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MODERN CHRISTOLOGIES AND MARY'S PLACE THEREIN: DOGMATIC ASPECT

Although it runs the risk of being stigmatized as "Denzinger Theology"—and that of the most reactionary kind, I should like to begin this talk by citing certain formerly well-known items from the Decree *Lamentabili*, issued by the Holy Office in July of 1907 as part of Pius X's response to the Modernist crisis. Propositions twenty-seven to thirty-eight of that Decree deal with the Christ. Six of those propositions read as follows:

1. The doctrine about Christ, which Paul, John and the Councils of Nicea, Ephesus and Chalcedon hand on, is not that which Jesus Himself taught but rather that which Christian consciousness conceived about Jesus (Prop. 31; DSch 2031).

2. The natural sense of the Gospel texts is not able to be reconciled with that which our theologians teach about the consciousness and infallible knowledge of Jesus Christ (Prop. 32; DSch 2032).

3. It is evident to anyone who is not led by preconceived opinions that Jesus either professed error about the proximate messianic coming, or that the greater part of his doctrine contained in the Synoptic Gospels lacks authenticity (Prop. 33; DSch 2033).

4. The critic is not able to assert for Christ a knowledge circumscribed by no limit unless he makes an hypothesis, which historically is hardly able to be conceived and which is repugnant to the moral sense, namely that Christ as man had the knowledge of God and nevertheless did not wish to communicate the knowledge of so many things to his disciples and posterity (Prop. 34; DSch 3434).

5. Christ did not always have consciousness (awareness) of His messianic dignity (Prop. 35; DSch 3435).

6. The doctrine about the expiatory death of Christ is not evangelical, but only Pauline (Prop. 38; DSch 3438).

The explanatory note of the thirty-second edition of Denzinger (the Denzinger-Schönmetzer edition) on the *Lamentabili* reads as follows:

Mens huius Decreti vero non adeo est condemnare propositiones de facto prolatas, sed potius statuere "in abstracto" propositiones, quae, "prout sonant," reprobare debent; — Neque Decretum ullam censuram theologicam determinatam apponit.

In other words, the propositions are to be rejected "*prout sonant*" (as they sound), but no specific theological note of condemnation is attached to them. We may say that they were listed as a warning about positions to be avoided, at least in the unnuanced form in which the Decree presents them.

I have cited them here, not for the purpose of putting much of what follows under the "Modernist cloud"—something which has been done too uncritically, too often, and by too many in recent years—but rather because I find them, knowingly or unknowingly, to have anticipated a line of development pursued in much, if not most, recent Christological speculation. What I mean is this. Each of those rejected propositions speaks either of the consciousness or self-awareness of Jesus or of the difficulty of reconciling the "Synoptic Jesus" with what we call the "Chalcedonian Christ." And it is precisely those two points, viz., the knowledge Jesus had of Himself and of His mission and of the meaning and value for our age of the Chalcedonian definition, which appear, in various forms, to be "center stage" in the Christological discussions of our own time. The position one takes *vis-à-vis* those two points makes a profound difference in how one views the "pre-Easter Jesus" or the so-called "Jesus of history," and, as a consequence, determines the view one will hold about the connection between Jesus' own life and preaching and the post-Paschal confessions of faith in Jesus as Christ, Lord, Son of God and Savior.

I shall try to illustrate what I mean by selecting the works of six men and attempting to see how they view the pre-Easter Jesus. I do not claim that they are representative of *all* modern Christologies. In fact, they are not since they are all Catholics and not even fully representative of all Catholic writing on the matter at hand. What will be presented is not even completely representative of all their own work in Christology, since I must limit myself to just a portion of their written works and since

there are many aspects of their thought which time does not permit us to treat. They are, on the other hand, not *sui generis* and each of the works, with possibly one exception, must be considered significant in the field. The men and their works are: Walter Kasper, *Jesus The Christ*;¹ Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*;² Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*;³ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*;⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*;⁵ and Karl Rahner and Wilhelm Thüsing, *A New Christology*.⁶

Each of these works explicitly adheres to the Chalcedonian Decree, although each also makes some effort to interpret it in the light of the overall Christological approach taken by the author or authors. But, because of the explicit affirmation of Chalcedon, we may be permitted to shorten our treatment of the works by half, limiting ourselves to dealing with their treatment of the knowledge Jesus had of Himself and of His mission. It will help, however, to keep the Chalcedonian Decree in view obliquely, as it were, mindful that the positions one adopts concerning His self-awareness must, at the very least, enter into dialogue with the "one person in two natures" doctrine of that Council.

A. *Walter Kasper*

Kasper's is the most "traditional" of the works to be treated. Near the conclusion of his book, he writes:

Much would have to be said about its (i.e. the hypostatic union's) consequence for Jesus' human knowing and willing. There has been a good deal of discussion in the last few years about Jesus' psychology in this sense. In the light of our previous reflections we can be

¹ Kasper (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); hereafter simply *Kasper*.

² Boff (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979); hereafter simply *Boff*.

³ Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978); hereafter simply *Sobrino*.

⁴ Schillebeeckx (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); hereafter *Schillebeeckx*.

⁵ Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1978); hereafter *Foundations*.

