

Christology and Anthropology: A Vision of Revelation and Faith, A Vision of Divine and Culture

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Someone has said that "Jesus is God's most human work." In the words of Albert Nolan, Jesus "is not supremely indifferent and detached, he is irrevocably committed to the liberation of mankind, for he has chosen to identify himself with all men in a spirit of solidarity and compassion. If this is not a true picture of God, then Jesus is not divine. If this is a true picture of God, then God is more truly human, more thoroughly humane, than any human being."¹

"Through his historical self-giving, accepted by the Father," affirms Schillebeeckx, "Jesus has shown us who God is: a *Deus humanissimus*."² That is the issue we would like to develop in the following pages: "Christology and Anthropology. A vision of Revelation and Faith. A vision of divine and culture."

Today we live in a world where the most opposite views seem to struggle to monopolize the human mind and heart. And every writer feels entitled to dogmatize with the utmost impunity whatever may have come lately to his or her imagination. For, as a journalist has recently said, "Whatever its provenance, the new

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¹ Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, Quezon City, Metro Manila: Claretian Publications, 1983, p. 138.

² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology*, N.Y.: A Crossroad Book, 1979, Part 4, Sect. 3, Chapter 2, p. 669.

style of religious – or irreligious – biography is very seductive... Taking a fresh look at Christian subjects, particularly if you are going to avoid the language and assumptions of explicitly Christian writers, has an enormous appeal.”³ Hegel used to call this the world of dialectics. What is taking place in the world in which we live, is happening likewise at the sphere of the religious, at the realm of the relations between the divine and the humans.

What is said of the world at large and of religions in general, we can apply to the Asian world and to the Christian religion as well.

It is in that very context, then, that I would like to forward a few analytical reflections in the hope that they may enlighten a bit some of those dialectical struggles in the Asian and Christian environment that could possibly be of some help to position us on a more balanced perspective leading to a clearer sense of the way we grasp our faith and inject it in the context of our environment.

The Logos Incarnated in “Human Flesh” and “Jewish” Culture

In a sort of clarificatory approach, it may prove of importance to come to terms with the meaning we are giving to some of the key concepts involved in the discussion.

1) By “*Logos*” we understand the pre-creation divinity who, in the context of salvation history, will one day join us humans in our “creatural” existence as the acknowledged Son of God. As divine he is accepted to be in possession of all that is divine, in nature and in attributes. This affirmation of the Logos joining the humans carries already an acknowledgement and acceptance of the Trinitarian understanding of the divine.

2) By “*incarnated*” one ought to understand properly a total joining of a total (God) with another total (the human) in the ultimate perfection of a divine person. This understanding, though, is not an initial concept in Christianity, but a process of a four centuries long theological elaboration. In a simpler and perhaps less proper

³Peter Stanford, “Jesus Bios Are All the Rage”, *Manila Bulletin*, March 27, 1997, p. B-11.

way of understanding the concept of "incarnation" one could think of some kind of insertion, adaptation or molding of God to the human condition.

3) By "*human*" one implies what is most proper to us as humans, for that and no other element would make us truly different from others, from the non-humans. If one follows the ideology of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, one may come to the understanding that by human we come to signify creatures in possession of a dimensional body and a not dimensional spirit featured by its reasoning and freedom. Playing then with this understanding, one would have to set aside as non-humans not only ordinary animals, but also pure spirits not attached to dimensional bodies.

4) By "*flesh*" one understands not any kind of flesh, but a qualified type of flesh, human flesh. Hence the "flesh" here is the noun preconditioned by the adjective "human." Attached to both concepts —"human" and "flesh"— one has to grasp the objectivity that both concepts make reference to realities often present with a load of limitations in their respective field. Yet, such limitations by no means would make either the "human" or the "flesh" less human flesh, but simply human flesh.

5) By "*Jewish*" we mean the people of Israel as a nation and as the Chosen People of Yahweh. As the Chosen People of God, the Jews have a peculiar history unequal by any other nation. It is upon God's initiative that He selects Abraham as his small tribe and then favors him and his descendance with special attention guiding them, protecting them, correcting them and giving them their basic law and teachings through the action of Moses and the Prophets. This is the *religious aspect* of the Jews, an invariable aspect in their relation with Yahweh, and in this religiosity Jesus will be born.

