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Final Review



Ha Yārdēn, Il Tevere, and Mā Gaṅgā.

Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness

R. Panikkar

University of California

Santa Barbara

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Does one need to be spiritually a semite
or intellectually a westerner in order to
be a christian?

I. The Dilemma

I would like to present from a general perspective what I have been doing and saying for almost half a century regarding the question of what does it mean today to be a christian.¹ My experiences and encounters are too numerous to recall them.² Leaving aside strictly theological problems, I shall limit myself to a more general philosophical description of the present christian situation.³ If it is true that humankind is facing a major change in our times, a contemporary theological reflection should not just proceed with the usual categories. The

¹Cf. R. Panikkar, from "Sobre el sentido cristiano del la vida" Arbor (Madrid) Nr. 64, (1951) and republished in my book Humanismo y Cruz, Madrid (Rialp), 1963, pp. 112-177, to "Que vol dir avui confessar-sè cristià" in Questions de Vida Cristiana, Montserrat (Publicacions del'Abadia de Montserrat), Nr. 128/129 (1985), pp 86-111.

²I would like to stress that although I have written extensively on these subjects, my praxis (talks, encounters, projects, activities, etc.) has been with me all along. In fact, what I have said and done may be more important than what I have written and published.

³This paper should be understood over against the background of some previous publications like:

- a) The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, London (Darton, Longman and Todd) and New York (Orbis Books), 2nd edition, 1981;
- b) The Intrareligious Dialogue, New York (The Paulist Press), 1978;
- c) Die vielen Götter und der eine Herr. Beiträge zum ökumenischen Gespräch der Weltreligionen, Weilheim (O.W. Barth), 1963;
- d) Religión y Religiones, Madrid (Gredos), 1965;
- e) "Statattva: A Preface to a Hindu-Christian Theology", Jeevadhara, 49 (January-February), 1979, pp. 6-63.
- f) "Salvation in Christ: Concreteness and Universality, the Supersame" (Inaugural Lecture) at the Ecumenical Institute of Advanced Theological Studies, Jerusalem (Tantur), 1972. A shortened version of the first part was published as "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation" in Evangelization, Dialogue and Development --Documenta Missionalia--Roma (1972), pp. 195-218.

problems are different, the very questions need rethinking, let alone the answers. This is what has prompted me to call not for a Vatican III but for a Second Council of Jerusalem. For this we need a certain vision of the state of the world and a certain inner-christian perspective. I shall limit myself here to the latter.

The history of the christian tradition in its relation to other religions could be symbolized by the three sacred rivers of the title. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, the Ha Yārdēn, the Nahr al-Urdunn.⁴ The waters of the Jordan cannot be washed away from the Body of Christ, i.e. the christians.⁵ Christian tradition shows an indelibly jewish origin. Jesus, the Apostles and the Evangelists, were all jews. Without a certain jewish spirituality the Gospels are incomprehensible. By spirituality I understand a set of basic attitudes prior to their manifestation in theories, or their unfolding in praxis. Our problem could be put straight away: Can there be a single universal spirituality, i.e. a basic human attitude which is both universal and concrete? Does a jewish-based spirituality offer such a possibility? Is the Jordan just the River as the egyptians called the Nile?

But theoretical considerations do not suffice. In point of fact the twenty centuries of christian history are equally marked by the waters of another sacred river, the Tiber, il Tevere. Peter and Paul went and died on its shores. They had an historical resurrection there. Without Rome christianity is also

⁴Cf. Matth. III,13: Mc. I,9.

⁵Let us remember that the expression Body of Christ traditionally meant the christian people and only later meant the Eucharist. Cf. F. Holböck, Der eucharistische und der mystische Leib Christi, Rom, 1941, and H. de Lubac, Corpus mysticum, Paris (Aubier) 1949; Meditation sur l' Église, Paris (Aubier) 1954.

incomprehensible, even in its anti-roman aspects. The Mediterranean is the christian sea, the mare nostrum, "our sea." Present-day christianity is a more or less harmonically blended complex of jewish heritage with helleno-roman-gothic-western elements. My point here is that we should neither overlook nor absolutize this fact. Christianity is the religion of these two rivers. We cannot do without them. But should it always remain so?

If spiritually christianity cannot dispense with judaism, intellectually it would collapse without its connection with the Tiber, this latter taken as the symbol of the western mentality, broad and multifaceted as this latter is.

The question today is whether these two rivers delimit the christian theological boundaries or one should cross another Rubicon, this time not to defeat Pompey but to reach peacefully the Ganges. The question is whether christians will have to recognize that they cannot--and should not--conquer the world, because they represent only one phylum in human history and thus, should not claim the universality of being the only true religion, or, whether there is something specifically universal in the christic fact: Christ the universal savior? I have mentioned the Gaṅgā here not only because of my familiarity with her, but also because it seems an apt symbol. The Ganges has many sources, including an invisible one, she disappears in a delta of innumerable beds, and has seen many religions be born on her shores. Yet by no means the metaphor should imply an arian bias. Any country has its rivers, and most of them are sacred. The Mā Gaṅgā, the motherly river of the Ganges is taken here as the symbol, not just for hinduism, buddhism, jainism, sikhism and primordial religions but for all

other traditions of Asia, Africa and Oceania, which represent not only other spiritualities but also different mentalities.⁶

Christian theology does not make much sense to those mentalities. Not only the Bible, but most of the christian presuppositions and ways of thinking are foreign to the non-abrahamic traditions, if not just bewildering. I should insist on this. Although hardly ten percent of the world speaks fluent English, although christians are a minority on the planet, these élites of the world are prone to assume that what they want and think represents universal patterns. Some cultures show a very definite universalizing syndrome.

Now, there are two possible answers, and both are legitimate. Which answer we favor is more than an individually religious decision. Which answer the christian body as a whole will favor is a political decision of immense historical consequences. Reality is not just given once and for all. The future of religions depends also on how the different traditions understand themselves and what kind of decisions are taken. Christianity is also what christians make--or will make--of it. Politics and religion must be distinguished, but they cannot be totally separated.⁷

The first answer will say that christians should not claim universality. Christians should let the rivers of the world flow peacefully without pumping christian waters into them or diverting their beds to the Dead Sea or the Mediterranean. They should not cross another Rubicon and inundate every country in the world. Christianity will then be considered as one religion among many,

⁶Cf. as a single example Hajime Nakamura, Ways of Thinking of Eastern People, Honolulu (University of Hawaii Press), reprint 1985.

⁷Cf. R. Panikkar, "Religion and Politics: The Western Dilemma" in P.H. Merkl, N. Smart (eds.), Religion and Politics in the Modern World, New York (New York University Press) 1985, pp. 44-60.

and Jesus, ultimately, the savior of christians. The relationship with other religions will have to be dealt with, as an inter-religious problem, like inter-national affairs among sovereign states. In this case christianity preserves its identity by differentiation.⁸ Christianity is unique because it is different. And this difference should be preserved. Tolerance, mutual respect, and good neighborliness are here not at stake. At stake is only the claim to universality of a certain christian tradition. Christians should acknowledge the other traditions each in their own right. Unlimited growth is cancer and so would be an ever growing single christian religion all over the world. The rivers should preserve their separate identities and so should the religions. The waters of the Gaṅgā, or of the Huanghe or the Nahr an Nil (Nile), for that matter, this first answer will say, contain too many salts (or pollution, if you want) and are too far away (philosophically, theologically, humanly) to be able to mix with the christian rivers without producing major chemical and physical transformations. It is better, then, to keep them separate. Or do christians dream of achieving the engineering feat of canalizing all those rivers? Has technology invaded also the theological mind? Paradoxically enough, only through the spread (invasion) of technology many people of other traditions begin to grasp what christianity is all about--for good and/or for ill.

The second, and probably still the most common answer, will say that the claim to universality is inherent to christianity. Christianity is seen here as a privileged phylum called upon to unify the world, to 'convert' the other cultural and religious streams into a christian Amazonas, watering the entire planet--in the process of which, of course, christianity itself will have to change into a

⁸Cf. R. Panikkar, Le Mystère du culte dans l'hindouisme et le christianisme, Paris (Cerf) 1970, pp. 37ss.

still more universal religion. With what right, this second question argues, do we stop the growth of the christian dynamism? Is it not the temptation of every revolutionary movement, once its leaders achieve power to suffocate any further evolution? Has christianity succumbed to such a temptation? Until now christians have absorbed syncretically the 'good things' of the Mediterranean religions. Why cannot they do something similar with other religions?

The dilemma is this: many christians will feel that they are betraying their deepest beliefs if they give up the conviction that the christic dimension of their faith is meant to be universal. On the other hand, an increasing number of christians begin to be painfully and dimly aware that the claim to universality is an imperialistic remnant of times which should be past, besides the fact that most followers of other religions feel this claim as a threat--and an insult--to their beliefs.

