Roman citizen is a fact to which he himself bears witness (Acts 22:28). Paul's place of birth was Tarsus, capital of the Roman province of Cilicea (Acts 21:39; 22:3). We may safely assume that either Paul's parents or his grandparents acquired the prestigious privilege of Roman citizenship.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>W. D. Davies, "Paul and Judaism," in The Bible in Modern Scholarship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 182.

<sup>31</sup>We have no specific information about how they became citizens. The book of Acts mentions a case where a centurion bought Roman citizenship "for a large sum" (22:28). However, that might not have been the



We are interested in Paul's Roman citizenship specifically because we consider that it provided the apostle great freedom to engage in Christian missionary activities. As the book of Acts testifies, when the Jews plotted to do away with Paul by falsely accusing him before the procurator, he chose to appeal to Caesar (25:8-12). This appeal was intended to provide the opportunity for a "fair trial." We also read that King Agrippa, conferring with the procurator, Paul could have been released had he not appealed to Caesar (26:32). Later when Paul was imprisoned in Rome he had a soldier guarding him (27:12).<sup>32</sup>

More important for our present purposes is the fact that Paul was a Rabbinic Jew. In Paul's own words he was "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). He was brought up in the strict traditions of orthodox Judaism. Paul appeals to his unblemished Jewish heritage as he defends himself against the Judaizers at Philippi. The apostle was confident that he had met all the requirements of the Jewish law on its own terms. His strict upbringing helped him develop an uncompromising attitude towards the traditional teachings and practice of the Jewish religion.

We noted that Paul was born outside Palestine, in Tarsus. As a son of diaspora Judaism he most likely began to amass the good command of the Greek language which is noticeable in his writings. At the same time, his conventional training at home must have imparted to him a

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case with Paul's family. For a suggestion as to how they came to possess this honor, see F. F. Bruce, New Testament History (New York: Anchor Books Edition, 1972), pp. 234-37.

<sup>32</sup>We consider this to be the time in which Paul wrote Colossians. Supra, pp. 66-73.

sound knowledge of Jewish religious practices. This assumption is clearly reasonable, as Davies points out in saying that Paul's home was "most probably a bit of Jerusalem outside Palestine."<sup>33</sup>

To what extent, then, did Paul associate with Jerusalem? There is some evidence in Acts that the family of Paul's sister was residing in Jerusalem (23:16). According to Van Unnik, Paul left Tarsus early in his childhood to settle in Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> It could very well be that, having relatives in the holy city, facilitated his education under Rabbi Gamaliel, a fact of which the apostle was very proud (Acts 22:3).

In his defense before King Agrippa Paul clearly states that his life from youth up in Jerusalem was familiar to all Jews (Acts 26:1-23). The apostle further relates his Pharisaic position since he chose to become a most dedicated Jew. Consequently he tried all possible means to exterminate the Christian community in Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup>

By all counts Paul proved himself to be an authentic and flawless Jew. That aspect of his personality did not change even after the Lord personally confronted him on the Damascus Road. However he abandoned

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<sup>33</sup>W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: SPCK, 1962), p. 8.

<sup>34</sup>Van Unnik presents this view very convincingly in his Tarsus or Jerusalem, the City of Paul's Youth (London, Epworth Press, 1962). Van Unnik develops the whole argument on the **ἐνατεθραμμένος** (upbringing) in Acts 22:3.

<sup>35</sup>Commentators hesitate to take the statement in Acts 26:10 literally, It was mandatory for the members of the Sanhedrin to be married. If this rule did not allow exceptions, then we should also agree that Paul was married, a hypothesis which does not have Scriptural support. A possible interpretation is that Paul consented to the Sanhedrin decisions although he was not an official member of it.

Jewish religious practices and remained faithful to the Old Testament Scriptures. Furthermore, in the Lord he found the fulfillment of the Old Testament. His greatest desire was that all Israel might become knowledgeable about the righteousness of God instead of trusting in its own established system of righteousness by works of law (Rom. 10:1-4).

Although certain detailed aspects of the formative period of Paul's life remain hidden, his versatility in authentic Judaism should not be considered any less orthodox than that of the native Palestinian Jews "since the strength of Jewish orthodoxy varied not so much geographically as according to mental climate in a given community or home."<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, if there appears signs of the influence of Greek culture in Paul's writings, that was because of his association with the Greek-speaking synagogue.<sup>37</sup> If diaspora Judaism had undergone any kind of change at all, the same could have happened also to the Judaism of Palestine. There was very little of the Roman empire left unaffected by the impact of Greek culture since the invasion of Alexander the Great. As Davies points out, "the Judaism of Palestine was not a watertight compartment shut off from all the Gentile influences but a religion which was inevitably open to Hellenization."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Richard Longenecker, The Ministry and Message of Paul (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1971), p. 25.

<sup>37</sup>Martin Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period, 2 vols., trans. by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973) 2:115.

<sup>38</sup>W. D. Davies, Invitation to the New Testament - A Guide to its Main Witnesses (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 247.

5 Thus, whether Paul was brought up in Jerusalem from his infancy or only since his youth, it may not be proper to explain Paul's theology one-sidedly, in terms of one of these historical presuppositions. Nevertheless, as H. J. Schoeps points out, "every explanation proceeding from rabbinism deserves a limine preference over all other explanations, insofar as it can be demonstrated sufficiently clearly and with an adequate basis of proof."<sup>39</sup>

Paul made the best and proper use of the wealth of his inheritance and experience. In his writings we confront the faithful Rabbi who considers Scripture to be holy and prophetic. Unlike some of his contemporary sectarian Jews, "probably at no point does Paul reveal his orthodox training more than in his treatment of Scripture, where his usual practice is to reproduce the exegetical forms of the earlier teachers."<sup>40</sup> The content of his message, however, was Christ and his gospel (1 Cor. 1:17, 23).

Paul's abiding fidelity to the Jewish heritage is further elucidated by the use of various principles of Rabbinical exegesis in his writings. Apart from the extensive use of quotations from the Septuagint, an added feature which accounts for the Apostle's command of the Greek language, specific implementation of Old Testament categories and images is also very conspicuous. As Ellis points out, "While rabbinic Judaism has influenced the mechanics of Pauline citation, . . . the

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<sup>39</sup>H. J. Schoeps, Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of the Jewish Religious History, trans. by H. Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 40.

<sup>40</sup>Longenecker, p. 25.

emphases, applications and hermeneutics of Paul's quotations mark him as one with the apostolic church in contrast to his rabbinic background."<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the above comment would help resolve the following issues which Samuel Sandmel raises in this connection. Sandmel argues that Paul was a Hellenistic Jew and "the content of his Judaism had undergone a subtle, but radical shift" from that of Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, in his opinion,

Had Christianity followed Paul without deviation, its overlapping with Rabbinic Judaism would have been less than it is. In the sense that to Judaism the Law remained conceived of as thoroughly divine in origin and eternal, and in Paul as limitedly divine and cancelable, one can almost set Pauline theology and rabbinic Judaism down as antithesis to each other.<sup>43</sup>

Against the above observation we must state that the shift which took place in Paul's theology was not due to the fact that he came from a Hellenistic background, but rather as the result of his conversion experience on Damascus road.

Moreover, none of the extant letters of Paul, even if we should limit them to only the uncontested ones, seems to comply with Sandmel's observation. Nowhere is it indicated that Paul in any way minimizes the significance of the law. Instead, Paul was in a position to appreciate the validity of the law because of its divine origin. In fact, Paul considers the law holy and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14), although he deplores its inability to motivate to life. Thus a difference occurred

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<sup>41</sup>E. Earle Ellis, Paul's Use of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup>Samuel Sandmel, The Genius of Paul, A Study in History, 1958. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, first edition, 1979), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

in Paul's emphasis not because he was a Rabbinic Jew, but because in Jesus Christ he saw the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

Let us briefly review Paul's claim that "concerning the law" he was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:4). In the same breath the apostle confirms the fact that concerning the righteousness which is in the law he is blameless or free from fault (verse 6). To a different group of readers Paul provides yet another aspect of his faithfulness to Judaism before Damascus as he writes:

I advanced in Judaism beyond many people who were of my same age, since I was far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers. (Gal. 1:14).

Such advancement in Judaism materialized for Paul under Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the grandson of the famous R. Hillel whose seven rules of interpretation have been accepted as the norm of rabbinic exegesis.<sup>44</sup> Having been trained under such an illustrious rabbi in terms both of heritage and scholarship, Paul was disciplined to pursue strict Pharisaism. In that he was more than successful. In passing, Pharisaism was not far removed from rabbinic Judaism once we consider that the former was the "immediate ancestor" of the latter.<sup>45</sup> It is likely that both intermingled very much in Paul's day.

Paul's indebtedness to some elements of Judaism is noticeable not only in his use of Scripture, but also in the exercise of Jewish

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<sup>44</sup>For a listing of the seven rules, see Ellis, p. 41.

<sup>45</sup>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., s.v. "Pharisees" by Matthew Black.

missionary strategy for the spread of the Gospel. David Daube brings home this point, basing his argument on 1 Cor. 9:19-23. There it is shown that the apostle was determined to become all things to all men so that at least some might be saved. Part of the Jewish missionary strategy was that "to be a successful maker of proselytes, you must become a servant of men and humble yourself."<sup>46</sup>

Finally, we shall remark on the apostle's zeal for the faith. With the same ardor with which Paul once tried to destroy the Christian faith, he now labors for its swift spreading. A devout Jew who once had a spotless record by virtue of his faith and practice, Paul now emerges as a missionary fully dedicated to the "cause" of Christ.

Paul uses his background in Judaism in order to defend his credentials as well as to combat the heresies which were creeping into the church of his time. The apostle's expertise in rabbinic exposition kept him on guard to encounter his adversaries on their own terms whether they were "syncretists," "gnostics" or "pneumatics."<sup>47</sup> Shining examples of this are evident in the letter to the Colossians.

#### An Analysis of Colossians 1:15-20

The focus of the discussion in this part of our present chapter is an understanding and appreciation of the key Christological passage in Colossians, namely, 1:15-20. This entails an overview of the many

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<sup>46</sup>David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London: University of London, The Athlone's Press, 1956), p. 337.

<sup>47</sup>John J. Gunther, St. Paul's Opponents and Their Background, A Study of Apocalyptic and Jewish Sectarian Teachings (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 317.

suggestions with reference to the literary formation of the said passage, an interpretation of the most important phrases involved and an exposition of certain expressions which are peculiar to the epistle.

#### The Structure of Col. 1:15-20

In recent years, the literary form of Colossians has been subject to much debate. Scholarly opinion differs as to whether the present passage should be understood originally as a creed, a hymn or as part of an early Christian worship service.<sup>48</sup> As Robinson succinctly puts it, Edward Norden in 1913 launched a comparison of liturgical materials from Hellenism, Judaism and Christianity. He used the conclusions of that study to find similar materials in Col. 1:15-20. Almost twenty years later Ernst Lohmeyer provided a certain strophic arrangement to our passage as he considered it to be part of the order of a primitive Christian worship service. In the opinion of Martin Dibelius the present pericope is a Christological confession composed by Paul.

As a turning point in the history of such interpretation, Ernst Kaesemann wrote his essay in 1949 on "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy" affirming that "the hymnic character of Col. 1:15-20 has long been recognized and generally acknowledged."<sup>49</sup> The same recognition is upheld by a host of other scholars since Kaesemann, although each has

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<sup>48</sup>For an appraisal of different opinions see James M. Robinson, "A Formal Analysis of Col. 1:15-20," Journal of Biblical Literature 76 (1957):270-98. (Includes bibliography.)

<sup>49</sup>Ernst Kaesemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy" in Essays on New Testament Themes, Studies in Biblical Theology 41 (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 149.



employed his own method of reconstructing the hypothetical original of the hymn before it found its place in Colossians.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps a commonly acceptable conclusion will never be reached in this connection, as long as scholars continue to work on this pericope with different presuppositions. None of the suggestions which have seen the light of day so far has been able to prevail for very long. The following observation of John Gibbs merits attention:

that scholarship has developed no consensus about the number and content of strophes in Col. 1:15-20, or about possible Pauline additions, so that one may safely speak only of certain parallels, such as those observed by Norden. No single reconstruction is fully convincing.<sup>51</sup>

Our immediate concern, however, is to examine the source of this hymn. In passing, it may be noted that any interpretation of our pericope hinges to a large extent on an understanding of the context in which it was presented to its first readers. Incidentally, Kaesemann suggests that these words, as they are presented in the epistle, are to be seen as "a Christian redaction of a pre-Christian hymn."<sup>52</sup> This comment is representative of the opinion of many others like him who hold that Paul inserted into an already existing hymn certain phrases to suit his purposes. Those insertions, according to Kaesemann, are "of the church" ( τῆς ἐκκλησίας ) at verse 18 and "through the blood of his cross" ( διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ ) at verse 20.

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<sup>50</sup>For an exhaustive list of representative articles, see Lohse, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup>John G. Gibbs, Creation and Redemption, A Study in Pauline Theology (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), p. 99.

<sup>52</sup>Kaesemann, p. 152.

If we should read the pericope without the eight Greek words listed above, the result will be a hymn of Gnostic origin, Kaesemann argues. But Lohse does not favor the idea that a rediscovery of the original hymn is still possible, although he accepts the interpretative additions suggested by Kaesemann. As an alternative, he presupposes that the hymn must have undergone a more thorough reworking since the individual lines fall short of proper correlation.<sup>53</sup>

A viable derivative, which stems from the above proposal of Lohse, is to search for the original hymn in Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>54</sup> The Hellenistic background of the hymn is suggested also by Moule who contends that the vocabulary of the hymn is largely reminiscent of Wisdom Literature.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, the most objective of all is the observation of Vawter as he surmises that

Col. 1:15-20 appears to have made use fairly indifferently of language and thought-patterns available from various sources without necessarily committing itself unreservedly to the intellectual background of any of them.<sup>56</sup>

Insofar as the varied attempts to reconstruct the possible original behind the Christological hymn remain matters of conjecture only, the possibility that the hymn was Paul's own composition should not be altogether dismissed.. It could very well be that Paul was putting together in poetic form words which were used of Jesus by early Jewish Christians. For, as we noted earlier, Paul could, as he wrote to the

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<sup>53</sup>Lohse  
Lohse, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>55</sup>Moule, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup>F. O. Vawter, "The Colossian Hymn and the Principle of Redaction," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 33 (1971):73.

Colossians, elevate himself to a poetic mood since he had no specific church problems to discuss.<sup>57</sup> If, on the other hand, Paul borrowed this hymn from a different source, it must have undergone considerable revision in his hands to communicate a different and new message.

Finally, we must note that Paul is presenting in these few words the sum total of God's act in Christ in terms of both creation and redemption. Even the casual reader of our pericope is bound to admit that in these lines the most exalted subject of the divine blueprint for God's acts of creation and redemption in Christ is graphically disclosed. Let us attempt a translation of this passage before we engage in the study of the key phrases.

A Translation of Colossians 1:15-20

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, the visible as well as the invisible things, whether they are thrones, lordships, principalities, or powers. All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and all things cohere in him.

Christ is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead in order that he might be preeminent in all things. For in His good pleasure God chose to have His fullness dwell in Christ permanently and to reconcile all things to Himself through him, having made peace through the blood of his cross - through Christ, whether things on earth or in heaven.

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<sup>57</sup>Supra, p. 71.

An Interpretation of Key Phrases in Colossians 1:15-20

A major purpose of Paul in his letter to the Colossians is to establish the centrality of Christ for the Christian faith. This is wholly accomplished in the few verses of the letter. To that end Colossians contains a very advanced form of Christology. We have noted that the vocabulary and style of the letter is very authentic and unique. The use of special words with profound implications is unmatched by even other books of the Pauline corpus.

For the purposes of placing our study of these special expressions in their proper context, let us recapitulate the nature of the problems confronted in the letter. Some parts of the letter indicate the fact that the people at Colossae were preoccupied with certain Jewish rituals such as circumcision, observance of special days like the Sabbath and new moon. At the same time, references to non-Jewish elements go beyond this sphere. Apparently, there were in existence a special kind of veneration of angels, faith in certain intermediary powers or beings between God and man and some ideologies of a theosophic nature. Furthermore, there was present a strong ascetic tendency which maintained that flesh is evil (2:16, 21, 23). Against such issues Paul portrays Christ by utilizing a series of expressions which evidently were familiar to his readers.

Image of the Invisible God  
( εἰκών τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου )

The expression "image of the invisible God" serves as a fitting introduction to the other theological concepts which follow in the hymn. The Old Testament parallel to εἰκών is אֱלֹהִים which means "statue"

(2 Kings 11:18), "image;" "identify" or "dignity." According to the creation account in Genesis God made man in His own image (1:26, 27). This prerogative of man distinguishes him from all other created beings, including angels.<sup>58</sup> Thus εἰκών should be understood not as simply the spiritual aspect of the human personality, but as the exact visual reproduction, the presentation of One who is unseen.<sup>59</sup>

The basic meaning of εἰκών is not identity in terms of form and shape, but resemblance as the ancient Egyptians regarded the stars as the "image of God" living in this world.<sup>60</sup> Viewed in this way, it is safe to assume that the word carries with it the idea of authority and dominion. We have no proof text to support the notion that man lost this image, in spite of the fall. However, when Paul uses εἰκών for Christ he means the "perfect reflection of the prototype, something which does not belong to men."<sup>61</sup> Truly then, as Scharlemann guides us, in Christ humanity was to see God's intentions for it when He made the first man. Contrary to the whim that flesh is evil, the apostle utilized the term εἰκών "to underline the fact that Jesus Christ became incarnate to be the Second Adam."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> However, later Judaism maintained that angels were created in the image and likeness of God. See also C. G. Monefiore and H. Lohse, A Rabbinic Anthology (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> Bruce Vawter, On Genesis: A New Reading (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977), pp. 55-56.

