

THE FINALITY OF CHRIST IN PERENNIAL PERSPECTIVE

THE INCREASING DIFFICULTY OF BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

Christian belief was jarred by the shock-waves of modern science in the nineteenth century. Then for a generation or two the common mind of the Christian community regained its equilibrium, only to be staggered more seriously by another wave of scientific discovery in the mid-twentieth century. We thought we had grasped some idea of the vastness of space and the complexity of our little planet. But as the scientists peer beyond the farthest galaxies to the quasars at unimaginable distance in space and time, or as they analyze and describe the structure of inanimate matter and even of the elements of living tissue, they appear to be penetrating the realms which Christian belief has held to be the impenetrable areas of divine mystery.

Now, it is a frightening thing to contemplate the greatness of the universe and the littleness of the earth. And much less significant than the earth seems man himself. This tiny but wondrous creature is like an intelligent plankton, pondering the size and meaning of the seven oceans.

From another viewpoint, however, there is an incompre-

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hensible vastness of the human race, the thought of which overwhelms the individual man. Existing for only a wink of time in the geological calendar, this race of upright, thinking animals is claimed by Christian faith to bear a unique resemblance to the Creator of all things. Their numbers run to countless millions. Even those presently living, if they were standing side by side, would gird the earth's equator more than forty times. For a thousand centuries has run the endless process of birth and death: opening womb, closing tomb. Man after man after man. Millions dying in infancy. Yet each of them more than a mere unit of *homo sapiens*. Each a person, each with a soul, each a private universe of experience, each a custom-made work of the Creator, each a distinctive person poured into the new mold which the Maker then destroys.

The apparent incredibility of Christian faith does not end with its claims about the personal creatures of the personal God. The Christian proclamation stretches intelligibility and credulity more than this—and even more than do the theories of the astrophysicists and cosmologists. Christians assert that at a particular point of time, just thirty-three years in the human historical continuum, in a tiny tributary of that vast river of man's earthly existence, in a malodorous cowbarn in a village of small importance, the Master Mind and Maker of this whole dazzling and virtually endless universe became man.

How can this belief be substantiated? Faithful Christians travel as pilgrims to the Holy Land, hoping to find reassurance for their faith as they look upon the places where Jesus lived and worked and died. But the effect of this visit is often twofold: it makes the historic life of Jesus seem more real; but it renders more difficult an unquestioning belief in the doctrine of incarnation. The wilderness east of Jerusalem to the Jordan River, as well as the barren hills of Galilee, lie in mute defiance of the likelihood that here, once and uniquely, the eternal

Word of God became man. No one need doubt that there once lived and taught in this forbiddingly rugged land a prophet of extraordinary wisdom and superior humanity. The records are dependable. But the sheer magnitude of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was true God and true man, in a unique and unrepeatably sense, makes this fundamental confession seem to outsiders no less than fantastic.

Equally unacceptable to the critical and skeptical mind, of course, is the further assertion of Christians that the life, death, and resurrection of this guileless Jew have constituted the act of God whereby men and women of all generations are enabled to enjoy a genuinely human existence and eternal communion with God.

From a natural, rational viewpoint the wonder is not that multitudes have either rejected or fallen away from this faith. The wonder is that so great a number of intelligent persons accept it, live by it, and find life's meaning in it.

UNIQUENESS AND UNIVERSALITY

The question about Jesus Christ is unique. No other issue in the extensive repertory of man's religious thought is like that of the person and perennial effect of Jesus Christ. There may be legitimate comparisons with the tenets of other religions: the range of belief in theophanies, revelations, incarnations, miracles, as well as in prophets, teachers, deliverers, and saviors. It is irresponsible and arrogant for some Christians to deny the possibility of such comparisons with the central figures of both defunct and continuing religions. But it is at the last quite fruitless to place Jesus amongst the persons and personifications, both historical and mythological, which are the founders or focal points of diverse religions. For Christian faith Jesus is simply outside the category of Moses, Gautama

the Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, Zoroaster, and the rest. We may say that in secondary matters, such as certain of his words and deeds, Jesus is comparable to others; but in primary ones, such as the identity of his person and his relation to God and man, he is incomparable. This does not mean that as human he is comparable but as divine incomparable; but in the unity of his person as both divine and human he is incomparable.