The present study has the ambition to solve this dilemma by showing that the rivers of the earth neither actually meet each other, not even in the oceans, nor do they need to meet to be truly life giving rivers. But 'they' meet: they meet in the skies, that is, in heaven. The rivers do not meet, not even as water. 'They' meet in the form of clouds, once they have suffered a transformation into vapor, which eventually will pour down again in the valleys of mortals to feed again the rivers of the earth. Religions do not coalesce, certainly not as organized religions. They meet once transformed into vapor, once metamorphosized into Spirit, which then is poured down in innumerable tongues. The rivers are fed by the descending clouds, and also by terrestrial and subterranean sources, after another transformation, that of snow and ice into water. The true resevoir of religions lies not only in the doctrinal waters of theology; it lies also in the transcendental vapor (revelation) of the divine clouds, and in the immanent ice and snow (inspiration) from the glaciers and snowladden mountain of the saints.

My contention will be that the christic principle is neither a particular event nor a universal religion. What is it then? It is the center of reality as seen by the christian tradition. But this vision is only the christian vision, not a universal one. It is the christic universal vision. I shall pursue this metaphor trying to show that no religious tradition has the monopoly on the living waters of the rivers (salvation) nor that we should water-down the tenets of any authentic religion in order to reach religious concord.⁹ Elsewhere I have developed the pars pro toto effect inherent to this problematic.¹⁰ Our metaphor does not stand for the transcendent unity of all religions in an unqualified way. It goes in this direction, but we would not like to confuse the actual rivers with chemically pure water. Each water is different as each religion is--each river carries its proper salts and micro-organisms. We shall not forget either that the waters undergo a transformation (of death and resurrection-- into water, snow, and again water) which alone allows them to go on fertilizing the earth. Religions are not static constructs. No religion should have the fear to let its water evaporate when the climate becomes unbearably hot. The clouds will restore the waters when the heat of polemics and waves subside. Put it another way: not only each water is unique, also every river contributes its shape, taste and beauty to the religious world, which is the human world facing its ultimate destiny. The meanders, ghats, ports, bathing spots, quiet ponds, quick cascades, tranquil and stormy waters belong also to the religious phenomenon. Whatever the 'essence' of religion may be, living and actual religions are not essences, but concrete,

⁹The last stanza of the Rg Veda (X, 191,4) is a hymn to religious concord.

¹⁰"The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?" to be published shortly in a volume edited by L. Swidler.

powerful and dangerous existences. Religious rivers are much more than chemical H₂O.

Our method cannot be purely deductive. It has to be empirical and historical. For this reason before drawing any conclusions we shall try to show, on the one hand, the christian self-understanding along the lines of history, and on the other, the theological interpretation of this fact.

II. The Five Historical Periods

We should keep in mind that the present day theological understanding of the christian phenomenon is function of temporal and contextual parameters besides other factors. In short, christians have not interpreted the christic fact always in the same way. The self-understanding of christians throughout history could be summed up in five historical periods, although each of them is still permeating the others. For this reason, I call them not chronological but kairological moments of christian history.¹¹

A. The Periods

1. Witnessing represents the prevalent christian self-consciousness of the first centuries. The early christians were not imagining that they formed a new religion. They were witnessing to those living words heard at the Jordan and confirmed by the Resurrection. It was just a fact which transformed their lives, soon interpreted, of course, in different ways, but always as a kind of transhistorical event. They were not living exclusively in history. Eschatology was an ever-present factor. They could fearlessly face death. They were martyrs,

¹¹Cf. my chapter "Christianity and World Religions" in the volume Christianity, Patiala (Punjabi University), 1969, pp. 78-127 (Guru Nanak Quintcentennial Collection Series) where these five periods are explained at a greater length.

witnesses to an event. Fidelity was paramount. This conviction was predominant roughly until the Fall of Rome under Alaric in 410, or the death of St. Augustine in 430. The true christian is the martyr.

2. Conversion represents the next moment. The world was becoming 'christian', but the climate was still 'pagan'. Slowly, christians did establish themselves as a societal and even political reality. Yet, christians were aware that the constantinization of christianity had its pitfalls. The true christians had to distinguish themselves from the 'world'. You become a real christian not so much because you adhere to an official religion but because you undergo a change of heart. "Conversio morum" is the monastic slogan. The authentic christian may tamper with the emerging political order or be allured by christian social power, but the real criterion is the style of life, the purity of the heart. To be a christian means to be converted to Christ. The true christians follow the monastic calling. But by now christianity has developed, not only a specific set of doctrines, but also of rules and political allegiances. The christian understanding is that by now christians form a religion, and even a State, the emerging Empire. This religion is not inimical to other religions, especially those far away, but conversion slowly acquires political connotations. Entire peoples get converted and carry with them the basic attitudes of their respective ways of life. This was the fate of a great part of the peoples of Europe. This state of affairs lasted until the Middle Ages, but suffered a convulsion at the clash with Islam. This clash elicits a new attitude.

3. Crusade is the basic attitude of the christian self-understanding of this new period which was predominant from the eighth century until well past the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, probably until the defeat of the turkish power at Lepanto in 1571. Meanwhile, Christendom is firmly established. There are struggles and inner tensions among christian princes, but nothing shapes christian

life more than the threat that Christendom felt vis-à-vis Islam. It was almost a collective obsession. Spain falls quickly under muslim dominion after the battle of Guadalete in 713, and the South of France is also 'invaded'. Charles Martel is hailed as the savior of (christian) Europe. Jerusalem and the Holy Places are under muslim domination. Vienna is threatened. The christian Empire has to assert itself. The danger is felt everywhere. Often jews are the scapegoats of christian frustrations. The christian has to be a soldier, a crusader, a 'militant', a word that will be used until our times. The superiors of the new religious movements are no longer called Fathers, Abbots or Mothers, but Generals--and the movements 'orders'. Militia Christi, either in the most literal sense, becoming a crusader, or in the most lofty interpretation becoming a Jesuit, or similar, represents here the main attitude. Protestantism presents also a similar feature: Christianity is a demanding enterprise, it requires courage, faith, decision. You have to be a christian chevalier. You need to be a hero, you have the sacred duty of conquering or reconquering for Christ the life within and the world without. One should not compromise with the world. Faith alone suffices. Islam, which is felt as the threat (partly providential, as a warning to not become lukewarm), becomes the specimen for other religions. Christianity begins to develop the idea of being the only true religion. The others are false. To be sure, "de vera religione" is a consecrated phrase, but the meaning shifts from true religiousness to the only true and salvific institutionalized religion. This feeling lasts for centuries. But, at a certain moment, something new happens in Christendom, i.e., in the Sacrum Romanum Imperium Germanicum: A new continent is discovered in 1492. This changes the scene: Christendom as a world-order slowly collapses and christianity as a religion emerges.

4. Mission then becomes the dominant feature until the end of the Modern Age. The thrust to conquer is irresistible. But the religious justification of

the Conquest of America cannot be that of a crusade. The Amerindians could neither be called a threat, like the muslims, nor were they accusing christians of anything. The "conquista" could only be justified if they were to be made christians. Salamanca is boiling with theological discussions. Bartolomé de las Casas defends the indios. Francisco de Vitoria tries his best, but the triumphant ideology is that christians have the duty, in a word, the mission, to proclaim, convert, and thus to save them. This ideology spreads steadily. The true christian is a missionary. The meaning of the word, again, extends from literally going to preach to the 'infidels', to mystically offering oneself for their salvation, obviously giving an example to the world. Thérèse de Lisieux secluded in her carmelite convent sees--and fulfills--her life as a missionary. Mission theology is the most elaborated theology.¹² Nevertheless, in contact with other peoples of the world christians discover that those religions contain treasures of spiritual values, and a theological reflection sets in. The names of Mateo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili suggest this approach, but many such efforts were stifled because the christian institutions found them threatening to the dynamism of the times, i.e., to the political expansion of the european states which, because they declared themselves christian, could not allow other interpretations that could undermine their power. The dispute over the chinese rites is well-known. In short, christianity has a World Mission. Christians still pay and pray for the

¹²The ground breaking book by Paul Knitter, No Other Name. A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions, Maryknoll, N.York (Orbis Books), 1985, is sponsored by the American Society of Missiology Series (Nr. 7). In the Preface to the Series, says W.J. Danker, the Chairman of the Committee: "Always the focus will be on Christian mission." And specifies: "By 'mission' in this context is meant a cross-cultural passage over the boundary between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence" (xi). The title given at the SEDOS Seminar (gathering 45 Roman Catholic religious families) in Rome (1981), on The Future of Mission, attended by 102 persons from six continents, was Mission in Dialogue, ed. M. Motte, J.R. Lang (Maryknoll, N.Y. [Orbis Books], 1982).

Missions. The political Embassies are called Missions up to our own times and the name becomes universally accepted. But two World Wars, a hundred million deaths, and the independence of some 150 new states mark the end of a period. Many christians realize that they can no longer 'missionize' other peoples. We enter into the contemporary age.

5. Dialogue is the new catchword after the dismantling of the colonial political order. There is a trend now to indigenization, inculturation, greater respect for other religions and, attempts at a new interpretation of the christic fact. These christians no longer want to conquer, not even to convert; they want to serve and to learn, they offer themselves as sincere participants in an open dialogue--with the understandable mistrust of their partners, as anybody conversant with past history will easily understand. Christians begin to say that dialogue is not a new strategy, but an open process of mutual enrichment and better knowledge of each other. Christendom has little prospect, christianity is in crisis, but the Christ symbol remains effective. Christianness emerges.