⁶ Rahner-Thüsing (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); hereafter *Rahner-Thüsing*.

brief. For all considerations lead always to the same fundamental maxim: the greater the union with God, the greater the intrinsic reality of the man. Precisely because (and not despite the fact that) Jesus knew himself wholly one with the Father, he had at the same time a completely human consciousness, asked human questions, grew in age and wisdom (cf. Lk 2:52). His consciousness of being one with the Father was therefore not a representational conceptual knowledge, but a sort of fundamental disposition and basic attitude which found concrete realization in the surprising situations in which Jesus became aware in the concrete of what God's will is.⁷

Thus, for Kasper, Jesus always knew who and what He was as Son of God and Messiah, but He knew it in a way that was truly human, i.e. capable of development, deepening, and explication. He knew this not as one knows an idea, but rather as we normally know ourselves—"instinctively" we might say, naturally and operationally—a knowledge that becomes self-reflective only as the events of life and human growth necessitate such self-reflection. As Kasper himself notes (cf. note 60, p. 248), this position is closely alligned to that of Karl Rahner in his important essay "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," which was first published in 1961.⁸

What Kasper has written earlier in his work is faithful to his conclusion. Although he writes that "we may assume that Jesus had been a member of John's baptismal movement, and accepted its leader's eschatological message,"⁹ he, nevertheless, rejects any form of adoptionism in the baptismal scene, stating that "His (i.e. Jesus') history and his fate are the history (not the coming to be) of his being, its ripening and self-interpretation."¹⁰ He rejects the position which would view Jesus as expecting an imminent end of the world and comments in that re-

⁷ Kasper, 248.

⁸ K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, V (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966) 193 ff.

⁹ Kasper, 66.

¹⁰ Kasper, 165.

gard: "If that were so, it would have far-reaching consequences both for his personal claim to authority and for the truth and validity claimed for his whole message."¹¹

In respect to Jesus' awareness of His coming death and its meaning, Kasper holds that Jesus was both aware that death would be the outcome of His mission and that this death would be of saving significance.

. . . the idea that his sacrifice of his life was a service for his fellows, just as all his activity had been, must have forced itself on Jesus. The late Jewish theologoumena about the representative and expiatory death of the just man pointed in the same direction. The fact that Jesus did not directly claim the title servant of God any more than those of Messiah and Son of God does not show that he did not know himself to be the servant of God who served and suffered for many. His whole life had that character, and there is no evidence against, but much in favour of, the claim that he maintained this view even in death; in other word, that he saw his death as a representative and saving service to many.¹²

This awareness of His death and its meaning manifested itself, says Kasper, in the eschatological climate of the last meal Jesus had with his disciples, perhaps even verbally in the terms of laying down his life for the many (cf. p. 121), although Kasper makes no direct mention of the Eucharistic institution at the Last Supper.

In short, Kasper deals well with the two implicit problems facing him: that of providing a reasonable framework within which one may fit some of the results of the self-styled historical-critical school of biblical exegesis and that of remaining true to the Chalcedonian format which, by all traditional understanding, demands not only an ontological unity but a psychological unity in Jesus while respecting the distinctive operations of the two natures. What Kasper does not do particularly well is provide—even in outline—a framework within which one might develop a "history of Jesus' self-awareness." He posits in

¹¹ *Kasper*, 78.

¹² *Kasper*, 120.

general terms a developmental model for Jesus' human self-understanding, but makes little effort to give us any idea of those "moments" or events in life which deepen or develop this apparently innate self-awareness. This can be seen especially in his failure to connect the use of *Abba* by Jesus with his own discussion of Jesus' Sonship (cf. pp. 80 and 104-111). Now, admittedly, the sources for constructing a psychology of Jesus' self-awareness are limited indeed, but if one is going to go that path at all, it is possible that there is more data available than Kasper or others are willing to admit.

B. *Leonardo Boff*

Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian Franciscan, did postgraduate studies in Germany and is one of the theologians at the forefront of applying the insights of the Theology of Liberation to the traditional tracts in theology. For that reason, his contribution in Christology is doubly important, viz. both for Christology itself as a general tract and for the Liberation Theology, since ultimately there will survive no true Theology of Liberation unless the particular concerns of that movement can be traced, at least indirectly, to the being and work of Jesus.

Like Kasper, Boff would appear to approach his Christology inductively, leaving the treatment of the Infancy Narratives and of the Chalcedonian definition to the final part of his work. For Boff, indeed, the inductive method would appear to give very limited information about Jesus, were Boff himself consistent in his approach to the historical value he attributes to the Gospel accounts. Early on in his work, he makes the following striking neo-Bultmanian statements:

The Gospels contain little of the historical Jesus (what he was like and how he lived) but a great deal concerning the reaction of faith among the first Christians who reflected on the words of Christ and compared them with the vital situations of their milieu.¹³

The Gospels are not simply books concerning Jesus. They are pri-

¹³ Boff, 34.

marily books that reflect the traditions and the dogmatic development of the primitive church.¹⁴

. . . we may say that the tradition of the primitive community preserved of Jesus only that which represented some function in the life of faith of the respective community.¹⁵

Despite these assertions, Boff apparently has no great difficulty in describing the psychological development of Jesus in respect to Himself and His mission. Thus, he writes:

Based on historical data, however, we can say this: Christ, at least at the end of his life, had a clear awareness of his mission to liberate people from all alienation; he believed that with himself the time had come for the breakthrough of the kingdom of God and that with his presence and activity this new order of things had already begun to ferment and manifest itself.¹⁶

It would seem that, for Boff, what Jesus expected early-on was the imminent end of the world (cf. p. 71) and saw his role as preparing for it. Gradually He came to realize that His own death as a result of His preaching was a real possibility. Citing Mark 9:27 ff and Luke 9:37 ff, Boff envisions this awareness as being provoked by what he calls the "so-called Galilean crisis":

In the apocalyptic atmosphere in which Jesus lived, it was believed that the breakthrough of the kingdom would take place after a great battle between the forces of good and evil. At the end of his public life, when he felt more and more isolated and opposed, his words became solemn. Jesus took into account the fact that it is through suffering that one enters the kingdom, . . . But he remains faithful and never flinches. He knows himself to be in the hands of the Father. . . . And right to the end he does not know exactly whether this implies merely great difficulties or death itself.¹⁷

¹⁴ Boff, 35.

¹⁵ Boff, 37.

¹⁶ Boff, 108.

¹⁷ Boff, 116.

In that perspective, Boff concludes that it was not Jesus Himself but the early community which attributed a redemptive value to His death (cf. p. 118), although the Christian interpretation of that death as sacrificial is only one interpretation among many (cf. p. 133).

Despite these sharp limitations on Jesus' awareness of his mission, Boff does hold that Jesus was aware—at least toward the end—of having a “unique relationship” with the Father. He puts it this way:

Undoubtedly—at least toward the end of his life, Jesus possessed a clear awareness of being a decisive factor in the breakthrough of the kingdom and of having a unique relationship with God. Anyone who calls God Abba-Father feels himself to be and is God's son.¹⁸

This awareness of Jesus, according to Boff, is ultimately grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation. As he writes: “Jesus is the incarnation of God himself, his epiphanic and diaphanous appearance within human and historical reality.”¹⁹ This incarnation Boff explains in what are basically traditional terms, although occasionally there are expressions which, at the least, are odd. Thus:

Jesus was the creature that God wanted and so created that he could exist totally in God, so created that the more he became united to God, the more he became himself, that is, human.²⁰

The Incarnation was not over when the Word was conceived in the womb of the Virgin. There the Incarnation erupted, to increase according as life increased and was manifested.²¹

As can be seen from the last-cited quote, Boff accepts the virginal conception and does so in an explicitly biological sense, although his exegetical understanding of the Infancy Accounts

¹⁸ *Boff*, 145.

¹⁹ *Boff*, 189.

²⁰ *Boff*, 198.

²¹ *Boff*, 199.

follows the same rigid and erroneous chronology of theological development adopted by Raymond Brown in *The Birth of the Messiah*, possibly indicating that independently they are working from earlier conclusions on which they are dependent.²²

Boff's overall picture of Jesus is somewhat confusing, and this may be caused by his efforts to balance an almost completely uncritical Bultmanian and post-Bultmanian exegesis with a fundamentally traditional view of the Chalcedonian definition. If there be a clue as to how all the pieces fit together for Boff, it may be in the remarks quoted above which seem to posit an incarnation which is inaugurated with the virginal conception but is developed progressively as the Word gives Himself more and more to the humanity. If there is an orthodox way to interpret such statements, it might be more evident how Boff sees Jesus as virginally-conceived God-incarnate, who became aware of His sonship and mission only in a very limited manner and at a very late date in His ministry. The failure on Boff's part to develop his own suggestions and a failure to distinguish between ontological and psychological development make for a lack of coherence in his Christology.

C. Jon Sobrino

Unlike Boff, whose writings he cites frequently, Jon Sobrino does present in his Christology a coherent picture of Jesus. For Sobrino, Jesus is essentially the man of faith, a faith marked by a total trust in and obedience to the Father, with Whom Jesus had an exclusive relationship "wholly different from that of other human beings."²³ Since the notion of personhood must be seen in basically relational terms—a concept Sobrino claims to draw from Augustine, Richard of Saint Victor and Hegel²⁴—Sobrino is persuaded to say that "Jesus, too, was faced with the choice of becoming a person through surrender to God or rejection of him; he, too, could fashion his person as a believer or an unbeliever."²⁵ Jesus, of course, always responded by surrender of self

²² Boff, cf. 161 ff. and notes.

²³ Sobrino, 71.

²⁴ Sobrino, 73.

