

## SEVEN THESES ON CHRISTOLOGY AND THE HERMENEUTIC OF FAITH

∴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI ∴

Since the end of the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) the panorama of theology has changed fundamentally, not only as regards the matters debated by theologians, but also and in particular as regards the structure of theology itself. Prior to the Council, theological debate took place within a closely knit and uncontested framework. Now the fundamentals themselves are widely matters of dispute.

This is very evident in the case of christology. Previously, discussion had centered on the various theories seeking to shed light on the hypostatic union or on particular questions such as Christ's knowledge. Now people are asking: *How is the christological dogma related to the testimony of Scripture? What is the relationship between biblical christology, in its several phases of development, and the figure of the real historical Jesus? To what extent is the Church an expression of the will of Jesus?*

In this connection it is significant that in contemporary writing the title "Christ" has largely given way to the personal name "Jesus." This linguistic change reveals a spiritual process with wide implications—namely, the attempt to get behind the Church's confession of faith and reach the purely historical figure of Jesus. He is no longer to be understood through this confession, but, as it were, in and through himself alone. Thus his achievement and his challenge are to be reinterpreted from scratch.

Consequently people no longer speak of following Christ but of following Jesus: for "discipleship of Christ" implies the Church's confession that Jesus is the Christ, and hence it involves a basic acknowledgement of the Church as the primary form of discipleship. "Discipleship of Jesus," however, concentrates on the man Jesus who opposes all forms of authority. One of the features of this "discipleship of Jesus" is a basically critical attitude towards the Church, this attitude being seen as a sign of faithfulness to Jesus.

This in turn goes beyond christology and affects soteriology, which must necessarily undergo a similar transformation. Instead of "salvation" we find "liberation" taking pride of place, and the question—*how is the liberating act of Jesus to be mediated?*—automatically adopts a critical stance over against the classical doctrine of how man becomes a partaker of grace.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the contemporary christological debate, see Magnus Löhrer, Christian Schütz, and Dietrich Wiederkehr, eds., *Mysterium Salutis, Ergänzungsband* [The Mystery of Salvation, Supplement] (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1981), 220–50 (Wiederkehr); Josef Pfammater and Franz Furger, ed., *Theologische Berichte II* [Theological Reports] (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1973), especially the article by Dietrich Wiederkehr, 11–119; *Theologische Berichte VII* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1978); Wolfgang Beinert "Jesus—der vollkommene Mensch," [Jesus—The Perfect Man] in *Menscherwerden Menschsein* [Becoming Human, Being Human], ed. Paulus Gordan (Graz:

This indicates something of the task which today faces a theology which understands itself as interpreting the common faith of the Church, not as reconstructing a vanished Jesus and at long last piecing together his real history. It is impossible, within the present compass, to answer all the many questions that face us at this point. That will be the task for a whole generation at least. My intention is more modest, namely, to put forward in a few theses certain fundamental characteristics of the indivisible inner unity of Jesus and Christ, Church and history.

### ***Jesus Is in Constant Communication with the Father***

*Thesis 1:* According to the testimony of holy scripture, the center of the life and person of Jesus is his constant communication with the Father.

Let us try to develop this idea a little further. The developing Church—like the contemporaries of the earthly Jesus—saw herself presented with the question as to who this Jesus was: “Who is he?” (Mark 8:27–30). The answers of the “people” in the time of Jesus, as reported in the gospels, reflect the attempt to find, in the arsenal of the known and nameable, categories in which to describe the figure of Jesus.

We see the same in Simon Peter’s famous avowal, which has become part of the Church’s confession. Although Peter’s confession provided a fundamental orientation, regarded by believers as pointing in the right direction, the single formula, “Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah” was not sufficient by itself. In the first place, the title “Messiah” had many different meanings; the argument between Jesus and Peter which concludes Peter’s confession clearly shows the problems connected with the word (Mark 8:31–33). The way Peter’s confession in Mark is developed in Luke and Matthew also clearly shows the need for explanation and clarification. What we have here is a piece of the Church’s creedal history within the synoptic tradition itself.

Thus we can say that, though this basic confession of faith provided the infant Church with a nucleus around which her interpretation of Jesus could crystallize, it also opened up a wide field of further interpretations, as is evident from the wealth of additional titles—for example, prophet, priest, Paraclete, angel, Lord, Son of God, Son. In concrete terms, the struggle to arrive at a proper understanding of Christ in the primitive Church is the struggle to sift these titles of Jesus and

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Styria, 1983), 371–424; Lucas F. Matero-Seco, ed. *Cristo, Hijo de Dios y Redentor del Hombre* [Christ, Son of God and Redeemer of Man] (Pamplona: University of Navarre, 1982). Basic still are: Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976); Louis Bouyer, *The Eternal Son* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1978); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2: *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, and vol. 3: *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990 and 1992). On the Protestant side, in addition to Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), see esp. Helmut Thielicke, *Gotteslehre und Christologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973), Eng.: *The Doctrine of God and of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977); and Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens* [Dogmatics of Christian Belief], vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1982).

put them in the correct perspective and order. In short, the whole process can be described as one of increasing simplification and concentration. In the end only three titles remain as the community's valid adumbration of the mystery of Jesus: *Christ*, *Lord*, and *Son* (of God).

Since the title *Christ* (*Messiah*) became more and more associated with the name Jesus and had little clear meaning outside a Jewish milieu; and since *Lord*, too, was not as clear as *Son*, a further concentration took place. The title *Son* comes in the end to be the only, comprehensive designation for Jesus. It both comprises and interprets everything else. So, finally, the Church's confession of faith can be satisfied with this title. We find it in its ultimate form in Matthew, in Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). In bringing the many strands of tradition together in this one word and thus imparting an ultimate simplicity to the fundamental Christian option, the Church was not oversimplifying and reducing; in the word *Son* she had found that simplicity which is both profound and all-embracing. *Son* is a basic confession in the sense that it provides the key to interpretation, making everything else accessible and intelligible.<sup>2</sup>

At this point, however, we are obliged to turn to the question of origins. Modern exegesis and history of doctrine are in principle suspicious that this kind of concentration of the historical inheritance may be a falsification of the original phenomenon simply because the historical distance is too great. In fact, however, in concentrating on *Son* as the comprehensive interpretative category for the figure of Jesus, the Church was responding precisely to the basic historical experience of those who had been eyewitnesses of Jesus' life.