Not only is Jesus Christ regarded and confessed as unique. He is also universal: the one who is for all. This assertion does not necessarily simplify a simple universalism with respect to the doctrine of salvation. This issue is still disputed, as in past centuries, on the ground of differing views of God's grace in electing people and of the consequences of a person's faith. Whether one be persuaded of a narrow or a very wide expectation of salvation, however, as a Christian he cannot reject the universality of Jesus Christ. Despite the localized particularity of his earthly life, as a Jew living briefly in Palestine, Jesus may be known as Savior and Lord by persons of every generation, nationality, culture, language, and social estate. The fact that Christianity has generally been a "Western religion" does not disprove his universality. It has been, and continues to be, demonstrated by Christians in all the world that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever." This bold assertion of Hebrews seems by now, at least in our limited experience of time, to have been well vindicated.

While Christ remains the same, however, Christologies have always varied. They have differed within the New Testament, among various church traditions, among schools of theological thought, and within the developing thought of the same person. But in view of our limited knowledge of Jesus Christ, (a knowledge imperfect but still sufficient) it is not astonishing to find such variety. Nor does the diversity necessarily detract from the authenticity of the Christian witness to Jesus Christ as

both unique and universal. Just as the recognized differences between the Synoptic accounts and those of Paul, the Fourth Gospel, and Hebrews serve to complement one another instead of standing in mutual antithesis, so the several types of Christology can provide a more adequate picture of Jesus Christ than any one of them can.

But what if the limits of legitimate diversity are overreached? What if two or more ways of thinking about Christ are contradictory rather than complementary? What shall be done when good numbers of faithful and intelligent Christians are sure that others have departed from truth in their thinking and have taught a false conception of the person and work of Christ?

These are not hypothetical questions, of course. They are the ones which have necessarily been raised in the history of the church because of suspected and alleged heresies. "Heresy" is a dreadful word for many Christians today, not because they dread heretical teaching, but because they are most unwilling to condemn any religious view which is sincerely believed. To be sure, many frightful crimes have been committed by Christians in the name of Christ and with the specified intention of defending the faith. But the grim and gruesome specters of Nestorius, Savonarola, Hus, Servetus, and Cranmer do not support the idea that the church need not concern itself any longer with the truth of the gospel. There is no unanimity among the churches generally as to what constitutes heresy on particular doctrines. The sword of excommunication is a dangerous weapon to wield, and fortunately these days it remains in its sheath. Even so, when there are deliberate departures from the standards of constitutive elements of the faith, no matter how sincere the motivation, the expression of charity is not in itself an adequate response. Fortunately, too, in most modern societies we have learned to respect and defend

freedom of conscience for all persons and the right to adhere to any religious view or to none at all. But the corollary of this wholesome toleration is not indifference or simple relativism with respect to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, while regretting the acknowledged excesses in zeal for persecuting alleged heretics in the past, we may continue to hold the conviction that there is a point where legitimate diversity of belief ceases to be a matter of mere variation and becomes a dangerous threat to the integrity of the Christian faith itself.

Although it may often be true that yesterday's heresies are today's orthodoxies, this is not an unalterable and dependable rule. Some of yesterday's heresies continue to be just that. And with respect to no other article of faith is the church so sensitive to heretical teaching than that having to do with Jesus Christ himself.

DECISIVE DEVIATIONS

The New Testament witnesses to Jesus Christ make it inevitable for Christians to confess in some way both his true humanity and his true divinity. The "raw materials" of Christology in the Bible (as R. H. Fuller calls them) do not dictate a uniform doctrine. But they plainly exclude the spurious ideas which lie beyond either pole of the divine-human scale of being. Neither sheer humanity on one side, nor sheer divinity on the other is permissible.

The pendulum of thought about Christ has oscillated between these poles throughout the history of the church, as well as in the lifetime of particular Christian thinkers. This swinging is tolerable until the pendulum, impelled by a skepticism which cannot endure the paradox, passes beyond the critical point at either end of the arc.