* * * * *

To be sure, the christian somehow retains all five traits. There is something of a witness in every christian, who will feel uneasy if he/she is not somewhat better than other people (conversion), has not the courage to confess his/her faith (a militant, a crusader) and does not sense the burden and responsibility of caring for the whole world (mission). Now, discovering that they are not alone, christians open up to dialogue. We are just at the beginning of a new spiral of the interaction between christians and the peoples of other belief systems.

B) The Lessons of History

We should situate our reflections within the respective historical contexts. The first period is still nurtured by the waters of the Jordan. The

Old Covenant is felt to be paramount. Christians are spiritually semites. The three following periods are nourished by the waters of the Tiber. Christians are intellectually europeans. The mediterranean cultures are here decisive. Across the Atlantic there are only colonies in the historical sense of the word, in spite of the fact that after half a millennium of more or less independent existence, the american continent presents features of its own.

It is only the fifth attitude that no longer is content to simply export mediterranean culture. It aspires to bathe in the waters of the Ganges and all the other rivers of the world together with other believers. Christians discover that those rivers are real rivers and that they do not belong to them. It is a new sociological situation in spite of remarkable exceptions of the past.

An historical note is here required. The contemporary attitude is one of dialogue, but this kairological moment was not absent in other periods. Let us only mention Minutius Felix, the Disputes of Barcelona and Toledo, Ramon Llull, Bernard of Clairvaux, Nicholas of Cusa, and, in more recent times, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, and John Wu among many others, just to show that the felt need for dialogue is not so brand new. On a more popular level this existential exchange has always existed there where populations of different religious allegiances live side by side. In Kerala for instance, animists, hindus, christians and muslims, have lived for centuries in a relatively positive symbiosis.

We may draw now some lessons from our historical survey.

The first lesson history makes us aware of^{is} that all our disquisitions are dependent on the temporal factor, i.e., on the historical circumstances. Were it not for the fact of the political decolonization of the world we would not say the things we say today. The dialogue has not sprung out of pure speculation. It has been almost forced by circumstances. Praxis conditions theory. But it is also wisdom to make a virtue out of a necessity.

The second lesson should be one of liberating us both from a narrow monodimensional supernaturalism and a sheer dialectical materialism. The change of the christian attitudes is neither the sole fruit of a providential care of a God guiding a particular people; nor it is the mere result of cynical calculation of the institutional churches in order to remain in power and continue dominating purses and consciences. Both factors--and still others--may be at work. If circumstances oblige us to take a certain attitude, this does not preclude that the same circumstances be fruit of still other forces acting in history, nor is a divine factor necessarily excluded in the play, though the latter is certainly not a deus ex machina. The Spirit of God, to use traditional language, should be distinguished but not separated from the spirit of the times. History explains the how, not the why. In other words, history shows neither the triumph of the best (blessed by divine Providence) nor of the most cunning ('blessed' by sheer Power). Dharmakṣetra and Kurukṣetra belong together, to say it with the Bhagavad Gītā, the wheat and the tares grow together, to speak with the Gospel.

The third lesson is one of relativization of all our endeavours, the theological and the intellectual not excluded. The critical distance that we take regarding ideologies of the past suggests that we ourselves are not an exception, and not essentially better off. We are also situated within a limited and ultimately provisional framework--just for the time being, which is our being in time. We are as much a passing phase as our ancestors were. If we have to beware of ethnocentrism we should equally overcome chronocentrism.

The fourth lesson stresses the creativity and freedom of authentic theologizing. Theology does not merely repeat past doctrines or only draw implicit consequences from them. It also creates something new and its decisions and insight, can be momentous; they can strike a new direction which is not a mere 'development' of an already existing dogma. There are mutations, and there is

freedom in the real world. Theology is not only exegesis, it is also praxis, not simply a matter of drawing conclusions, but also of establishing new premises, and creating new situations. In other words, the history of the christian self-understanding is not a logical unfolding of some premises; it is the fruit of a series of factors, many of which are free movements of the human and/or divine spirit.

To sum up: the criterion for the next step is not a logical continuation of the previous ones. It presupposes them, but is not necessarily contained in them. Life is more than logical unfolding--or even evolution.

History also teaches us the proper way to approach our topic. In order not to lengthen this study, I shall only enunciate some methodological principles.

C. Methodological Reflections

1) A christian reflection on christian self-understanding has to take into consideration three factors:

- a) The original sources of christian self-understanding;
- b) The interpretation by tradition of such sources;
- c) The personal experience and new reflection upon it all.

The art consists in blending the three in a convincing harmony.

2) A christian interpretation of the christic fact today needs to pay attention to:

- a) Not to commit apostasy, i.e. to sever itself from the very tradition it wants to interpret;
- b) Not to dilute it into an amorphous common denominator, not even for the sake of tolerance or ecumenical spirit;
- c) Not to neglect a thorough knowledge of other traditions: It has to be open to other religious experiences, and belief-forms (and systems), to be willing to listen to them, to learn from them and even to incorporate anything

that appears to enrich and/or deepen the christian interpretation, to be ready for a mutual transformation. This interreligious fertilization may produce a new awareness and even, eventually, a new form of religious consciousness or religion.

3) The method has to be a dialogical method applied:¹³

a) Among religions themselves. In this case, christianity and the other religions of the world.

b) Within the very heart of one's own religion. In our case, among the different sorts of christian understandings and theologies.

c) Within the inner recesses of the theologians themselves, or the persons engaged in such an enterprise. It is an intimate religious exercise.

I do not elaborate any of these points, but hope that this paper itself is an example of such a methodology.

III - The Three Geo-Theological Moments

A) The Rivers

The christic fact has been understood so far as being essentially historical. Thus, our previous analyses of the five kairological moments. But it is also transhistorical. The christic event is not something of the past or of the future only. It belongs also to the order of the heart, of the personal life of the actual believer. It has a sui generis contemporaneity and, in a way, transcends time and space without abolishing the spatio-temporal framework. It is theological. It reflects on the given data under the light beacons by its own tradition and eventually coming also from other lighthouses--although everything

¹³Cf. my "Dialogical Dialogue" in The World's Religious Traditions, Edinburgh (T.T. & Clark), 1984, pp. 61-72. [Volume in honor of W.C. Smith], edited by Frank Whaling.

is filtered by our optical glasses. The three moments we are going to describe are also kairological: they are intertwined, each is present in the other. And yet the respective moments appear with major force at precise points in the temporal expansion of christic consciousness.

History and tradition are loci theologici. Any theological reflection today ignoring the new context is methodologically flawed. Neither dogma, nor the christian self-understanding are ahistorical and ageographical facts. Geography as much as history is a human and also a religious category.

If the five described facets of christian self-understanding have developed along historical lines the following three theological moments follow a religio-geographical pattern. If the christic phenomenon of the third century is different from that of the twentieth century, a similar difference exists between the christian experience at the shores of the Tiber and at those of the Ganges. Our potamic metaphor is more than a geographical nicety. It is also a theological category. Irrespective whether christianity is universal or not the christian interpretation of life in an african desert is different from the one in a scandinavian city. We have been sensitive to history, but much less to geography.

We should be fully aware that the geography of christianity cannot be reduced to the Jordan of Palestine, the Tiber of Italy, and the Ganges of India. Not only the fauna and flora is different in the shores of the many rivers of the world, humans are also distinct and their religiousness vary. The geo-theological coordinates are not cartesian and neutral geometrical parameters, they impinge in the very nature of the humans and their beliefs. The Geography of Religions is still an unexplored discipline. Furthermore, Geography and History are intertwined. ²

The Tiber for instance, is not only the Tiber of Rome. Rome is also Byzantium, and Moscow for centuries was the Third Rome. Even the italian city

encompasses three Romes, that of the Caesars (christian or not), that of the Popes (with or without temporal power), that of the people. Yet we take the Tiber to be the representative of this second period of christian geography. We will have to limit our presentation to a bare sketch, of course.

1. The Jordan

Water, Faith, Event, Religiosity, Upwardness: Exclusivism

Jesus is the Christ. This is the possibly shortest formulation of the christian belief, whereby the meaning of Christ is polysemic and, in this first moment, still very much linked to the jewish understanding of the Messiah, although already with some specific traits, for Jesus himself seems to have been often uncomfortable with that title. There is a shift of meaning in the otherwise grammatically synonymous words: 'Anointed One', 'Messiah', 'Christos', 'Christ', and, of course, 'Jesus-Christ'.

The christian self-understanding is here intimately linked in continuation of and confrontation with the jewish Bible. Circumcision is abolished and this creates a break with judaism. But it is 'replaced' by the baptism of water. This water is the Jordan water. Those waters baptized Jesus, the son of Mary, the Son of Man. They are holy waters because the Spirit of God is brooding upon them. Water is the symbol for initiation: cleanse, run, are in polarity with fire, they come from wells and rivers, but also from high and underneath the earth, bringing death and resurrection. But there is only one Jordan. Not everybody is initiated. Exclusivism is lurking, although all water, we shall be told later, is Jordan water.

The christian is the Man of faith. This faith is centered on the person of Jesus. Theological discussions will have to elucidate who this Jesus is. However, the central point is not so much his nature, but the reality of his

Event, especially the Resurrection. This event is first of all the historical fact in the life of Jesus: The condemnation of a palestinian by the legal, religious and political authorities of the times. We are embedded in history and personal history. Fidelity to his person is here central. The teachings of that young rabbi, in spite of the fact that most of the sayings might have been said before, are fascinating and his example has an irresistible attraction.