Calling Jesus *the Son*, is far from overlaying him with the mythical gold of dogma, a view that has been put forward ever since Hermann Reimarus (d. 1768). To the contrary, it corresponds most strictly to the center of the historical figure of Jesus. For the entire gospel testimony is unanimous that Jesus' words and deeds flowed from his most intimate communion with the Father; that he continually went "into the hills" to pray in solitude after the burden of the day (for example, Mark 1:35, 6:46, 14:35, 39). Luke, of all the evangelists, lays stress on this feature.<sup>3</sup> He shows that the essential events of Jesus; activity proceeded from the core of his personality and that this core was his dialogue with the Father. Here are three examples:

2 See Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* (Munich: E. Wewel, 1982), 17–22, Eng.: *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987). Heinrich Schlier, "Die Anfänge des christologischen Credo," [The Beginnings of the Christological Creed], in *Zur Frühgeschichte der Christologie* [The Early History of Christology], ed. Benedict Welte (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 13–58.

3 The following points develop ideas adumbrated in my book *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (Munich: Kösel, 1976), 66–68, Eng.: *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on God in the Trinity*. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979).

First, let us begin with the calling of the Twelve, a symbolic number indicating the new People of God, whose pillars they were destined to be. In them, therefore, in a gesture of Jesus which is both sign and reality, he inaugurates the "People of God" in a new way; that is, their calling is to be seen theologically as the beginning of all that is "Church." According to Luke, Jesus had spent the night which preceded this event at prayer on the mountain: the calling of the Twelve proceeds from prayer, from the Son's converse with the Father. The Church is born in that prayer in which Jesus gives himself back into the Father's hands and the Father commits everything to the Son. This most profound communication of Son and Father conceals the Church's true and ever-new origin, which is also her firm foundation (Luke 6:12–17).

Next, I cite the account of the very origin of the Christian confession of faith. This, as we have already mentioned, is the prime source for the earliest history of christological dogma. Jesus asks the disciples what men say of him and what they themselves think about him. As is well known, Peter replies with the confession which, then as now, is constitutive of the Church in fellowship with Peter.

The Church lives by this confession, which unlocks the mystery of Jesus and the mystery of human life, and the mystery of human history and of the world—because it manifests the mystery of God. This confession unites the Church, which is why the Simon who makes the confession is called Peter, designated and appointed the "rock" of unity. Thus the confession and the Petrine office—the confession of faith in Jesus and the unity of the Church—are inseparably linked together with Peter and centered on him.

We can say, therefore, that Peter's confession represents the second stage of the Church's taking shape. Again it is Luke who shows that Jesus put the crucial question of how the disciples stood toward him at the very moment when they had begun to share in the hiddenness of his prayer. In this way the evangelist makes it clear that Peter had grasped and expressed the most fundamental reality of the person of Jesus as a result of having seen him praying, in fellowship with the Father.

According to Luke, we see who Jesus is if we see him at prayer. The Christian confession of faith comes from participating in the prayer of Jesus, from being drawn into his prayer and being privileged to behold it. This confession interprets the experience of Jesus' prayer, and its interpretation of Jesus is correct because it springs from a sharing in what is most personal and intimate to him.

### ***Discipleship as Participation in the Prayer of Jesus***

Thus we have arrived at both the very basis and the abiding precondition of the Christian confession of faith: only by entering into Jesus' solitude, only by participating in what is most personal to him, his communication with the Father, can one see what this most personal reality is; only thus can one penetrate to his identity. This is the only way to understand him and to grasp what "following

Jesus” means. The Christian confession is not a neutral proposition; it is prayer and only yields its meaning within prayer. The person who has beheld Jesus’ intimacy with his Father and has come to understand him from within is called to be a “rock” of the Church. The Church arises out of participation in the prayer of Jesus (Luke 9:18–20; Mark 16:13–20).

My third example is the story of Jesus’ transfiguration “on the mountain.”<sup>4</sup> In the gospels, “the mountain” is always a realm of prayer, of being with the Father. It was to this “mountain” that Jesus had taken the three who formed the core of the community of the Twelve: Peter, James, and John. “As he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered,” Luke tells us (9:29). Thus he makes it plain that the transfiguration only renders visible what is actually taking place in Jesus’ prayer. He is sharing in God’s radiance and hence in the manner in which the true meaning of the Old Testament—and of all history—is being made visible; that is, revelation. Jesus’ proclamation proceeds from this participation in God’s radiance, in God’s glory, which also involves a seeing with the eyes of God—and therefore the unfolding of what was hidden.

So Luke also shows the unity of revelation and prayer in the person of Jesus: both are rooted in the mystery of sonship. Furthermore, according to the evangelists, the transfiguration is a kind of anticipation of resurrection and parousia (Mark 9:1). For his communication with the Father, which becomes visible in his prayer in the transfiguration, is the true reason why Jesus could not remain in death and why all history is in his hands. He whom the Father addresses is the Son (John 10:33–36). But the Son cannot die. Thus Luke suggests that the whole of christology—our speaking of Christ—is nothing other than the interpretation of his prayer. The entire person of Jesus is contained in his prayer.

Many other instances illustrating this view can be adduced from the other Evangelists. Again I would like briefly to mention just three of them. My first is the prayer of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, which, now that the hour of his passion has begun to strike, has become the mountain of his solitude with the Father. The “Abba” with which Jesus addresses God, which Mark has preserved for us in Jesus’ Aramaic mother tongue, goes beyond every mode of prayer then known. It expresses a familiarity with God which would have appeared impossible and unseemly to the Jewish tradition. Thus this one, unique word expresses the new and unique manner of Jesus’ relationship to God—a relationship which, on his own side, calls for the term “Son” as the only possible one.<sup>5</sup>

This brings us to my second point, which is the absolutely fundamental role played by the terms “Father” and “Son” in Jesus’ vocabulary. Jesus never called the

4 Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium* [Commentary on the Gospel of Luke], 3 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 1:553–67; for important remarks on the interpretation of the transfiguration; see also Hartmut Gese, *Zur biblischen Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1977), 80f., Eng.: *Essays on Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981).

5 Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), Chapter 1.

disciples or other people “son” or “sons” in the same way as himself. Furthermore, he used the expression “my Father” in a way which clearly distinguished it from the general fatherhood of God which embraces all men. The “*Our Father*” form of address is intended for the disciples, who say “we” as they pray as a community. It expresses the fact that those who belong to Jesus participate in Jesus’ relationship to God through their community prayer, without blurring the difference between their respective modes of relationship to God. In all the words and deeds of Jesus, this filial relationship always shines through, ever-present and ever-creative; we perceive that his whole being is at home in this relationship.