6) By "*culture*" we mean the other aspect of the Jewish people, the aspect whereby the Jews interpret the divine invariable through the passing of the time, combining such interpretation to sooth their geographical and political environment. It is the "secular" and "nationalistic" aspect of Judaism. It is the language, the customs, the traditions, the ways of expression.

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It is relevant in historical preliminaries to be initially aware that we are referring to a religion where we accept the *divine* has come to be *incarnated* and that such incarnation took the initial step of being a *human* incarnation and a human incarnation at the level of *Jewish* environment. Or, to make it shorter, that we Christians affirm that God has become a "Jew."

The affirmation carries a load of consequences, for among other things, it means, in the negative, that he did not become an Asian, an American, or an African. He was incarnated as a Jew. And a Jew carries a heavy load of background religion and culture. And it is precisely in that heavy load of religion and culture that God becomes a Jew named Jesus.

At this initial stage of our reflection, it would do good, then, to be clear about what that Jesus brings to us of the "divine" load, and what is that he incarnates of what is human, and more concretely of what is Jewish both in term of Jewish religious beliefs and of Jewish cultural environment.

Accepting the *divine* as synonymous with the *human*, and more obviously, as synonymous with the *Jewish* beliefs or culture could lead us into a "xenophobic" sublimation of the non divine. Certainly that would be unacceptable for a number of rather obvious reasons.

Out-rightly rejecting the *human*, and more concretely the *Jewish* religious beliefs and culture, in Jesus would bring us back to the radical rejection of what the incarnation is all about, a concretization of the divine in a human context. This situation then would return us to square one on the issue of Christianity, or it would simply make of Christianity a *modus loquendi* valid for any culture.

One may be treading a more realistic ground reflecting on the reality of the divine and yet enriching oneself with the "inculturated" aspect and thereby seeing what is that the divine truly "incarnates." Is it only the purely *human* level? Or is it the *religious* Jewish level? Or is the purely *cultural* Jewish level?

In striving to search for an answer, one may have to come to terms with the possible affirmation that perhaps the divinity does not "incarnate" any of the three, or that the divinity incarnates

the three. For one may wonder whether, for instance, the "religious" and the "cultural" Jewish levels are *separable* or not?

Reading the Gospels, it seems that the Divine *incarnated* the three levels, though not necessarily accepting ("consecrating") the three of them. This affirmation needs a little clarification indeed.

That the *divine* incarnated the *human* seems rather easy to affirm. But then nobody less than Thomas Aquinas questions whether the divinity incarnated the human "in abstract" or an "individual" human: *Whether the Son of God ought to have assumed human nature abstracted from all individuals?*⁴ The answer given by Aquinas is straight forward: "It is fitting that as one Divine suppositum is incarnate, so He should assume one human nature."⁵ Yet the reality of the *divine* incarnating the *human* is there.

When it comes to the *religious* Jewish level, the words of Jesus in Matthew seem to indicate that the *divine* has incarnated not only the Jewish *human*, but likewise the Jewish *religious*. "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them" (*Mt* 5:17).

But then, we are all aware of the difficulty of delineating clearly the separation of the *religious* from the *cultural* in any culture, and perhaps much more in the Jewish background where religion and culture seem so closely connected. Still, observing Jesus, and listening to him, it seems that quite often he draws a line not only of separation, but at times even of rejection when certain "inseparability" is brought about between the religious and the cultural. One has but to hear Jesus talking about "the Sabbath made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (*Mk* 2:27), or talking about people who for the sake of culture have twisted the divine (religious) dimension (*Mt* 15:1-9).

Still, if one would like to come to a comprehensive understanding of the "incarnational" issue, one will do well by keeping in mind that only by grasping the *anthropological*, the *religious* and also

⁴ *Summa*, III, 4, 4.

⁵ *Summa*, III, 4, 5, c.

the *cultural* dimensions of the *incarnation*, can one truly be able to know what Jesus is all about and how other possible *incarnations* (in-culturations) can take place in other environments.