The christians, in spite of the warning of the Angels at the Ascension, still look up to Heaven. They have a 'religious' attitude which permeates their lives, a particular religiosity, not a religion. They look upward to the Risen Christ. The eschatological hopes are predominant. His resurrection will reveal and effect 'our' resurrection.

There is something of a privilege to come under the influence, spell, grace of Jesus. There is something special: it confers upon you a dignity, it is a source of joy, but also a burden. The Jordan, to continue with our potamic metaphor, has a particular power, as the Old Testament already knew. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Can I not wash in them and be clean?" exclaimed Naaman, the commander of the King of Aram's army, to Elisha, the prophet of Israel¹⁴. In other words, uniqueness, privilege and even exclusiveness do not create any insurmountable problem in a hierarchical world. Christians are few and even fewer are the number of the saved¹⁵. There is nothing repellent with a certain exclusivism here.

¹⁴II Reg. V, 12.

¹⁵In a still unpublished paper of mine "Das Heil der Welt" I have tried to show how this idea was common in all salvation-religions. It is after all the law of Nature: one among millions of spermatozoa becomes fecundated; one among the millions of living species becomes human, one among the millions of plants becomes an animal, and so on. Only a few of the peoples of the world are christians and even fewer become divinized, saved, realized,...

This first moment corresponds to the first historical period, which we have featured as presenting the basic attitude of Witnessing.

It is obvious that the central theological problems here shall hinge on the identity of Jesus Christ: christological and trinitarian issues.

2. The Tiber:

Fire, Belief, Institution, Religion, Introversion: Inclusivism

But is the Jordan the only sacred river? Is the baptism not also of fire? Fire burns the old and it spreads afar. It purifies, but it also destroys. Christian identity today cannot be reduced to the experience of the first generations and overlook the cultural and religious constructions which twenty centuries of christian life have produced. We are dealing here with the second, third and fourth periods mentioned above, i.e., Conversion, Crusade and Mission. We span well over fifteen centuries of christian history.

The christian is committed to a certain world-view; which is expressed in a set of beliefs. To be a christian does not mean just to profess fidelity to Christ, it entails also adherence to christian society, be it called church or even christian civilization or christian values. It implies orthodoxy, the right beliefs. Splits and schisms, once well established, develop also their own orthodoxies. Christianity becomes an institution. The sense of belonging together becomes highly institutionalized. The ideal is Christendom, the christian Empire, the christian civilization, and, when it begins to collapse, around the XVI century, it is more and more replaced by Christianity as religion.

The Jordan was a geographical and mystical river. Its waters are baptismal waters. The Tiber is an historical and political river. Its waters flow into the Thames, the Seine, the Donau, the Potomac...Its waters carry a theology, a well-structured vision of the world, even if broad and flexible. They are the

waters of the christian civilization of the past and the present. Christendom and christianity as its successor are not just private affairs. The christian waters flow everywhere; they irrigate all the fields of a civilization which will claim to encompass the entire world. Such a variety of contemporary names as John Paul II, President Reagan, Queen Elizabeth, General Pinochet, and also philosophers like Maritain and Gilson, theologians like Barth and Lonergan, and historians like Toynebee and Heer, could be added here. All those names represent the belief in the superiority of christianity. This belief does not prevent one from acknowledging the greatness of others and the failings of christians, but it will be argued that this very judgment is made with the very scale of values of christianity itself and stands under the authority of Christ.

Christianity has become so powerful and universal, so convinced of its mission that it does not feel the need to look outside except to learn and to improve itself. Inwardness is one of its features, be it mystical, religious or political. Within the christian revelation, doctrine, praxis, and way of life one finds all that is needed for a full human life and also for judging other religions and cultures. This is the kind of introversion we are referring to: in ourselves we find the whole truth. Theology is turned inward. We want to find in ourselves, in our own tradition or revelation the answers to all theological issues. We may speak about the others, we may revere them and integrate them in our system, but it is still 'we' who perform the task. Here is one example: when for the first time in Church History an Ecumenical Council recognized the own right of existence to other religions and even praised them, as happened in the Declaration Nostra Aetate of Vatican II, no need was felt to invite the representatives of those other religions to speak by and for themselves. The Roman Catholic experts felt sufficiently confident to speak on behalf of others. The Tiber was enough.

The strict theological ideas will tend here to defend a certain kind of christian inclusivism. The christian religion represents the culmination of religious evolution; it stands for universal values and claims a sort of universality. In brief, christianity does not need to despise others but considers itself certainly superior.

"Anima naturaliter christiana", "anonymous christians", "fulfillment theology", "servants of humankind", "the realm of nature and that of grace", or in more secularized ways, "Democracy", "Global Civilization", "World Government", "One World Market", "Universal Human Rights", etc., are all expressions of the same syndrome. All the rivers carry the same water. Ultimately it is our water, even if the canoes rowing up or down the stream do not know it.

To be sure, there are many christian institutions, churches and theologies. They are struggling either among themselves whether for power, a better understanding of their theological issues (internal or ecumenical), or for how to deal with other religions or with the world. In spite of diversity, we detect in them the same kind of language. Could we call it the western logos? One of its features is that christians get irritated at such a qualification, because the logos, they will say, which can only be 'our' logos, is universal. If not the Tiber, the waters of the Tiber are everywhere. That is why we need fire and inwardness.

The efforts at greater openness are praiseworthy: there is the notion of an invisible christianity, and that of a cosmic Christ¹⁶, a universal pneumatic Church, a God which makes sense also for the buddhists, and a Law which does not

¹⁶May I note that one of my books, with its ambiguous title, does not deal with the known Christ to christians and unknown to hindus, but with The Unknown Christ of Hinduism--and a fortiori of christianity.

exclude nómos, dhamma, karma, or li. The ideal is a universal Theology of Religion or, in more scientific terms, a Unified Field Theory¹⁷. This Tiber is indeed longer than the Mississippi.

As long as Christianity remains invisible, Christ unknown, the Church spiritual, God ineffable, the Law unwritten, and Theology undone, there is no quarrel. Homo loquens tamen, and we cannot speak language as such, nor practice religion as such. We have to speak a particular language and practice a particular religion. Christian universality then becomes suspect and collapses--unless...

Unless it is felt that the christian phylum is so privileged that it absorbs all the others and becomes the only Amazonas for the entire world. This is the case in the new forms of revivalism and fundamentalisms of all sorts. In a word, preoccupation with self-identity is central.

It is also clear that here the main theological problems will hinge on who christians are and what their destiny means: problems of ecclesiology, grace, salvation, relation with other religions and, in general, orthodoxy.

3. The Ganges

Earth, Confidence, Religiousness, Dimension, Extroversion: Pluralism

We face now the challenge of a possible 'theology' for a post-colonial era. It corresponds to the above-mentioned fifth attitude of dialogue. Now, a dialogical theology begins by positing what it is talking about only when the very

¹⁷Cf., representing the contemporary northamerican debate, W.C. Smith, Toward a World Theology, Philadelphia (Westminster Press), 1981, and the many responses it has elicited.

subject matter--and obviously the language--has been found in common or created in the dialogue itself. The very agenda of the dialogue should be worked out in the dialogue itself. In other words, Gangotri is only one of the sources of the Ganges (the Sarasvati is an invisible one,...) and the delta is no longer a river, nor even indian territory. The sources of our Ganges are the snow of the mountains and the clouds of the skies. None of them are actually water.

The symbol here is earth, i.e. secularity (saeculum), or the Kingdom of Justice here on earth, which entails the readiness to collaborate with every creature, even if we disagree. There is no planetarian consciousness, but there is a special awareness of the other(s) and a certain trend to ^{welcome} without suffocating, i.e. to accept without comprehending. We trust. We have a higher confidence in our common destiny than the certainty (security) placed on our logos. Christian identity begins to appear neither as defending a certain culture nor as belonging to an institutionalized religion, but as living a personal religiousness, i.e. a sort of religious attitude which constitutes a dimension of Man, one factor of the humanum, one aspect of the Divine. Christians are no longer worried only about themselves, but are also open toward the others, and the world at large: Outwardness. This moment is characteristically outward bound, not in order to go out and conquer, but to be in relationship. It is an attitude that sees oneself in relation to others and others in relation to oneself. I do not call it openness so as to keep the balance with the other two moments. An example may clarify what we mean. The christian theology of the second moment tended to emphasize the newness of the christian message, was kin in defending identity by difference and thus affirming that love of one's neighbor, the doctrine of the trinity, gracē, etc. were all specific and unique contributions of the christian

revelation.¹⁸ Whatever the particular cases may be, the third moment will feel more comfortable if it discovers that all those doctrines and sayings are humanity's common good and that christianity simply incarnates the primordial and original traditions of humankind.

What I am saying is this. Neither exclusivism nor inclusivism represent the proper attitude of this third moment, but pluralism.

But before elaborating the positive aspect of the new moment which I call christianness, let us mention the negative feature which will lead us, like Moses, as far as the border of the Promised Land: the possible mutual incommensurability of ultimate world views.