²⁵ Sobrino, 97.

to the Father, a surrender, however, always preceded by "critical crises of self-identity."²⁶ These periods of crisis enable us to view the life of Jesus in stages. As Sobrino writes:

The end of the first stage comes with what is called the "crisis in Galilee." It is given that geographical label because Jesus abandons the heart of Galilee, heading first to Caesarea Philippi and then toward the ten towns of the Decapolis on the borders of Syria and Phoenicia. This geographical break in Jesus' activity expresses an even deeper break in the person of Jesus himself. Jesus comes to realize that he has failed in his mission as he had previously understood it. The crowds are abandoning him, the religious leaders of the Jewish people will not accept him, and God is not getting any closer with power to renovate reality. So there is a real break in both the internal awareness and external activity of Jesus.²⁷

These breaks or crises are in part shaped by the natural development of historical circumstances and in part by the obscurity present in Jesus' own awareness of his actual mission. Citing Mark 9:1 ("I assure you, among those standing here there are some who will not taste death until they see the reign of God established in power."), Sobrino notes that "Jesus' ignorance is not merely in matters of incidental detail. It goes right to the core of his own person and his mission."²⁸ In an error that Sobrino classifies as not merely quantitative, but qualitative, Jesus is mistaken about the day and time when the kingdom will come; "he did not envision the existence of a 'church,'"²⁹ and perhaps even thought that the Son of Man about whom He spoke as ushering in the reign of God in power was someone distinct from Himself.³⁰

The ultimate crisis is, of course, the cross, which Sobrino—following the thought of Jürgen Moltmann—describes in these terms:

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Sobrino*, 93.

²⁸ *Sobrino*, 101.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Sobrino*, 68-69.

Jesus, too, died as a prophet. But there was nothing beautiful about his death, nor was he just another martyr: "Jesus' death-cry was not an expression of pious surrender; it welled up from his feeling that he had been abandoned by God." His death differed from that of other martyrs and prophets, for they died with the intention that their death should serve as their last act in defense of their cause. Thus their death often stood in *continuity* with their life and cause. It had real meaning for them, and hence their psychic or physical suffering was secondary. By contrast Jesus dies in total *discontinuity* with his life and his cause.³¹

In such a scene it is needless to ask whether Jesus saw and intended a redemptive value to His death, or to ask what happened at the Last Supper, an incident in the Gospels which, along with the Infancy Narratives, Sobrino passes over without comment.

How such severe limitations on the awareness that Jesus had of Himself and of His mission are reconcilable with the Chalcedonian definition, Sobrino tries to make clear in presenting his own interpretation of that decree. Affirming that the definition is fundamentally a doxological statement (an insight he attributes to Moltmann^{31a} and following Rahner in reminding us that the *communicatio idiomatum* is indeed a limited vehicle of theological expression,³² Sobrino states that "the divinity in Jesus is the modality of this personal relationship [i.e. self-surrender to another] with the Father, which takes place in history and amid the conflict-ridden reality of history."³³ This is an historical statement, he claims. What the dogmatic decree does is to state in doxological Trinitarian terms what has been previously stated in historical terms, thus teaching that the historical distinctiveness and uniqueness of Jesus are to be formulated by saying that Christ is the eternal Son of the Father.³⁴ It is a theology

³¹ Sobrino, 218.

^{31a} Sobrino, 326.

³² Sobrino, 333. Rahner's essay, "The Position of Christology in the Church Between Exegesis and Dogmatics," can be found in *Theological Investigations*, XI (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) 185 ff.

³³ Sobrino, 336.

³⁴ Sobrino, 337.

of ascent, as opposed to a theology of descent, and Sobrino sums it up this way:

Thus the Christology elaborated here maintains the dogmatic statements, but it offers a different approach to understanding them. Instead of beginning with the doxological affirmation of the incarnation of the eternal Son in Jesus of Nazareth (the theology of *descent*), it ends up with the doxological statement that this Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son. Both approaches involve a shift from the historical to the doxological. The advantage of my approach here over that of the traditional Christology of descent is that it regards the history of Jesus as basic and essential to the dogmatic assertion that Christ is the eternal Son.³⁵

Whether in fact—despite his assertions—Sobrino's Christology leaves room for more than a verbal adherence to a Christology of descent, and whether his understanding of "doxological" statements is an adequate one are questions we may consider below.

D. *Edward Schillebeeckx*

The Bultmanian notion about Jesus' death and Jesus' own awareness of the meaning of that death—an idea which, in its fundamentals, we have seen propounded in the theology of Sobrino—is met head on by Schillebeeckx who writes:

As Jesus was no fanatic—and that is quite certain from what we know about him—then from a particular moment in his career he must have rationally come to terms with the possibility, in the longer term probability and in the end actual certainty of a fatal outcome. This is more or less unanimously agreed nowadays, by exegetes and historians; it is just theologians who are still affected by Bultmann's dictum that we cannot know what Jesus thought about his death and that he may have been steeped in total despair and perplexity because of this surprising turn of events, which had thwarted all his plans. What had been cautiously uttered by Bultmann as a piece of pure speculation has for certain theologians come to be an essential element in their theological thematizing

³⁵ *Ibid.*

(and hence "popularized" in some quarters). It smacks more of modish ideology and "cashing in" than of historical accuracy.³⁶

Schillebeeckx, moreover, maintains that Jesus Himself had come to see His death as a service for the many and interpreted it thus for His followers at the Last Supper:

. . . there is no getting round the historical fact that in the very face of death Jesus offers the cup of fellowship to his disciples; this is a token that he is not just passively allowing death to overcome him but has actively integrated it into his total mission, in other words, that he understands and is undergoing his death as a final and extreme service to the cause of God as the cause of men, and that he has communicated this self-understanding to his intimate disciples under the veiled sign of extending to them the fellowship-at-table shared with his friends. The "for you" (*hyper* formula), in the sense of Jesus' whole pro-existence, had been the historical intention of his whole ministry, which his very death now substantiates.³⁷

The author also refuses to follow those who would attribute to Jesus a mistaken expectation about the imminent end of the world.