This relationship, this being of his, which fashions from within and which is the person of Jesus, is not only seen in the various forms of the word “Son.” It also occurs in a series of formulas which are found throughout Jesus’ preaching—for example, “therefore have I come” and “therefore was I sent.” In Jesus’ own awareness, as we see it in the gospels, he does not speak and act from himself but from Another: it is of his very essence that he comes from this Other. His entire existence is a “sending,” a “mission;” that is, a relationship.<sup>6</sup>

Once we have observed these features in the synoptic gospels, it becomes clear that the Fourth Gospel, which is built wholly on concepts like “Word,” “Son” and “send,” adds nothing alien to the older tradition but only underscores what the other gospels present to us. We could say that the Fourth Gospel draws us into that intimacy which Jesus reserved for those who were his friends. It shows Jesus from the experience of friendship which allows us to glimpse inner realities.

### ***Jesus’ Death: An Act of Love to the Glory of God***

**Thesis 2:** Jesus died praying. At the Last Supper he had anticipated his death by giving of himself, thus transforming his death, from within, into an act of love, into a glorification of God.

After what we have reflected on in Thesis 1, this second thesis requires relatively little explanation. For in Jesus’ prayer we have discovered the clue linking together christology and soteriology, the person of Jesus and his deeds and sufferings. Although the evangelists’ accounts of the last words of Jesus differ in details, they agree on the fundamental fact that Jesus died praying. He fashioned his death into an act of prayer, an act of worship.

According to Matthew and Mark he raised his voice to a “loud cry” as he uttered the opening words of Psalm 21 [22], the great psalm of the suffering and yet rescued righteous man: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46). Both evangelists also tell us that these words were not understood by the bystanders, who interpreted Jesus’ cry as his calling for Elijah.

6 Valuable pointers in Carlo M. Martini, *Damit ihr Frieden habt. Geistliches Leben nach dem Johannesevangelium* [That You Might Have Peace: Spiritual Life according to the Gospel of John] (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 76f.

According to them, therefore, it needed faith to understand that this death cry of Jesus was the messianic prayer of the great psalm of the sufferings and hopes of Israel, concluding with the prospect of the poor being satisfied and the ends of the earth being turned to the Lord.

This psalm was a christological key-text for the earliest Christians. In it they found a prophecy, not only of Jesus' death on the cross, but also of the mystery of the Eucharist stemming from the cross, which truly satisfies the "poor," as well as of the Church of the Gentiles which likewise comes from the cross. So this death cry, which was taken by those who witnessed it to be a vain call to Elijah for help, became, for Christians, the most profound interpretation of Jesus' death, an interpretation which he himself had given it. The theology of the cross found in this psalm applied to him just as much as the promise it held out. From the vantage point of the promise's fulfillment, this attribution was shown to be true. The psalm was shown to be Jesus' own word: no one else could pray it as truly as he could, rejected and despised, and yet, in this very condition, sustained and glorified by the Father.

It must be borne in mind that the whole story of the passion was woven, again and again, from the threads of this psalm; the account reveals a constant interpretation of Word and reality. Here the archetypal suffering, portrayed anonymously by this psalm, had become concrete reality. Here this primal suffering on the part of the Righteous One—apparently rejected by God—had actually taken place. Thus it became clear that Jesus was the true speaker of this psalm, that he had undergone that suffering from which came the feeding of the poor and the turning of the nations to worship the God of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

But let us return once more to our point of departure. As we saw, there was no unanimous tradition as to precisely what were the last words of Jesus. Luke envisages them as coming, not from Psalm 21 [22], but from the other great passion psalm, Psalm 31 (v. 6, Luke 23:46). John chooses a different verse (v. 15) from Psalm 21 and links it with the passion Psalm 68 [69] (John 19:28–30). But the gospel tradition is unanimous about two things, and consequently every theological interpretation must concentrate upon them: common to all the evangelists is the conviction that Psalm 21 [22]—in its entirety—was connected in a special way with the passion of Jesus, with its actuality as well as with Jesus' acceptance of it.

Moreover, they all agree that the last words of Jesus were an expression of his devotion to his Father and that his cry was not uttered to anyone, anywhere, but to him, since it was of his innermost essence to be in a dialogue relationship with the Father. Thus they all agree that his dying was itself an act of prayer, his death a handing-over of himself to the Father. Finally, they all agree that Jesus prayed in the words of Scripture and that Scripture became flesh in him, became the actual

7 See Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium II* [The Gospel of Mark] (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 494ff., with references.

passion of this Righteous One; and that he thus inserted his death into the word of God, in which he lived and which lived in him, declaring itself in him.

Once this has been seen, the indissoluble bond between the Supper and the death of Jesus is also plain: his dying words fuse with the reality of the Supper. For the event of the Supper consists in Jesus sharing his body and his blood—that is, his earthly existence. He gives and communicates himself. In other words, the event of the Supper is an anticipation of death, the transformation of death into an act of love. Only in this context can we understand what John means by calling Jesus' death the glorification of God and the glorification of the Son (John 12:28; 17:21). Death, which by its very nature is the end, the destruction of every communication, is changed by him into an act of self-communication; and this is man's redemption, for it signifies the triumph of love over death. We can put the same thing another way: death, which puts an end to words and to meaning, itself becomes a word, becomes the place where meaning communicates itself.

### ***Entering Into the Meaning of Jesus***

*Thesis 3:* Since the center of the person of Jesus is prayer, it is essential to participate in his prayer if we are to know and understand him.

Let us begin here with a very general matter of epistemology. By nature, knowledge depends on a certain similarity between the knower and the known. The old axiom is that like is known by like. In matters of the mind and where persons are concerned, this means that knowledge calls for a certain degree of empathy, by which we enter, so to speak, into the person or intellectual reality concerned, become one with him or it, and thus become able to understand (*intellegere = ab intus legere*)<sup>8</sup>.

We can illustrate this with a couple of examples. Philosophy can only be acquired if we philosophize, if we carry through the process of philosophical thought; mathematics can only be appropriated if we think mathematically; medicine can only be learned in the practice of healing, never merely by means of books and reflection. Similarly, religion can only be understood through religion—an undisputed axiom in more recent philosophy of religion. The fundamental act of religion is prayer, which in the Christian religion acquires a very specific character: it is the act of self-surrender by which we enter the Body of Christ. Thus it is an act of love. As love, in and with the Body of Christ, it is always both love of God and love of neighbor, knowing and fulfilling itself as love for the members of this Body.