<sup>60</sup> Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, A Commentary, Rev. ed., (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., s.v. "Image of God" by N. W. Porteous.

<sup>62</sup> Scharlemann, p. 294.

In this connection Robin Scroggs points out that εἰκών has a dual meaning in the Pauline usage once it is understood with Genesis 1 as the background. First, in a Midrash form, Paul is suggesting that Christ is the reality of true humanity. Secondly, Christ is the true revelation of God precisely because he is true man.<sup>63</sup> When Christ walked this earth he demonstrated true humanity by living it out as Adam failed to do. That in itself is proof of the fact that the human race cannot accomplish God's intended purpose for it except by the merits of the One who is truly human. Also, the true revelation of God is not possible apart from Jesus Christ. Christ as the image of God reflects and illuminates the existence and essence of God. Quite fittingly, then, Jesus satisfied Philip's interest in seeing God with the pronouncement "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9)

In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs suggests the fact that wisdom is an hypostasis of Yahweh (8:22-31). Evidently, wisdom came into being as the first principle (πρῶτον ἔ, MT; ἀρχή, LXX ). The same thought is carried over into the apocryphal Wisdom literature where wisdom is described as an image of God's goodness and therefore treated as a distinct personality.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, Paul was making use of his rabbinic heritage in order to combat the Colossian philosophy in its own terms as he resorted to the language of the image of God.

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<sup>63</sup>Robin Scroggs, The Last Adam, A Study in Pauline Anthropology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 98.

<sup>64</sup>Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26, 8:4, 6. E. Lohse, pp. 46-48, dismisses this association on the grounds that Col. 1:15-20 is a Hellenistic Christian hymn.

That Paul was at home with the motifs of Jewish Wisdom literature is obvious in his other letters, too. In 1 Cor. 11:7 the apostle clearly states that man is the image ( εἰκών ) and glory of God. Apparently this is in accordance with his understanding of the creation story. At the same time, later in the same epistle, Paul vividly expresses the great resurrection hope that we too shall bear the image of the heavenly man (15:49). Now, this image, Paul goes on to say, is not susceptible to corruption. It is to this imperishable state of being that those who belong to Christ are already being conformed (Rom. 8:29). To that end, the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God will keep on shining, however strong its adversaries might be (2 Cor. 4:4).

It follows, then, that Paul's use of εἰκών is best understood in the soteriological setting. Christ, who is the perfect image, endows man with a certain dignity and beauty by virtue of the fact that the light of God's glory has shown on the face of Christ. Christ as the image of God reflects and illuminates God's essence and existence. Unlike the so-called superior wisdom which was considered to be the unique possession of the intellectual elite, God in His good pleasure has pleased to reveal Himself in Christ to all mankind. Furthermore, as the image of God, Christ alone can be the mediator between God and man.

Finally, we must note that the idea of the image of God has cosmic significance. The use of the expression is just another way of saying that the person of Christ is not limited to any one particular point in time or space. If we should resort to the Johannine terminology, then the Word that was in the beginning is the same Word which became flesh and dwelt among men. He is the same one whom the armies of heaven

will follow (Rev. 19:13-14). Christ is active in creation as God's Agent, and in the new creation as the Redeemer. Just as man was created in the image of God, those who belong to Christ shall put on his image in the last day.

First Born of All Creation  
( πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως )

The second title which Paul ascribes to the Christ is that of "the firstborn of all creation." Interestingly enough, here we notice a sudden shift in Paul's presentation, as it were, from the transcendental to the temporal. By placing the phrase in its present position the apostle presents to his readers the only individual who has access to the temporal as well as the eternal spheres.

Much has been written about whether *πρωτότοκος* refers to chronological advantage or to status.<sup>65</sup> For our guidance, Michaelis points out that *πρωτότοκος*, perhaps, owes its origin to the Bible since there is no evidence for its use anywhere prior to the formation of the Septuagint.<sup>66</sup> From the perspective of the Old Testament *πρωτοτοκία*, meaning primogeniture, is a privilege which one enjoys purely on account of his birth. The first born son is the legal heir of the father's wealth (Gen. 25:29; 2 Chron. 21:3) and therefore takes precedence in the family over others. In later usage the title became

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<sup>65</sup>For example, see the debate between A. W. Argyle and H. G. Meecham presented in Expository Times 66 (1954):61, 123, 318-19.

<sup>66</sup>Michaelis, " *πρωτότοκος* " in TDNT 5:873-74.



indicative of the king since he was considered someone special to God (Ps. 89:27).<sup>67</sup>

The Old Testament idea of the first born initially is symbolic also of the relationship of Israel to God. In fact, Israel is called God's first born (Ex. 4:22). Later on the weight of the argument slowly moved from the people of Israel as a favored race to culminate in the Messiah in particular (Dan. 9:25). In New Testament times God's anointed was manifested in Jesus Christ who is the custodian of the all divine rights on the merits of his divine sonship.

A trend within modern scholarship looks for the origin of **πρωτότοκος** in the literature of Jewish speculative thought about wisdom.<sup>68</sup> In 1926, C. F. Burney proposed the hypothesis that Col. 1:15-18 is a typical rabbinical exposition of the first word of Genesis.<sup>69</sup> It is Burney's contention that in the Colossian hymn Christ is portrayed as the one fulfilling the meaning of **בְּרֵאשִׁית**. The author interprets this point to its last detail by identifying Christ with **πρωτεύων ἐν πᾶσιν**.<sup>70</sup>

The basic proposal of Burney about the connection between Genesis 1 and the present hymn may be accepted, although admittedly the suggestion uses certain speculative thoughts to substantiate his

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<sup>67</sup>In Psalm 89, the reference is precisely to King David. It is significant to note that the Messiah came out of the lineage of David (Cf. Ps. 2:7).

<sup>68</sup>Lohse, pp. 48-49.

<sup>69</sup>C. F. Burney, "Christ as the **ἀρχή** of Creation," Journal of Theological Studies, 27 (1926):160-71.

<sup>70</sup>See further discussion on **πρωτεύων** on p. 111.

position. The thought that Christ fulfills the meaning of  $\text{בְּרֵאשִׁית}$  is very appropriate once we agree that Paul's major purpose here is to demonstrate the primacy of Christ in everything.

$\text{Πρωτότοκος}$  is perhaps best understood as an expression which reflects both the status of Christ and his origin.<sup>71</sup> Christ is not part of the created universe, but he is the agent of its creation. Consequently he is different from all that has been created. Significantly the Sacred Writings bear witness not to an evolution of Christ but to his coming. That itself is proof of the fact that the position which he enjoys is radically different from that of the whole universe. The coexistence of the creation and Christ is a matter of relationship between them which transcends the level of "flesh and blood."

The idea of the first born could not have emerged from Gnosticism since it was not a prominent notion in its philosophical framework prior to the writing of Colossians.<sup>72</sup> Rather it must be interpreted against Paul's background in the Old Testament where the first born symbolizes a relationship, a privilege and a responsibility (Is. 42:6; Jer. 31:9; Amos 3:2). God the Father has entrusted Christ the responsibility to exercise authority over all of creation. This is the point which the apostle makes at the beginning of our epistle, where he alludes to the sonship of Christ. Furthermore, the Son carries out God's

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<sup>71</sup>Hugo McCord, "Becor and Prototokos," Restoration Quarterly 10 (1967):40-45, prefers the idea of the status of Christ to that of his origin.

<sup>72</sup>Micahelis, p. 879-80.

eternal plan of redemption for mankind as this has been the specific job for which he was commissioned by the Father.

First Born From the Dead  
( πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν )

Our present title is parallel to the one above. It was already established in verse 15 that Christ was the Lord of all creation. The Lordship of Christ is further demonstrated in verse 18 by alluding to his victory over death. In other words, Christ became Lord by virtue of his resurrection.<sup>73</sup> The specific use of **πρωτότοκος** here helps to disavow the false notion which tends to ascribe the same status to pre-existent Wisdom. As Gibbs points out,

The **πρωτότοκος** is not, then just the pre-existent wisdom of Wisdom literature, but is the Sovereign who is installed by God through the resurrection as Lord over not only the Church but also the whole universe.<sup>74</sup>

According to Paul, the Christ who is the source of creation is the source also of the new creation. The act of the new creation is inaugurated by Christ's own resurrection. On account of his resurrection God installed Christ both as the head of the church and as the Lord of the universe. Therefore, the significance of the resurrection of Christ is not limited to those who believe in him, but is extended to the whole universe.

The resurrection of Christ plays a significant role in Paul's testimony for the purpose of defending himself and his message. In his witness before King Agrippa, the apostle establishes the fact of Christ's

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<sup>73</sup>Scharlemann, p. 296.

<sup>74</sup>Gibbs, Creation, p. 104.

being the *πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν* , and that this is in accord with predictions in the Old Testament (Acts 26:23). The same thought is reflected in the introductory section of Romans, where the resurrection event is interpreted as the attestation for Christ's divine Sonship as well as his Lordship (Rom. 1:1-6).

Paul further elucidates the same thought in Rom. 8:21-29. Here the apostle depicts the exalted Christ as the *πρωτότοκος* among many brethren. A new beginning is already under way for those who belong to Christ to be conformed to his image. While all of creation eagerly awaits its release from the captivity to decay, the believers, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, already have the assurance of this release on account of Christ who conquered the last enemy.

In 1 Cor. 15:20, 23 Christ is depicted as the *ἀπαρχή* of those who have fallen asleep. This must be viewed in juxtaposition to Romans 8 because in both instances *ἀπαρχή* has a chronological significance.<sup>75</sup> In this connection it must be pointed out that God invests Christ with unique authority by virtue of his resurrection. As enunciated in Col. 1:18, it is by the resurrection that Christ receives this authority.<sup>76</sup>

In this connection the apostle's description of Christ as the first born from the dead ( *ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* ) deserves special attention. His readers must understand that the powers of death could not hold to themselves the God-incarnate. Instead Christ defeated death, destroyed its dominance over creation. God's anointed is the first and only one

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<sup>75</sup>Delling, " *ἀπαρχή* "; TCNT 1:486.

<sup>76</sup>Gibbs, *Creation*, p. 106.

who has demonstrated that the tyranny of death has no binding significance over mankind. His rising from the dead is living proof to the fact that God does not forsake His people in the depths of Sheol.

Finally, the resurrection of Christ must be viewed as an event with cosmic significance. This fact is indicated by the latter part of our hymn, where the whole story of redemption is presented in brief. The Christ through whom the whole universe came into being has become the one through whom alone it has been set into proper relationship with God. Just as the whole creation became subject to a curse because of one man's sin, the restoration of the whole creation has begun with Christ's conquering the last and greatest enemy, death.

The Head of the Church  
( ἡ κεφαλή τῆς ἐκκλησίας )

The word translated "head" is κεφαλή which is the Septuagint equivalent of the Hebrew  $\text{רִאשׁוֹן}$ . In secular Greek κεφαλή means the upper or anterior part of an organism, signifying the seat of the intellect and the place which controls the rest of the body. However, as S. Bedale points out, neither in classical nor in contemporary Greek κεφαλή alludes to a ruler or the chieftain of a community. "If κεφαλή has this sense in the writings of Paul (it certainly has it nowhere else in the New Testament), we must suppose it to have been acquired as a result of the LXX use of the word to translate  $\text{רִאשׁוֹן}$ ."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>S. Bedale, "The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles," Journal of Theological Studies 5 (1954):211-15.

Many instances in the Old Testament point to the fact that  $\omega\lambda\lambda$  represents the head or ruler of a community or a tribe.<sup>78</sup> In such cases the picture is symbolic of authority, dignity and supremacy. In Colossians Paul further develops this concept to illustrate the dynamic relationship between the head and the body as represented in our title. In this respect the church owes its very existence to Christ. It is maintained as the community of believers under the authority of Christ. In the opinion of Taylor, "the name 'the head' asserts His inseparability from the church, but excludes His identity with it."<sup>79</sup>

It is significant to note that in Colossians Paul refers to Christ as the head also of all rule and authority (  $\eta\ \kappa\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\eta\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\acute{\eta}\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\epsilon}\xi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  2:10). However, the reference here is primarily to Christ's supremacy over all things, including the principalities and powers since he has defeated them also by his death on the cross.<sup>80</sup>

Although Christ and the church are two different entities, the one is the sine qua non for the other. When Christ is referred to as the head, it "implies one who stands over another in the sense of being the ground of being."<sup>81</sup> In this sense the existence of the church as the body is dependent on Christ who is its head.

The use of  $\kappa\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}$  in other Pauline epistles also represents the basic idea of relationship. As a case in point, the apostle exhorts

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<sup>78</sup>Deut. 28:13; Judg. 10:18; 11:8-9; 11, and so forth.

<sup>79</sup>V. Taylor, The Names of Jesus (London: Macmillan & Co., 1953), pp. 101-102.

<sup>80</sup>Moule, p. 94; Bruce, p. 223.

<sup>81</sup>Henrich Schiller, "  $\kappa\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}$  in the N.T.", TDNT 3:679.

the Ephesian Christians to accept the relationship between Christ and his church as the pattern for that between husband and wife (Eph. 5: 21-23). This implies that the attitude of the church to her Lord should be that of obedience and subjection.

Both Colossians and Ephesians share the idea that Christ, as the **κεφαλή** , causes the growth of the church (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15). In this connection, it is very appropriate to view this growth in an eschatological context. It is God who initiated this growth, and He will bring it to perfection. Unlike other organizations, the congregation of Christ owes its origin as well as its existence to the head which fully equips it to reach the heavenly goal. Christ is the one who gives the church the proper direction.

The above observations indicate that a major issue which the apostle had to deal with was the bona fide primacy and supremacy of Christ over everything. This aspect is lucidly disclosed in our hymn by the use of such concepts as **εἰκὼν, πρωτότοκος** , **ἀρχή** , and **κεφαλή** .

The Fullness  
( **τὸ πλήρωμα** )

Various attempts have been made to explain away the exact meaning of **πλήρωμα** .<sup>82</sup> For example, almost a century ago Bishop Lightfoot

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<sup>82</sup>J. H. Burtness, "All the Fullness," Dialogue 3 (1964):257-63.  
H. A. Merklinger, "Pleroma and Christology," Concordia Theological Monthly 36 (1965):739-43.

had contended that the word had to be understood in its passive sense.<sup>83</sup> In recent years, on the other hand, although with some hesitation, an acceptable approach has been to personalize the concept of the fullness of God by providing it with an active meaning.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, there are those who think that the whole idea originated in the gnostic notions about emanations as they approach the issue with the presuppositions of the so-called Redeemer myth.<sup>85</sup>

The great number of interpretations represented above reflect the idea that the exact meaning of **πλήρωμα** is open to question. However, a straight-forward rendering of **ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι** appears to be rather simple: "in him (God) pleased to have all the fullness dwell." Such a rendering is also the most agreeable to the context. As a recent paraphrase runs, "He was pleased that all the Pleroma (of the Godhead, 2:9), should dwell in the Son."<sup>86</sup>

In the Septuagint **πλήρωμα** is used in a spatial sense denoting mostly "content," especially "fullness" or "totality."<sup>87</sup> When the Psalmist sings that the earth is the Lord's and its **πλήρωμα**, and exhorts

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<sup>83</sup>Lightfoot, pp. 257-73. The two classic studies on the concept of **πλήρωμα** have been those of Lightfoot and J. Armitage Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 255-59. Robinson, partly in contradiction to Lightfoot's position, argues that the passive sense of our word cannot be insisted on although it appears that way according to 'lexical rule.'

<sup>84</sup>Moule, pp. 164-69.

<sup>85</sup>Kesemann, p. 158.

<sup>86</sup>J. C. O'Neill, "The Source of Christology in Colossians," New Testament Studies 26 (1979):92. O'Neill objects to taking **πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα** as the subject of **εὐδόκησεν**.

<sup>87</sup>Delling, "**πλήρωμα**," TDNT 6:299.



the πλήρωμα of the sea to sing to the Lord, the reference is to the entire content or totality of the universe (Ps. 23:1 and 95:11 LXX). We might also note that the same analogy is to be found in the Rabbinic idea of Shekinah.<sup>88</sup>

With similar ideas in the backdrop, the apostle was conceivably correcting the Colossian error by stressing the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Christ the Godhead took human form totally. For this reason the believers "have been given fullness" in Him (2:10 NIV). Under any circumstances, Paul instructs his readers to shun the infiltration of their faith by man-made philosophy and empty deceit.

It is sufficient to say that in Col. 1:19 Paul's purpose is to intimate that Jesus Christ is the place of God's presence. It may be noted that the apostle expresses an identical wish for the Ephesian Christians: that they may be filled with the πλήρωμα of God (3:19). According to Ephesians, God has made Christ the fullness of him who fills all in all (1:23). He places the challenge before the individual as well as the church to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13).

In conclusion, we must note that the above observations are very expressive of the whole history of salvation. Inasmuch as humanity needs to know something of the mysteries of the Godhead, the Almighty was pleased to reveal them in the fullness of time, as Paul stipulates elsewhere (Gal. 4:4). This indeed is the decisive event as Scharlemann rightly observes that God in His Wisdom has "arranged history in such a

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<sup>88</sup>George F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 1:435.

way as to provide a moment called 'the fullness of time.' His eternal purpose planned a happening - the Christ-event - as a way of offering fullness and meaning for everything."<sup>89</sup>

Reconciliation  
( ἀποκατάλλασις )

Our discussions thus far have hinged particularly on the person of Christ according to Colossians 1:15-20. The concepts we dealt with were titular references to the Lord. Now we must direct our attention to perhaps the most noteworthy verb in the pericope, namely

ἀποκατάλλασθαι . It is only appropriate to consider this act of God as the crux interpretum of Christian theology. The God of the cosmos has effected reconciliation once and for all in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

Little needs to be said about the philosophical background of ἀποκατάλλασις since no compelling evidence is found to establish that the word was used outside the Christian community. Even within the New Testament this expression or its cognate is never found in the writings other than Paul. Hence we might conjecture that Paul himself coined the term.<sup>90</sup>

In the Pauline epistles ἀποκατάλλάσσειν is used only of God. God is the one who reconciles the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 5:10). The purpose of such references is to show that God, out of His grace, always takes the initiative to restore man's relationship with

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<sup>89</sup>Scharlemann, "Scope," p. 294.