In this regards, therefore, one can then make three affirmations. First, that the divine becomes *incarnated* in *Jewish, human, religious* and *cultural* environment. The second is that such incarnation happened in that context, and as it happened in that context it has not happened and will not happen in any other context.⁶ Then a third affirmation, drawn from the previous two, can be advanced, namely, that *incarnation* as it happened in Jesus, and *inculturation* as we would like Jesus to be and be presented are similar in many ways perhaps, but they are not exactly the same thing.

The KYRIOS Is Alive [Period 33-325]

With the event of the resurrection something changes radically in the perception of Jesus. He appears to be transformed, *transfigured*. In that transformation the bodily aspect, the flesh, seems to reach a different level from the flesh of the pre-resurrection.

It is accurate to say that Jesus repeatedly asserts the identity of his flesh with the pre-resurrection flesh (Cfr. *Jn* 21:9-14; *Lk* 24:40-43). But still the disciples do not recognize him on the route from Jerusalem to Emmaus (*Lk* 24:13-35); neither Mary, his intimate friend (*Jn* 20:11-18), and Thomas raises very strong doubts about the identity of Jesus (*Jn* 20:24-29).

This ecclesial attitude becomes more and more prominent after the event of Jesus' ascension. The emphasis is going to be predominantly on Jesus' divinity. The Community will stress most of all the image of Jesus as the *Kyrios*. The resurrection message, "The Lord is risen" (*Lk* 24:6 & 35), becomes the proclamation banner of the Community and its vision and worship of Jesus focuses on that aspect, the divinity of Jesus.

Historically this process will polarize most of the theological thought of the early Church, from the year 33 to the year 325, that

⁶ *Summa*, III, q. 1, aa. 5 & 6.

will mark the solemn proclamation of Jesus as "*homousion* with the Father."⁷

What happened to the other aspects of Jesus' *incarnation*? The *human* and the *flesh* are not forgotten, but they are kept under wraps due to the overall stress on the divine.

An important change happens in the cultural variable of the incarnation. The new community changes the "interpretation" of the religious aspect. We see, for instance, St. Paul's talk about the meat offered to the idols (*I Cor. 10:23-30*), and the ritual of the circumcision (*Rom 2:25-29*), and the respect for the civil authorities (*Rom 13:1-7*), it is all a different way of the *variable* aspect of the Jewish religiosity and of the Jewish culture.

The most radical transformation takes place in the purely cultural variable, in the *philosophy*, the vocabulary, the way of expression. By the year 325, marking the celebration of the council of Nicea, the Community is thinking in "Greek"; it is expressing its faith and beliefs in the Greek language. The Christian *Jewish* Community of Jerusalem has become the Christian *Greek* Community of the Greco-Roman culture.

As for the *invariable* of the Jewish religiosity, it undergoes a process of interpretation and thus it is elaborated and expressed (thinking and language) with the *variable* of the Greek culture. One can say that the *invariables* of Jesus' incarnation have remained, but the *variables* have been transformed.

Jesus "Human" (ANTHROPOS)

For the next half a century, changes continue to take place in the *inculturation* of the Logos *Incarnated*. The main drive comes from the ideologues of the school of Antioch in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean sea. It is the age of the Cappadocians.

When a new general council of the Christian Community will gather in Constantinople (381), the stress on the Incarnated

⁷ In historical terms, it is the predominance of the theological school of Alexandria located in the south-eastern part of the Mediterranean sea with its *Sarx-Logos* approach. Its most prominent leader: Origen.

Jesus will switch from its emphasis on the invariable of the *divine* to an emphasis on the invariable of the *human*. Jesus will retain its invariable aspect of *divine*, but the stress will be now on the *humanity* of Jesus, and a “full” humanity of human *flesh* and human *soul*. No compromise will be accepted on this invariable of Jesus’ incarnation. It is as if Jesus would have come down again from “heaven” to show us his *human* image and thus show us that not only we can worship him, but that we can follow him also. It is the *Logos* “*inhumanatus*.”⁸

Thus with I Constantinople, three invariable of the incarnated Jesus have come to the front of Christian theology, his *divine*, his *human* (soul), and his *flesh* (human body).

The *invariable* of the “Jewish religiosity” is maintained, but it has become gradually diluted with the *variable* of the Greek culture. The Jewish religiosity is now expressed and understood in mostly *Greek* culture, thinking and language.