As has been said already, Jesus preaches in the assured conviction of God's rule being at hand; and the "being at hand" he sees *in* his own ministry; but it nowhere appears from the texts that he identifies this coming, this drawing near, with the end of the world.³⁸

As far as Jesus' own self-awareness is concerned, Schillebeeckx approaches it indirectly through an analysis of what he calls the "Abba-experience" of Jesus:

Jesus' experience and awareness of the Father in prayer was also manifested in what for his listeners was an astonishing way of speaking about God, so much so that some took offence at it. It was not in his use of *Abba* as a way of addressing God that Jesus showed

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, 301.

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, 311.

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, 152. Cf., however, p. 177.

himself to be forsaking late Judaism; but the *Abba* form of address (expressing a religious experience of a special colour), when linked with the substance of Jesus' message, ministry and praxis, began to prompt theological questions. The *Abba* experience would appear to be the source of the peculiar nature of Jesus' message and conduct, which without this religious experience, or apart from it, lose the distinctive meaning and content actually conferred on them by Jesus.³⁹

Schillebeeckx warns us, however, that this *Abba*-experience of Jesus does not allow us

. . . to build on it an awareness on Jesus' part of some "transcendent" sonship and still less a Trinitarian doctrine. . . . For that more is needed. If we can find it, then, in Jesus' unaffected intercourse with God as *Abba* we may justifiably perceive the natural consequences of it; not, however, the other way around.⁴⁰

He defends the Chalcedonian definition (with some questionable nuances which we have not the opportunity to develop here) and the virginal conception as a truth of revelation whose function "is not to impart any empirically apprehensible truth or secret information about the family history."⁴¹ Schillebeeckx does not strive for a detailed integration of these truths with his remarks on the self-awareness or consciousness of Jesus. In fact, despite his more elaborated exegetical efforts, he contributes little in this area beyond what we have already seen in Kasper's work. Indeed, he does not, in this work, make it quite as explicit as does Kasper.

E. Karl Rahner and Karl Rahner-Wilhelm Thüsing

Karl Rahner's understanding of the self-awareness of Jesus we have seen above when we were examining the thought of Kasper. This Rahnerian position has changed little in its abstract formulation, as can be seen from his remarks in *Foundations of*

³⁹ Schillebeeckx, 226.

⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, 260.

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, 555.

Christian Faith (cf. p. 247). There has, nonetheless, been a development in the manner in which Rahner will describe the concrete manifestations in Jesus' basic non-thematic awareness of Himself and His mission. His recent writings reveal that Rahner will admit that Jesus did have an expectation of an imminent end of time, although Rahner is reluctant to call this "error" in the way he would wish to define that word. Thus we read:

If we ignore the question left open by Jesus about the ultimate meaning of "soon" in the coming of the day of Yahweh, then because this "soon" and the knowledge that the day was unknown were not synthesized into a higher unity in the consciousness of Jesus we may speak of an "error" in the imminent expectation of Jesus. In this "error" Jesus would only have shared our lot, since to "err" in this way is better for historical man, and hence also for Jesus, than to know everything in advance.

But if we presuppose and preserve the more correct notion of "error" in the sense of existential ontology, there is no reason to speak of error of Jesus in his imminent expectation. A genuine human consciousness *must* have an unknown future ahead of it. The imminent expectation of Jesus was for him the *true* way in which he had to realize in his situation the closeness of God which calls for an unconditional decision.⁴²

Because of this position, it is possible for Rahner to defend the statement—although with some reservations—that "Hans Küng can assert today that Jesus did not found a Church, and, what is more, in saying this express a truth that can no longer be denied."⁴³ In Rahner's view, Jesus did indeed "found" the Church in the sense that the Church comes from Jesus.⁴⁴ In like

⁴² *Foundations*, 250. Cf. *A New Christology*, 23, where, presenting the same explanation, he speaks in a more direct manner, writing: "I believe, however, that we are bound to react differently from Catholic Christians at the time of Pius X and frankly, sincerely, soberly and clearly admit that there was a temporally imminent expectation present in the case of Jesus and that this expectation was not fulfilled in the way in which he presented it to himself and formulated it in words."

⁴³ *Rahner-Thüsing*, 22.