<sup>90</sup>Friedrich Buchsel, "καταλλάσσω," TDNT 1:254.

Him. In passing it should be pointed out that the simple **καταλλάσσω** as such does not occur in Ephesians and Colossians, but only in its compounded form **ἀποκαταλλάσσω** (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 22). This special use of a double compound is viewed by Scharlemann as "implying restitution to a previous order of things. Its use serves to recall . . . God's purpose to return the universe to its original condition."<sup>91</sup>

Paul summarizes for the Colossians God's act reconciliation on the cross in the soteriological setting. The blood of the first born brought an end to the hostility between the Creator and the creation. Thus God has done away with the "document" that testified against mankind.<sup>92</sup> The legal demands have been met and the wall of separation removed. Indeed, Christ has united earth and heaven.<sup>93</sup>

The reconciliation consummated by Christ pertains to all things (**τὰ πάντα**). In general, **τὰ πάντα** is a comprehensive expression which includes everything God created (see also Deut. 10:41; Job 41:3). However, its use by Paul must be understood in the context of his overall teaching. Inasmuch as the sin of Adam brought the curse of God on all things, all things will be redeemed through the vicarious death of Christ. To be sure, Christ's death reconciled all things - man as well as nature - to God, whether things upon the earth or things in the heavens (verse 20). At the same time there is no cogent reason to speculate that the fallen angels also benefit from Christ's redemption.

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<sup>91</sup>Scharlemann, "Scope," p. 297.

<sup>92</sup>E. Lohse, "Pauline Theology in the Letter to the Colossians," New Testament Studies 15 (1969):2.

<sup>93</sup>E. Schweitzer, "Lord of the Nations," SEAJT 13 (1972):18.

That the reconciliation between two parties was effected by having made peace ( *εἰρηνοποιήσας* ) is no bone of contention.<sup>94</sup> This is the core of Paul's message elsewhere in the New Testament also. As a case in point, in Romans 5 the apostle speaks about the peace those who have been justified by faith have. According to Ephesians (2:11-16) the purpose of having made peace was to bring together the Jew and the Gentile in Christ. In a word, reconciliation is possible only in and through Christ.

In concluding the present section, it is perhaps fitting to refer to three acts of God mentioned in the preface to the hymn, acts which are illustrative of restoring a lost relationship. These actions, all of which appear in the aorist, are *ἠγαλώσαντι* (1:12), *ἐρρύσατο* and *μετέστησεν* (1:13). These completed actions of "having been made sufficient" to be partakers of the heavenly inheritance, "having been delivered" from the power of darkness and "having been translated" into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, together indeed set the tone of an "inaugurated eschatology."

In and through the work of Christ a new life begins for each individual and a new community of these individuals is built up as the church. These individuals as members and this new community as the visible representation of Christ's body reflect his image. The corporate existence of the body continues to serve as a light to the nations until the day when Christ will come a second time and manifest his Lordship fully.

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<sup>94</sup> *εἰρηνοποιήσας* is a distinctive word in the N.T. (Infra, pp. 109-12).

The "Distinctive Words" in Colossians 1:15-20

The epistle to the Colossians contains several words which are peculiar to it. At the same time, however, some of these expressions occur elsewhere in the New Testament, in the writings other than those of Paul. A few others are understood to be typically Pauline.<sup>95</sup> For our purposes we examine only those special words which occur in the great Christology of the epistle. These are **τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα**, **θρόνοι** and **κυριότητες** in verse 16, **πρωτεύων** in verse 18 and **εἰρηνοποιήσας** in verse 20.

We must state at the outset that the use of these expressions alone to determine the exact nature of the false teaching at Colossae is not a viable option. However, the fact that these expressions are not typically Pauline and that their use is strictly limited to the present epistle allows for the possibility that the apostle was aware of the difficulties caused by them.<sup>96</sup> Paul's mastery over the situation helped him to link these issues to his Christology with a view to refuting them.

All the references of **ἀόρατος** in the New Testament, except the present one, are related to God (Rom. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:17 and so forth). However, in Colossians **τὰ ἀόρατα** could refer to the angels and spirits

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<sup>95</sup>For a complete list of the particular words, see T. K. Abbott, Ephesians and Colossians, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1897), lix-ix.

<sup>96</sup>Other references in the Epistle which allude to the heretical teaching are 1:10, 16, 18, 22.

(2:8) while τὰ ὀράτα represents possibly the whole earthly sphere, the stars, all other heavenly phenomena and man.<sup>97</sup>

The point of formulating all these phrases is to demonstrate that Christ is in control of all things since he is the Lord also of the universe. Lightfoot translates the expression as "things material and immaterial."<sup>98</sup> Whatever they are, they can claim no independent existence since Christ is "the sphere within which the work of creation takes place."<sup>99</sup> Also, none of these is worthy of worship or veneration.

The θρόνοι and κυριότητες are perhaps part of the long list of angelic or demonic powers supposedly controlling the universe.<sup>100</sup> These powers are often mentioned in the plural (see also Eph. 1:20-23). Among other possibilities, it is conjectured that the θρόνοι belong to the highest classes of angels, although precise distinctions are impossible.<sup>101</sup> If this assumption is right, then these "angels" should perhaps be identified with the "elemental spirits" of 2:8 and 20. Again, their mention in Colossians is only to disavow their credentials for worship since all of them are subordinate to God.

It is evident in Colossians that creation is subject to a number of cosmic powers other than those mentioned above. These are

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<sup>97</sup>Michaelis, "ὀρατός," TDNT 5:369.

<sup>98</sup>Lightfoot, p. 152.

<sup>99</sup>Bruce, p. 197.

<sup>100</sup>For a summary of interpretations and their background, see Moule, pp. 65-66.

<sup>101</sup>Schmitz, "θρόνος," TDNT 3:16-67.

designated as τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (2:9), ἀρχαὶ and ἐξουσίαι (2:15).<sup>102</sup> These powers prevail in the world on account of men's sin which brought God's curse upon the whole earth. They exercise authority not only over humanity, but also over the cosmos. To be sure, Christ stripped all these powers of their dominion through his death so that he alone might be Lord over all things.

While dealing with the key phrases in Col. 1:15-20, we have indicated that Paul was intent on underscoring the primacy and supremacy of Christ over all things. As a summary of those qualifications, a new idea is introduced when Paul writes, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσι αὐτὸς πρωτεύων (verse 18). Both in the Septuagint and in antiquity πρωτεύω signifies being the leader or first in rank.<sup>103</sup> Christ's victory over death quite properly places him over all things. By using this clause Paul "sums up, intensifies and rounds off" what he said in the previous lines.<sup>104</sup>

A similar "rounding off" of the description on the act of reconciliation is served by the use of εἰρηνοποιήσας in verse 10. Although the concept of making peace is alluded to only twice in the Old Testament (Prov. 10:10; Is. 27:5 LXX), most scholars agree that the conception of a cosmic reconciliation involving heaven and earth would be unthinkable in Gnosticism.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>On the subject of Cosmic Powers, see A. J. Bandstra, The Law and the Elements of the World (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1964), pp. 5-74. G. B. Caird, Principalities and Powers (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1956).

<sup>103</sup>Michaelis, " πρωτεύω ," TDNT 6:881-82.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Lohse, p. 60.

Summary

In this chapter we have dealt with the historical setting of the letter to the Colossians and analyzed the key Christological statements in the letter. The study was conducted in order to appreciate the cosmic dimensions of Christ's person and work.

The first section was devoted to exploring the exact nature of the Colossian heresy. We noted that it is difficult to draw from the letter conclusive evidence of any Gnostic influence since that phenomenon was fully developed only in the second century A. D. We concluded that the problem must be viewed as a local caricature with a syncretistic nature. The people of Colossae entertained the notion that in some way they had to supplement the salvation obtained by Christ. For that reason they engaged in the worship of angels and spirits, observed special festivals and sought superior knowledge. These aspects might have served as the forerunners of the teachings of Gnosticism.

We have also seen that the unique style used in the letter is due to the particular situation of the church at Colossae. The presence of this new style does not disprove Pauline authorship. Instead, it only shows that Paul was using specific concepts and expressions to point out the error he was combatting and to reveal to his readers who Christ really is.

In the second half of this chapter we dealt extensively with certain titles ascribed to Jesus Christ. We discovered that these were utilized to emphasize Christ's Lordship in creation as well as in redemption. They indicate that there is no existence without Christ.



The redemption which Christ brought to the whole creation is complete. This redeeming act cannot be substituted or supplemented.

In the next chapter we shall provide a synthesis of the above ideas. This will be done with a view to answering some fundamental questions raised in modern Christology as these will be illustrated.

## CHAPTER IV

### A SYNTHESIS OF COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

Having established an adequate textual basis for our investigation, we move on to a synthesis of the key ideas formulated in the third chapter. Our intent here is to determine the criteria by which to evaluate modern Christological thought concerning a cosmic Christology. On the pages which follow we will consider Christ's role both in creation and in the new creation.

In this chapter we will also illustrate how Paul understood Christ's relationship not only to individual human beings but also to the universe. For this purpose we have included in the discussion ideas such as Christ and creation, Christ and the cosmic powers, and, particularly, Christ and His Church. Reference will be made, wherever applicable, to relevant texts from other Pauline epistles.

#### Christ and Creation

We have noted in the previous chapter that Christ is not part of the created universe, but he is the agent of its creation.<sup>1</sup> Consequently he is different from all that has been created. Let us, then, briefly discuss in what way Christ and creation are related and how that relationship persists.

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 94.

According to Paul, Christ is the "first-born of all creation." In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, whether they be visible or invisible (Col. 1:15-16). Most scholars consider the part played by Christ in the creation of the world to be of cosmic significance. Some consider this to be a speculation which was borrowed from Gnostic literature.<sup>2</sup> However, we are more interested in the New Testament and Rabbinic understanding of the creation of the world since these are the sources from which Paul developed his theology.

Scripture does not set forth a definite cosmological system, although many would argue that it does. Biblical Hebrew does not have an equivalent to the word *κόσμος* in the sense in which it denotes the universe. Instead, it utilizes the phrase "the heavens and the earth" in order to present the comprehensive nature of God's creation.

The Greek word *κόσμος* may be applied to creation in the same sense in which it represents creation in its entirety (1 Cor. 3:22) or the natural order of things (Rom. 1:20). The opening chapter of Genesis explains how God established this order in creation. The two chapters that follow illustrate the way in which man established his dominion over the rest of God's creation. The psalmist also sings that God has put all creatures under man's feet (Ps. 8:6-8).

Judaism taught that God created the world, and that the existence of the world was dependent on God. It defined the created world as that which includes "the whole universe, visible and invisible, land,

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<sup>2</sup>See Ernest Kaesemann, Essays on New Testament Themes, trans. by W. J. Montague, Studies in Biblical Theology, 41 (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 149-68.

<sup>3</sup>Genesis 1:; 2:1; 14:19-22.

seas, the firmament of heaven and the vast deeps beneath the earth, the realms of the living and the dead, the seven heavens, and the abodes of angels and spirits -- even of the dead in Sheōl and the cavernous prisons of the damned."<sup>4</sup>

Against this background, Paul states that all things in heaven and on earth were created in Christ. In other words, all created objects have their being in Christ. Conceivably, then the essence of creation reflects the image of God. Thus, we note that the Old Testament, Judaism and the apostle Paul recognize a unity in all that has been created.

In Rom. 8:19-22 Paul presupposes this unity between creation and man, for the *κτίσις* referred to several times in this pericope represents the entire cosmos including irrational and inanimate objects.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, when Paul speaks of creation having been subjected to futility, he alludes to Gen. 3:17 which shows how man's sin brought God's curse upon the whole earth.

To understand creation by discounting its relationship to man is impossible. In the books of Esdras it is said that the Lord made the world for the sake of the people. The narrative also points out that the transgression of Adam brought God's judgment upon the world (2 Esdras 7: 11-12). Also in Pauline writings, the interdependence of creation and man is maintained. As Gibbs observes,

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<sup>4</sup>Frederick C. Grant, Ancient Judaism and the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), p. 60.

<sup>5</sup>J. G. Gager, "Functional Diversity in Paul's Use of End-Time Language," Journal of Biblical Literature 89 (1970):328-29.

According to Paul, as according to the prophets and many apocalyptic writers, one cannot speak rightly of creation without speaking of man, nor rightly speak of man without speaking of the world in which he lives.<sup>6</sup>

On several occasions Paul points out that God the Father is the source and goal of creation and Christ is the mediator of both creation and redemption.<sup>7</sup> For example in the Corinthian correspondence Paul relates that there is one God, the Father, from (ἐξ) whom are all things and for (εἰς) whom we [exist], and that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through (δι') whom are all things and through whom we [exist] (1 Cor. 8:7). In the Colossian hymn creation is referred to as an act of God in (ἐν) Christ. All these indicate that there is a close relationship between Christ and God the Father, both in creation and redemption.

Finally, we must distinguish between Christ's role in creation and in redemption. Accordingly, "redemption is not an appendix to the work of creation, nor is it implied in the creation."<sup>8</sup> God's plan of redemption was already at work in the act of creation. Both creation and redemption have cosmic significance. While creation testifies to the goodness of God, redemption bears witness to His gracious will to save mankind from the curse of sin. Just as the Colossian hymn states that God created all things through Christ, so also it implies that His purpose to redeem the world has been completed through the cross and resurrection.

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<sup>6</sup>John G. Gibbs, Creation and Redemption, a Study in Pauline Theology (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), pp. 40-41.

<sup>7</sup>See also Rom. 11:36; Eph. 4:6.

<sup>8</sup>Gibbs, p. 141.

## Christ Is The Center of Unity

The relationship between Christ and the universe did not end with the act of creation. According to Paul Christ is also the sustainer of everything that has been created. In fact, he says that the whole creation coheres in Christ. The fact that creation exists is evidence for its dependence upon Christ as its center.

In the Old Testament, wisdom is described as a unifying principle which holds the world together. In Prov. 8:30, wisdom is called 'the one who fits things together ( ἀρμοζούσα LXX). On this point R. B. Y. Scott calls our attention to the fact that "a living link" or "vital bond" is a more appropriate translation of the Hebrew original ( יִוָּזַף ).<sup>9</sup> This is precisely the sense in which Paul uses συνίστημι in Col. 1:17.

By alluding to the principle of cohesion Paul asserts Christ's primacy and superiority in the cosmological spheres. This is, moreover, an expression of the universal lordship of Christ which the apostle emphasizes very much. As Lightfoot points out, Christ as the one in whom everything coheres "impresses upon creation that unity and solidarity which makes it a cosmos instead of a chaos."<sup>10</sup> It is on account of Christ that the creation enjoys order, harmony and unity.

When Paul expounds the concept of the cosmic Christ he does not minimize the significance of the person of Christ. Instead, the apostle

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<sup>9</sup>R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation: the 'Amon of Prov. 8:30,'" Vetus Testamentum 10 (1960):213-23.

<sup>10</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974 Reprint), p. 156.

says that Christ is before all things ( *πρὸ πάντων* ). Both his pre-existence and his primacy over all things are included in this phrase. He enjoys superiority as well as chronological priority over creation. The fact that he existed before the creation of the world qualifies him to be its sustainer also.

When it is said that the universe coheres in Christ, this does not imply that the two are a unified whole. Instead, the integrity and identity of both Christ and creation are safeguarded by that statement. The relationship between Christ and creation is not that of a hypostatic union. On the contrary, the basis for such a union of Christ and God the Father is provided in Colossians as Paul writes, "in him the entire fullness of deity dwells bodily" (2:9; compare 1:19).

Christ and the universe are not united with each other in terms of a 'mystical union' either, as for example, Teilhard visualized.<sup>11</sup> If that were the case, then his misconstrued notion that the purpose of Christian revelation is to build up a "Mystical Body" would also have to be true. Teilhard has built up the false hope that the material universe would some day converge into consciousness and thus the 'cosmic' significance of Christ would be realized.

The coherence of all things in Christ must be explained as something which takes place in Christ. This is important because not only is the universe created in Christ and by Christ, but it also exists in him. By the same token, each individual object in the universe will keep always the identity which it received at creation. Unity in this context

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<sup>11</sup>Supra, pp. 25-32.

is best explained as the whole creation being knit together, with Christ at the center, in such a way that the identity of each component is still maintained as a distinct item. In the setting of the community of believers this unity may be understood as their fellowship with each other in the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

#### Christ Is the Goal of Creation

We have noted that the origin and existence of the whole creation is essentially a reflection of God's image in Christ. Now we must also state that the destiny of creation is determined by its relationship to Christ since there is an eschatological dimension to that relationship.

The Colossian epistle makes it clear that creation finds its goal in Christ. The Christological hymn is a specific example in which the whole creation is described as destined to return to Christ.<sup>12</sup> It follows that the fullness ( πλήρωμα ) of creation is achieved only in Christ. It is Christ who brings everything to its final end ( τέλος ). He alone has the capacity to bring each creature and all creation to its goal according to God's purpose.<sup>13</sup>

By itself, creation cannot return to its appointed goal because it and man are the subjects of hostile powers.<sup>14</sup> It is clear from the letter that the people at Colossae doubted whether the work of Christ was really cosmic in its scope. Paul addressed himself precisely to this

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<sup>12</sup>Allan D. Galloway, The Cosmic Christ (London: Nisbet & Co., 1951), pp. 49-50.

<sup>13</sup>John G. Gibbs, "Pauline Cosmic Christology," Journal of Biblical Literature 90 (1971):474.