The *variable* of the *Greek* culture, thinking and language is maintained in the Christian Community through Nicea and Constantinople.

Jesus “Divine Person”

Fifty years after I Constantinople, once again the Christian Community gathers in a universal council in Ephesus (431), part of the Greek cultural environment. The influence of Rome and its culture is becoming more and more noticeable, but fundamentally the ideology of Ephesus is Alexandrian.

The Community is debating on the understanding of how to accept the co-existence of both, the formula of Nicea, a Jesus *homousion* with the Father, and the formula of I Constantinople, a Jesus fully *anthropos*.

The Alexandrian ideology prevails in the supremacy of the *divine* person that ontologically unites the *homousion* nature of Jesus with the Father and the *anthropos* nature of Jesus. The incarnated Jesus, one can say from now on, is most of all “divine.”

⁸ *Denz. & Sch.*, n. 125.

Thus with Ephesus, once again, three invariable of the incarnated Jesus have remained in the front of Christian theology, namely, his "divine", his "human" (soul), and his "flesh" (human body). Of the three, the "divine" will prevail as the overriding aspect of Jesus' divine person.

The *invariable* of the *Jewish religiosity* is maintained, but it becomes more and more diluted with the *variable* of the Greek culture. The Jewish religiosity is now expressed and understood in mostly "Greek" culture, thinking and language. One does not go any longer to the culture or the religiosity of the Bible to look for new ways of expressing an aspect of the incarnated Jesus. One debates again and again on the possible meaning and coining of a new Greek word, *prosopon*, an expression not found in the Bible. It is, one could say, the ultimate triumph of the secular Greek culture over the Jewish secular culture that is by now taking a strong hold on the Jewish religiosity.

Thus, the *variable* of the *Greek culture*, thinking and language is maintained and promoted in the Christian Community through Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

Jesus, both "Divine" and "Human" (*DYO-PHYSIS*)

With Chalcedon, only twenty years after Ephesus, the Community seems to be making a final effort to find a formula of *harmony* to view and to express the incarnated Jesus. It is the formula of the *dyo-physis*, two perfect natures in their respective orders, the *divine* and the *human*, united in the supremacy of the *divine* person. One could say that the three *invariables* have been put into focus. Chalcedon is thus seen as a formula of "harmony" (or could one say a formula of "compromise"?).

The *invariable* of the Jewish religiosity is maintained, but without much emphasis and certainly projected with the *variable* of the Greek culture. The Jewish religiosity is now expressed and understood, as it was more and more since Nicea, in mostly *Greek* culture, thinking and language. One does not go any longer to the culture or the religiosity of the Bible to look for new ways of expressing an aspect of the incarnated Jesus. One debates again and again on the possible meaning and coining of a new Greek word, *physis*, an expression, like the *prosopon*, not found in the Bible.

It is, one could say, the ultimate triumph of the "secular Greek culture" over the "secular Jewish culture" that by now has taken already a strong hold on the Jewish religiosity.

Thus the *variable* of the *Greek* culture, thinking and language is maintained in the Christian Community through Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon.

"*Communicatio Idiomatum*" and "*Dyo-Theitism*"

The year 553, more than a century after Chalcedon, the fifth ecumenical council, II Constantinople, is convened with the Community once again trying to unveil the mystery behind the *incarnated* Jesus. How do the *divine* and the *human* invariable in Jesus relate to each other? The *divine* is divine and the *human* has been declared to exist in its fullness in Jesus. Thus when one starts making comments about Jesus a certain confusion may arise as to whether, for example, it would be appropriate to say that the *divine* suffered on the cross or that the thirsty Jesus begging for some water at the well is the *divine*. Likewise confusing may sound to claim that the one appearing in majesty transfigured before Peter, John and James (*Mt 17:1-8*) is the *human* Jesus who joins the dinner with Simon (*Mt 26:6-13*) or with Zaccheus (*Lk 19:1-10*).

One more century and in the year 680 the III Constantinople is convened and some similar issues are raised concerning now the existence and interrelation between the divine and the human mind and will powers. If both divine and human mind, if both divine and human will coexist in Jesus, how do they interrelate? Is there no conflict? And how could that be?