⁴⁴ *Rahner-Thüsing*, 24.

vein, he appears, in a 1971 essay, to cite with approval the idea that even Protestant exegetes and theologians "will no longer assert with such boldness and apodictic certainty that the institution of baptism and the eucharist in the New Testament goes back to explicit words of institution on the part of the historical Jesus."⁴⁵ As regards Jesus' understanding of the meaning of His death, Rahner holds that Jesus, "on the level of his explicit consciousness, deemed it at least the fate of a prophet."⁴⁶ Whether Jesus saw it as a sacrifice of expiation, Rahner leaves open as an historical question, but asserts:

. . . Jesus maintains in death his unique claim of an identity between his message and his person in the hope that in this death he will be vindicated by God with regard to his claim. But this means that his death is an atonement for the sins of the world and was adequately consummated as such.⁴⁷

We have already noted Sobrino's appeal to Rahner's reservations about the use of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Rahner returns to express these reservations in *Foundations*, stating that the *communicatio idiomatum* "is always in danger of being understood in a 'monophysitic' sense, that is, as a formula which simply identifies the subject and predicate." He continues:

These formulas do not intend this, but neither do they prevent it positively, and they are formulas which are thought to be shibboleths of orthodoxy: "Do you believe that Jesus is God, yes or no?" The misunderstandings with which these formulas resonate do not harm the pious in their traditional piety. They think rather that these misunderstandings are the most radical form of orthodox faith. But people today are inclined in many ways to understand these misunderstandings as parts of orthodox faith, and to reject it as mythology. This is only fair under *this* supposition. We should admit this and in pastoral matters take account of the fact that not

⁴⁵ Rahner, "What Is a Sacrament?," *Theological Investigations*, XIV (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) 136.

⁴⁶ *Foundations*, 254.

⁴⁷ *Foundations*, 255.

everyone who has problems with the statement "Jesus is God" must for this reason be heterodox.⁴⁸

Thüsing, in his section of the book co-authored with Rahner, *A New Christology*, goes farther than Rahner himself and writes:

The doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* was developed in a particular spiritual climate or context, in which the classical Christology with its ontic categories was current. . . .

In fact, the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* is nowadays only understood by a relatively small circle of specialists in dogmatic theology (and especially the history of that theology). It is no longer used in catechetics or in homilies and in these and related spheres other ways have to be found for safeguarding the unique significance of Jesus.⁴⁹

The Infancy Narratives are not treated by Rahner in his section "Jesus Christ" in *Foundations*, nor are they treated in the Rahner-Thüsing work.

I think it is fair to say that in all the positions I have just attempted to summarize—all too briefly, considering the many nuances in the writings of the men dealt with—there is a graduated movement away from the traditional Christology, Kasper's work being the only true exception. While formally adhering to the Chalcedonian doctrine, albeit variously reinterpreted, most of the authors treated work from what we might call the inductive approach, striving to develop a "Christology from below," one, that is, which works from what the so-called historical-crit-

⁴⁸ *Foundations*, 290-291. It is interesting to note that when Hans Küng was asked by the German bishops "Do you concur without reservations with the profession of the Church that Jesus Christ is true man and true God?" (*The Küng Dialogue* [Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1980] 123), Küng replied: "As it appears also from other Christological publications of recent years we are dealing here with extremely subtle and complex problems, which face all theologians, and which, also in the opinion of other Catholic theologians, cannot be coped with by means of catechism answers." (*Ibid.*, 131) What is at stake, of course, in the remarks of both Rahner and Küng is an assertion of the Creed, not simply a "catechism" response nor the "misunderstandings of the pious in their traditional piety."

⁴⁹ *Rahner-Thüsing*, 180-181.

ical method of biblical exegesis is able to uncover of the pre-Easter Jesus. Such an effort has distinct advantages given the context from which it springs. Having to deal with what amounts almost to a dichotomy between the Jesus of the ministry and the Christ of faith, these studies have endeavored to root the Christological creed of the Church, as well as the developments in Church order and sacraments, in the life and work of Jesus Himself. They have also managed to recapture something of the milieu in which Jesus lived and taught. In this way, they have begun a revitalization of the theology of the mysteries of His life and work, aspects of Christology which later scholasticism had practically abandoned to ascetics or popular piety. As a result, one seems to find here a more "historical" Jesus, and a method which stresses human growth and response as conditioned by contingent situations. It avoids, to an extent, the abstractions of some earlier writing in the area.

It is Hans Küng, with his extraordinary skill for saying explicitly what is often found only by implication in the work of others, who has stated the contrast between the older Christology (a Christology "from above") and the newer inductive method in clearest terms. He writes the following in his letter to Cardinal Höffner of February 21, 1977:

. . . This is the way in which to construct on solid historical foundations a Christology "from below" as suggested by the whole historical research of the last 200 years. The Christology "from above" is known to me from my seven years of study in Rome, as well as from the new Catholic and Protestant interpretations of our time. . . . I still regard it as a legitimate Christology. Yet I have already explained . . . why today it seems to me to be objectively right and pastorally appropriate to approach Christology "from below."

. . . it makes a decisive difference . . . , methodologically, whether, in dealing with the interpretation of the New Testament witness, as well as with the traditional Christology from the Fathers to Karl Barth, a doctrine of the Trinity and of the Incarnation is the premise from which we start, and then move deductively from God ("from above") to the man Jesus of Nazareth; or whether I, as well as various other Catholic and Protestant theologians, begin by taking stock of modern exegetical discussions, and, placing ourselves

time and again in the perspective of the first disciples of Jesus, as it were ("from below"), we systematically think our way to God, inductively and interpretatively. When one attempts an exact definition of the concepts, one cannot think with methodological consistency "from above" and "from below" at the same time. From a methodological point of view, we have here a genuine either/or.⁵⁰