<sup>14</sup>On hostile powers, see subsequent discussion, *Infra*, pp. 125-135.



issue as he declared that the redeeming work of Christ was unlimited in its power, its reach and in its worth.

Against this background, Paul exhorts his readers not to shift from the hope of the Gospel, but to remain in this hope which is laid up for them in heaven (1:23, see also 1:5). In Christ they are assured of the final victory over everything. This Christ is present in them in accordance with God's gracious plan. Moreover, the Christ who is the hope of glory is also the basis for their faith in the future.

Paul strikes another eschatological note in the hymn when he speaks about the resurrection of Christ. According to the hymn Christ rose from the dead in order that he might be pre-eminent in everything (1:18). Evidently, in spite of the historical event of Christ's resurrection, his supremacy over everything has not yet been established fully. It is part of the mission of the church on earth to bring this task to completion.<sup>15</sup>

Paul clearly expresses the idea elsewhere that the whole creation finds its fulfillment only in Christ (Rom. 8:21-23). This fact may be further illustrated on the basis of the solidarity which Paul finds between man and the rest of God's creation. Accordingly, the redemption which Christ brought for man must lead the whole of creation to deliverance. Since the creation was designed to serve man it is being redeemed to serve the redeemed man. Hence the hope of creation to be released from the bondage of corruption can be understood in the light of man's redemption which has been achieved in Christ. The kosmos can now expect

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<sup>15</sup>E. Schweitzer, "Christ in the Letter to the Colossians," Review & Expositor 70 (1973):451-55.

its liberation by way of a reconstitution after the catastrophe of the final destruction.

It is in this light that we should understand Paul's exhortation to the Colossian Christians to seek the things from above (3:1-4). With this introduction the apostle sets out to describe the new life of the believers who have been raised with Christ.

The man in Christ possesses the victory which Christ won over the 'principalities and powers.' For, Christ achieved this victory for men, and it was won in the realm of the world where man is.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, as the church proclaims this victory in each age, it points to the Christ who has redeemed man together with his environment. Moreover, the believer has the assurance that Christ leads creation to its final goal. This assurance is based on the fact that he himself has died with Christ, he has been buried with Christ and he has been raised with Christ.<sup>17</sup>

The state of having been raised with Christ by baptism is the beginning of the new life in Christ. This life is actualized when the Christian recognizes the lordship of Christ in his life and follows his command.<sup>18</sup>

Finally we must note that there is an appointed time for the creation to reach its goal. Paul states that the time of Christ's second

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<sup>16</sup>R. S. Barbour, "Salvation and Cosmology: The Setting of the Epistle to the Colossians," Scottish Journal of Theology 20 (1967):257-71.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. ἀπεθάνετε (2:20-3:3); συνταφέντες αὐτῷ (2:12), and συννηγέρθητε (2:12).

<sup>18</sup>Eduard Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon, trans. by Wm. R. Poehlmann and R. J. Kanis, ed. by Helmut Koester, Hermeneia Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 132.

coming is that moment.<sup>19</sup> This is the parousia in which all of creation will receive final approval from God on account of Christ. Those who are in Christ will assume their new bodily existence after the pattern of Christ's resurrection body. The hidden glory of the new life will then manifest itself under the supreme lordship of Christ.

#### Christ Is the Means of God's Revelation

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Christian faith is that it is founded on trust in the mighty acts of God. These acts represent God's self-giving and self-revealing nature. Paul prayed unceasingly for the Colossian Christians that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will (1:9). He also knew that the true knowledge of God's will was that about His plan of salvation in Christ. It follows that without Christ the saving truth of God would remain a mystery (μυστήριον).

Regarding the Septuagint use of the word μυστήριον, Bornkamm notes that the word was first used in apocalyptic literature. In this context μυστήριον pointed to the eschatological mystery, he adds. In other words, mystery in the Septuagint represented "a concealed intimation of divinely ordained future events whose disclosure and interpretation is reserved for God alone" by way of an apocalypse.<sup>20</sup>

It may be noted in passing that Jesus used μυστήριον in connection with his parabolic teaching of the kingdom. Although this mystery of the

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<sup>19</sup>Col. 3:4; cf. Phil. 3:20, 21; 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:12-28; 2 Cor. 5:1-4.

<sup>20</sup>G. Bornkamm, "μυστήριον," TDNT 4:814-15.

divine rule was concealed from some by means of parables, it was disclosed to the disciples.<sup>21</sup>

In the Pauline corpus the term *μυστήριον* is firmly linked with Christ and the message of his kingdom. In the letter to the Colossians Paul states that Christ is the content of the mystery of God.<sup>22</sup> Addressing those who are in search of certain superior wisdom he asserts that in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2). Accordingly, Christ is the means by which created beings can understand the inner workings of God's grace.

To understand creation fully one must comprehend Christ. Understanding Christ is passed on to each generation by the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel which is complete in itself and universal in its application declares that the Gentiles too can now know God's revelation in Christ. It is the desire and purpose of Paul to announce this message to all people (4:3).

That Christ is the means of God's revelation is further elucidated by Paul as he writes, "for in him [Christ] the entire fullness of the deity dwells bodily" (2:9). By the above statement he rules out all speculations about cosmic powers and angelic intermediaries. For Christ alone embodies the fullness of God in his one human person. He illumines God's mysteries to creation, even as he himself is the image of God (1:15).

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<sup>21</sup>On the mystery of the parabolic teaching of Jesus, see J. Jeremias, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). According to Jeremias, "the parables, like all the words of Jesus, announce no special secrets, but only the one secret of the kingdom of God" (p. 18).

<sup>22</sup>Lightfoot, p. 174; Lohse, p. 164.

Other letters of Paul also express the fact that salvation is the purpose of God's revelation in Christ. For example, in the concluding doxology of Romans, the apostle mentions this purpose as bringing all nations to the obedience of faith by way of a mystery hidden from ages past (16:25-26). The first letter to the Corinthians indicates that this revelation is made possible by God through the Holy Spirit (2:7-13). Again, the letter to Ephesians brings out the cosmic nature of this revelation. According to it God's great plan for the salvation of man and the restoration of all things can be known only by way of His revelation in Christ.<sup>23</sup>

By way of recapitulation, let us note that, according to Colossians, Jesus Christ represents God's decisive revelation. He is the mediator of creation; and he leads the whole creation to its appointed goal. The relationship between God and creation is determined by the relationship between creation and Christ. Christ occupies a distinctive position in the origin, existence and destiny of all created objects. His significance for human existence is so resolute that in him "all lines of God's relation with men and men's with God are found to be meeting."<sup>24</sup>

#### Christ and the Cosmic Powers

According to Colossians man and creation are subject to a number of cosmic powers. These powers are presented by various terms such as

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<sup>23</sup>Eph. 1:9; 3:3-5, 9, 10; 6:19.

<sup>24</sup>C. F. D. Moule, The Origin of Christology (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 152.

θρόνοι , κυριότητες , αρχαὶ , ἐξουσίαι , στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου  
 and sometimes even as ἄγγελοι .<sup>25</sup> To describe the exact nature of  
 these powers is not simple, for the New Testament nowhere provides a  
 clear picture of them. Nevertheless, it is evident that these forces  
 in some way oppose God's creation and therefore must be resisted.<sup>26</sup>

Nowhere in his writings does Paul attempt a systematic descrip-  
 tion of these powers; neither does he rank them according to function  
 and mission.<sup>27</sup> However, he often warns his readers that these powers  
 are realities against which they must contend (Rom. 8:38, 39; Eph. 6:  
 12). He also gives them the assurance that all these powers will ulti-  
 mately be subjected to Christ (1 Cor. 15:24).

Even the casual reader must be able to notice in Paul's letters  
 the frequent mention of these powers. The terms "principalities and  
 powers" ( ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι ) often appear as a pair. Also, Paul  
 uses them both in the singular and in the plural.<sup>28</sup> Other names to be  
 noted are 'powers' ( δυνάμεις ), 'lordships' ( κυριότητες ) and thrones

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<sup>25</sup>Col. 1:13, 16; 2:8, 10, 15, 18, 20.

<sup>26</sup>On the subject of cosmic powers, see Hendrik Berkhof, Christ and the Powers, trans. by J. H. Yoder (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1962); George B. Caird, Principalities and Powers, A Study in Pauline Theology (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); Henrich Schlier, Principalities and Powers In the New Testament (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961); E. Gordon Rupp, Principalities and Powers, Studies in the Christian Conflict in History (London: Epworth Press, 1952).

<sup>27</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Secret of God's Plan," Concordia Theological Monthly 40 (1969):539; J. Y. Lee, "Interpreting the Demonic Power in Pauline Thought," Novum Testamentum 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 55; Schlier, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup>1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; Col. 2:10; Eph. 3:10; 4:12; Col. 1:16, 2:5.

( θρόνοι ).<sup>29</sup> Besides these, Paul also speaks of "many gods and many lords ( θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοὶ ) (1 Cor. 8:5).

For our purposes we must note those powers which have cosmic influence. Paul designates them in various ways such as "the world rulers of this darkness ( κοσμοκράτορες τοῦ σκότους τούτου , Eph. 6:12), "the elements of the world" ( τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου , Col. 2:8), "rulers of the present age" ( ἀρχόντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου , 1 Cor. 2:8), and the god of this age" ( ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου , 2 Cor. 4:4).

Repeated references to these phenomena in the letters of Paul lead us to the conclusion that his readers were well aware of what these names entailed. It is also possible that these ideas had a place in Judaism, particularly in Jewish apocalyptic writings.<sup>30</sup> They have some basis in the Old Testament, too.

In the Old Testament these non-human forces of evil are pictured as God's opponents. The Hebrew word  $\text{קַיִן}$  which means 'the opposing one' or 'the one who acts as an adversary' represents these forces.<sup>31</sup> Other references illustrate that the same word is used to indicate the kingdom of evil forces. It is not limited to a proper name.<sup>32</sup>

The apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon blames the devil as the one who brought death into the world. That is, the author of Wisdom identifies the serpent of Genesis 3 with Satan. The lines read:

<sup>29</sup>Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:21.

<sup>30</sup>Schlier, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup>1 Kings 11:23, 25; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; Ps. 109:6.

<sup>32</sup>1 Sam. 39:4, 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:2; Ps. 109:6; Zech. 3:1.

For God created man for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity. But through the devil's envy death entered the world; and those who belong to his party experience it (2:23-24 RSV).

By way of difference, according to Paul, it was not the devil but man's sin which brought death into the world (Rom. 5:17; 6:23).

In the pseudepigrapha the activities of Satan are depicted in a more graphic way. For example, the Book of Enoch presents him as the ruler of a rival kingdom of evil. Moreover, the demonic beings are said to have been the offspring of the fallen angels in Genesis 6 who lusted after the daughters of men. The function of these beings is threefold: namely, to tempt to evil, to accuse the inhabitants of the earth and to punish the condemned.<sup>33</sup> In the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs these Satanic forces are associated with cruelty, lying and hatred.<sup>34</sup>

The documents of the Dead Sea community describe the evil forces in a very similar way. Moreover, this community saw the fate of these powers in an eschatological light. As a case in point, it is said in the War Scroll that God has appointed a day of final battle between the sons of darkness and the sons of light, the former denoting the powers of evil and the latter the elect people of God.<sup>35</sup>

What has been discussed above must serve as sufficient ground to say that ideas about Satanic and cosmic powers were not strange to the

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<sup>33</sup>The Secrets of Enoch 29:4; The Book of Enoch 16; 40; 69:4-6. References are to R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English, Vol. 2 of 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

<sup>34</sup>Test. Dan 3:6; 5:6; 6:1; Test. Gad 4:6.

<sup>35</sup>Theodore H. Gaster, The Dead Sea Scripture with Analytical Index (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 400, 428.



people of the first Christian century. Accordingly, the use of these and similar concepts in the Pauline writings must be understood as part of his attempt to communicate effectively to the people the centrality of Christ in everything including these powers.

The Colossian correspondence itself contains several expressions which are similar to some of the powers mentioned above. In one place Paul praises God who made us partakers of the inheritance of the "saints in light" by delivering us from the "authority of darkness" (1:12-13). Paul's perspective on these powers, however, was new and different. He understood them as beings which attack creation. He knew that God, in accordance with the divine economy of salvation, was in control of the work and function of these powers in the universe. He was convinced that the existence of these powers in a permissive sense depended on Christ (1:16).

There is a close connection between these powers and sin, according to Paul. When he speaks of the deliverance from the dominion of darkness, he also speaks in the same breath about the forgiveness of sins, which is redemption (1:13-14). In a different context Paul repeats the thought that "the principalities and powers" have no hold over us because of the cross of Christ which he endured for the forgiveness of sins (2:13-15).

That sin is an ubiquitous power threatening mankind is a central thought in Paul. Elsewhere the apostle describes it as the sting ( κέντρον ) of death (1 Cor. 15:56). In fact, the whole humanity is under the power of sin because of Adam's rebellion (Rom. 3:9; 7:14-23).

The tyrannizing power of sin subordinates all men to death (Rom. 5:12-21; 8-10). Therefore man is enslaved by sin and its consequence, death.<sup>36</sup>

The cosmic powers become the instruments of evil and sinful activities in the world when sin and the law begin to interact with each other in the human will. This does not mean that in Paul's opinion the law itself is hostile to the purposes of God.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, he points out that sin has distorted the law and its proper use. Accordingly, the law cannot liberate man from the bondage of sin.<sup>38</sup> Here, Paul departs from Judaism, which viewed the Torah as the means which man uses to fend off and oppose sin and all evil.<sup>39</sup>

The lordship of the powers over man has cosmic repercussions, just like the sin of Adam. It follows that the whole universe shares with man the slavery under these powers. According to Rom. 8:20, 21, creation has been subjected to ματαιότης . Ματαιότης , which means "emptiness," "purposelessness," or "vanity" is here synonymous with δολεία τῆς φθορᾶς from which creation is to be freed eventually. If this is true, the ματαιότης may very well include false gods and

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<sup>36</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, The Body, A Study in Pauline Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), p. 37.

<sup>37</sup>Caird, pp. 51-52.

<sup>38</sup>Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 7:7-23; 10:1-5; Gal. 2:6; 3:11.

<sup>39</sup>See also Sirach 15:4-8; Wisdom 6:16-20.

false lords (1 Cor. 8:6).<sup>40</sup> In a word, and in consequence, the entire universe stands in dire need of deliverance and redemption.<sup>41</sup>

Paul refers to these hostile powers as realities against which the Christian must defend himself (Eph. 6:12). The fact that some of them are called "angels," "princes" and even 'gods' indicates that they enjoy an independent existence as beings of their own. Their chief, Satan, is also known as the adversary and the destroyer, as we observed earlier. As Schlier points out, "They manifest themselves as beings of intellect and will which can speak and be spoken to. They are something which is capable of purposeful activities."<sup>42</sup>

The apostle did not doubt the existence of these beings as independent entities. To the Corinthian Christians he wrote that they should shun any fellowship with 'demons' (1 Cor. 10:21). As mentioned in Eph. 6:12, their abode is in "the heavenly places." Moreover, they seek to dominate men and are constantly engaged in a fierce battle against God's created order.

We have noted that these powers were also part of God's creation (Col. 1:16, see also Rom. 8:38-39). According to Paul Christ has brought the domination of these beings to an end (Col. 1:19, 20).<sup>43</sup> Just as these objects were brought into existence by God through Christ, so also they have been disarmed in and through his cross and resurrection.

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<sup>40</sup>Gibbs, p. 43.

<sup>41</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Scope of the Redemptive Task," Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (1965):296.

<sup>42</sup>Schlier, p. 18

<sup>43</sup>Berkhof, p. 36.

Accordingly, the powers which lord it over creation are subjected to the lordship of Christ. As Gibbs observes,

the lordship of Christ is not limited merely to those who acknowledge it, for his lordship over all things was being exercised through his mediatorship in the work of creation before he became, or was made, the Mediator in the work of redemption.<sup>44</sup>

Christ's lordship over the powers has eschatological significance. Paul uses three verbs to express this truth. He says that Christ has "disarmed" them, "made a public example" of them and has "triumphed over" them.

Formerly they were almost universally venerated by Jew and Gentile as the most basic or ultimate realities ( *στοιχεῖα* ) of the world. But now Christ's encounter with them unmasked their false identity and stripped them of their power over mankind. Christ's victory over the cross was God's seal of approval on his victory over the powers. His resurrection manifested that "in Christ God has challenged the powers, has penetrated into their territory, and has displayed that he is stronger than they."<sup>45</sup>

The powers can no longer prevail over the community which experiences God's redemption in Christ. God has put everything under Christ's feet and has made him head over all things. Therefore, the apparent strength of the powers has no lasting effect. As Cullmann observes, the history of these powers have been subjected to the history of salvation. Christ has completed the work of redemption at the midpoint in history.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Gibbs, p. 63

<sup>45</sup>Berkhof, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, The Primitive Christian, Conception of Time and History, trans. by Floyd V. Filson, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 104.

What has been described above may be summed up as follows: The powers have a definite place in God's creation. According to Paul, God created them in, through, and for ( *ἐν, δι, εἰς*) Christ (Col. 1:16). They have a significant place in God's plan of redemption as the enemy from which men are liberated also. As Paul says, Christ has triumphed over these powers. Consequently, Christ's lordship extends over them, too (Col. 1:20; 2:15).

At the beginning of the present survey we said that the Christian ought to resist these powers. Now we must note that "the elements of the world," the principalities, and so forth, do not merely possess powers, but they are themselves powers. They constitute power in such a way that they become an ally to the enemies of creation. In fact, they are power in terms of personhood. On this issue Schlier's comment is worth noting:

They are pure power, not merely the power of the universe as such; they are power, pure and simple, not the power of space, time or existence in general or of the void. They are power, capacity, dominion in person; they are the personified essence of power, capacity, etc.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to note that Christ through his cross and resurrection has triumphed over the cosmic powers. Consequently these powers, which are part of chaos, have been divested of their dominion over the cosmos. As Barrett observes,

It is clearly implied, though not specifically stated, that these beings rebelled against their Maker and his Agent; the good creation has gone wrong, and an element in its preservation which needed to be put right was the revolt of spiritual powers and angels.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Schlier, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup>C. K. Barrett, From First Adam to Last (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 11.