Every textbook of church history describes the struggles and pangs which the Christians of the first five centuries seemed

obliged to endure in order to contend for the truth about Jesus Christ. It was not simply as though a strong, orthodox mainstream of faith were occasionally disturbed by the eddies of excess on right and left. The whole church, or at least the reflective and articulate members of it, in the face of religious and philosophical challenge from non-Christians, were groping for concepts adequate to express the reality of the Lord whom they met in the New Testament and in personal faith.

It was not so difficult to show cause why a strictly and exclusively human picture of Jesus of Nazareth was inadequate to the point of being heretical. The party or sect of Ebionites fashioned the general pattern, which has reappeared frequently in history, and especially within the past century of Protestantism and of liberal humanism. One could so interpret the four Gospels as to believe that God found in Jesus the man who pleased him most and therefore adopted him, so to speak, as the special bearer of his will and word. Or one could turn this interpretation completely around and assert that Jesus, being a religious genius of unusual perceptivity, was able to teach the superior way of life so effectively that his hearers, and later his readers, were convinced that he spoke for God. In either case, whether by divine adoption or by eminent endowment, Jesus could be no more than a second Moses with a new law, or else a living exemplar and teacher of the best insights concerning human existence. But in order for this picture to be acceptable to people, the crucifixion of Jesus had to be regarded as just a cruel tragedy, while the evangelists' testimony to his resurrection had to be questioned and rejected along with much of the apostolic preaching of salvation. Long before the era of biblical criticism began, therefore, a wedge was driven between the so-called "Jesus of history and the Christ of faith," to the grave detriment of the doctrine of Christ.

Professor John Knox has proposed the plausible thesis, that whenever the early church faced the issue of Christology—i.e., the humanity and divinity of the Lord—it felt obliged to choose the alternative which stressed Jesus' divinity. The motive for this was ostensibly to secure the veracity of the preaching of salvation. Only a divine savior could rescue a fallen, sinful human race. But however right this intuition may have been, it tended to be expressed at the expense of the equally important understanding, classically formulated by Athanasius: What he did not assume (humanity and human flesh) he could not redeem. Despite the protestations of Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons concerning the true, historical, and human life of Jesus Christ, and despite the clear intention of confessing "suffered under Pontius Pilate" in the early creed, the church included large numbers who gravitated to far in the direction of espousing his sheer divinity.

Docetism was the general category of belief in which the reality of the Incarnation was displaced by the idea of mere appearance of the Christ-figure. He was a deity or divine emissary wearing the temporary disguise of a man called Jesus.

Gnosticism was the religious system which brought docetism to its most intricate and captivating expression. Abhorring all matter as evil and beyond redemption, the Gnostics could scarcely tolerate a doctrine of the divine Wisdom made real flesh.

While the esoteric schemes for emancipation from earthly corruption through attainment of degrees of divine Gnosis, as taught by Gnosticism, have survived in just a few forms of occultism, the docetic view itself remains today in rather wide currency. Not only is the religion known as Christian Science a repository of docetism, but in the minds of many church members there lies an implicit rejection of incarnation and thus of Jesus' genuine humanity.

Sensing the inadequacy, if not the heresy, of this conception of Jesus Christ's person, many Christians today are attracted, either knowingly or unwittingly, to the idea which was promulgated by the presbyter Arius of Egypt in the fourth century. Although Arianism as an organized movement was forcibly suppressed after the Council of Nicaea in 325, the appeal of its Christology has never disappeared entirely. As the late C. S. Lewis, who had the courage to write boldly clear statements of his faith, wrote in the preface to a translation of *The Incarnation of the Word of God of Athanasius*, the attractiveness of Arianism lay in its reasonable, common-sense portrayals of Jesus Christ, like "one of those 'sensible' synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended today." The human mind has trouble comprehending eternity. Therefore a man's common sense and credulity are strained by the confession of a pretemporal, premundane Son of God, who is coequal with the Father, by whom he was begotten, not made. So the Arians sang their jingles about "the time when he was not" and their ante-Nicene tribe increased. But Arius was apparently as little convinced of Jesus Christ's true divinity as of his humanity. He could not accept the fact that the Jesus who was crucified was in all respects, except in sin, a man like himself or you or me. The Arian Christ was neither Ebionite nor docetic nor orthodox. He was more like the demi-gods of Olympus than the incarnate Lord of Galilee. He was a compromising third force over against the divine-human paradox which most Christians believed.