I have been arguing time and again that, properly speaking, Comparative Philosophy is not possible because the necessary stand from which the comparison is made belongs already to a definite philosophical view.¹⁹ Something similar can be said about Comparative Religion.²⁰ Unless we assume that Reason, and ultimately as we understand it to be, is the neutral, universal and sufficient criterion for evaluating religions, we cannot assume at the outset that all religious traditions can be justly and truly measured with the same metron. Each religious tradition, as a relatively complete system of self-understanding, segregates its own parameters. A fruitful dialogue has to agree on the parameters to be used in the dialogue itself, otherwise there is only talking at

¹⁸The title of the otherwise wonderful book by K. Prüm̄m is significant of what we are trying to say: Christentum als Neuheitserlebnis, Freiburg (Härder), 1939.

¹⁹R. Panikkar, "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge" in L.S. Rouser (ed.) Religious Pluralism (Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion - vol. 5), Notre Dame (University of Notre Dame Press), 1984, pp. 97-115.

²⁰R. Panikkar, "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion", Man and World, vol.13, 3-4 (1980), pp. 357-383.

cross-purposes. Simply stated: what do we mean by the very words we use? The talk about meaning of words preceeds, conditions, and also constitutes the dialogue.

The consequence of this is that religious traditions may be incommensurable, i.e. they may not have a common measure which can adequately evaluate them. And in point of fact, they are mutually irreducible--until some agreement has been reached or established. A realistic assessment of the present-day state of affairs is that religions, and even theologies, often consider themselves mutually incompatible. And we do not necessarily need to resolve our intellectual frustration by postulating an intellect for which all, absolutely all, is intelligible. This hypothesis only begs the Ultimate Question. It pretends to answer the Why of Being, and doing this makes Being subservient to the Why, to logos, to Consciousness. We may logically say that all what an infinite or supreme intellect encompasses is intelligible. There are no limits to an infinite intelligence: all is intelligible to it. But unless we identify Being with Consciousness we cannot logically show that there could not be Being which could not be known. In other words: all that can be known, can be known by a Supreme Intelligence, so that it truly knows ALL that can be known. But we do not know, cannot affirm whether Reality 'is' only that which can be known--by an (Infinite) Intellect. This Intellect may have no limits qua intelligence, but still there could be Reality standing off-limits that Intelligence, not qua Intelligence, but qua Being--except, obviously, if we beg the question identifying Being and Consciousness. It is said that if such an Intelligence could not know All it would not be infinite. It is answered that an Infinite Intelligence is infinite qua Intelligence, but does not need to be infinite qua Being, unless we already assume that Being and Intelligence ultimately coalesce--which is precisely what is under discussion. This simply implies that there may be a facet of Reality opaque

to the light of the Intellect. Obviously, we do not know it, but also don't know the contrary. We shall return to this when dealing with the notion of pluralism.

If the problem of the two previous moments were christological/trinitarian and ecclesiological/soteriological, the theological problems here will hinge on the issues of humankind and how christians can contribute to solve them. This does not mean that these problems are merely political or economic, or only a matter of justice. They are also anthropological, for Man has gained a peculiar self-understanding. They are also cosmological, i.e. concerning the vision of the world and of history.

* * * * *

It is over against this historical and geotheological background of our two-fold typology that we should put the specific problem of a christian self-understanding for our times. We shall spell out some features which may be helpful in elucidating our question.

B) The Attitudes

Christendom, Christianity, Christianness

We begin with a question of vocabulary.

The word christian can be the adjective of christendom (a civilization), of christianity (a religion) and of christianness (a personal religiousness). During the period of the so-called christian culture of the higher middle ages one could hardly be a christian without belonging to christendom. Until recently, one could hardly confess oneself to be christian without belonging to christianity.

Now, people increasingly envisage the possibility of being christian as a personal attitude without adhering either to christendom or to christianity as institutional constructs. We speak here of a personal and not an individualistic attitude. The person encompasses all the personal pronouns and always implies community. The christian attitude is ecclesial, which does not mean

ecclesiastical, in the current sense of the word, which is synonymous with a large traditional organization. Ecclesia, strictly speaking, implies an organism, not an organization. An organism needs a soul, life. An organization requires an idea, a rationale.²¹

The distinction is important. To be a christian as a member of christendom belongs mainly to the past and to the dreams of some for the future, but it does not constitute a problem for the majority of theologians. Yet, the spirit and the reality of christendom has neither disappeared today nor can it be totally abolished from christian consciousness. Not only the past is there, the so-called christian civilization. It belongs also both to human nature and to christian dynamism to build 'reservations' where the christian ideal can become incarnate to the full in the smallest details of human life. In the past it was called the Christian Empire, or Christian Nation, later Religious Orders and in modern times Sects or Movements. The situation is ambivalent and not totally obsolete. But the christic fact cannot be exhaustively identified with what we call christendom. There is also christianity, and christianness. There are many mansions in the Father's house!

We have then also christianity. To be a christian as a member of christianity amounts to belonging to one religion among many. It may be more or less pure than others. However, it would represent not only an abuse of language but an abusive language to denounce the other religions as false or incomplete. The problems of christianity as religion are different from the issues of christendom as a full-fledged social organization. Some hundred years ago

²¹Cf. my "The Dream of an Indian Ecclesiology" in In Search of an Indian Ecclesiology ed. by The Indian Theological Association, Bangalore (I.T.C.) 1985, pp. 25-54.

catholics who would fight the 'divine right' of the pontifical states were excommunicated. Those who would deny the right to torture the heretic incurred also in excommunication. No catholic christian today feels obliged to obey the rules, laws and injunctions of the medieval and renaissance popes. They belonged to christendom and not to christianity.

We should add a remark here similar to the one we made regarding christendom. Papal Nuncios belong to christendom, they still exist and their function may have some historical justification. Canon Law is still valid and Pontifical Encyclicals carry their authority--to put just Roman catholic examples. But they no longer exhaust the ways of being christian and even 'catholic'.

It emerges powerfully in our times a third facet. To be a christian, thirdly, can also be understood as confessing a personal faith, adopting a christ-like attitude inasmuch as Christ represents the central symbol of one's own life. Not to do undue violence to grammar I call it christianness. Germans may call it Christlichkeit, cristiana, in spanish. It does not need to be interpreted as an historical fact. It is just a factum, i.e, something we make and which at the same time is made not just by us. Elsewhere I have made a similar distinction: Christianity, Church, Christ, referring respectively to the social aspect of religion, its sacramental dimension and its mystical core.²² The latter could be called the christic principle.

Let us give some examples from the Roman tradition. The use of contraceptives is formally forbidden by the supreme authority of catholic christianity. Yet a non-negligible part of the people belonging to the catholic church ignore such a law and consider themselves 'good catholics'. With divorce

²²Cf. "Christianity and World Religions", art. cit.

there begins to be something similar in some countries. There are some 80,000 validly ordained catholic priests who consider themselves such, in spite of having transgressed what they consider the unjust law of celibacy. Abortion, euthanasia, pacifism, capitalism, communism, are words representing similar conflicting situations. Can one be a communist and a christian, a capitalist and a follower of the Gospel...?

In a word, christianness is differentiating itself from christianity as christianity did extricate itself from christendom. The situation is certainly fluid. Each period is a period of transition, but there are epochs more saliently different than others.

Let us give one more example. The Latin-american grass-roots communities (comunidades de base) have spontaneously developed a christianness which does not reflect the existing christianity. The Vatican has seen it clearly. Yet, institutionalized christianity shows enough theological discrimination, common sense, and/or political prudence to know that it cannot alienate itself from one of the largest christian continents. It strikes a political compromise so that christendom, christianity and christianness be not split. The christianness of the past century was mainly pietistic and individual. It could tamper with institutionalized christianity without major tensions. Present day christianness presents a more personal and political commitment. It presents a challenge to christianity. Wisdom here, as elsewhere, consists in transforming destructive tensions into creative polarities.

We are only describing the contemporary context necessary for the elaboration of an adequate christology for our times--to speak a traditional language.

Christianness should not be described only negatively in confrontation with christianity. We have been saying all the time that the three belong together and cannot be totally separated, although they have to be distinguished.

There is further a theological reason for that distinction. Many religions have sacred-legal Scriptures. In the two monotheistic religions of the abrahamic trunk Law is part of the Revelation itself (Torah, Quran). One could incidently and ironically remark that marxism, as the fourth abrahamic religion, shows also a similar respect for the Party which represents a secularized Revelation. Not so with christianity. Christianity has no Law of its own. Bible for christianity meant during long centuries only the 'Old Testament'. The 'New Testament' was not considered Holy Scripture.²³ Christianity has also no proper name for the Supreme Being. It is called 'God' which is a common name (and in the words of Jesus, his Father). All this suggests the possibility of certain christianness different from christendom and christianity.

To be sure, the mystics living in christendom have always stressed christianness and the mystics living in christianity have always been witnesses to the respect due to the legal structures without being imprisoned in them. Sheer rebellion or simply dropping out is not the christian solution. The example of Jesus Christ is too glaring. He is a denouncer and a protestor, even a transgressor, but not a runaway, a traitor. Peter had learned to obey God rather than Men, yet as a loyal jew he did not wish to abolish circumcision--although he accepted to be overruled--by his colleagues and the Holy Spirit.