The whole of creation can rejoice in Christ now that he has triumphed over these powers. All things material or immaterial have been put right, including "those created beings that from their superior rank had been or might be set in rivalry with the Son."<sup>49</sup>

Since Christ, through his cross, has put all creation right, by him a new creation is called into being. This is implied in God's act of reconciliation in Christ.<sup>50</sup> Reconciliation (Col. 1:20) is restitution to a previous order of things. It follows that in Christ God has laid the foundation for a peaceful relationship between Him and His creation. Peace, evidently, was characteristic of the original order of things. It was the sin of man which destroyed this harmony. Because Christ has conquered sin, the community of believers, as the company of the redeemed and forgiven people, has the assurance of living in peace.

An understanding of the cosmic powers is very important for an appreciation of the theme of the cosmic Christ. Those who doubt or deny the existence of true powers, in the final analysis, also fail to admit that man is a sinner and that his sins have cosmic consequences. Accordingly they deny the significance of Christ and his cross for the whole of the created order.

Our study has shown that no part of God's creation has been left untouched by the deceptive activities of these powers. Satan and all his angels attempt to dominate not only individuals but also societies and nations. But we noted that Christ's lordship extends over all these

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<sup>49</sup>Lightfoot, p. 152.

<sup>50</sup>See discussion on "Reconciliation," *Supra*, pp. 106-108.

"personified essences" of powers. Moreover, his victory on the cross has been his triumph over these evil forces.

The victory which Christ achieved through his cross and resurrection indicates his triumph also over man's sin and death. Accordingly, through the cross Christ has achieved for man redemption from sin and all its consequences. Those who receive the message of this redemption through his Word and Sacraments are called to be his body which is the church. In the following section we shall consider in some detail the relationship between Christ and his church.

#### Christ and His Church

In the first part of the great Christological hymn in Colossians the apostle Paul emphasized the fact that the whole of creation was dependent on Christ, and that Christ was God's agent who brought the cosmos into being. In the second half of the same hymn, however, the apostle indicates that there is also a unique relationship between Christ and his church. This is built on Christ's redemptive work which culminated in his cross and resurrection. The motive behind the cross and resurrection has been to bring the new creation into being. The church as the visible manifestation of the new creation, has been entrusted with the specific task of proclaiming to the world this mighty act of God in Christ.

In the pages which follow, we shall examine the concept of the new creation in Christ, the mission of the church to all nations and the hope for the future which marks the second coming of Christ. We shall also outline certain concepts such as the centrality of the cross, and

the forgiveness of sins as they are directly related to the new creation in Christ.

#### New Creation in Christ

The new creation is an overarching theme in the Pauline epistles.<sup>51</sup> It must be noted that the apostle uses the exact words *καινή κτίσις* only twice in his writings (2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15). In both these instances he alludes to the fact that in Christ God has brought about a new creation or a new order of existence. In the following survey we will note how this thought affects man as well as the cosmos.

We noted that the idea of the new creation is implied, though not explicitly stated, in many different places in the Pauline Corpus.<sup>52</sup> In 1 Cor. 7:31, for example, the apostle exhorts the Christians to live as if they had nothing to do with the world. To substantiate this exhortation he says that the form (*μορφή*) of this world is passing away. The consideration that the time of this world is short implies that the place of the present order of things will be taken over by the new creation. This new creation, however, will not be a fresh start, but the old made new. It is not a *νέα* but a *καινή κτίσις*.<sup>53</sup>

In this connection it is appropriate to take note of the two observations which Scroggs makes about the Pauline concept of new creation.

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<sup>51</sup>Cf. N. A. Dahl, "Christ, Creation, and the Church," in The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology, ed. by W. D. Davis and D. Daube (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), pp. 422-43.

<sup>52</sup>For example: Rom. 8:18-22; 1 Cor. 7:31; Eph. 1:9-10, 20-23; 2:1-2, 3:10, 18-19; 5:21-6:12; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9, 10, 15; 3:24-25.

<sup>53</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, p. 82.



The first observation is that Paul may not have faced the question whether the new creation is simply a return to the conditions of the original creation, or whether it implies something superior. According to Scrogg, neither Paul nor his contemporaries were forced to describe the original perfection of creation within the limits of the Old Testament.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, "Jewish theology often used more 'super-historical concepts' than those found in the Old Testament to describe the content of the original perfection."<sup>55</sup>

5 As the second point Scroggs suggests that Paul does not use the term 'new creation' as a metaphor. In Pauline thought man in Christ is a truly new creature. Furthermore, "the reality of this new creation is nothing more and nothing less than a final restoration to that truly human reality God has always desired for men."<sup>56</sup>

Paul's use of the concept of new creation is also related to his understanding of the image of God. In Col. 1:15 the apostle states that Christ is the image of the invisible God.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, those who are in Christ become the image of God. In fact, they are to be fashioned ( *σύμμορφος* ) after the image of Christ who is God's image (Rom. 8:29).

In Col. 3:10 Paul urges the believers to put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

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<sup>54</sup>Robin Scroggs, The Last Adam, A Study in Pauline Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 62-63.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>57</sup>See also 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 2:6. For a discussion on the subject, see *Supra*, pp. 91-94.

The phrase "put on the new nature" is an exhortation to put on "the regenerate man formed after Christ."<sup>58</sup> In this sense it indicates God's act of new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). Furthermore, as the apostle wrote to the Ephesians, this new creation is the result of Christ's work of reconciliation by which he abolished in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances (Eph. 2:15).

According to rabbinic tradition there is a close connection between the creation of man and the giving of the law. In fact, later Judaism taught that the two tablets of law were created on the sixth day, the day on which man was created. Furthermore, the righteousness of God was to be sought in the Torah since God Himself revealed His glory in the "letter" of the Torah.<sup>59</sup>

Paul responds to this tendency in Judaism by saying that this is a mistaken understanding of the Torah.<sup>60</sup> For Paul it is in the Gospel, or more precisely, it is in Christ, that the glory of God is revealed (2 Cor. 4:4). Consequently, the community of believers in Christ stands in contrast to the people of the synagogue. Whereas the former can see the glory of God in Christ, the latter have veils over their minds (2 Cor. 3:16). It is the believer in Christ who is changed into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). This "image" is bestowed on him since he has been reconciled to God on account of the cross of Christ.

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<sup>58</sup>Lightfoot, p. 215.

<sup>59</sup>Sirach 11:3-4; Jubilees 7:20; 20:2; Test. Levi 13:5-7; I Baruch 2:9; 4 Ezra 8:12.

<sup>60</sup>In 2 Cor. 3:7-19 Paul explicitly states that the splendor of the Torah was short-lived.

Reconciliation in Christ

In the Colossian epistle the reconciling act of Christ is central to the thought of the new creation (1:20, 22). Apparently, whatever Judaism claimed for the Torah, Paul now claims for Christ; only Paul understands Christ to be superior even to the Torah. Judaism never taught that the Torah was the image of God. But for Paul Christ is the pattern after whom the new man is created in righteousness to be the image of God (Col. 3:10). Torah by itself was incapable of establishing the right relationship between God and man; for on the basis of the Law, righteousness was an unattainable goal.<sup>61</sup> But Paul asserts that the death of Christ reconciled man with God.

No adequate understanding of the new creation is possible except in the context of God's reconciling act in Christ. Reconciliation (in the sense of restitution to the original order of things), according to Paul, is the product of the peace established between God and creation through the blood of Christ. Just as Christ is the agent of creation itself, so also is he God's agent in the act of new creation. The new creation is an outcome of the reconciliation which Christ achieved on the cross.

Our letter states that there is no need to improve or supplement what God has accomplished through Christ's cross. There is no superior knowledge or revelation to be sought which can add to this unique act. The one thing to know, and to be made known is that through the cross the

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<sup>61</sup>H. J. Schoeps, Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, c. 1961), pp. 281-83.

hostility between God and creation has been brought to an end. The cross testifies to the fact that Christ is the "Lord of reconciliation."<sup>62</sup> The believer appropriates this reconciliation to himself by way of baptism and faith.

At this juncture it is important to note that the cross of Christ is God's way of redeeming His creation. The word redemption (*ἀπολύτρωσις*) means basically "liberation from imprisonment and bondage."<sup>63</sup> In Paul's epistles it is stated at times that redemption has already taken place. For example, in 1 Corinthians we read that Christ has become our redemption (1:30). Redemption according to Paul means nothing less than forgiveness of sins.<sup>64</sup>

Paul describes sin (*ἁμαρτία*) as a power which entered the world because of Adam's disobedience (Rom. 5:12). He also mentions the fact that the cross of Christ divested sin of its power (Rom. 8:3). Moreover, Christ was made to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). This is perhaps the most tangible way of explaining the cross of Christ as God's way of redeeming us. God in Christ did what the Jewish law failed to do. God has accomplished redemption in Christ.

It is in baptism that a life of redemption is appropriated to and by the individual. The fact of being baptized into Christ includes both a burial and a resurrection with him (Col. 2:11). These two acts

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<sup>62</sup>Schwetizer, p. 451.

<sup>63</sup>Friedrich Büchsel, "*ἀπολύτρωσις*," *TDNT* 4:351-56.

<sup>64</sup>Col. 1:13, 14; 2:13; See also Eph. 1:7.

are described elsewhere as putting off the old self and putting on the new (3:10). Everyone who has been baptized into Christ has been raised with him to a new life. In other words, the new creation has already begun in such a person. This kind of life is constantly renewed in order for it to be conformed to the image of the one who created it.<sup>65</sup> The new man is created and sustained in each baptized individual after the pattern of Christ who is the "prototype and ground-plan of the renewal."<sup>66</sup>

The apostle continues his discussion of redemption in the sense of forgiveness of sins at Col. 2:13-15. It could very well be that here he is making use of what appears to be a fragment of a hymnic confession.<sup>67</sup> Apparently Paul did this, as Lohse points out, "because it clearly expresses what was for him the essential connection between forgiveness of sins and victory over the powers and principalities."<sup>68</sup> In fact, Christ's submission to the cross and resurrection entailed also the establishment of his lordship over the principalities and powers.

Two points follow from the above. First, on the cross Christ erased the certificate of debt ( *χειρόγραφον* ) which stood against man. Secondly, he stripped the principalities and powers of their power. Thus, Christ has won forgiveness of sin and freedom from the tyranny of

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<sup>65</sup>Col. 3:1, 10; see also Rom. 6:11; 13:14; Ga. 3:27.

<sup>66</sup>Ralph Martin, Colossians and Philemon, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1974), pp. 107-108.

<sup>67</sup>On this view see Andrew John Bandstra, The Law and the Elements of the World, An Exegetical Study in Aspects of Pauline Teaching, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam (Kampen: J. K. Kok N.V., 1964), pp. 158-68; Lohse, p. 106.

<sup>68</sup>Lohse, p. 107.

the powers. The salvation which Christ brings, therefore, is total and complete. No part of the cosmos can be or has been redeemed without the cross of Christ.

On account of his victory over sin and the powers, Christ is the source of the new creation. In Ephesians 2:15, which is similar to Col. 1:15 in many respects, it is said that Christ shed his blood in order that he might create a new man. Evidently Paul believed that in Christ the new Genesis had already begun. Christ for Paul is the second Adam who calls the new creation into existence. In him are healed the divisions caused by man's sin.<sup>69</sup>

This concept that Christ is the second Adam goes back to the Old Testament and to Jewish tradition. Judaism taught that Adam was a kingly figure.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, it was said he had sinned and was stripped of the glorious garment which he had before.<sup>71</sup> For Paul, however, Jesus Christ in his human nature was the man that God had intended Adam to be originally. Christ did all that Adam failed to do. Christ brought life in the place of the death which Adam's sin brought. Christ exhibits fully and completely the image of God whereas Adam failed to be God's image.

According to Paul, therefore, the new creation is anchored to the cross of Christ. It is on the cross that the great mystery of God's

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<sup>69</sup>Richardson, p. 243. According to the Rabbinic Midrash on Gen. 30:14, he who brings a Gentile near God is as though he created him.

<sup>70</sup>2 Enoch 30:12. Genesis R. 19:4. See also the references to Christ's kingship in the Gospels. For example, Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 26, 32.

<sup>71</sup>Gen. R. 20, 12; Ex. R. 32, 1; Sanh. 38.

eternal plan of salvation was fully revealed. The cross crippled the cosmic powers and brought to an end the tyranny of sin. The cross is the means by which God restored peace between both Himself and the created order. Consequently, the power of sin which separated man from his creator has been removed. The church, therefore, as the community on earth of forgiven sinners is called upon to proclaim to all nations the message of the cross.

#### Mission To All Nations

It must be stated that in his letters Paul generally uses the word *ἐκκλησία* to denote the local congregation. In Colossians, however, *ἐκκλησία* represents the "universal church, the community of believers in Christ." The church is the body of Christ which grows continually, nourished and supported by its head (1:18; 2:9).

In our epistle Paul argues that, since all things were created in Christ and cohere in him, it is also the ultimate destiny of all things to return to him (1:15-20). This return of all things to Christ takes place through his body which is the church (2:19). Hence there is a tremendous urgency for the church to engage in the great missionary task.

The job of the church is to proclaim the gospel all over the earth. Paul sees the faith of the church in a worldwide context right from the beginning of the letter (1:6). According to him the gospel is bearing fruit and growing.<sup>72</sup> The time allotted in this world for the

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<sup>72</sup>It must be noted that Paul uses *καρποφορούμενον καὶ ἀξάνόμενον* in v.6 as well as in v. 10.

church is the time to proclaim the gospel. Proclamation takes place in the life of the local congregation as well as when the word is preached to those outside the church.<sup>73</sup>

Paul rejoices in his sufferings for the sake of bringing the Gospel to all creatures. In fact he ventures to say that in his flesh he completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (1:24). In this connection the use of the verb ἀνταναπληρώω has caused considerable difficulty to interpret.<sup>74</sup> That the redemptive suffering and death of Christ are complete in themselves is indicated in our letter on several occasions.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, as Moule points out in his commentary on Colossians, the phrase 'what is lacking' should be understood as 'what is yet to be shared' or 'what is still due to us.'<sup>76</sup> In other words, for Paul to share in Christ's sufferings is the privilege of those who are incorporated into the church which is Christ's body.

Furthermore, this particular use of the word indicates that there is an eschatological dimension to the suffering of the Christian. In this respect, the more the apostle suffers in the course of his ministry before the purposes of God are complete, the greater is his contribution to hasten the second coming of Christ by virtue of filling up what still

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<sup>73</sup>This is comparable to Jesus' injunction to preach the Gospel of the kingdom to all nations. Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Mark 13:10, and so forth.

<sup>74</sup>For a survey of different approaches to this problem see C. F. D. Moule, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), p. 76.

<sup>75</sup>Col. 1:14, 20, 22; 2:13-14.

<sup>76</sup>Moule, Colossians, p. 76.



has to be endured.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, that which is 'still lacking' is the suffering of the Lord's personal witnesses for the purpose of inviting all people into his church.<sup>78</sup>

Those who respond to this invitation are called to be part of the community where Christ is all and in all. They put on the new nature after the image of Christ (3:10). It is through baptism that each person comes to this new life, as we noted earlier. That is, in baptism, the new life which Christ achieved through his death and resurrection is bestowed upon the believer. Baptism therefore signifies that, in order to attain the new life, a person cannot and need not do anything alongside or in addition to Christ.

The church must be firmly rooted and established in Christ before it begins to witness to others. As a prefatory admonition in this regard, Paul exhorts the Colossians to build in Christ the growing structure of their Christian life (2:5-7). Christ and his gospel is the message the church can offer the world, for in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). Accordingly, the church alone qualifies to bring to the world the true revelation of lasting wisdom and knowledge.

On the part of the church the apostle expects certain order and firmness of faith as these are essential for the faithful proclamation of the Christian message. The words *τάξις* and *στερέωμα* originally had military association. Consequently, for the missionary task

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Scweitzer, p. 463.

of church, they signify an orderly formation and firm front which originate from faith in Christ.<sup>79</sup>

Mission in this sense grows out of God's word. The church therefore is called to a life in the word of Christ (3:1b). The unique privilege of the church to live in the word is demonstrated by the exercise of forgiveness, love, peace and thanksgiving (3:12-17). Paul's choice of these terms evidently is governed by the qualities which in the first place are applicable to God's attitudes and actions.<sup>80</sup> These qualities may also be seen as indicative of the impact of Christ's coming into the world. For, his incarnation and his self-offering on the cross provided "a paradigm of a life-style to which the believer henceforth conforms."<sup>81</sup>

God has called a special people to pass on this word to others. These are the chosen holy and beloved people of God. The words **ἐκλεκτοὶ**, **ἅγιοι**, and **ἠγαπημένοι**, indicate that God out of His grace has called the church into being in order that through it He might accomplish His purposes for all people. As Lightfoot points out, these terms are "transferred from the Old Covenant to the New, from Israel after the flesh to Israel after the Spirit."<sup>82</sup> The church of the New Testament therefore is the living witness to God's act of salvation.

The apostle notes that proclamation of the Word must be backed by prayer (4:3). It is true from the immediate context of the letter

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<sup>79</sup>Moule, Colossians, p. 89.

<sup>80</sup>See also Rom. 12:1, 15:7-8; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 5:2, 29; Col. 3:13.

<sup>81</sup>Martin, p. 112.

<sup>82</sup>Lightfoot, p. 221.

that Paul asked the Colossians to pray for his release and that of his companions from prison. At the same time, Paul longed for release in order to be able to continue the proclamation of the mystery of Christ. In fact, he wanted his readers to pray for him and the fellow-prisoners so that God may open to them a door for the word. The Christian Church, therefore, is called to be diligent in praying unceasingly for the spreading of the Word.