At Nicaea Arianism was attacked theologically by the young Athanasius and rejected by the great majority of the bishops. After 325 it was orthodox to confess that Jesus Christ was *homoousios*, or consubstantial, with the Father in the unity of the Holy Trinity. But the final ratification of the doctrine of true humanity had to wait another 126 years. Nonetheless it may

justly be observed that the Arian type of Christology has remained within the church for all these centuries. It has recurred in much so-called Christian art, from the noble Michaelangelo to Salvador Dali and the popular Warner Sallman (who, to the chagrin of critics and theologians, is popular with no one except the people). Likewise, in common acts of devotion, mainly in Roman Catholicism but also in some precincts of Protestantism, the Arian Christ, who is neither God nor man, proves to be the figure whom many can best think about and adore.

So there still abide docetism, Ebiouitism, and Arianism, these three; and the worst of these is a matter of one's judgment. We who think of ourselves as enlightened Christians have a proper distaste for hunting heretics. And when we write our ecumenical conference reports today, we are rightly disinclined to conclude each section with a *damnamus* against all who disagree. Nevertheless, we should not let this Christian restraint prevent our acknowledging that the ante-Chalcedonian struggles against the varieties of christological distortion did indeed serve the purpose of preserving the New Testament gospel for centuries to come. The cost of this grim effort was very high, of course. It was paid out to the debit of charity and personal faith and to the credit of corporate hostility and intellectualism. Only the specialized historians know the dimension of such costs. But we who read their works can sense with dismay how the Christian church was strained and rent by the controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. It was by no means a lovely history in which the reconciling love of Christ overcame dissensions. But for all the personal vanity and political pretension of the major actors, this tragic drama was motivated by a concern of highest import: to preserve, not a bare proposition about the person of Jesus Christ, but an authentic faith in him as Lord of all things and Savior of mankind.

CHALCEDON: ABSOLUTE OR OBSOLETE?

Within the basilica of St. Euphemia the Martyr in the small city of Chalcedon, just down the coast from imperial Constantinople, the 529 council fathers, mainly Eastern, gathered to settle the dispute over Christ's person. It was October in the year 451, but the controversy had continued for a century and a half. Books published on the 1,500th anniversary of the council, notably R. V. Sellers' *The Council of Chalcedon*¹ and essays edited by Alois Grillmaier and Heinrich Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*,² have shown how precarious it is for the amateur student to reduce the council's agenda to a choice between black-and-white alternatives. Even apart from the personal and ecclesiastical rivalries and political intrigues in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, a coherent and confessible statement of faith in Jesus Christ had to be extracted from the welter of unbalanced ideas and allegedly heretical teachings of Eutyches, Nestorius, and the like. The Alexandrine Cyril and the Roman Pope Leo were the champions of the orthodoxy which prevailed.

Rejected by the council was the notion that Jesus Christ, in order to be both human and divine, really was two persons in the one man. Rejected also was the belief that he had but one physis, or nature, and this was divine. This was even less acceptable than the earlier proposal of Apollinaris, that Jesus while being in bodily attributes truly human, nevertheless had the eternal Word (*Logos*) in the place of a human spirit.

Asserted positively and formally decreed was the doctrine of the divine and human natures, coexisting in the one person of Jesus of Nazareth. In respect to God the Father Jesus was homo-ousios, that is, of the very same being. In respect to humanity he

¹ (London: S. P. C. K., 1953).

² (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1953-1954).

was also homo-ousios, and this was underscored by reference to his birth from the womb of Mary, the *Theotokos*, or bearer of God.

Thus the christological paradox was baldly and bindingly decreed as the only true and permissible faith of the church. Moreover, perhaps to tighten the lines of paradox, the council fathers agreed that after the Incarnation, when the divine Word and the human being became one person, there was neither confusion nor change (*asunchútos, atréptos*) of the two natures, nor could they henceforth be divided or separated (*adiairéto, achorístos*).

All of which language is literally Greek to most Christians today and seems to bear as much resemblance to the apostolic preaching of Christ as do triadic number-games to the Triune God.