In Thesis 1 we saw that prayer was the central act of the person of Jesus and, indeed, that this person is constituted by the act of prayer, of unbroken communication with the one he calls "Father." If this is the case, it is only possible really to understand this person by entering into this act of prayer, by participating in it. This is suggested by Jesus' saying that no one can come to him unless the Father

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8 To understand equals to read from within.



draws him (John 6:44). Where there is no Father, there is no Son. Where there is no relationship with God, there can be no understanding of him who, in his innermost self, is nothing but relationship with God the Father—although one can doubtless establish plenty of details about him.

Therefore a participation in the mind of Jesus—that is, in his prayer, which as we have seen is an act of love, of self-giving and self-appropriation to men—is not some kind of pious supplement to reading the gospels, adding nothing to the knowledge of him or even being an obstacle to the rigorous purity of critical knowing. On the contrary, it is the basic precondition of real understanding, in the sense of modern hermeneutics—that is, the entering-in to the same time and the same meaning—is to take place.

The New Testament continually reveals this state of affairs and thus provides the foundation for a theological epistemology. Here is simply one example: when Ananias was sent to Paul to receive him into the Church, he was reluctant and suspicious of Paul. The reason given to him was this: go to him “for he is praying” (Acts 9:11). In prayer, Paul is moving toward the moment when he will be freed from blindness and will begin to see, not only exteriorly, but interiorly as well. The person who prays begins to see; praying and seeing go together because—as Richard of St. Victor says—“Love is the faculty of seeing.”<sup>9</sup>

Real advances in Christology, therefore, can never come merely as the result of the theology of the schools, and that includes the modern theology as we find it in critical exegesis, in the history of doctrine and in an anthropology oriented toward the human sciences, etc. All real progress in theological understanding has its origin in the eye of love and in its faculty of beholding.

### **Revelation, Wisdom, and the “Carrier” of Tradition**

*Thesis 4:* Sharing in Jesus’ praying involves communion with all his brethren. Fellowship with the person of Jesus, which proceeds from participation in his prayer, thus constitutes that all-embracing fellowship that Paul calls the “Body of Christ.” So the Church—the Body of Christ—is the true subject of our knowledge of Jesus. In the Church’s memory the past is present because Christ is present and lives in her.

In teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus told them to say “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9). No one else but he can say “my Father.” Everyone else is only entitled, as a member of the community, to use that “we” which Jesus made possible for them. That is, they have the right to address God as Father because they are all created by God and for one another. To recognize and accept God’s fatherhood always means accepting that we are set in relation to one another: man is entitled to call God

9 Text in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Garnier and J.P. Migne, 1844–1864), 196, 1203. See also Endre von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus* [Plato and Christianity] (Einsiedeln: Herder, 1964), 333; on the whole context, 309–51.

“Father” to the extent that he participates in that “we”—which is the form under which God’s love seeks for him.<sup>10</sup>

This connection corresponds to an insight on the part of human reason and historical experience. No one can build a bridge to the Infinite by his own strength. No one’s voice is loud enough to summon the Infinite. No intelligence can adequately and securely conceive who God is, whether he hears us, and how we should act toward him. As a result, in the entire history of the religion and of the mind, we can observe a peculiar dichotomy in the question of God. On the one hand, there has always been a kind of basic evidence for the reality of God—and there still is. What Paul asserts in Romans, taking up a theme from the Old Testament Book of Wisdom (Wis. of Sol. 13:4)—that the Creator can be seen in creation and is therefore evident (Rom. 1:19–20)—is by no means a dogmatic postulate but an observed fact which is confirmed by the history of religion.

But Paul takes up and expands the idea of Wisdom by adding that this evidence goes hand in hand with a tremendous obscuring and twisting of the image of God. This too is a sober description of fact. The basic certainty of the existence of God was and is always accompanied by a sense of its being an immense riddle. Once we attempt to name and describe this God in more detail, once we try to relate human life to him and respond to him, the image of God falls apart in contradictory aspects. They do not simply eliminate the primary evidence, but they so obscure it as to make it unrecognizable; indeed, in extreme cases, they can actually destroy it entirely.<sup>11</sup>

A consideration of the history of religion yields a further result: the theme of revelation crops up regularly. Negatively, this shows that man is not in a position to produce a relationship to God on his own account. He knows that he cannot compel the Divinity to enter into a relationship with him. Positively it means that the existing means of relating to God go back to an initiative on the latter’s part, the tradition of which is passed on within a community as the wisdom of the ancients. To that extent, even the awareness that religion must rest on a higher authority than that of one’s own reason, and that it needs a community as a “carrier,” is part of mankind’s basic knowledge, though found in manifold forms and even distortions.

At this juncture we can return to the figure of Jesus. Although Jesus stood in a very unique personal relationship to God, he did not simply depart from the basic pattern we have just described, with its essential features of community and revelation. He lived his religious life within the framework of the faith and tradition of

10 Compare Cyprian, *De dominica oratione*, 10–11, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna : F. Tempsky, 1866- ), Volume 3, 1:273ff. Eng.: *Treatise on the Lord’s Prayer*. (Willits, CA: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1980).

11 Compare the wealth of material in Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 vols. (San Francisco: Harper, 1979).

God's People of Israel. His constant dialogue with the God of the patriarchs, with his Father, was also a conversation with Moses and Elijah (Mark 9:4).

In this dialogue he passed beyond the letter of the Old Testament and laid bare its spirit in order to reveal the Father "in the Spirit." In doing so, however, he did not destroy the letter of the Old Testament, the common religious tradition of Israel, but showed its real depth for the first time, "fulfilled" it. Thus, too, this dialogue did not destroy the idea of the "People of God"—it renewed it. Pulling down the wall of the letter resulted in giving the nations access to the Spirit of revelation and hence to God the Father, the God of Jesus Christ. This universalization of the tradition is its ultimate ratification, not its abrogation or replacement. If we grasp this, it becomes clear that Jesus did not need to start by founding a People of God (the "Church"). It was already there. Jesus' task was only to renew this People by deepening its relationship to God and by opening it up for all mankind.