Finally, we must note that the message which the church presents to the world is one of hope. Paul states that this hope is laid up in heaven for those who believe in Christ (1:5). Moreover, it is the believers who will be able to cherish fully this hope since they will appear in glory with Christ who is the hope of glory (3:4; see also 1:27). The gospel is the only means by which people can begin to experience the hope of being with Christ eternally.

It is typically Pauline to use the triad of faith, hope and love as it appears in Colossians,<sup>83</sup> We must particularly note that in all these instances faith is mentioned first. Certainly faith, according to Paul, is the source of Christian life; and faith is grounded on the person and work of Christ. As Lohse summarizes:

faith bases itself on the unique, eternally valid Christ-event, and confesses its binding power; love is active in the present in that it is extended to all the saints . . . (and) hope is directed to the anticipated consummation.<sup>84</sup>

The implications of the Christian hope, however, should not be interpreted as confined to the future only. Moule's observation that

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<sup>83</sup>Col. 1:45; 1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Titus 2:2.

<sup>84</sup>Lohse, p. 17.

hope is a "potent incentive for here and now" explains the relevance of hope for the present day.<sup>85</sup> Elsewhere the apostle himself states that the hope he calls our attention to is that of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8). Hope in this sense brings stability and motivation to a life with Christ in the present.

Our appraisal of the topic "Christ and His Church" according to the Colossian hymn, may be summarized as follows: The relationship between Christ and his church is different from that of the one between him and the rest of creation. The church is the covenant people of God. It is in the church that God's eternal plan of redemption becomes a living experience. The focus of this experience is the cross of Christ. The believer in Christ has this experience appropriated to himself as he is declared forgiven on the merits of Christ's death and resurrection. The community of believers, the church, is called to declare to all the world the message of God's redemption in Christ.

#### Summary

In this chapter we have discussed in some detail some aspects of the theme of the cosmic Christ as Paul presented it in the great Christological hymn in Colossians 1:15-20. Our intent has been to derive an adequate Scriptural basis for a discussion on the cosmic dimensions of Christ's person and work.

In the first part of the present chapter, we pointed out that the whole universe would have no life without Christ. He is the source, the means of existence, and the goal of everything that has been created.

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<sup>85</sup>Moule, Colossians, p. 50.

Accordingly the entire creation depends on Christ, and the very existence of the universe is proof to the fact that it coheres in Christ.

The second part was devoted to an understanding of the nature and work of the cosmic powers. We have concluded that they are real powers and therefore have to be resisted by Christians. We have also noted that their very existence depends on Christ. Through his cross he has stripped them of their power. Moreover, they are not worthy of veneration, and their apparent domain over creation has been brought to an end.

Christ and his church have been the point of discussion in the third part of the present chapter. We have seen that the place of the church of Christ in the entire creation is unique. In the church the great mysteries of God are revealed as the gospel is proclaimed and the forgiveness of sins is received. The church also has been sustained as the means by which God's act of redemption in Christ is proclaimed to all the world.

In a word, we have concluded that the whole of creation has rebelled against its creator on account of man's sin. Since Christ has taken that sin upon himself and has suffered the consequence of sin on the cross, all creation is offered freedom from the bondage of sin. The redemption which Christ won is for the whole creation. Accordingly, only in Christ can the whole creation be reconciled to its Creator. Since the "powers" belong to the realm of chaos and not cosmos, their redemption was not contemplated in the reconciliation of all things to God. The comparison of these conclusions with those of our second chapter will be discussed in our final chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### TOWARD A CORRECTIVE TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGY

Our intention in the present chapter is to test the conclusions of the second chapter against those of the third and fourth chapters. By way of recapitulation, in the second chapter we showed that the dangers which plague most modern Christologies are deeply rooted in the presuppositions with which they have been developed. Our purpose in the third and fourth chapters was to arrive at a positive statement of the identity of Jesus Christ and his work of redemption so that we might evaluate the conclusions of our second chapter.

In the first part of the present chapter we will briefly discuss some concepts such as secularization, humanization, liberation theology, and indigenization, which govern much of contemporary theology. Secondly, we will work toward a corrective to the problems which have been cited so far. We shall demonstrate that the theme of the cosmic Christ is not a modern discovery. It is as old as the New Testament. We will also point out that the person and work of Christ do not change although the life situations of people do change.

What we stated about Christology in the introductory chapter will serve as the foundation for our deliberations in the present chapter. That is to say, "Christology occupies the pivotal position in any facet of Christian theology. In fact, it performs normative functions for the

rest of theology. Consequently, Christian theology hinges on the proper understanding of Christology."<sup>1</sup>

### Contemporary "Christian" Secularity

Under the title "contemporary Christian secularity" we propose to demonstrate how modern theology has ignored the mandate of keeping Christ at the center of theological discussions. We will note that in recent years the focus of doing theology has shifted from an understanding of God and His acts in Christ for mankind to a desire for building a more just society for the purpose of providing for people what is often called a "more fully human" life.

Much of modern theology raises doubts as to how occurrences in centuries past could have contemporary validity. In many instances where theologians have attempted to identify the Christian faith with particular situations, the truth claims of Christianity seem to have lost their identity. Instead of being in the world in accordance with our Lord's command, theology today faces the danger of being very much part of the world. The fact is that contemporary theology operates on the notion that man is pretty well the master of his own destiny.

### Secularization

It was Friedrich Gogarten who first introduced the idea of secularization into Christian theological thinking. He believed that

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 1.

secularization was "a necessary and legitimate consequence of the Christian faith."<sup>2</sup>

Harvey Cox defines secularization as "the liberation of man from religious and metaphysical tutelage, the turning of his attention away from other worlds and toward this one."<sup>3</sup> That is to say, it is a process by which man, his society and his culture, may be 'liberated' from their dependence on religion. Cox maintains that the Christian faith demands such a liberation of Christians from traditional ways of religion.

According to Cox, secularization is an attempt to integrate Christianity into the social, political and cultural aspects of contemporary human life. He maintains that the process of secularization is deeply rooted in the biblical faith itself. Consequently, it arises from the influence of the church and "other movements which derive from the Christian faith."<sup>4</sup>

Following Gogarten, Cox attempts to distinguish secularization from secularism. According to Cox, secularism is an ideology, a closed system which operates like a new religion. Secularization, however, is a "necessary condition for an authentic relationship between men and nature."<sup>5</sup> In short, Cox maintains that secularism destroys the openness which secularization produces.

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<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Gogarten, Despair and Hope for Our Time, trans. by Thomas Wieser (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>Harvey Cox, The Secular City, Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-21

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 20.



From the above standpoint it may be said that secularization views Christianity as a force which must work for a better and more just society in the world. It accuses the church of being overly concerned with other-worldliness, and it takes pride in being a truly this-worldly expression of faith. Those who promote secularization avoid any public mention of God and Jesus Christ: for this would constitute the discussion of a theme which is other-worldly. As one writer has observed, "When all is said and done, secularization assumes neither the style nor the method of a biblical theology."<sup>6</sup>

#### Humanization

We have noted that the motive behind the idea of secularizing the Christian message is to make Christianity lose its religious character and work with secular ideals. We must note also that, according to its advocates, secularization is God's way of working out man's salvation in a changing world situation. Following these guidelines humanization seeks to find a relation between the gospel of salvation and "the struggle of men everywhere for their humanity."<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between secularization and humanization may be further illustrated by the fact that both are derived from the works of theologians such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Gerhard Ebeling.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Robert L. Richard, Secularization Theology (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), p. 62.

<sup>7</sup>M. M. Thomas, Salvation and Humanization, Indian Christian Thought Series No. 11 (Madras: CISRS-CLS, 1971), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>See P. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

In their attempt to see the work of God in the events of world history, these men have decided that Christianity should become a world movement which operates outside and without the framework of religion.

Humanization is motivated towards regaining 'true humanity.' Those who propagate this notion begin their arguments with the theory that man is subject to several 'dehumanizing' powers. They see man also as being put into such a situation from which he cannot be freed without outside help. They maintain that the needed help in this connection comes to man from God through Jesus Christ who is the 'new humanity.'

We must note also that the idea of humanization has been developed partly on the assumption that Christianity is a means by which Western countries dominate the world. Furthermore, western Christendom is accused of being 'paternalistic' in its attitude towards the people of the Third World. It is disappointing to note that all these notions significantly influence chiefly those who are engaged in the task of developing a Third World theology.

With a view to opposing these so-called paternalistic and imperialistic attitudes, Paulo Freire has suggested for the people of Latin America a "Pedagogy of the Oppressed."<sup>9</sup> Freire advocates the need to awaken a critical consciousness in people, which, in turn, will make it possible for them to search for their self-affirmation as responsible human beings. This process he calls "conscientization." This ideology operates on the same assumptions of humanization, and motivates the so-called exploited people themselves to fight against their oppressors.

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<sup>9</sup>Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. by M. B. Ramos (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971).

Interestingly enough, following these guidelines, the Second Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellín in 1968 proposed a theology of conscientization. The conference felt it necessary to defend the oppressed against those who allegedly exploited them.<sup>10</sup>

The World Council of Churches maintains that humanization is part and parcel of what God has done in Christ for mankind. Consequently, the church must engage in such activities which will eventually lead to the humanization of all people. According to the WCC, man participates with God in this act of humanizing. For example, it is stated in the report on "Renewal and Mission" which was presented to the Council's Uppsala Assembly in 1968 that

There is a burning relevance today in describing the mission of God, in which we participate, as the gift of a new creation which is a radical renewal of the old and the invitation to men to grow up into their full humanity in the new man, Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

It is now clear that the above report puts much emphasis on man and his humanity. It argues that man is potentially able to work with God in the process of humanization. Accordingly, it redefines the mission of the church as that of "bringing about the occasion for man's response to Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> This statement rejects the notion that the proclamation of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins is the primary mission of the church.

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<sup>10</sup>See The Church in the Present Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, ed. Louis Colonnese, 2 vols. (Washington D. C.: Latin American Bureau, U. S. Catholic Conference, 1970), 2:80-81.

<sup>11</sup>The Uppsala Report 1968 (Geneva; World Council of Churches), pp. 27-28.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

In this connection Peter Beyerhaus has observed that "the present ecumenical attempts to redefine the goal of mission in terms of humanizing the social structure reveal a decisive theological deviation at the very heart of the Christian faith."<sup>13</sup> He rightly points out that there is no place for humanization as currently taught in Christian theology and Christian mission.

Our protest against the idea of humanization does not mean that we oppose any attempt on the part of Christians to become involved in humanitarian enterprises. To be sure, the history of modern missionary movements testifies to the fact that the Christian faith has always provided enough incentive to contribute to the welfare of human society. But this attitude must be seen as one which reflects a Christian's responsible citizenship. The fact is that the Christian community does not have to exist as a church to be involved in such affairs.

Humanization is not part of the saving event in Christ. Humanness is the common possession of all human beings. Mankind does not have to be involved in any evolutionary process in order to become fully human. It is a mistaken notion that the church's endorsement of the so-called struggle against exploitation and injustice will somehow help to build a more fully human society. God's saving act in Christ does not entail the promise that the present world must be transformed into something better. On the other hand, it guarantees the believers the assurance of a perfect life in the world to come, even while they live in this world.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Peter Beyerhaus, "Mission and Humanization," International Review of Mission 60 (1971):16.

<sup>14</sup>John 6:47; 14:2; Phil. 3:12; 2 Tim. 1:12; Rev. 21:4.

We have presented sufficient evidence to show that contemporary Christianity has broken loose from its commitment to a biblical basis for its mission. Theology today has left the impression that Christianity is just another agency of good will ready to fight against social and political injustice. Consequently, in the name of social praxis, the proclamation of the good news of God's reconciling act in Christ has been almost fully left out of the missionary activity of the church.

In fact Bishop Stephen Neill calls our attention to the danger involved in the recent non-descript use of the term 'mission' and rightly chooses the term 'witness' to replace it. For he contends that "if everything is mission, nothing is mission, and we are back in the night in which all cats are gray."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, witness includes every form of Christian activity. At the same time, he explains that the church is obligated to involve in a mission to all nations. In this sense mission "simply takes the New Testament seriously, basing itself on the affirmation that Christ died for all in order that all men may die to themselves to live in him in the light of the new covenant that he has made with them in his death and resurrection."<sup>16</sup>

The above comment from Bishop Neill should serve as the antidote to the present-day theological defection. We are bound to note that theology today does not take the New Testament seriously. Consequently, as Scharlemann points out, "theology turns out to be a kind of

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<sup>15</sup>Stephen Neill, Salvation Tomorrow. The Originality of Jesus Christ and the World's Religions (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 57.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

'Christology from below.' It is in fact interested primarily in anthropology and conceives history to be the process of the humanization of man."<sup>17</sup> This point will become increasingly clear as we examine the theology of liberation.

### The Theology of Liberation

The theology of liberation is developed around man and his socio-political and economic situation. It is concerned primarily with man's existence in society at present and in the future. It operates on the assumption that "the struggle for a just society is in its own right very much a part of salvation history."<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the notion of secularization, which is aimed at a worldwide church, humanization and liberation concentrate particularly on the people of the Third World. In a limited sense the theology of liberation may be considered to be a reaction to some aspects of missionary activities in the modern era.<sup>19</sup> However, this new thinking only emerged in theology in recent times, after western colonialism had almost ended. Consequently, the definition of "liberation" has become more comprehensive. According to René Laurentin, "True liberation ought not only to destroy

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<sup>17</sup> Martin H. Scharlemann, The Ethics of Revolution, Contemporary Theology Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Gustave Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation, trans. by Inda and Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 168.

<sup>19</sup> It is true, for example, that the Spanish conquest in America and the Portuguese conquest in India first made it possible for Christian missionaries to enter these countries. Pierre Bigo, The Church and the Third World Revolution, trans. by J. M. Lyons (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), pp. 272-75.

oppressive forces and structures, but also to generate viable structures of freedom, creativity and communication. . . . Liberation must be realized at all levels: economic, political, cultural and human."<sup>20</sup>

It is true that the ideas expressed in the above definitions of liberation are worthy objectives towards which each responsible citizen must work. At the same time, we must note that never in the history of societies or nations was there a point at which at least one group of people was able to achieve these ideals fully. Any thought of reconstructing the world for an 'authentic human existence' must begin with the proper understanding of the situation which lies behind the problem in today's world, namely, that "man's will is in revolt; only as it is brought into obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit is there the kind of radical solution which exhibits what God has in mind for reconstructing the world."<sup>21</sup>

While dealing with a theology of liberation Gustavo Gutierrez observes that 'sin' is the root of all misery and injustice in this world. Accordingly, in his opinion, sin is the fundamental obstacle to (God's) kingdom. On these two premises he concludes that "the very meaning of the growth of the kingdom is also the ultimate pre-condition for a just society and a new man."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Rene Laurentin, Liberation, Development and Salvation, trans. by C. V. Quinn (New York: Orbis Books, 1972), p. xiv.

<sup>21</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, The Church's Social Responsibilities (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>Gutierrez, p. 176.

In this connection it is very important to examine the subtle way in which Gutierrez defines sin. According to him, sin is a "social historical fact, the absence of brotherhood and love in relationships among men, the breach of friendship with God and with other men, and, therefore, an interior personal fracture."<sup>23</sup> Such an interpretation of sin is intended to justify the position that salvation is liberation from economic maldistribution and social injustice. Its purpose is to combine the notion of a just society on earth with the teaching of the kingdom of God.

The optimism about building a new and just society on this earth is at the core of liberation theology, which teaches that the most essential task of the church's mission consists in helping people to regain their humanity. It does not seem to consider seriously the fact that man's rebellion against God has brought a curse upon the ground, too (Gen. 3:17b; 4:11-14). After the fall man is destined in a sense to be a 'fugitive and wanderer' on this earth. The prophets of liberation theology miss the point when they assume that a more fully human society will come into being as the consequence of man's liberation from sin, understood as economic maldistribution.

We must reckon with the fact that the cosmic scope of man's sin in the biblical sense continues to persist. On account of man's sin all of creation must face God's judgment. The enduring nature of sin in the world indicates that the "religious" thrust of salvation must take precedence over its other spheres. The world as we know it today is bound

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 175.



to disappear. The growth of the kingdom of God will culminate in the judgment of the present order of things and not in its improvement.

When we say that the religious aspect of salvation must take precedence over its other aspects, we do not intend to endorse any power which victimizes or abridges individual and/or national freedom. Our point is that the community of believers as such, without any reservations, cannot give its blessings to any kind of revolution. As Scharlemann reminds us, the question before us is not that of the need for new structures, but for a new method. The church cannot forgo its unique call to be the church.<sup>24</sup>

In its attempt to abolish injustice and to build a new society, liberation theology proposes a 'humanization' of revolution. In the name of love and justice its proponents recommend any kind of revolution, including guerilla warfare. As a case in point, Nester Paz, a seminarian who died while being involved in a guerilla war in the Bolivian jungle wrote in his campaign journal:

I want my capacity to love to increase with my ability as a guerilla . . . that is the only way of qualitatively and quantitatively improving the revolutionary impulse.<sup>25</sup>

The theology of liberation is, in sum, an attempt to motivate the church to engage fully in the struggle against social, economic and political oppression. It propagates the notion that today the mission of the church is to lead the fight against power structures in the name

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<sup>24</sup> Scharlemann, The Church's Social Responsibilities, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Choan-Seng Song, Christian Mission in Reconstruction, An Asian Analysis (New York; Orbis Books, 1977), p. 154.

of love. It claims that the lack of love among people is the reason for poverty and injustice in the world.