And in fact, if we look back to history we find a score of christians who believed to have reached christianness having overcome, not rejected, christendom and christianity. Tertullian, Origen, Eckhart, Savonarola, Dante, Vico, Jioachim of Floris, Saint Joan of Arc, Saint John of the Cross, Erasmus, Kant, Hegel, and

²³"Es ist bekannt..., dass das Neue Testament sich nirgendwo als 'Schrift' versteht, 'Schrift' ist ihm nur das Alte Testament, wahrend die Christusbotschaft eben 'Geist' ist, der die Schrift verstehen lehrt." K. Rahner, J. Ratzinger, Episkopat und Primat, Freiburg (Hérder), 1961, p. 47.

up to our times Padre Pio, Teilhard de Chardin, Abhishiktananda and Merton could be mentioned as examples.

In sum, the different interpretations of the Gospel's injunction "Look for the Kingdom of God and its Justice" could serve as a way of expressing this threefold structure of christian consciousness. The first attitude will understand "the Kingdom," again quoting another text, as being a construct "among" us. The Kingdom is also on earth and it has political connotations. The second will underscore the same greek particle, entos, as meaning that the Kingdom is "between" us, so that the cultural-communitarian aspect becomes paramount. The third, finally, will be inclined to interpret the Kingdom to be "within" us, thus emphasizing the dimension of interiority. Something similar could be said regarding the interpretation of the word Justice: as meaning mainly a political symbol, a doctrinal one or an immanent reality. Needless to recall that the New Testament word dikaioynē means both justice and justification. The sociological importance of this fact may allow an extra paragraph. There is undoubtedly in the world today a certain crisis of christian identity. While there are revivalist movements going back to the ideal of a modernized christendom and other more theological tendencies striving for a reformed christianity, there is a growing number of responsible people struggling to articulate a genuine christian confession without being totally conditioned by the historical burden of the past and the doctrinal strictures of tradition. They do not sponsor a privatization of the christian identity, although sometimes they are almost forced to it. They sponsor an exteriorization of their christian identity which is fruit more of the inner experience than of historical and doctrinal inertias. They are more or less consciously aware that the world is undergoing a mutation and are attempting to live it at the deepest, i.e., religious level of their consciousness -- and consciences: In simpler terms, a substantial number of the contemporary

generations of christian origins would like to be religious, believers and even christian if these names would not connote all the 'scum' they would precisely like to get rid of. They aspire to rediscover their roots in order to grow on another soil unspoiled by the manure of ancient times, the graftings of the middle ages, the pesticides of the modern age and the radiation of modernity. This struggle for renovation is innate in the human being, it has always been so, but it acquires today somewhat cosmic proportions.

After all, if we take 'religion' to mean what it claims to be, it is a human reality of nine dimensions²⁴. The difficulty consists in a balanced way of integrating them all.

C) The Problems

1. Concrete and Universal versus Particular and General.

We should distinguish, as I have elaborated elsewhere, between concreteness and particularity, universality and generality. The concrete can be universal, not so the particular. Something is concrete (my belief, parents, house, ...) precisely because it embodies the universal (faith, parenthood, habitat...). The universal is universal because it re-presents the entire field and not because it detracts from concreteness, as the general does. The universal is centered, it is turned toward its own center: "uni-versus". It is incarnated in the concrete. The christian attitude is and should be concrete. It is limited, and yet it re-presents the totality. Like the very mystery of the Incarnation, in the concreteness of one Man dwells the fullness of the Divinity. I have called this phenomenon the pars pro toto effect. We see the whole through our window, we see

²⁴Cf. R. Panikarr, Religionen und die Religion, München (Hueber) 1965, pp. 42-113. More recently I have added three other dimensions to the complex meaning of the word religion when taking into account a more integral anthropology.

and even are the totum in parte.²⁵ The concrete is the pars pro toto. The particular is the pars in toto. We may 'sacrifice' the particular for the sake of the whole. We cannot do it with the concrete.

The modern geometrical mentality interprets the meaning of universal as the sum total of an elementary geometrical area constituted by contiguous parts. One part, of course, one sector of a circle, cannot be the whole. This is not the traditional way of understanding universality in christian history. St. Augustin still translates "catholic", καθ' ὅλου literally by secundum totum, i.e., as that religiousness which for us is complete inasmuch as it provides all we need for our fulfillment and salvation. It is only with the geographical expansion of the late and collapsing christendom that christianity as catholic religion came to mean the spread of one single religion all over the earth.

But there is still more. Universal is not necessarily a quantitative notion. A drop of water may be equal to another drop of water, but it is not the second drop. They are numerically and factually different. They may contain exactly the same mass of water, but one water is not the other. In spite of the fact that both are water, and that if it were not for the surface tension making them to be two drops in space and time, we could not distinguish them. Nevertheless, one individual mass of water is not the other one. And yet if we abstract the quantity of water, both are just water, the water indivisible (from within as it were). In other words, the water of the drop--not the drop of the water--is both

²⁵Cf. "The Invisible Harmony", art. cit.

concrete and universal: it is both this water and simply water.²⁶ The christian scholastics used to speak of the specular character of the universe in the sense that each being, especially each human being, image and likeness of God, reflects, mirrors, represents the entire reality.

Christ, as the second Adam, stands for the entire humanity, and in a certain sense for the whole cosmos, says christian tradition following Paul. Minutis minuendis, every person re-presents and is the symbol of the entire reality. The mechanistic worldview, prevalent in our times, is the great obstacle to re-enact this liberating experience. The problem of the universality of Christ and of christian salvation would practically be solved if approached in the light of a more traditional cosmology. There is no question of competition, say between Christ, Buddha, Krishna or whoever. There is no question of separated constituencies either. If christian theology is ad usum delphinis, be it christendom or christianity such problems may arise. But christian theology today cannot ignore christianness. In this perspective the problem is not one of jurisdiction. Doctrines may differ, theologies may quarrel, institutionalized religions may discuss their spheres of influence, but the existential problem of 'salvation' of the human being is not one of discriminating which is the passport to heaven, and which consulate or embassy has the right to emit such documentation. What we have to change is the very perspective of the question.²⁷

The universality of Christ would represent his transparency, his perfection. We are here within another cosmology, which dissolves the problem of singularity

²⁶Cf. R. Panikkar: "L'eau et la mort. Réflexion interculturelle sur une métaphore" Filosofia e religione di fronte alla morte, Edited by M. Olivetti (Archivio di Filosofia) Padova (CEDAM), 1981, pp.481-502.

²⁷I have here to refer to my long promised and still unfinished Christophany.

and universality.²⁸ We should not confuse the individuality of Christ with our individuation of him; his identity is not his (our) individuation.²⁹ Christ is unique--as any loved child is unique for his parents--eminenter, we may add.

Perhaps an example will help to clarify all this. The ptolemeic conception of the solar system was exceedingly complicated. One of the advantages of the copernican revolution was that the new heliocentric system was much simpler. In one stroke an enormous amount of calculating became superfluous. Something similar is what I am suggesting. As long as we entertain a mechanocentric conception and a geometrical notion of reality a number of problems are exceedingly complicated and can hardly find any solution. Either Christians 'stick' to their 'Christ' and become exclusivistic, or they give up their claims, dilute their beliefs and become, at best, inclusivistic. These two horns of the dilemma are equally unacceptable. The parallel copernican revolution consists in shifting the center from linear history to a theanthropocosmic vision, a kind of trinitarian notion, not of the Godhead alone, but of reality.³⁰

²⁸Cf. R. Panikkar: "Singularity and Individuality. The Double Principle of 'Individuation'", Revue Internationale de Philosophie, 'Méthode et philosophie de l'histoire'--Hommage à Raymond Klibansky--Bruxelles, 111-112, Fasc.1-2 (1975), pp. 141-165.

²⁹Cf. R. Panikkar, "Salvation in Christ," art. cit.

³⁰For clarity sake I am forced to refer to other publications of mine: "Colligite Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality" in F.A. Eigo, S.E. Fittipaldi (eds.), From Alienation to At-Oneness,--Proceedings of the Theology Institute of Villanova University-- Edited by F.A. EIGO (The Villanova University Press), 1977, pp. 19-91. and "Der Mensch--ein trinitarisches Mysterium" in R. Panikkar, W. Strolz (eds.), Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus, Freiburg (Herder), 1985, pp. 147-190.

2. Mythos and Logos

One of the major crises in the self-understanding of christian theology is due to the cosmological changes of relatively recent times. As I have often commented, Cardinal Belarmino was ultimately right in his dispute with Galileo. Scientific investigation has to be free, no doubt, but it is not independent of theology. Without theology, cosmology loses its base. And without cosmology, theology loses its vehicle, its language. Most of the alleged theological difficulties today are cosmological problems.

Some examples will suffice: The Resurrection. Within a traditional cosmological worldview, the possibility, plausibility, and even the fact of the Resurrection, offers no major difficulty. Spontaneous generation was a matter of direct observation; interpenetration of bodies in their diverse layers was a matter of course; miracles did not need to be suspension of some inexistent laws, etc. The difficulty arises with the post-Newtonian worldview and post-Cartesian conception of space, time, matter, and spirit. Heaven, Hell, Ascension, Resurrection and most of the christian symbols are undermined and deprived of their full meaning, if there is no cosmology undergirding those symbols. To go on theologizing with old notions, as if nothing had happened in between, only creates theological impasses. The present day discussion on the Virgin Birth is another telling example of this state of affairs. The traditional tenet of the Virgin Birth has nothing to do with a physiological function of a cartesian body. It has an old cosmological and mythical pedigree and it is simply linked to the saving power of Jesus. In that traditional world-view, Christ, could only be a divine redeemer if free from Original Sin. Now, Original Sin was believed to be transmitted by the human semen. Ergo...