One should not pass abrupt judgment upon the decree of Chalcedon, however, until he has studied it carefully and tried mentally to enter into the thought-forms and language of the times. The eminent Orthodox theologian, George Florovsky, has even proposed that no one can understand the Chalcedonian subtleties unless he think and speak in Greek. But if this were so, the vast majority of Christians would be forever excluded from understanding this basic formulation, which the churches of the East and the West have honored as authoritative. The attainment of such theological and philosophical empathy was difficult enough for the Latins of the fifth century. The failure to translate the key Greek words *phúsis*, *ousía*, *hypóstasis* and *prósopon* into exact Latin equivalents is notorious. *Natura*, *substantia*, and *persona* did not quite fit, even though they had become basic to the christological language used ever since Tertullian in the Western tradition.

If the non-Hellenic contemporaries could not rightly grasp the whole meaning of the decree, is there any hope for us twentieth-

century Christians? The words "substance" and "nature" have changed radically, due to modern scientific reflection. And psychology in general has given us a concept of "person" or personality which is far different from the ancient idea of the "mask" through which the real being was expressed. Has not Chalcedon, then, become obsolete as a guide to our present thinking about Jesus Christ? Present opinion is divided.

Most are willing to acknowledge that the council served a necessary purpose for its time. It excluded as heretical the teachings of Eutyches and the Nestorians, which imperiled faith in Jesus Christ as effective Savior. So it mitigated and eventually ended the contention within the Eastern Orthodox and Western Latin churches. However, this peace was bought at the cost of further schism in the East. The so-called Monophysite churches, sometimes given the gratuitous name, "Lesser Oriental Churches," were cut off from both Rome and Constantinople. Only now in the present decade, after a millennium and a half, is there evident hope of healing this ancient breach, since discussions have at last revealed that the alleged Monophysitism is more amenable to Orthodoxy than was ever realized.

The Council of Chalcedon must be evaluated, moreover, within the limits of its purpose. That is to say, the council was not convened in order to formulate a complete constitution on the person of Jesus Christ. It met to deal with particular threats to matters within a total Christology; so it cannot be blamed for failing to do what it was never intended to do.

A further point seems often to be neglected when we look to the Chalcedonian decree for light on contemporary questions about Christ. Today we are challenged by the critical missionary task in a world in which, for the most part, people are quite skeptical of any transcendent or metaphysical reality. For many Christians the Incarnation is no longer the burden of a faith

to be proclaimed, but a question to be avoided in any religious discussions. Thus has skepticism invaded the church and damaged the nerve of mission. But if witness to Christ in a doubting society is of ascendant importance, what help can come from Chalcedon? Manifestly not very much. Because the question decided in 451 was not posed to the church by doubters or adversaries or even potential converts. The question of how Jesus Christ's relation both to God and man could be understood was raised by Christians within the church, in order to allay their own uncertainties. Therefore the decree has had relatively little value for missionary and apologetic purposes. It serves, rather, to guide and enlighten those who have already become Christians and accept in faith that Jesus Christ was uniquely related to God and man.

As the standard by which Christology has been guided for fifteen centuries, the decree has probably been more influential than any document written after the books of the New Testament. It has been authoritative for both the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church; and the churches which follow the Reformation have either formally acknowledged its authority, or else have paid it due respect. The fine points on which the Chalcedonian theologians seemed rather brashly to have attempted an analysis of Christ's personal identity and makeup may now be elusive for us; e.g., Leo the Great's attempt to show that when Jesus did miracles it was by divine power in him, but when he was tempted it was his human nature; or the ensuing debate on Monothelitism, i.e., whether Jesus had only one will or two.

However, the major point of the decree need be regarded as neither unduly speculative, baffling, nor obsolete. It is the plain affirmation which had been adumbrated at the previous councils of Nicaea and Constantinople and formulated in the ecumenical creed which these two produced. And it is unnecessary

to understand Greek to know what is meant. It is this: Insofar as Jesus Christ is known to us, he is known as the one man, born of Mary in Bethlehem, crucified in Jerusalem, and encountered by his followers as the Lord raised from the dead; he is known as a genuine human being, and yet as one to whom the evangelists and apostles could readily apply the highest names of divinity, such as Son of God, Lord (*Kurios* = *ADONAI*) and the fullness of God.