At this juncture we must note that liberation theology confuses God's goodness and His grace. From the day He created the universe God has established order for all creation. Accordingly God out of His goodness has instituted social and political institutions so that they may serve as His instruments to maintain "civil righteousness."<sup>26</sup> Christians must therefore obey these institutions as these are established by God the Creator. Even though governments may go wrong the Christian must submit to them knowing that the sufferings he has to endure under them are "never more than penultimate in their significance. The ultimates of the Gospel are the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation" which are characteristics of God's kingdom of grace.<sup>27</sup>

Against such liberation theology we must note also that the kind of 'revolution' which Jesus propagated was that of repentance. Repentance which leads to conversion is Christ's way of leading people into his kingdom of grace. Accordingly, "only through those who become converts are the structures of society affected. Such new beings know the extent of change, but they also trust in a God who is constant."<sup>28</sup>

The part which the church plays in liberation must be in accordance with the will of its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. The church, even

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<sup>26</sup>The Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV (11), 13 in The Book of Concord, trans. & Ed. by Theodore A. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 226.

<sup>27</sup>Scharlemann, The Church's Social Responsibilities, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup>Scharlemann, Ethics, p. 52.

in its earthly form of existence, with all its failures and weaknesses, is not just another agency to bring about revolution. The church is called, instead, to be involved in a warfare which is much more difficult than the worst kind of violent action. Jacques Ellul calls this the warfare of faith.<sup>29</sup> According to the apostle Paul the weapons of this warfare are only those of prayer, of the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, of the justice of God, and of that zeal with which the gospel of peace endows us.

#### Indigenization

Our discussion of contemporary Christian secularity so far has hinged on some recent attempts to identify the church with certain political situations. Now we must turn to more difficult issues involved in the communication of the gospel to people from a different cultural background. The effort of people of a traditional culture to respond to the gospel in the language and traditions of their own culture is called indigenization.

H. Richard Niebuhr defines culture as "'the artificial secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values."<sup>30</sup> In other words, culture constitutes a people's social heritage which is also known as its civilization.

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<sup>29</sup>Jacques Ellul, Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), p. 165.

<sup>30</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 32.

Consequently, when attempts are made to translate the Christian message into a different culture, they must be done in such a way that the message will suit the language, habits, and so forth, of the people who live in a particular environment. This is what indigenization proposes to do. That is to say, indigenization is an attempt to make the church bear the distinctive seal of the assembly of believers in Christ within a given area.

The question that confronts us then is the extent to which the Christian Church, without losing its identity, can adapt itself to the cultural setting of a particular people. An indigenous church, by definition, is bound to relate itself relevantly to existing forms of religious thought and practices. This fact is very challenging especially in the case of the churches in nations such as India where, for the most part, culture cannot be separated from some kind of non-Christian religious beliefs and practices. That being the case, we must ask whether it is at all possible to change the form of the Christian proclamation without changing the content of the Christian faith.

The development of any language arises out of the culture from which it evolves. It follows that the words which compose a language represent the cultural, philosophical and religious milieu from which they stem. The greatest difficulty in indigenization, therefore, arises whenever concepts which already have an established meaning in a given religion and/or culture are employed to communicate a different meaning.

For example, A. J. Appasamy, a pioneer of indigenous Christianity in India has suggested that, as Christianity becomes indigenous to India, the idea of "God as Mother" would find a significant place in Indian

Christian thought. Appasamy, whose father converted to the Christian faith from a strong Hindu tradition, admits that the idea of God as 'Mother' takes its origin from the ancient conception of the reproductive process which has been personified and worshipped, often with obscene rites and songs. In spite of this background, he maintains that understanding God as 'Mother' "is a beautiful way of thinking of the tender, devoted and unselfish love of God."<sup>31</sup>

Appasamy's ideas first appeared almost forty years ago, in 1942. At the same time, however, it must be pointed out that the notion about a 'feminine' nature of God has gained much attention in recent ecumenical discussions on theology. In fact, Dr. Kiyoko Takedo Cho, one of the former presidents of the World Council of Churches, emphasizes "the need for the element of the mother image with overtones of love and forgiveness in the Christian understanding of God."<sup>32</sup>

These examples we cited above from Appasamy and Cho cause us to doubt whether even the form of the Christian proclamation can be changed without any fixed standards. Apparently the former was trying to relate the gospel to the people of a particular religious orientation while the latter was addressing herself to the feminist persuasion of recent origin.

Against Appasamy's viewpoint we must state that it is perhaps better to avoid the so-called mother image of God altogether especially

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<sup>31</sup>A. J. Appasamy, The Gospel and India's Heritage (London and Madras: SPCK, 1942), p. 73.

<sup>32</sup>K. T. Cho, "Inquiry into Indigenous Cultural Energies," in Douglas J. Elwood, ed., Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p. 63.

in India since it already has wrong connotations within Hinduism. Both Appasamy and Cho are missing a most important part of the Christian faith when they say that God has to be a mother to show people compassion, forgiveness, and unselfish love. A quick glance at a concordance to the Bible will prove how the God who has revealed himself through His son Jesus Christ is loving, forgiving, and merciful, even when He is referred to as Father.

That God the Father is full of compassion, forgiveness and unselfish love is accented by Paul in his letter to the Romans. He wrote:

While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man -- though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die -- But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation (5:6-11 RSV).

One striking characteristic of the Christian message is its simplicity. In First Corinthians, Paul states that this message is "Christ and him crucified" (2:2). Furthermore, according to Paul this message does not meet the lofty expectations and rationale of either Jews or Greeks (1:22-23). Consequently, whatever changes are made in the form of presenting the gospel must conform to its content. According to modern scholarship, the content of the gospel is that

God's promises made to his people in the Old Testament are now fulfilled. The long expected Messiah has come. He is Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good and wrought mighty works by God's power; was crucified according to the power of God; was raised by God from

the dead and exalted to his right hand. He will come again for judgment.<sup>33</sup>

A widely quoted text in support of anything that is done in the name of indigenization is the one in Acts 17:23, a part of the apostle Paul's address to the Greeks at Areopagus where he mentions the inscription, "To the Unknown God." It is argued that such "indigenous religious consciousness" may be considered as "an indigenous wild olive branch to be grafted to the root."<sup>34</sup> But the God whom Paul preached is the Maker of Heaven and earth, who does not live in man-made shrines (17:24). Accordingly, it is one thing to maintain some kind of a God-consciousness, but it is quite a different thing to know God through His mighty acts. Moreover, the 'grafting' about which the apostle Paul talked in Rom. 11:24 is that of the people who come to faith by breaking away from their past and not by joining their former beliefs and practices to the Christian faith.

Our appraisal of some attempts toward indigenizing the gospel shows that there are many difficulties involved in this endeavor. It is necessary for a church in a particular area to make itself "at home" in that cultural context.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, this goal must be achieved under the absolute lordship of Christ over the church. The church must

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<sup>33</sup>A. M. Hunter, The First Epistle of Peter, Introduction and Exegesis in The Interpreters Bible 12 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 82. It was C. H. Dodd who first attempted a summary of the kerygma along these lines. See his The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936).

<sup>34</sup>K. T. Cho, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup>R. H. S. Boyd, India and the Latin Captivity of the Church (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 17.

give expression to its faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through indigenous forms of language, liturgy, chanting, dancing, music and so on. The greatest difficulty in these matters, however, arises in situations where a culture has intimate connections with some form of religion.

Indigenization of the gospel in a cultural context which is dominated by other religions, therefore, must be viewed with caution. For it includes the danger of compromising the Christian faith. The arguments of Raymond Panikkar, which he developed in his book, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, offer a case in point.<sup>36</sup> Panikkar developed a rather convincing thesis that Christ was the fulfillment of Hinduism.

In recent years another expression called "contextualization" has crept into theological vocabulary. Contextualization includes all that we discussed so far in the present chapter. According to its advocates, it is an attempt to let theology speak in the context of secularization, humanization, liberation and indigenization.

Contextualization operates on the hypothesis that "a new concept is needed in theology because a new situation demands it."<sup>37</sup> Its intentions are to let the Christian faith take root in indigenous soil. Like many other modern expressions of theology, contextualization has the blessing of the World Council of Churches and the Theological Education Fund. In the language of the Nairobi Assembly report of the WCC, the purpose of contextualization is "to discover dimensions unknown to

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<sup>36</sup>See our evaluation of Panikkar's book, *Supra*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>37</sup>D. J. Elwood, Asian Christian Theology



us before" in confessing Christ.<sup>38</sup> In other words, it is an attempt to restate the Christian faith in terms of the traditions and concepts of a given context.

Our critique of contextualization is the same as that of indigenization. The addition of this new word -- which, incidentally, is considered to be an ugly one by native English speakers -- to theological vocabulary does not make the proclamation of the gospel any easier. The gospel as it is presented in the New Testament draws our attention to the fact that sin is the root of all problems in the world. It also bears witness to God's way of solving these problems through the cross and resurrection of His Son. Consequently, the communication of the gospel can be simple even in today's world so long as the church remains a herald of God's act in Christ for mankind.

By way of review, we must state that contemporary Christian thinking emphasizes the logos aspect of the term "theology," often ignoring the theos aspect. The task of the theologian is not simply to find the allegedly similar teachings of Christianity when compared with other religions. Nor is it somehow to establish that the Christian faith is the most highly evolved form of religion. On the contrary, theology must be about the business of narrating the mighty acts of God which have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ as mankind's Messiah.

In conclusion we must note that contemporary theology hesitates to "claim finality for Jesus Christ" in everything -- to borrow Bishop Newbigin's expression. According to the bishop, to claim finality for

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<sup>38</sup>"Confessing Christ Today," (A Plenary Document), in Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975 (Geneva: WCC, 1976), p. 46.

Christ "is to claim that commitment to him is the way in which men can become truly aligned to the ultimate end for which all things were made."<sup>39</sup> Commitment to the absolute Lordship of Christ issues forth from conversion. Conversion in this context is "such a turning round that, in the fellowship of those similarly committed, one is enabled to act in history in a way that bears witness to and carries forward God's real purpose for the creation."<sup>40</sup>

The biblical synonym to the word 'conversion' is repentance (μετάνοια). The theme of repentance has been at the heart of the Old Testament prophecies. It demanded of man that he turn from his sinful ways in obedience and faithfulness to God. In New Testament times John the Baptist announced that repentance, followed by baptism and faith in the gospel, was the means for appropriating the kingdom of God. With these ideas in the background, let us turn to the New Testament understanding of the expression "kingdom of God."

#### The Kingdom of God

Discussions concerning the kingdom of God have occupied a central place in modern Christian theology.<sup>41</sup> It is a theme which runs through the length and breadth of the Bible. In fact, it "belongs to that plan of our heavenly Father which He designed from all eternity as

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<sup>39</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, The Finality of Christ (Richmond, Va: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 115.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>41</sup>For an appraisal of modern discussions on the kingdom of God, see Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1963).

our way of salvation."<sup>42</sup> Consequently, "to grasp what is meant by the kingdom of God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation."<sup>43</sup>

As far as the New Testament is concerned, our Lord was the one who gave full clarity to the phrase "kingdom of God" ( βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ).<sup>44</sup> It was central to his teachings and life on this earth. Indeed, his teachings were designed to teach people how difficult it was to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:20; 7:21). His parables pointed to the "secrets" ( τὰ μυστήρια ) about the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:11). The purpose of his miracles was to show that the kingdom of God had come upon those who followed him (Matt. 12:28). Furthermore, he taught his disciples to pray for the coming of this kingdom (Matt. 6:10; Luke 18:7). He exhorted them to be alert for the consummation of the kingdom (Matt. 24:44; Luke 12:35-37). But he also made it clear to the people that by themselves and with only their resources they could neither hasten nor delay the coming of God's kingdom (Mark 4:26-29).

Now we must ask the question, "What does the term 'kingdom of God' mean?" Modern scholarship has attempted to answer this question in many different ways. People like Adolf Harnack argued that the kingdom of God is "God himself in his power." That is to say, it is an inward

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<sup>42</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>43</sup>John Bright, The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1958), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup>For the Old Testament and Rabbinic background of the concept, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, God's Rule and Kingdom, 2nd ed. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), pp. 1-76.

power which lays hold of the individual soul by coming into it.<sup>45</sup> Harnack understood the idea of the kingdom as limited to the religious realm of life.

Others like Albert Schweitzer have maintained that the kingdom of God is an altogether future and supernatural happening which will occur at the end of history. In his opinion Jesus kept as a secret from his contemporaries the fact that he was the Messiah, even though he knew that he was the one who would be revealed as the Messiah at the coming of the kingdom in the future. In other words, according to Schweitzer, Jesus was preparing the people for the coming of the kingdom, expecting it to break in during his lifetime.<sup>46</sup>

C. H. Dodd came to the conclusion that the kingdom of God had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In his viewpoint the mystery of the kingdom of God is "not only that the 'eschaton' is now a matter of actual experience, but that it is experienced in the paradoxical form of the suffering and death of God's representative."<sup>47</sup> Consequently, those who reject Jesus reject also the kingdom of God.

In recent years a secular interpretation has been given to the concept of the kingdom. It views the teachings about the kingdom as outlining an ideal pattern for human society. Its proponents think that

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<sup>45</sup>Adolf Harnack, What is Christianity?, trans. by T. B. Saunders (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 56.

<sup>46</sup>Albert Schweitzer, The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity, trans. by L. A. Garrard (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), pp. 102-107.

<sup>47</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, Rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 59.

the New Testament provides the basis for such an interpretation. They maintain that the kingdom of God is a classless society, a new social order which will eventually help solve all economic and social inequities. We have referred to some of these tendencies in the first part of the present chapter.

Now we must focus our attention on the New Testament meaning of the kingdom of God. The Greek term βασιλεία is usually translated 'kingdom!' But it is a widely accepted position that when the phrase, βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ( τῶν ουρανῶν ) occurs in the New Testament it must be interpreted against the Aramaic understanding of the word malkuth. Malkuth as an abstract noun means "kingship," "kingly rule," "reign" or "sovereignty." Accordingly, the expression the 'malkuth of God' connotes the fact that God reigns as king.<sup>48</sup> Thus it is proper to say that the kingdom of God indicates God's kingship and His kingly rule. In this sense the kingdom of God means His rule of grace. (see also Ps. 145:11, 13).

The word kingdom also means the "authority" or the "right to rule," G. E. Ladd makes this point, basing his case on Luke 19:11-12.<sup>49</sup> There it is stated that Jesus was talking to his disciples who supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. Jesus told them the parable of a nobleman who went into a far country to receive a βασιλείαν and then return. Ladd explains that the nobleman went away not to get an area over which to rule, but to get the needed authority to rule, just

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>49</sup>George Eldon Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 20-21.

as Herold the Great had to go to the Roman Senate to be made king of Judaea. But as we noted earlier, when the New Testament speaks of the kingdom of God, it refers to God's rule of grace.

Against this background it is possible to list some of the distinguishing features of the kingdom of God. For that purpose let us note the observations made by Dr. Scharlemann in his book, Proclaiming the Parables.<sup>50</sup> The salient points are the following:

According to Scharlemann, grace is the first characteristic of the kingdom of God. The word [God's] grace is used here to emphasize the fact that man can contribute absolutely nothing to the coming of the kingdom. God's kingdom is a manifestation of His undeserved favor. Accordingly, man can neither hinder nor help its arrival.

Secondly, the kingdom of God indicates that God has chosen to dwell with His people in mercy and forgiveness. In other words, it is a realm into which the people of God may enter purely because of God's own choice. God, for example, redeemed the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, and on that account made them the people of His presence. In the same manner God, through Christ's work of redemption, has created the community of believers which may be called the new Israel.

Thirdly, on the basis of the above it may be said that the kingdom of God is a community set apart to do God's will. For that purpose it is also given the name "kingdom of priests." It follows that the community is built on a special relationship between itself and God as well as among its members.

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<sup>50</sup>Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables, pp. 34-36.

Finally, the unique relationship which exists between God and this community is called a "covenant relationship." Consequently the members of this community are a covenant people. The word covenant (ברית) stands for 'unilateral action' on God's part. In sum, the kingdom of God may be understood as the realm of grace in which people who, out of God's undeserved favor, have been called into a covenant relationship to live in His presence.

At this point we must examine the apostle Paul's view of the kingdom of God. The apostle refers to this concept approximately ten times in his epistles. In some of these instances he indicates that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Other references speak about those who will come into the kingdom of God and why they will enter it.<sup>52</sup> In two places Paul comes close to providing a definition of the kingdom as he says that "the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17); and that "the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power!" (1 Cor. 4:20).

According to Paul the kingdom of God comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup> That through the death of Jesus God manifested His righteousness and condemned sin is a well-established thought in Paul (Rom. 3:25; 8:3). In this connection Dodd points out that the manifestation of righteousness of God and His judgment upon sin

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<sup>51</sup>1 Cor. 6:9-11; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5.

<sup>52</sup>1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8.

<sup>53</sup>Schweitzer, p. 157.

are essential elements in the idea of the kingdom of God.<sup>54</sup> Since in baptism the believers share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they also inherit the kingdom.

In the epistle to the Colossians, the apostle speaks about the kingdom of God's "Beloved Son," that is, the kingdom of Jesus Christ (1:13). Only the context can help us determine the meaning of this phrase, since this way of speaking is not common in the New Testament. In the present context Paul contrasts the kingdom of Christ to the 'dominion of darkness.' He explains that the believers have been transferred from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son since they have been redeemed in Christ and their sins have been forgiven (1:14). In this sense the kingdom of the Son is synonymous to the kingdom of God.

What we have discussed so far pertains to God's kingdom of grace. Now we must note that God's kingdom of grace is different from His kingdom of power. The latter concept may be called "divine providence which means that God actually preserves and governs all individual creatures through His omnipresence and omnipotence."<sup>55</sup> That is to say, the God who created the universe continues to preserve it and sustain it.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians that "all things cohere in Christ" (Col. 1:17). This statement means that no form of existence is possible without Christ. Accordingly, secular institutions such as government also are under the lordship of Christ. In other words, God

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<sup>54</sup>Dodd, p. 58.