Therefore the question of whether Jesus intended to found a Church is a false question because it is unhistorical. The only proper way to phrase the question would be to ask whether Jesus intended to abolish the People of God or to renew it. The answer to this question, rightly put, is plain: Jesus made the old People of God into a new People by adopting those who believe in him into the community of his own self (of his "Body"). He achieved this by transforming his death into an act of prayer, an act of love, and thus by making himself communicable. Put differently, Jesus has entered into the already existing subject of tradition, God's People of Israel, with his proclamation and his whole person, and by doing so he has made it possible for people to participate in his most intimate and personal act of being; that is, his dialogue with the Father. That is the deepest layer of meaning of that process in which he taught his disciples to say "Our Father."

This being so, fellowship with Jesus and the resultant knowledge of Jesus presupposes that we are in communication with the living subject of tradition to which all this is linked. It presupposes that we are in communication with the Church. The message of Jesus has never been able to live and mediate life except in this communion. Even the New Testament, as a book, presupposes the Church as its subject.<sup>12</sup> It grew in and from the Church; its unity comes solely from the Church's faith, which brings together diverse elements into a unity. We can see this mutual involvement of tradition, knowledge, and community life in all the writings of the New Testament. In order to express it, the Gospel of John and the Johannine letters coined the "ecclesial we." Thus, for example, in the concluding verses of the First Letter of John, we come across the formula "we know" three

12 See the International Theological Commission, *Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theologische Pluralismus* [The Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism] (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973), 32–42. On the questions of exegesis and communication theory which underlie these remarks, see the important book by Pieter Johannes Müller, *Der Traditionsprozess im Neuen Testament* [The Process of Tradition in the New Testament] (Freiburg: Herder, 1982).

times (5:1–20). It is also to be found in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:11). In each case it points to the Church as the subject of knowledge in faith.

The concept of "remembrance" in the Fourth Gospel plays a similar role. The evangelist uses it to show the intertwining of tradition and knowledge. Most of all, however, he makes it clear how progress and the preservation of faith's identity mutually sustain one another. We could put it like this: the Church's tradition is the transcendental subject in whose memory the past is present. As a result of this, as time moves on, and in the light of the Holy Spirit who leads men to the truth (John 16:13; 14:26), what is already present in the memory is seen more clearly and better understood. This advance is not the advent of something entirely new but the process whereby the memory becomes aware of itself.

This dependence of religious knowledge, knowledge of Jesus and God, on the Church's community remembrance by no means excludes the personal responsibility to exercise one's reason, nor does it hinder it. Rather, it provides the hermeneutical context for a rational understanding; that is, it leads to the point where my "I" fuses with the "other" and hence to the realm of understanding. This remembrance on the part of the Church lives by being enriched and deepened by the experience of a love which worships. But it also lives by being continually refined by critical reason. The ecclesial quality of theology, which we have just outlined, is thus not an epistemological collectivism, not an ideology which violates reason, but a hermeneutical context which is essential to reason if it is to operate at all.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Liberation and Truth: Christology From Above and From Below***

*Thesis 5:* The core of the dogma defined in the councils of the early Church consists in the statement that Jesus is the true Son of God, of the same essence as the Father and, through the incarnation, equally of the same essence as us. Ultimately this definition is nothing other than an interpretation of the life and death of Jesus, which was preordained from the Son's primal conversation with the Father. That is why dogmatic and biblical christology cannot be divorced from one another or opposed to one another, no more than christology and soteriology can be separated. In the same way, christology "from above" and "from below," the theology of the incarnation and the theology of the cross, form an indivisible unity.

Having made these affirmations, let us turn back to Theses 1 and 2. If what we said there was a correct interpretation of the content of the biblical testimony, Thesis 5 follows automatically. The dogma's basic assertion, "the Son is of the same substance," which summarizes the entire witness of the ancient councils, simply

13 In the struggle against the ideological disintegration of theology caused by Nazism, Henrich Schlier made a great contribution by maintaining the ecclesial nature of theology. Today, reading his lectures on the theology student's responsibility to the Church, and on the Church's responsibility for the teaching of theology, one is amazed at their contemporary relevance. They are reprinted in Schlier, *Der Geist und die Kirche* [The Spirit and the Church] (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 225–50.

puts the fact of Jesus' prayer into the technical language of philosophical theology, nothing more.

Certainly, this result is contradicted by the widespread view that Scripture and dogma arose in two different cultures: Scripture in the Hebrew culture, dogma in the Greek. It is said that putting the biblical testimony into the forms of Greek philosophical thought brought about a complete refashioning of what was once the plain witness to Jesus. Faith, which up to then had been a simple act of trust in saving grace, had become changed into an assent to philosophical paradoxes, to a belief in particular teachings. Thus, trust in God's action was supplanted by an ontological doctrine which is totally alien to Scripture.

Here we must interpose a very simple, basic human question. For the whole argument about Christ revolves around man's liberation, his salvation. But what can liberate man? Who liberates him, and to what? Put even more simply: What is human freedom? Can man become free without truth; that is, in falsehood? Liberation without truth would be a lie; it would not be freedom but deception and thus man's enslavement, man's ruin. Freedom without truth cannot be true freedom, so, without truth, freedom is not even freedom.<sup>14</sup>

Let us take up another line of thought. If man is to be free, he must be "like God." Wanting to be like God is the inner motive of all mankind's programs of liberation. Since the yearning for freedom is rooted in man's being, right from the outset he is trying to become "like God." Indeed, anything less is ultimately too little for him. We see this very clearly in our own time, with its passionate and strident demands for anarchic, total freedom, dissatisfied as it is with all the bourgeois freedoms and libertinisms, be they ever so great. If it is to do justice to its own aims, therefore, an anthropology of liberation will have to face the question: what is meant by becoming like God, becoming God?

Now let us try to bring these two lines of thought into one focus. What do we see? When man poses the questions which are most vital to him, questions that are inescapable—about truth and freedom—he is asking ontological questions. The question of being, which is so slandered today, arose for no other reason than the desire for freedom, which cannot be divorced from man's need for truth. So it cannot be said that the question of being belongs only to a particular phase of mankind's intellectual development, to the age of metaphysics, which Auguste Comte, in accordance with his three-stage law, allots to the middle phase, between the mythical age and the positive age. (In Comte's view, we are now in the latter stage, in which the erstwhile metaphysical question is obsolete.)<sup>15</sup>

It is uncontested that the human sciences, which attempt to give a "positive"

14 On the various dimensions of the concept of freedom, especially the relationship of freedom and truth, see Martin Kriele, *Befreiung und politische Aufklärung* [Liberation and Political Education] (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), especially 83–103.