We Christians do not believe this because it is absurd, as Tertullian claimed to do. Nor do we flaunt it before non-Christians as a sheer wonder to be admired or a paradox to cause perplexity.

We confess the message of Jesus Christ as the God-man because upon this foundation rest our ministry of reconciliation, the reality of worship, and the existence of the church.

THE DESIRE FOR RESTATEMENT

Probably few theologians would now maintain that the Chalcedonian decree *invariata* stands as an adequate statement of Christology, although the Orthodox teachers would be less disposed than any others to tamper with it. Friederich Schleiermacher may have been the first of the major theologians to reject the terms of the decree. But when there is a call to reject or revise the words and concepts of Chalcedon, we must ask whether the reality to which these refer is also being rejected or revised. Contemporary theologians so different as Emil Brunner, Edmund Schlink, Paul Tillich, and Hans Küng have clearly suggested that a new vocabulary is needed to replace the key words of the decree. But they are not thereby dismissing the content of it. (However, it is at least questionable whether Tillich remains as true to the Chalcedonian Christology as he promised to be in his *Systematic Theology*.) In a series of lectures on this subject Albert C. Outler advanced the motto,

"Back to Chalcedon—and forward!" This is a most valuable directive for both christological reflection and the proclamation of the gospel today.

Outright rejection of the decree would be tantamount to the acceptance of either one of the ancient heresies: either the humanistic extreme or else some form of docetism.

Feeling the need to express the complete unity of Jesus Christ, Schleiermacher bluntly discarded the concept of the two natures in his person.³ In place of this he endeavored to construct a Christology on the idea of Jesus' perfect "God-consciousness." More than any other man, for reasons which cannot be known, Jesus had a prodigious ability to know the will of God and to feel intimate communion with him. Schleiermacher claimed that this was not just the subjective experience of Jesus, but that the "God-consciousness" was the very power of God at work in him. Therein lay the peculiar character of his relation to God; and therefore Jesus was the uniquely perfect man. This was not a question of ontological speculation, as he considered Chalcedon's statement to be, but of God's endowing and empowering Jesus with what he called the "dignity" requisite to his work as redeemer of mankind. Schleiermacher is not easy to understand here. He does try to retain the singular character of Jesus' person. But it is difficult to see how this "God-consciousness," which might be deemed the equivalent of his divinity, is a gift in which other human beings with varying degrees of such consciousness could not also participate.

The influence of Schleiermacher has been very extensive, of course. And after the rough attacks upon him by his two cultured despisers, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in their younger years, there is now a movement to rehabilitate his theology. Yet, it remains at best dubious whether a return to what is

³ *The Christian Faith* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1928), Proposition 95.

generally seen as a subjectivistic basis for Christology will satisfy either the Christian's craving to understand Jesus Christ or his need to know how to articulate the gospel to others.

Although Schleiermacher commanded the nineteenth century in Protestantism, the influence of Albrecht Ritschl upon some German and much Anglo-Saxon theology was particularly strong. The key word of his interpretation of Christianity was "moral value," which none would contest as a worthy concept. The latter half of the century was a time of increasing emphasis upon the teaching of Jesus and decreasing concern with the question of who he was. Therefore, for many of the time the Ritschlian dictum concerning Jesus was definitive: Jesus had the value of God. This concept, as illuminated by the words and deeds of Jesus in the Gospels, certainly was applicable as a guide to Christian life. In this respect it had a clear advantage over what seemed to be the abstract intellectualism of the traditional christological teaching. And yet Ritschl really failed to come to terms with the essential and perennial question, Who is Jesus Christ? His teaching of "moral value" was vulnerable to loose interpretation. As appropriated by some Christians, it degenerated to the level of the banal humanistic portrait of Jesus as the best of all good men.

Recently prevailing over traditional norms has been the provocative idea of the "New Being" as set forth by Paul Tillich. He must surely be admired for his prodigious effort to make Christian theology amenable and intelligible to contemporary intellectuals, especially those who have explored the meaning of human life by way of depth psychology and the philosophy of existentialism. But Tillich did not invent the concept of New Being for this purpose. It is as old as Paul's letters.