It is the implicit recognition of this theological "either/or," I suggest, which dominates the Christological approaches in the authors we have looked at, including even that of Kasper who verbally eschews a Christology completely from below, noting that such an approach is "condemned to failure."⁵¹ Rahner, too, whose methodology tends to be "aprioristic" because of his "transcendentalist" philosophy, gives way to the "from below" approach when it comes to understanding the Pre-Easter Jesus. Illustrative of this implicit capitulation to the "either/or" approach is, I think, the fact that each of the works treated deals with the Chalcedonian definition only in the second part or near the end of the treatise. The Infancy Accounts, when they are treated at all, share the same fate. What occurs from such a stance is that these elements in Christology are allowed—*when* they are allowed—to shed light on our understanding of Jesus only retrospectively, whereas *in fact* they are *antecedent* elements in His being, His mission and His self-understanding. I will try to exemplify what I mean by now looking at what is supposed to be the direct focus of this paper, namely "Modern Christologies and Mary's Place Therein." For, up to the present moment, I have said nothing directly and little indirectly about Mary's role in the Christologies treated. The reason for this—as can be inferred from all that has gone before—is that she plays little or not role in the Christologies elaborated by these men.

As we have seen, in the survey completed above, Kasper, Boff and Schillebeeckx mention and accept the virginal conception of Jesus, although each tends to view it as a theological conclusion arrived at in a relatively late stage of Christological development

⁵⁰ *The Küng Dialogue*, 114.

⁵¹ *Kasper*, 247.

and, as such, not reflecting familial sources. Sobrino, Rahner and Rahner-Thüsing do not treat it at all in their development of Christology. As a result, one can conclude that, at best, this doctrine is an appendage to Christology, an item to be "tacked on" rather than integrated into our view of the Pre-Easter Jesus. As such the doctrine is not allowed any role in the efforts of these theologians to understand the developing self-awareness which the human nature of the Incarnate God had of Himself and of His mission. Speaking of such an approach, Harry Blamires accurately notes:

. . . we must beware of defending *primarily as theories* doctrines which are essentially descriptions of facts. For instance, it is useful, satisfying—and for many of us perhaps necessary—to appreciate the logical coherence and inevitability of the Virgin Birth within the framework of Christian theology; but we must never forget that the Virgin Birth is a fact, not a theory, that its validity is by no means dependent upon the tidiness with which it fits into our intellectual synthesis.³²

If one does accept the virginal conception as a description of a fact, a reality known and meditated upon by those directly touched by so astounding a mystery (viz. Mary, Joseph and Jesus Himself), then indeed the "Abba experience" (as Schillebeeckx calls it) of Jesus finds an historical starting point and a psychological and spiritual referent point of unparalleled value. How better explain Jesus' human awareness of an absolutely unique relationship to the God of Israel as "Father" than to include as part of His psychological and spiritual development the awareness that He had no human father, that His origins are in the mystery of God as paternal point of reference?

On the other hand, ignoring or shunting aside the historical and psychological consequences of the virginal conception as a datum in the self-awareness of Jesus must inevitably lead to a picture of that self-understanding which is, at best, incomplete and potentially the source of complete misunderstanding. And

³² Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1978) 116.

what other pieces to the psychological development of Jesus *vis-à-vis* the way He viewed himself and His mission—even of a ministry of suffering—would be added could one include the Lucan narratives of Simeon's prophecy to Mary and the awareness of filial mission possessed by the twelve year-old in the midst of the doctors of the Law?

My purpose here is not to develop a "psychological Christology"—a construction difficult in the extreme—nor to argue for the historical facticity of the Presentation nor the Finding in the Temple. My point is, rather, to show that relegating to an appendix what is as a matter of fact prologue unnecessarily complicates and even distorts our understanding of Jesus' self-awareness. It is the product of a *non-contextual exegesis of Scripture*, by which I mean an unwillingness to integrate what the Community which produced the Sacred Books has always recognized as fact and not mere theological refinement (i.e. the virginal conception and the Chalcedonian "from above" approach) into one's overall understanding of the historical development of the point in question, namely the self-awareness of the Pre-Easter Jesus. And such a non-contextual understanding would still be the case, even if it could be demonstrated—which it cannot—that knowledge of the virginal conception was arrived at deductively and only gradually in the Early Community. For, in such a case, one would be faced with only a late *discovery* of a fact, not a later fact. The family of Nazareth would have known of the fact and thus it would have influenced their lives and self-understanding, even if the later Christian community came to know of the fact only slowly or even deductively.

It would be the theme of another paper to try to examine all the reasons which have led dogmatic theologians to neglect the contributions made by the Infancy Accounts, especially the virginal conception, to a proper understanding of the self-awareness of Jesus. Part of the reason, I am convinced, is the near enslavement of some dogmatists to that school of scriptural exegesis called the "historical-critical method." In this regard the words of Martin Hengel, himself an exegete in that same general tradition, must be given greater consideration: "Talk about '*the* historical-critical method' is questionable" and "There has not

been enough critical reflection on the limits and consequences of this 'historical-critical method,' which has been reduced to a 'dogmatic' positivism."³³ Elements of such dogmatic positivism are evident, I think, in the conclusions drawn from the assumptions made as hypotheses—and then often taken as established facts—about the dates of the writing of the Gospels, the priority of Mark, the time involved in the development of a so-called "high Christology" and the existence, value and primitive nature of source "Q."