15 On Comte, see Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995).

account of man in the sense of modern scientific methods, can yield important insights into man's nature. But they cannot render superfluous the question as to man's real truth—the question of from where this phenomenon of man comes and what is his destiny. If the human sciences were to try to make the question of truth superfluous, they would become tools of self-alienation and hence of man's enslavement.

The question of truth and the question of freedom are involved in the question of being and therefore also in the question of God. Indeed, they *are* the question to God. So, whereas it is certainly possible to allocate the methods of patristic theology to a particular time and thus to indicate the limits of this theology, the questions which it has posed are always and everywhere necessary to man. An interpretation of the New Testament which puts these questions on one side is missing the essential point; it becomes a mere collection of marginalia.

This brings us back to our concrete question. At first sight it may seem to be a rather parochial, merely internal Christian matter, when we speak of the prayer of Jesus as the New Testament's basic affirmation regarding his person. In reality this is precisely the point which concerns us, it is what is central to humanity. For the New Testament designates it as the place where man may actually become God, where his liberation may take place; it is the place where he touches his own truth and becomes true himself. The question of Jesus' filial relation to the Father gets to the very root of the question of man's freedom and liberation, and unless this is done everything else is futile. Any liberation of man which does not enable him to become divine betrays man, betrays his boundless yearning.

Let us add an observation concerning the language of the dogma. At one point in its Creed, as is well known, the Council of Nicaea clearly went beyond the language of Scripture in describing Jesus as "of one substance with the Father." Both in ancient and modern times the presence in the Creed of this philosophical term, "of one substance," has given rise to major disputes. Again and again it has been suggested that it indicates a serious departure not only from the language but also from the thought of the Bible. We can only answer this charge if we ascertain precisely what it actually says.

What does "of one substance" really mean? The answer is this: the term is used solely as a translation of the word "Son" into philosophical language. And why is it necessary to translate it? Well, whenever faith begins to reflect, the question arises as to what, in reality, the word "Son" might mean as applied to Jesus. The word is very familiar in the language of the religions, and so people cannot avoid asking what it means in this particular case. Is it a metaphor, as is commonly found in the history of religion, or does it mean more? The Council of Nicaea, in interpreting the word "Son" philosophically by means of the concept "of one substance," is saying that "Son" is to be understood here, not in the sense of religious metaphor, but in the most real and concrete sense of the word. The central word of the New Testament, the word "Son," is to be understood literally.

So this philosophical phrase, “of one substance,” adds nothing to the New Testament. On the contrary, at the crucial point of its testimony, it defends its literal meaning so that it cannot be allegorized. Thus it signifies that God’s word does not deceive us. Jesus is not only *described* as the Son of God, he *is* the Son of God. God does not remain hidden for all eternity beneath the clouds of imagery which obscure more than they reveal. He actually touches man, and allows himself to be touched by man, in the person of him who *is* the Son.

In speaking of the Son, the New Testament breaks through the wall of imagery found in the history of religions and shows us the reality—the truth on which we can stand, by which we can live and die. Thus we can say that it is precisely the scholarly term, “of one substance,” that defends that guileless simplicity of which the Lord speaks when he says: “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (Matt. 11:25; 1 Pet 2:2).<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Inner Unity of Biblical Theology and Dogmatic Theology***

*Thesis 6:* The so-called neo-Chalcedonian theology which is summed up in the Third Council of Constantinople (680–681) makes an important contribution to a proper grasp of the inner unity of biblical and dogmatic theology, of theology and religious life. Only from this standpoint does the dogma of Chalcedon (451) yield its full meaning.

It is common enough for the theological textbooks to pay scant attention to the theological development which followed Chalcedon. In many ways one is left with the impression that dogmatic christology comes to a stop with a certain parallelism of the two natures in Christ.<sup>17</sup> It was this same impression that led to the divisions in the wake of Chalcedon. In fact, however, the affirmation of the true humanity and the true divinity in Christ can only retain its meaning if the mode of the unity of both is clarified. The Council defined this unity by speaking of the “one person” in Christ, but it was a formula which remained to be explored

16 See Ratzinger, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, 70–76; on the historical question, see my article “Emanation,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* [Encyclopedia for Antiquity and Christianity], 17 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950– ) 4:1219–28; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2nd ed. (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 249–73; Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*; Karl Lehmann “Dogmengeschichtliche Hermeneutik am Beispiel der Christologie des Konzils von Nikäa” [Hermeneutics and the History of Dogma as Exemplified by the Christology of the Council of Nicaea], in Bernhard Casper, *Jesus, Ort der Erfahrung Gottes* [Jesus, Locus of the Experience of God], (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 190–209.

17 Criticism of this weakness of the Chalcedonian model is a recurring theme in the two works by Dietrich Wiederkehr quoted above; see Note 1. Since, however, he devotes insufficient attention to the succeeding development in later councils and completely misunderstands the Third Council of Constantinople, in spite of good observations he comes to no satisfactory solution, especially in relating the christology of being to that of consciousness, the doctrine of the Son to the biblical witness to the Son’s experience. With regard to this fundamental issue, a correct interpretation of Constantinople is crucial.

in its implications.<sup>18</sup> For the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ which brings “salvation” to man is not a juxtaposition but a mutual indwelling. Only in this way can there be that genuine “becoming like God,” without which there is liberation and no freedom.

It was to this question, after two centuries of dramatic struggles which also in many ways bore the mark of imperial politics, that the Third Council of Constantinople (680–681) addressed itself. On the one hand, it teaches that the unity of God and man in Christ involves no amputation or reduction in any way of human nature. In conjoining himself to man, his creature, God does not violate or diminish him; in doing so, he brings him for the first time to his real fullness. On the other hand (and this is no less important), it abolishes all dualism or parallelism of the two natures, such as had always seemed necessary in order to safeguard Jesus’ human freedom. In such attempts it had been forgotten that when the human is taken up into the will of God, freedom is not destroyed; indeed, only then does genuine freedom come into its own.

The Council of Constantinople analyzed the question of the two-ness and the one-ness in Christ by reference to the concrete issue of the will of Jesus. It resolutely maintains that, as man, Jesus has a human will which is not absorbed by the divine will. But this human will follows the divine will and thus becomes one will with it, not in a natural manner but along the path of freedom. The metaphysical two-ness of a human and a divine will is not abrogated, but in the realm of the *person*, in the realm of freedom, the fusion of both takes place, with the result that they become *one* will, not naturally, but personally.