Although the ancient Paul did not carefully describe what he meant by the "new creation" in Christ, he asserted, with more

emphasis on Resurrection than Incarnation, that in Jesus Christ was effected the beginning of the really renewed humanity. And this could happen within the sphere of human history only because of who Jesus Christ was and is: the eternal Son who emptied himself in order to become man and assume the form of a servant, even to the point of death by crucifixion, so that he could be raised and exalted as the one New Man. Thus, when any man by faith has entered into full communion with Christ, there is a new creation.

The contemporary Paul also sees this New Being in Jesus Christ. But Tillich is apparently even more cautious than Paul in explaining precisely what he means. Why is Jesus as the Christ called the New Being? Because he alone has somehow overcome the dreadful bane of man's life, namely, the tragic estrangement between his essence and his existence. All persons in this earthly life suffer from the brokenness and partiality inherent in existence. Only Jesus as the Christ experienced the genuine and authentic life; so only he is qualified to be the healer of man's fragmented, inauthentic existence.

This is an appealing and apparently satisfying interpretation of Christian faith for many of Tillich's readers, and one would not wish to contradict their expressions of appreciation for it. However, his Christology still leaves the reader wondering who this Jesus as the Christ really was and is, and how he alone can be the New Being for all persons. It may well be suggested that Tillich's valuable thought here would be strengthened and clarified if place were given for the concepts of the Chalcedonian decree.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology differs greatly from Tillich's, but his chief concern was the same. He felt a passion to make Jesus Christ known to men and women who have forfeited the "God-hypothesis" in all their thinking and belief. For this widely approved reason Bonhoeffer's designation of Jesus as

"the man for others" has gained much currency. This is a description which is surely true to the New Testament portrayal of Jesus' life in a way more profoundly meaningful than Ritschl's. And it is quite pertinent to the increasing numbers of people today who are sensitive to the lovelessness, loneliness, frustration, and suffering of their fellow men. However, it would be a travesty to conclude that Bonhoeffer was content to commend a merely human and humanitarian Jesus. His lectures and writings on Christology, posthumously collected and published, give strong affirmation of the substance of the perennial doctrine of Christ. Along with the designation of the lowly "man for others," he spoke clearly of the transcendent Word as embodied in Jesus Christ. Making a pun, but not for humor, he said, "Christology is Logology." To know Jesus Christ is to know the divine Logos. But can we fully know the meaning and mystery of his person? Bonhoeffer is more modest than Chalcedonian fathers were, for he admits that God alone knows this mystery. And he is less sanguine than his Lutheran ancestor in confession, Philip Melancthon, concerning the way we come to know within necessary limits just who Christ was and is. In his oft-quoted dictum Melancthon declared that knowing who Jesus Christ is depends on first knowing his benefits or his redeeming work. In technical terms soteriology must precede Christology. But not for Bonhoeffer: "Only when I know who does this work, do I have access to the work of Christ," he said.⁴ The self-giving life for others, the willingness to be despised and rejected, the disturbing and inspiring teaching, and the death on the cross—all of these depend upon the personal identity of Jesus Christ before they can of their intrinsic worth be called redemptive. This is why the doctrine of the unity of the divine and human in him takes precedence

⁴ *Wer ist und wer war Jesus Christus* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1962), p. 24.

over interpretations of atonement and reconciliation. Even as the man for others, Jesus remains the unique and universal man. With great men such as Goethe and Socrates, said Bonhoeffer, we can have encounter and dialogue, and upon this depends our education and ethos. But upon our encounter with Jesus Christ depends our life and death.⁵

Christian thinkers must necessarily obey the restless impulse to seek words and phrases which will express with all possible clarity what the church has always known to be true of Jesus Christ: the singularity of his person and the comprehensiveness of his saving life. Neither a simple "back to the Bible" nor a "back to Chalcedon" attitude will suffice, even though both Bible and Chalcedon and the long tradition of expounding the gospel of Jesus Christ are indispensable. As efforts are made to find the fitting and meaningful words, excesses and errors are to a degree inevitable. But they are worth risking, even at the cost of occasional heretical utterance, because the church's doctrine cannot remain static and immutable. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, precisely because he is knowable to human beings of all times and all places, from the primitive to the richly cultured, from the illiterate to the highly sophisticated, from Jerusalem and Samaria to the ever receding boundaries of human experience.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.