In short, the christian self-understanding is not independent from the human understanding of the world, and the latter has changed. I am not saying we know

better now and we have the right vision of the world, alchemy is wrong and chemistry right, astrology superstition and astronomy science. I am only detecting a change in cosmologies which affect all theological issues.

Something should be stressed here. Most of the contemporary theological efforts in this field accept as a given the prevalent cosmological world-view, and attempt to reformulate the theological insights within those parameters. It is a noble effort, and almost necessary, for those who have absolutized the modern scientific paradigm: the followers of Galileo Galilei! Typical examples are the eucharistic disputes and the quarrels about creation in the school programs of some countries. Transsubstantiation, and material creation ex nihilo make no sense in a molecular and evolutionistic world-view. I do not agree with literal and fundamentalists interpretations, but I equally relativize the underlying cosmological views of modern science. The earth moves, but so does the sun. The aristotelian category of substance may not offer any basis for the explanation of the Eucharist in our present setting, but equally, if not more unconvincing, are the theories which speak of a mere change of meaning. We lack a proper cosmology.

In sum, christian self-consciousness is neither autonomous nor heteronomous in relation to its cosmological underpinnings. We have to discover their ontonomic relationship.³¹ It is not that science dictates what theology has to do or vice-versa.³² But the fact remains that we cannot have theology without cosmology nor the latter without the former. A cosmology without a theology becomes itself theological, i.e. ultimate. A theology without a cosmology becomes

³¹Cf. my contribution "Le concept d'ontonomie" to the XI International Congress of Philosophy, Brussels, 1953. Proceedings published by Nauwelaerts Louvain (1953), vol.III, pp.182 ss.

³²Cf. R. Panikkar, Ontonomia de la ciencia. Sobre el sentido de la Ciencia y sus relaciones con la Filosofia., Madrid (Gredos), 1961.

meaningless, unless itself turns into cosmology. Even apophatic theology needs to deny the meaning of those words which are meaningful in our cosmos.

I consider this fact of paramount importance. The present day crisis is not brought about by the conflict of cosmologies, but by the absence of them. The scientific view, strictly speaking, is not a proper cosmology. It is only the popularizers who convert science into scientism. In fact, the scientists stress again and again the limits of the scientific enterprise and are fully aware of the purely quantitative parameters of science. Often theology also wants to disassociate itself from any cosmology and limit itself to exegesis or hermeneutics. But neither science nor theology can properly function in a cosmological vacuum. Electrons may be only energy quanta detectable in a Geiger chamber, angels may be genera in themselves of pure intellectual nature, but the human being must 'locate' both within a coherent or at least consistent and existent universe of discourse in order to understand them in a relevant way for human life. Yet we find no proper 'locus' for electrons and angels without an underlying cosmology. What happens then is this: we extrapolate the data and 'locate' the electrons and angels in the ruins of a by-gone cosmology. Now, because of the prevalent scientific culture we live in, we find it easier to situate electrons (as little entities) than angels (perhaps as peculiar clots of energy also). But in both cases electrons and angels do not acquire a proper degree of reality until they are integrated in their proper universe. However, we do not now have such a universe--although scientists (perhaps more than philosophers) are trying to build one.³³ My contention is threefold: First, we

³³ Names like I. Barbour, D. Bohm, F. Capra, K. Pribram, I. Prigogine, R. Shell Drake, and their forerunners B. Bavink, P. Duhem, A. Koyré, and many others come to mind.

cannot build a world-view at will. If at all it should be the almost spontaneous work of poets and artists; it needs inspiration more than just logical planning and calculus. Second, we need a crosscultural cooperation for this.³⁴ It has to be the fruit of a mutual fecundation of cultures and religions. Third, the modern christian consciousness has not yet become sufficiently aware of this cosmological predicament and goes on by and large uncritically repeating the Nicean Creed, for instance.³⁵

Yet, we should not think that we can drink without containers or get rid of all structures--and substructures. One thing is that many christians can no longer re-enact the Nicean Creed because the language has been severed from its proper soil, and another to believe that we can finally totally demythicize.³⁶ We can only transmythicize. Some metaphysics may not be convincing. But we cannot repress the search for a foundation of the physis. And this is what metaphysics is all about.

³⁴Cf. by way of random examples, R.W. Lovin and F.E. Reynolds (eds.) Cosmogony and Ethical Order, Chicago (Univ. Press), 1985, S.H. Nasr, "The Role of the Traditional Sciences in the Encounter of Religion and Science--An Oriental Perspective" in Religious Studies 20/4 (1984), pp. 519-541. Cf. his earlier book, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Press) 1964; revised 1978. Useful are W.F. Warren, The Earliest Cosmologies, New York (Eaton and Mains), 1909 (as an historical document of the beginning of the new modern interest); and the remarkable essay by S. Toulmin, The Return to Cosmology, Berkeley (University of California Press), 1982.

³⁵Cf. J.S. O'Leary, Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition, Minneapolis, MN (Winston-Seabury) 1985, especially "Overcoming the Nicean Creed" published in Cross Currents, 34/4 (Winter 1984) pp. 405-413.

³⁶Cf. my first essay dealing with this problematic, "La demitologizzazione nell'incontro tra cristianesimo e induismo" in E. Castelli (ed.) Il problema della demitizzazione, Padova (CEDAM), 1961, pp. 243-266.

The correlation between mythos and logos is a constitutive one.³⁷ The one cannot exist without the other. Our cosmological background is not free from mythos, nor are science and theology possible without some mythical base.

These considerations bear directly upon our central discussion. They are telling us that no single intellectual paradigm will ever suffice to explain reality, ultimately, because reality is irreducible to paradigms. They tell us, further, that our own situation is just another moment in the adventure of reality. They make us aware that consciousness, not even absolute consciousness, is not all that there is 'in' reality. Furthermore, they may help us to overcome the dialectical impasse of our time, in religion as well as theology and science, by making us aware that the problem of truth and of reality can never be solved as problem, because we are necessarily part of it. We may objectify part of reality. We cannot objectify it totally. We would eliminate ourselves. It is at this level that the issue of pluralism finds its adequate place.

3. Plurality and Pluralism

Our times seem ripe for a pluralistic attitude.³⁸ We may sum up this attitude in several axioms:

1. Pluralism does not mean plurality or a reduction of the latter to unity. It is a fact that there is a plurality of religions. It is also a fact that these religions have not been reduced to any sort of unity. Pluralism means something more than sheer acknowledging of plurality and the mere wishful thinking of unity.

³⁷Cf. C. Blacker (ed.) Ancient Cosmologies, London (Allen & Unwin) 1975 just to see the interplay between mythos and logos in any conception of the world.

³⁸Cf. R. Panikkar: "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel - A Meditation on Non-Violence" Cross Currents, XXIX, 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 197-230.

2. Pluralism does not consider unity as being the indispensable ideal, even if allowance is made for variations within that unity. Pluralism accepts the irreconcilable aspects of religions without being blind to their common aspects. Pluralism is not the eschatological expectation that in the end all shall be one.

3. Pluralism affirms neither that truth is one nor that it is many. If truth were one we could not accept the positive tolerance of a pluralistic attitude. This latter would be connivance with error. If truth were many we would fall into a plain contradiction. We said already that pluralism does not stand for plurality--of truths in this case. Pluralism adopts a non-dualistic, advaitic, attitude which defends the pluralism of truth because reality itself is pluralistic, i.e. incommensurable to either unity or plurality. Being as such, even if 'encompassed' by or 'co-existent' with the Logos or a Supreme Intelligence, does not need to be reduced to Consciousness. The perfect self-mirroring of Being is Truth, but even if the perfect Image of Being is identical to Being, Being is not exhausted in its Image. If the Logos is the transparency of Being, the Spirit is, paradoxically, its opaqueness. The Spirit is Freedom, the freedom of Being to be what it is. And this is, a priori as it were, unforeseeable by the Logos. The Logos accompanies Being; it does not precede it, it does not pre-dict what Being is. It tells only what Being is. But the 'is', Being is free. The Mystery of the Trinity is the ultimate foundation for pluralism.

4. Pluralism does not allow of any System. A pluralistic System would be a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable. This incompatibility is not a lesser evil (judging then only by the logos) but a revelation itself of the nature of reality. Nothing can encompass Reality.

5. Pluralism makes us aware both of our own contingency/limitations and the non-transparency of Reality. It is incompatible with the monotheistic assumption of a totally intelligible Being, i.e. with an omniscient Consciousness. Pluralism does not shun intelligibility. The pluralist attitude tries to reach intelligibility as much as possible, but it does not need the ideal of a total intelligibility of the real. It 'knows' that we have to stop somewhere lest we corrode (the 'originality' or independence of) Being by reducing it to (self-)intelligibility. All that is not self-intelligible would then not be Being, but only borrowed Being, "esse ab alio". Knowledge would then be approximative knowledge, but only according to a unitarian model.