This free unity—a form of unity created by love—is higher and more interior than a merely natural unity. It corresponds to the highest unity there is, namely, trinitarian unity. The Council illustrates this unity by citing a dominical word handed down to us in the Gospel of John: “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). Here it is the divine Logos who is speaking, and he speaks of the human will of the man Jesus as his will, the will of the Logos. With this exegesis of John 6:38 the Council indicates the unity of the subject in Christ. There are not two “I”s in him, but only one. The Logos speaks in the I-form of the human will and mind of Jesus; it has become his I, has become adopted into his I, because the human will is completely one with the will of Logos. United with the latter, it has become a pure “Yes” to the Father’s will.<sup>19</sup>

18 On the complicated history of the gradual exploration of the Chalcedonian formula, see Aloys Grillmeier *Mit ihm und in ihm* [With Him and in Him], (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), 283–300; 355–70.

19 The Council text can be found in *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, ed. Joseph Alberigo (Bologna: Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1973), 124–130, Eng.: Tanner, Norman P. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990). The intellectual and political factors which led to the Council and influenced it are concisely and accurately



Maximus the Confessor, the great theological interpreter of this second phase of the development of the christological dogma, illuminates this whole context by reference to Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives, which, as we already saw in Thesis 1, expresses Jesus' unique relationship to God. Indeed, it is as if we were actually looking in on the inner life of the Word-made-man. It is revealed to us in the sentence which remains the measure and model of all real prayer: "Not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36).<sup>20</sup> Jesus' human will assimilates itself to the will of the Son. In doing this, he receives the Son's identity, that is, the

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presented by Johann Beck in *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte II* [Handbook of Church History], ed. Hubert Jedin (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), 2:39–43. The central distinction which is fundamental to the Council (and which has received scant attention up to now) was worked out by Maximus the Confessor: he distinguishes the *θέλημα φυσικόν* (*thelēma physikōn*), which belongs to the nature and thus exists separately in Christ's godhead and manhood, from the "gnomic" *θέλημα* "which is identical with the *liberum arbitrium* [freedom of will and judgment] and pertains to the person; in Christ it can only be a single *θέλημα*, since he subsists in the divine Person" (Beck, 41). Thus "much that had earlier been regarded as Monophysite . . . could be taken into spirituality" (Beck, 43). Once this basic idea of Constantinople III, which is central to neo-Chalcedonian christology, has been grasped, it becomes clear that Wiederkehr's attacks on neo-Chalcedonian Christology, based on Pannenberg, are futile, resting on a misunderstanding. In *Theologische Berichte* 2:29, Wiederkehr speaks of the "symmetrical path of the two-natures doctrine" under the influence of the "two-wills" decision and thinks that it resulted from the idea "of an internal christological dialogue . . . between a divine and a human nature." Thus he can rightly object that "there is nothing of this in the Jesus of the synoptics." "As far as the man Jesus is concerned, his dialogue partner is the Father, not his own self in his divine nature and person." This assertion, which he opposes to neo-Chalcedonism, is in fact precisely the view of Constantinople III, except that the latter works out its ontological and existential structure very much more thoroughly than Wiederkehr. Pannenberg formulates it thus: "'Person' is a relationship concept, and, because the relation of Jesus to the Father in his dedication to him is identical with the relation to the Father intended by the designation, 'the Son,' Jesus in his human dedication to the Father is identical with the eternal Person of the Son of God." See *Jesus, God and Man*, 339. It seems to me, if I read him correctly, that Pannenberg also fails to see that he is thinking along the same lines as Constantinople III (and Maximus the Confessor). In fact he is concentrating rather on the dispute with Leontius of Byzantium. From the point of view of the history of ideas, Wiederkehr's insistent opposition to the "internal christological" and "symmetrical" concept of the two-natures model, in favor of a relational trinitarian Christology, is interesting in that it brusquely rejects what Karl Rahner had proclaimed in 1954, in support of Paul Galtier. At that time, in opposition to what he saw as the faithful's actual monotheletism, he put forward a radical "two-wills" position which had apparently lost sight of the unity of the "gnomic" will in Jesus. This introduced a split in the person which neither had biblical foundation nor was philosophically intelligible ("Chalcedon—Ende oder Anfang?" [Chalcedon—End or Beginning], in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart* [The Council of Chalcedon: History and the Present], eds. Aloys Grillmeier and Henrich Bacht, (Würzburg: Echter, 1951), 3-49, especially 13.

- 20 I find it interesting that Constantinople III here uses the same scriptural text quoted by Pope Honorius, correcting (or developing) his view by relating the text to the gnomic will. For further light on the interpretation of the Council, see Antonio Miralles, "Precisiones terminológicas entorno al misterio de Cristo sugeridas por la lectura de los Concilios I y III de Constantinopla," [Clarifications of Terminology Concerning the Mystery of Christ Suggested by the Readings of the First and Third Councils of Constantinople] in Mateo-Seco, *Cristo, Hijo de Dios y Redentor del Hombre*, 597–606.

complete subordination of the I to the Thou, the self-giving and self-expropriation of the I to the Thou. This is the very essence of him who is pure relation and pure act. Wherever the I gives itself to the Thou, there is freedom because this involves the reception of the “form of God.”

But we can also describe this process, and describe it better, from the other side: the Logos so humbles himself that he adopts a man’s will as his own and addresses the Father with the I of this human being; he transfers his own I to this man and thus transforms human speech into the eternal Word, into his blessed “Yes, Father.” By imparting his own I, his own identity, to this human being, he liberates him, redeems him, and makes him God. Now we can take the real meaning of “God has become man” in both hands, as it were: the Son transforms the anguish of a man into his own filial obedience, the speech of the servant into the Word which is the Son.

Thus we come to grasp the manner of our liberation, our participation in the Son’s freedom. As a result of the unity of wills of which we have spoken, the greatest possible change has taken place in man, the only change which meets his desire—he has become divine. We can therefore describe that prayer which enters into the praying of Jesus and becomes the prayer of Jesus in the Body of Christ as freedom’s laboratory.

Here and nowhere else takes place that radical change in man of which we stand in need, that the world may become a better place. For it is only along this path that conscience attains its fundamental soundness and its unshakable power. And only from such a conscience can there come that ordering of human affairs which corresponds to human dignity and protects it. Every generation has to seek anew this right ordering of the world in response to a conscience that is alert, until the kingdom of God comes, which God alone can establish.

### ***The Explanatory Power of the Hermeneutic of Faith***

*Thesis 7:* The historico-critical method and other modern scientific methods are important for an understanding of holy Scripture and tradition. Their value, however, depends on the hermeneutical (philosophical) context in which they are applied.