<sup>55</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 Vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I:483.



through Christ exercises His power over our secular life also. However, the secular kingdoms do not stand under the Lordship of Christ in the same way in which the kingdom of grace does.<sup>56</sup>

The kingdom of God's power is a continuation of the divine order of creation. This kingdom is set for the conduct of an orderly life in this world. Accordingly, God may use non-believers as His servants to execute His rule of power. Paul advises us that we must obey them for the sake of our conscience as well as to avoid God's wrath. Since they serve God's purpose in the secular realm the apostle calls those in authority "the ministers of God" (Rom. 13:4, 5). The kingdom of grace, on the other hand, operates on God's work of redemption, and only the believers enter it.

Our discussion on the kingdom of God has shown that it can not be understood as a territory or a geographical entity. Rather, it refers to God's rule of grace. Consequently, it is intimately connected with God's undeserved love which He expressed in His Son Jesus Christ. Christ is God's agent in establishing this kingdom of grace. The church as the body of Christ is the locale of God's rule of grace at work in word and sacrament. Furthermore, it is in the church as the visible expression of the community of believers that God's grace and His relationship with His people are experienced by the means of grace. On that basis we shall try to analyze the concept of the community of believers.

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<sup>56</sup>Paul Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, trans. by R. C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 79.

The Community of Believers

In the fourth chapter we outlined the essential nature and function of the church.<sup>57</sup> There we stated that the church, as the community of believers, is called to declare to all the world the message of God's work of redemption in Christ. Now we must examine the significance of the community of believers in the context of recent trends in theology.

Little needs to be said to substantiate the fact that the philosophy of Karl Marx has influenced much of contemporary theology. Marx viewed all religious movements as being of no avail for solving the miseries in the world. He considered religion to be the "opiate of the people." It is unfortunate to note that in the opinion of many theologians Christianity is the means by which to bring about the Marxist utopia of a classless society.

Marxism claims to have obtained its revolutionary ideas from the book of Acts. Friedrich Engels, a collaborator of Marx, found all the ingredients of the socialist movement in the early Christian community. According to Engels, "the history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working class movement."<sup>58</sup> He maintained that Christianity was the form in which socialism was possible. He reached the conclusion that both Christianity and socialism were originally a movement of the oppressed people, that both preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery, that both are "persecuted,

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<sup>57</sup>Supra, pp. 135-47.

<sup>58</sup>F. Engels, "On the History of Early Christianity," in Marx and Engels on Religion (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1957), p. 313.

discriminated and despised," and that both "forge victoriously, irresistably ahead."<sup>59</sup>

Now it must be clear why contemporary theology makes use of Marxist ideology as a major source of its formulations. For Marxism is intent on awakening among the people an ethos to establish a classless society in which all people share the same economic and political status. Unlike Marxism, the kingdom of God about which the New Testament speaks does not anticipate such a utopia. On the contrary, the yardstick of the kingdom is the relationship between God and His creation. This relationship again is a gift from God which in His gracious will extends to the world through His Son Jesus Christ.

Once we agree that the grace of God is His undeserved favor toward mankind we will be able to understand the nature of the community of believers. An appreciation of God's grace as manifested in Christ must also help us to realize that it is not part of God's plan to transform the present world as it is into His kingdom. This is precisely where Christian theology must differ from all secular ideologies.<sup>60</sup> We shall illustrate this point the following way.

First we must acknowledge the fact that, according to the New Testament, the primary task of the church is to declare to the world the message of salvation which God achieved through Jesus Christ. This is in accordance with our Lord's command (Matt. 28:18-20; 24:14). Further, this has been the fundamental objective for which the early Christians

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 313-43.

<sup>60</sup>Supra, 153-57.

came together as an assembly of believers. This Christian message of salvation has been at the center of the apostolic preaching. We need only to observe the zeal with which the apostle Paul took the proclamation of the gospel as a privilege when he says that he became all things to all men that he might "by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

Secondly, we must emphasize the fact that the word "mission," as it is used in contemporary theology, is not a New Testament term. Rather the New Testament speaks about the church's responsibility to witness ( μαρτυρεῖν ) and to evangelize ( εὐαγγελίζεσθαι ). The witnessing and evangelizing activity of the church is "a direct continuation of the proclamation of Jesus."<sup>61</sup> In this sense the content of Christian proclamation is not empty jargon but the powerful word of God which accomplishes what it says.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the activities of the community of believers must contribute to the effective witnessing of the word.

As the third point, we must state that the community of believers must design its task with the proper understanding of the biblical teaching on eschatology. The strength of this community, therefore, lies in the bold confession of the resurrection from the dead and the life everlasting. Consequently, building a "new humanity" with a view to establishing a just society on earth is not the real concern of the community of believers. The church in its earthly form of existence is not free from the struggles against inequalities and injustice. While the

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<sup>61</sup>Gerhard Friedrich, " εὐαγγέλιον ," TDNT 2:278.

<sup>62</sup>Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 1 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2; 8:9.

Christian community itself suffers from such weaknesses, it cannot maintain the notion that a new order of things on this earth will have any lasting value.

Finally we must note that the church exists in the world as a corporate entity for the specific purpose of confession, worship, proclamation and welfare ( *διακονία* ). This is how the community of believers can show that the kingdom of God is in their midst (Luke 17:21). The dawning of the kingdom is not a time for social upheaval but of repentance and conversion. Turning in faith to the Lord of the universe and of the church is the way to restore the broken relationship between God and man. The return of man to God and the restoration of a peaceful relationship between them are the purpose of Christ's coming to the world as God incarnate.

#### Christ Is All and In All

The goal we set for the present study has been to work toward a corrective to the problems in some recent interpretations of Christ's person and work. Our analyses of these issues have shown that theology today operates from a wrong starting point. In other words, it develops its arguments from current ideologies and then attempts to find Scripture portions which might seemingly support such points of view.

While dealing with some of these recent speculative thoughts at some length we have suggested that Christian theology must be about the business of narrating the mighty acts of God which have been fulfilled in mankind's Messiah, Jesus Christ. We have pointed out that the notion of a classless society is no counterpart to the biblical concept of the

kingdom of God and the community of believers. Now we must examine how our findings will provide a proper understanding of Christ.

We have already noted that, according to Paul, Christ and the community of believers have between them a head-body relationship (Col. 1:18).<sup>63</sup> In First Corinthians Paul writes that Christ is the foundation ( θεμέλιον ) of the church (3:11). Both these instances indicate that there can be no Christ without the church. Such is the intimate and vital connection between Christ and Christian community.

Generally speaking, a superstructure will suggest the quality of the foundation on which it is built. Accordingly when an edifice appears in distorted condition, the status of its foundation must be seriously questioned. We have already referred to several trends in contemporary Christian secularism which are potentially dangerous to the truth claims of the Christian faith. Hence the basis of such tendencies which jeopardize the faith must be scrutinized and corrected.

We have two major arguments against the Christology of today's secularized version of theology. The first is specifically against the tendency to find the Christ-Principle in all religions. Our second disagreement concerns the growing consensus within theological circles to wrongly interpret the meaning of salvation. It is our view that both of these trends in contemporary theology are the consequences of an inadequate appreciation of the incarnation of Christ.

In passing we must note that the wrong interpretations of Christ's person and work are the result partly of the recent argument that the

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<sup>63</sup>Supra, pp. 101-102.

Bible is just another document in the history of religions. Furthermore, theologians like Karl Barth have stated that "it is when we look at Jesus Christ that we know decisively that God's deity does not exclude, but includes His humanity," and that "God does not exist without man."<sup>64</sup> Such undue emphasis on humanity has led to the perversion of Christianity into a humanistic syncretism.

The tendency to find Christ in all religions is advanced largely by those who are in some way engaged in the study of comparative religion. They operate on the notion that religions are the attempt on man's part to search for the absolutes. Accordingly they propagate the view that potentially all religions lead men to eternal salvation. Thus they accuse traditional Christianity of being particularistic in claiming that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone.

The greatest danger we see in theology today is that of the failure to distinguish between God's revelation and His act of salvation. A statement from Paul Tillich may be cited as a case in point. According to Tillich, man

is given a revelation, a particular kind of experience which always implies saving powers. One never can separate revelation and salvation. There are revealing and saving powers in all religions. God has not left himself unwitnessed.<sup>65</sup>

We must go back to Tillich's statement that "one can never separate revelation from salvation." In this connection it is appropriate to remember his view that the truth Christianity seeks to expound is also

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<sup>64</sup>Karl Barth, The Humanity of God (Richmond, Va: John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 49-50.

<sup>65</sup>Paul Tillich, The Future of Religions (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 81.

present in other religions. According to Tillich, "the question of salvation can be asked only if salvation is already at work, no matter how fragmentarily."<sup>66</sup> Obviously the distinction between God's general revelation and His once-and-for-all act of redemption in Christ is not one of his major concerns. In our second chapter we have examined a similar proposition from Tillich that "Jesus is the Christ for us, namely, for those who participate in the historical continuum which he determines in its meaning."<sup>67</sup>

There is perhaps only one reason for such failure to distinguish between God's general revelation and the unique incarnation in Jesus Christ. That is, human nature does not want to acknowledge the fact that man is a sinner. As long as this attitude prevails it is simply not possible to believe and understand the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. We do not need to expound the reality that general revelation in the Biblical sense is that act of the Divine by which He exhibits His goodness to all of creation. Neither should we debate the point that mankind may become aware of God's goodness apart from the knowledge of Jesus Christ offered in the church.

However, the grace of God which leads to eternal life is distinct from His goodness. It is a grace which forgives sins for the sake of Christ. This grace we described earlier as characteristic of the kingdom of God. The embodiment of God's grace is Christ, and in this sense Jesus is the embodiment of the kingdom of God.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly we have

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<sup>66</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 Vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2:80.

<sup>67</sup>Supra, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup>Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables, p. 35.



no right whatsoever to diminish the crucially important role of Jesus Christ in the divine economy of salvation.

This is where we are able to see the distinction between revelation and salvation. Salvation in the New Testament sense may be called a "special revelation" which has universal application. That is why the church has been commissioned by its Lord to proclaim the gospel to all the world. As the apostle Paul defines it the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the only way to God's kingdom.

The second issue we must refute is the notion that God's act of salvation is co-existent with world history. This ideology operates on the assumption that salvation for the whole world is progressively revealed and man cooperates with God for its fulfillment. This position is characteristic particularly of those who interpret the concept of the kingdom of God in a secular way. Accordingly, they apply to Christ new names such as "the man for others," "the New Humanity" and "the Liberator."

Those who view Christ in these ways interpret also wrongly sin and its impact on creation. In fact they define sin to be "exploitation," economic inequalities and social injustice. Accordingly, they understand salvation as humanization, freedom, equality of all people and justice in the present world. They fail to acknowledge that man's sin has caused the breaking of his relationship with his creator.

The New Testament does not describe Jesus as the New Man and the bringer of the New Humanity. Rather, in the sacred writings we meet the pre-existent Son of God, who, through his cross and resurrection,

achieved true freedom for us, freedom from sin and its consequences. Christ has redeemed humanity from eternal damnation. This redemption is appropriated to the individual by baptism, as he is brought to faith in Jesus Christ. He must always be mindful of the fact that it is God who saves man.

God's message to the people of the world is Christ. The task of the theologian in every age, therefore, is to proclaim "Christ and him crucified." We must either acknowledge him as the "Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world," or reject him and subject ourselves to God's condemnation. To those who acknowledge him as the Son of God he promises a share in his kingdom. They are kept as the community of believers in the world. As his church they are preserved from becoming something of the world just as their Lord is not of the world.

#### Summary

In this chapter we have attempted to highlight some ideologies which govern much of contemporary theology. For that purpose we have pointed out some areas where attempts have been made to accommodate secular ideologies to biblical propositions. We have indicated that the greatest danger in modern theology lies in its attempt to update the message of the Bible to suit the present world situation. We have argued that while people's situation in life changes, the basic issue which mankind must confront does not change. We stated that the broken relationship between man and his Creator is the cause of disorder, unrest and injustice in today's world. The solution to this problem, therefore, lies in the restoration of that relationship.

We have concluded the present chapter by stating that the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way to solve human miseries. Unending discussions about 'love,' 'liberation,' and 'new humanity' do not help improve the world situation. What the world needs most is the repeated assurance that God is in control of the universe and that He has already worked out His plan of salvation in His Son Jesus Christ. The community of believers live in anticipation of experiencing fully the life of salvation. The total manifestation of such life will be realized at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Only believers can look forward to the coming again of Christ, since they alone accept the fact that God has reconciled the world to Himself in Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of our study was to provide a Scriptural answer to some of the questions raised in contemporary Christian theology. We focused our attention on a few issues relating to modern interpretations of Christ's person and work. In order to evaluate these recent attempts at reconstructing Christology we studied one specific text from the New Testament, namely, Colossians 1:15-20.

We have worked with the conviction that when the source and norm of theology change, the content of theological conclusions also changes. We have noted that a radical change in methodology has been the reason for many a struggle in theology today. We reached the conclusion that the clear and basic truth of the Christian Gospel is obscured and potentially destroyed in recent attempts to interpret Christ's person and work to suit the categories of different religions, cultures and politics.

Our survey of some issues in contemporary Christology has helped to highlight some serious misconceptions in theology today. We have seen that in the modern era not only the redemptive significance of Christ's work for the whole world but also his very person have come under attack. Theologians have taken the liberty to deny the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as God's Messiah. Many of them have interpreted him as a spiritual power or principle which is present in every man's conscience or in some cosmic or even social process.

Another problem we have confronted is the so-called "Christology from below," in which man and his situation in life are the criteria on the basis of which theological statements are made. Consequently, it is said that what the world today needs the most is a "functional Christology." The proponents of this kind of thinking maintain that the only real task of the church is to become involved in the fight against class and race hatreds as well as social and political oppression. Their motto is to help establish an equal and just social order among peoples and nations.

Against this background we have attempted in the third and fourth chapters an exegetical analysis and synthesis of the great Christological hymn in the apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians (1:15-20). Our intent was to analyze in depth the apostle's teaching on Christ's person and work. With a view to appreciating the profound nature of Pauline Christology we have investigated also the historical context of Colossians and the theological issues to which the letter was originally addressed.

Our analysis of the key phrases in the Christological hymn of Colossians has produced two results. First, we showed that the apostle made use of these phrases to emphasize Christ's lordship over the entire universe. Christ, according to Paul, is the agent of God's creation. Accordingly, there is no life nor existence without Christ. Christ is both the source and the goal of everything that has been created. The whole creation also coheres in Christ.

Secondly, we have seen that Christ has an even greater role in God's act of redemption. Christ achieved this redemption through his cross and resurrection. Our study has shown that this unique act of God

in Christ is better understood in terms of reconciliation, or a restitution by re-creation into the previous order of things.

Reconciliation implies reestablishing a working relationship between two parties. The relationship between God and man was broken by man's sin. Sin brought God's curse on all of creation. Through the cross Christ has paid the penalty for such sin. In this way, the relationship between God and man has been restored. This new relationship is appropriated to the individual by baptism as he is brought into faith in Jesus Christ.

The church exists as the community of people who have by grace through faith been reconciled to God through Christ. She is the visible expression of God's new creation, because her members have been reborn by baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. In this community believers share a life in Christ. It is in the church that the Word of God is proclaimed and the sacraments administered. The members of the community grow together in the grace of God and the forgiveness of their sins and in love and service to each other.

The church exists also as a community set apart to proclaim to all the world the good news of God's redemption in Christ. In this way the church occupies a unique position in God's creation. The church is the body of Christ. As such it is the place in which the great mystery of God's salvation is revealed and exhibited. Moreover, this community is entrusted with the authority to forgive sins.

In our study we also dealt with the concept of the cosmic powers. We have concluded that these are real powers and must therefore be resisted. We noted that they belong to the realm of chaos and not of

cosmos. The redemption of these powers was not contemplated in God's act of reconciliation. Rather, through his cross, Christ has stripped them of their power. Accordingly, their domination in its fullness over creation has been brought to an end.

We have developed the theme of the cosmic Christ from the fact that Christ is Lord of both creation and the church. On that basis we have stated that the theme of the cosmic Christ is as old as the New Testament. The New Testament illustrates that the cosmic scope of Christ's person and work cannot be separated from the historical person of the Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, the person and work of Christ do not change although the life situations of people change.

In sharp contrast to the above conclusions, much of contemporary theology assumes the possibility of building a utopia on earth in the name of the kingdom of God. We concluded that theology today does not take seriously the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It does not want to emphasize the finality of Christ in everything. Contemporary interpretations of Christ picture him as a revolutionary of his time who worked against the power structures of that day, both religious and political.

Furthermore, we pointed out that contemporary theology does not fully consider the fact that man is a sinner. Whenever it refers to the idea of sin, it speaks about exploitation in terms of both economic and social injustice. Accordingly, its concept of salvation is different. It concludes that the role of the church is to seek radical changes in society. Contemporary theology thus motivates the church to become yet another agent in the so-called struggle against socio-economic and political problems in the world, its task being to sensitize and conscientize the poor.

It is our position that the Christian church today is engaged in a fight for its very existence. This struggle must continue as long as factions within the church disclaim the supremacy of Christ in everything. The church must be constantly reminded of the fact that it constitutes the body of Christ on earth. Its mission in the world is primarily that of bringing others to that knowledge of Christ which alone leads to salvation. Any activity in which the church engages must be tested invariably against the will of its head.

In conclusion, we must state that the church is the locale where the powers of the kingdom are at work. It exists in every age under the absolute Lordship of Christ. This community grows in a unique relationship with God. Through the means of grace the Spirit leads the community of believers to its appointed goal. Until the parousia the church will continue to exist in the world as a corporate entity for the specific purpose of confession, worship, proclamation and welfare. This is how the community of believers shows that the powers of the kingdom of God are at work in its midst.



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