More to the point of our theme, however, must be the growing questioning of the dogmatic value of the *communicatio idiomatum*, of which Mary's role as *Mother of God* may be the prime example. It is true that remarks such as those of Thüsing (cf. p. 67 above) can be dismissed as mis-informed, since the use of the *communicatio idiomatum* antedates by a few centuries the appearance of "classical Christology with its ontic categories" and since its use and understanding, both in the *Hail Mary* and in the Christological sections of the Creed used weekly at Mass, indicate that more than a "relatively small circle of specialists in dogmatic theology" understand it. The caveats placed by Rahner, however, merit closer attention. He notes that the various formulations of the *communicatio idiomatum* are and must be seen as a *sui generis* use of language. Such indeed is true and must be granted. He goes on to remark, however, that these formulas do not intend a simple identification of subject and predicate, for to do so would be "monophysitic." In this he is surely mistaken, as the disputes before Ephesus and Chalcedon clearly show. The direct purpose of the use of the *communicatio idiomatum* is the simple identification of subject and predicate, as the repeated assertions of Chalcedon concerning the "one and the same" Who is God and man make abundantly evident.³⁴ Cyril and Nestorius were not fighting over the "doxological" nature of the assertion "Mary is Mother of God"; both would, I

³³ Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 129.

³⁴ Cf. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), whose remarks in this regard are illuminating: "In some sense, of

think, have granted that. The fight was over the question as to whether this particular "doxological" statement was in fact true or not. It is "doxological" to call John Wayne "the Duke"; it is not in fact true in the sense of royal peerage. What was at stake at Ephesus was not a title of honor but a reality which rests on the actual identity of Mary's Son with the Eternal Word. That identity was affirmed, and, despite the exegetical disputes concerning the fact of whether the New Testament calls her Son God, the Ephesian and Chalcedonian definitions are no more "monophysitic"—nor more open to "monophysitic" interpretations—than the bald assertion which says of a thirty year-old Man: "Before Abraham came to be, I AM" (Jn 8:58). That statement itself is sufficient to ground the *communicatio idiomatum* in the New Testament. And, quite contrary to the danger of misunderstanding it in a "monophysitic" sense, it is an immediate invitation to recognize the uniqueness with which this subject and predicate are affirmed one of another. For that reason, if—as I think it is—the designation of Mary as Mother of God is the most commonly-used form of the *communicatio idiomatum*, we may claim that for the average Christian it serves as his or her hold on, or grasp of, the Chalcedonian definition of the Church's faith in the nature and identity of the Lord.

I remarked at the beginning of this paper that the cited condemnations of the *Lamentabili* evidenced the Church's concern about what was being said about Jesus' self-awareness of His identity and mission. That concern has not ceased, as recent Magisterial statements show. When the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith pronounced judgment on the book of Jacques Pohier, *Quand je dis Dieu*, it listed "among the more evident errors of this book the denials of the following truths: Christ's intention of giving His passion a redemptive and sacrifi-

course, Nestorius failed . . . as the theological position of current christology could have shown him that his metaphysical analyses did not fully succeed in doing justice to tradition. We mean the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, of which the famous Theotokos was the expression. It already contained a metaphysical intuition that the Logos was the final subject in Christ." (p. 518; cf. also, p. 546.)

cial value," etc.⁵⁵ In response to the urging of Pope John Paul II in his opening talk to the bishops of Latin America,⁵⁶ the magisterial activity of the bishops of an entire continent saw it necessary to teach the following:

We must present Jesus of Nazareth as someone conscious of His mission, as the proclaimer and realizer of the Kingdom, and as the founder of His Church, whose visible foundation is Peter . . . ⁵⁷

The Church cannot be separated from Christ because He Himself was its founder. By an express act of His will He founded the Church on the Twelve. . . . The Church is not a later "result" nor a mere consequence "set in motion" by the evangelizing activity of Jesus. It was born of this activity to be sure, but in a direct way. . . . ⁵⁸

How manifestly these assertions clash with the opinions of some of the theologians we have looked at is, I hope, not in need of further elaboration. What is at stake is not only the question of what Jesus knew and understood about Himself and His mission, but also the truly redemptive nature of a freely-willed death, the foundation of the Church, the explicit institution of the Eucharist and the divine mandate contained in all His moral teaching.

The desire to understand better His human consciousness and to understand the gradual development of that consciousness during the Pre-Easter ministry is a laudable one—as necessary as it is intriguing. It cannot be treated adequately, however—at least for the Catholic theologian—by a non-contextual approach which neglects what the Infancy Accounts and the Council of Chalcedon have already determined to be factual starting points for the human existence of Jesus. And because the virginal conception is central to the Infancy Accounts and the title "Mother of God" typical of Chalcedon's teaching on the unity of subject

⁵⁵ *PSP* 24, no. 3 (Fall, 1979) 227.

⁵⁶ *Puebla and Beyond* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980) 59-60, especially section I, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *Final Document*, 145.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

in Christ, any study of the pre-Easter Jesus which fails to incorporate what we may call the Marian data is fated to be but partial truth. The development of the human consciousness of the God-man, like His human life itself, begins with the Mother.

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