In the interpretation of holy Scripture we are in danger today of divorcing scholarship from tradition, reason from faith. Many people are under the impression that historico-critical exegesis destroys faith. On the other side the view gains ground that critical exegesis is the real teaching office, subordinate to no other authority. But the believer is convinced that there cannot be any contradiction between reason and faith if both are exercised properly. Without reason, faith would not be truly human; without faith, reason has neither a path nor a guiding light.

The historico-critical method is essentially a tool, and its usefulness depends on the way in which it is used—that is, on the hermeneutical and philosophical

presuppositions one adopts in applying it.<sup>21</sup> In fact, there is no such thing as a pure historical method. It is always carried on in a hermeneutical or philosophical context, even when people are not aware of it or expressly deny it. The difficulties which faith continually experiences today in the face of critical exegesis do not stem from the historical or critical factors, as such, but from the latent philosophy which is at work. The argument, therefore, must relate to this underlying philosophy; it must not attempt to bring historical thought, as such, under suspicion.

Historically speaking, this method was first applied to the gospels at the time of the Enlightenment, with the aim of using history to correct dogma, setting up a purely human, historical Jesus against the Christ of faith. Since then the method has undergone much change and has played a part in quite diverse scenarios. Again and again, competent scholars have purged it of these rationalistic intentions, and it has yielded very many important insights, enhancing our understanding of the biblical testimony and of the saving history which it contains. However, where the Enlightenment line is pursued, new divorces follow with inner inevitability from the original separation of Jesus and Christ.

Since the inner unity of the books of the New Testament, and that of the two testaments, can only be seen in light of faith's interpretation, where this is lacking, people are forever separating out new components and discovering contradictions in the sources. Then, as a result, the figure of Jesus also is continually splitting into new pictures of Jesus. There is the Jesus of the logia, the Jesus of this or that community, Jesus the philanthropist, Jesus the Jewish rabbi, the apocalyptic Jesus, Jesus the Zealot, Jesus the revolutionary, the political Jesus, et cetera.

In all these cases some preconceived idea determines the principles of interpretation. Once these have been adopted, the historical method is applied, with varying degrees of care and subtlety, in order to try to prove, to oneself and to others, that the Jesus of one's own preconceptions is the only possible historical Jesus. In reality this process of dividing-up only reflects the divisions in man's mind and in the world; indeed, the process only serves to intensify them. But Jesus did not come to divide the world but to unite it (Eph. 2:11–22). It is the one who "gathers" with Jesus, who works against the process of scattering, ruin, and dismemberment, who finds the real Jesus (Luke 11:23).

21 The question of method can only be dealt with very generally here. It seemed appropriate, however, to make some basic reference to the way in which method and hermeneutics are interwoven. See *Theologische Quartalschrift* [Theological Quarterly] 159:1 (1979), with contributions by Josef Blank, Hans Küng, Walter Kasper, Bernhard Lang, Hermann Josef Vogt and others; Leo Cardinal Scheffczyk, *Die Theologie und die Wissenschaften* [Theology and the Sciences] (Aschaffenburg: Pattloch, 1979.); Peter Stuhlmacher, "Thesen zur Methodologie gegenwärtiger Exegese" [Theses Concerning the Methodology of Contemporary Exegesis], in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* [Journal for the Scientific Study of the New Testament] 63 (1972): 18–26. An important book offering criticism of modern exegetical positions is Reiner Blank, *Analyse und Kritik der formgeschichtlichen Arbeiten von M. Dibelius und R. Bultmann* [Analysis and Critique of M. Dibelius and R. Bultmann's Form-Historical Studies] (Basel: F. Reinhardt, 1981).

Here, at any rate, we come face to face with the question of which hermeneutics actually leads to truth and how it can demonstrate its legitimacy. We cannot go into the question in great detail, but I would like to indicate the general line of approach. From a purely scientific point of view, the legitimacy of an interpretation depends on its power to explain things. In other words, the less it needs to interfere with the sources, the more it respects the corpus as given and is able to show it to be intelligible from within, by its own logic, the more apposite such an interpretation is. Conversely, the more it interferes with the sources, the more it feels obliged to excise and throw doubt on things found there, the more alien to the subject it is. To that extent, its explanatory power is also its ability to maintain the inner unity of the corpus in question. It involves the ability to unify, to achieve a synthesis, which is the reverse of superficial harmonization. Indeed, only faith's hermeneutic is sufficient to measure up to these criteria. It has a twofold unifying power.

First, it is the only hermeneutics which is in a position to hold fast the entire testimony of the sources. It is also the only one which is able to comprehend the sources' different nuances and their pluriformity, because it alone has a vision of unity which is wide enough to accommodate the apparent contradictions; nothing needs to be excluded on the grounds of its being a hostile development which cannot be integrated into the whole.

Only the doctrine of the two natures joined together in one Person is able to open up a vista in which the apparent contradictions found in the tradition each have enough scope and can be molded together into a totality. Every other view of the figure of Jesus is partial; it has to absolutize a portion of the sources, or even manufacture sources behind the sources, if it is to survive. This always involves throwing doubt on some part of the historical corpus.

Second, faith's hermeneutics is also the only medium which, in the breadth of its vision, transcends the differences of cultures, times, and peoples. It does not alienate any civilization, any people, from its own values. In the higher unity of the incarnate Word they can all find their place, cultivate what is distinctively theirs and, through the refining influence of this faith, discover the true depth it possesses. Such a hermeneutics can also surmount all the divisions which tear the world to pieces and can initiate a spiritual fellowship in which everything belongs to everyone and there is a mutual relationship of giving and receiving, because of him who has given us himself and, in and with himself, the whole fullness of God.

If we had space to follow these thoughts, we could show faith's fruitfulness, which does not violate the historical record but reveals its truth and is open to every genuine truth. The unity of the person of Jesus, embracing man and God, prefigures that synthesis of man and world to which theology is meant to minister. It is my belief that the beauty and necessity of the theologian's task could be made visible at this point. He would be bringing to light the foundations for a possible unity in a world marked by division. He must seek to answer the question of how this unity can be recognized and brought about today. In this way he could be

contributing to prepare for that unity which is the locus of both freedom and salvation. But he can only do this provided he himself enters that “laboratory” of unity and freedom of which we have spoken—where his own will is refashioned, where he allows himself to be expropriated and inserted into the divine will, where he advances toward that God-likeness through which the kingdom of God can come. Thus we have arrived back at our starting point: Christology is born of prayer or not at all.