6. Pluralism then is not a merely rational symbol. It expresses an attitude of cosmic confidence (in the Spirit, which is not subordinate to the Logos) which allows for a polar and tensile coexistence between ultimate human attitudes, cosmologies, and religions. It does not eliminate evil or error, but does not absolutize it.

7. Pluralism does not deny the logos and its inalienable rights. The principle of non-contradiction, for instance, cannot be eliminated. But pluralism belongs also to the order of the myth. It incorporates the myth, not, of course, as an object of thinking, but as the horizon which makes thinking possible. The myth is the locus of beliefs.

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A christian pluralistic attitude may subscribe to the following statements:

1. There is no single christian self-understanding.
2. There is a plurality of them.
3. They cannot be put under one common umbrella as a Supersystem.

These are simply three facts, hard as we may try to belie the third.

Further,

4. Different theologies can be recognized as christian by their own self-affirmation. Their unity transcends the logos because one theology may consider the other incompatible with a christian stance, and yet all declare themselves christian. Their link is not a common essence but an existential fact. Yet their diversity does not contradict the logos because we may find each time a formal common denominator. However, no theology can be sufficiently described by some minimal doctrines because the internal coherence of a theological system makes even those minimal 'truths' dependent on their overall incorporation within the total picture, so that the alleged common denominator is a sheer reductionist abstraction. All christian theologies, for instance, may confer upon 'Christ' a central role, but the meaning--and even referent--of this word may be radically different.

5. We cannot prescribe from one single perspective what the other christian views should be. This would amount to erecting ourselves as the ultimate criterion for christian identity and destroying pluralism. Pluralism, we said, belongs to the order of the myth.

6. A christian pluralistic attitude has to be ready to be excommunicated by a non-pluralistic view without retaliating by declaring the other non-christian. Pluralism undermines the rationale for power struggle.

7. Christian pluralism could accept as motto: all that is not against us is for us. All that which does not contradict a concrete opinion cannot be rejected. The principle of tolerance is not based on the recognition of truth but on confidence.

8. Vis-à-vis the religions of the world, the christian pluralistic attitude will affirm the christian tenets, but without forgetting the limitation and contingency of the subject who formulates them. In other words, it will never proclaim: "The true belief is x". It will always confess: "I believe x to be

true" (The true belief). The "I believe" cannot be severed from belief. Nevertheless, this does not prevent me from affirming that I believe that others are wrong and even that their views are so harmful that I may feel obliged to combat particular errors--although not as absolute evils.

9. The christian pluralist will not affirm that there are many saviors. This is a non-pluralistic assertion. The pluralistic christological affirmation will begin--as with the Trinity ("qui incipit numerare incipit errare" said Augustine)--by denying the meaningfulness of any quantitative individualization in the Mystery of Christ. The Saving Power--which christians call Christ--is neither one nor many.

All this means that christian self-understanding is a function of the all-embracing myth reigning at a particular time and place. This unifying myth is not constant. The mythemes for our present situation may be summed up in the following conclusions.

IV. Some Conclusions

A christian reflection today may want to incorporate into its agenda the following points:

1. We should neither ignore nor neglect the past, we should respect the traditional self-understanding(s), but submit them to an appropriate (new) interpretation.

2. We should not be satisfied with merely exegetical approaches. We should allow for a possibly new christian awareness.

3. The greatest change in the christian self-understanding is both the text and the context. The text is being enlarged by the incorporation of other sacred texts which until now had been excluded. In other words, the reflection on "the christian economy of salvation" can not ignore the existence--and the challenge--of

the religions of the world. The traditional context was represented by the Tiber. The new context is that of the Ganges, i.e., not the context of western history, but that of a present day more universal relevance. Obviously, the Ganges does not stand here for an exclusively hindu river (the Jordan of hinduism as it were), but as a symbol of the wider world.

4. The new context is not just a new territory added to the old one, nor is it the same territory but seen in a new light. The new context entails both new elements, which were not there, and a transformation of the old context. It is a new context which embraces, corrects and supercedes the old, but which keeps a certain continuity with it. Nevertheless, this new context is equally limited and concrete. It should not be identified with a sort of universal texture, which would amount to an antipluralistic homogenization of reality.

5. We should not identify the christic fact of christianness with christianity as religion, and much less with christendom as civilization.

6. There is no need for one single view of Christ, however broadly this may be conceived of. No single notion can comprehend the reality of Christ.

7. Religions may be incommensurable with each other in spite of some possible common traits. Each religion is unique with the uniqueness of every real being. But we should not confuse the autopsy of a religion with its living existence. This very incommensurability, like that of the radius with the circumference, does not prevent the fact that each religion may be a dimension of the other in a kind of trinitarian perichoresis or circumincessio. Each one represents the whole of the human experience in a concrete way.

8. Each religion expresses one concrete form of humanness. This does not exclude a possible divine shaping of the humanum, nor religious degradations of it.

9. When religions encounter each other, they can mutually enrich each other and also destroy each other.

10. If christians are able to extricate from their own religion the christic principle, in what we called christianness, this principle can be experienced as a dimension at least potentially present in any human being, as long as no absolute interpretation is given. This could equally be said of a similar principle in other traditions (buddhahood for instance).

11. Christians may find in this christic principle or christianness the point of union, understanding and love with the entire humankind and the whole of the cosmos, so that in this concreteness they find the most radical human, cosmic and divine communion with reality--notwithstanding other possible homeomorphic equivalents.

12. The christian point of insertion is the kenotic experience of Christ which entails acceptance of and openness to the Spirit.

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We may say, in conclusion, that an awareness of the over-all context of our world today leads to the recognition of a mutation in christian self-understanding.

This mutation is due to:

- a) Historical changes: the passage from christendom to christianity and from here to the christic attitude which we called christianness.
- b) Philosophical discernment between the concrete/particular and universal/general, i.e. the overcoming of the quantitative patterns of thinking.
- c) Cosmological revolution inasmuch as the worldview in which traditional christianity thrived can no longer stand any scrutiny today--without, for that matter, having been replaced by any other encompassing worldview.

d) Theological recognition of the own right and authenticity of other religions, and thus a healthy pluralism.

This implies an acute awareness of the christic fact or principle transcending sociological and religious constructs.³⁹ We accept slowly the emergence of a new christian consciousness tied neither to christian (western) civilization, nor to christian (institutionalized) religion. New communities may appear, even in traditionally non-christian countries, and some may even shun the name "christian" because the "christian" label may be understood as a mere continuation of the past.

It is not a question of denying the civilizational aspects of christians, nor of minimizing the importance of organized religion. It is only a question of emphasizing the personal spiritual life, the discovery of the Kingdom of Heaven, the pearl, the wholeness of the Mystical Body, the communion with the Divine, the interior, historical, and at the same time cosmic and transtemporal Christ. There have been times in which it was dangerous to be a christian, others in which it was advantageous. These two features are still very real today. But I am underscoring a third feature: it is difficult. It is difficult because it requires the personal discipline, the courage to face not only the profane world, but also the ecclesiastical institutions. Christianness stands for experience of the life of Christ within ourselves, the insight into the communion, without confusion, with the entire reality, the experience that "I and the Father are One", that labels don't matter, security is of no importance, and reflection also

³⁹Cf. my essay "La religión del futuro - o la crisis del concepto de religión: la religiosidad humana" in Civiltà delle macchine Roma, XXVII 4-6 (1979), pp. 82-91, where of the 12 points,⁴⁹ the first says: "The problem of the future of religion is not that of the religion of the future," and the eleventh: "The future of religion is first of all a personal religiousness and not a single religious confession."

a secondary source. It is with hesitation that I use the phrase mystical experience, but perhaps there is no shorter way of saying it. Not without a certain bias I chose the mystical Gaṅgā as the symbol. Was not this what Christ said? "Waters of eternal life"--from any river or sea. One has only to drink them.

I may give now my own understanding of Christ which I believe fulfills the methodological requirements, but which in no way is normative, or even perhaps representative.

V. The Cosmotheandric Christ

That mystery which is at the beginning and shall be at the end, that alpha and omega, by and through which all has to come into being, that light which enlightens every creature, that word that is in every authentic word, that reality which is totally material, completely human and simply divine, which is at work everywhere and elusively present wherever there is reality, that meeting place at the crossroads of reality where all realms meet, that which does not come with fanfare and about which one should not believe that it is here or there, that which we do not know about when we perform a good or an evil' action and yet is 'there', that which we are--and we shall be--and which we were, that symbol of the entire reality not only as it was or is, but as it still shall freely be, also through our synergy, is what I believe to be the Christ.

It may be retorted that I am escaping the scandal of the Incarnation and the process of Redemption; but I am not ignoring those historical facts. It is simply that I do not worship history, nor do I limit reality--nor even human reality--to history, nor history to the abrahamic history. Just as traditional theology speaks of a creatio continua, we could by analogy envisage a continuous incarnation, not only in the flesh, but also in the acts and events of all creatures. Every being is a christophany.

If it is said that the symbol is too broad and universal, I would respond that if the circumcision of the body has been superseded, why should we not overcome the circumcision of the mind?

R. Panikkar

Santa Barbara, 21 November 1985

Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed

Virgin Mary