In both councils the central point remained the "divine Person" of Jesus. It is through the divine Person that the divine as well as the human attributes are channeled and thus comes the consequent *divinization* of the dynamism of Jesus. It is through the divine Person, likewise, that the divine as well as the human mind and will are channeled and hence comes the ultimate *divinization* of the total dynamism of Jesus. The *human* aspect is accepted in its existence and granted a *subordinated* role in its dynamism, but it is the *divine* that prevails and the *human* is more and more relegated to the background.

With III Constantinople one may say that the Community closes the Christological debates. From then on, the Community will come back to the soteriological issues only peripherically. What ever happened then of the *incarnated* Jesus?

We can accurately affirm that the Alexandrian ideology prevails in the supremacy of the *divine* person which from now on is looked upon as the anchor of the union between the *homousion* nature and divine dynamism of Jesus with the Father and the *anthropos* nature and human dynamism of Jesus. The incarnated Jesus, one can affirm from now on, is most of all *divine*.

Thus with the closing of those first six ecumenical councils, three invariable of the incarnated Jesus remain in the front of Christian theology, namely: his "divine", his "human" (soul), and his "flesh" (human body). Of the three, the "divine" will prevail in the overriding aspect of Jesus' divine person. The "human" will remain mostly silent in centuries to come.

The *invariable* of the Jewish religiosity is maintained as a point of reference, but it is now read, interpreted and accepted in the *variable* of the Greek culture. It is, one could definitely affirm, the ultimate triumph of the secular Greek culture over the secular Jewish culture.

The *Hellenization* of Jesus' Jewish religiosity and the substitution of the Jewish secular culture with a Greco-Roman culture becomes from now on an established factor that in later centuries will come to be known as the *Westernization* of Christianity. One may be tempted to allege that the variable of the interpretation of the Jewish religiosity and the *variable* of the Jewish culture become a "*quasi-invariable*" known as the *Westernization* of Jesus.

Period of Scholasticism up to the End of the XIXth Century

It would not be completely accurate to claim that the *human* aspect of Jesus has been forgotten, for great theologians like Bernard, Peter Lombardus and Thomas Aquinas speak about the human Jesus and indeed in a very forceful way.

There are two points, though, that need to be stressed. First, in the dialectics of the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools of

thought, the Alexandrian ideology with its load of Platonism definitively retains the upper hand in the presentation of Jesus. Jesus is most of all, and above, all "divine."

The second point is that while one ought to admit the stress on the humanity of Jesus by many of the Scholastic theologians, still the *human* aspect of Jesus shines almost exclusively during the triduum of Jesus' Passion, while so very little is stressed about the humanity of the previous thirty three years of Jesus' life. Besides, the *human* of the Scholastics and later centuries becomes so *Westernized* that one can reasonably question whether such *human* aspect is an *invariable* or a *variable* aspect depending on the context of the *inculturation* in which it is taking place. What we have in mind here is the fact that often times the *human* Jesus was often presented so much as the victim of the "impious Jews" that one could rightly ask if Jesus was a totally non "human Jew."

Similar comments could be made concerning the *Westernization* of the Jewish religiosity and the Jewish culture. Hardly any distinction is ever made. All aspects are practically embraced in that *Westernization* of Jesus. One has but to remember the various *religious* wars that often pitted *national* saints leading *Christian* armies against each other. The same with various apostles championing one *nationality* or another, not to forget even Mary bannerng conflicts under various Marian denominations. The same Mary warring with her Christian children against the same Mary on the opposite side warring with her likewise Christian children.

Along the same line, then, one can hardly attest that the *human* Jesus was much projected as the uniting factor of all humans, but rather it became so *Westernized* that often it was pictured as the symbol of the colonial power as if he was in alliance with the conquerors in subjugating the "*infidels*." If we would like to proceed with the argument, maybe one could ask, how many crucifixes has one ever seen with a "black," "indian" or "oriental" Jesus on the cross? I still remember the experience when projecting in a seminary class a "Filipino" Jesus (Jesus dressed in Filipino style) preaching to his apostles. All the seminarians laughed in unison. I wondered why!

Beginning of the XXth Century to Vatican II (1962-1963)

Sporadic attempts to *resuscitate* the *human* in Jesus were seen during the post Trent period. But it is only in the twentieth century when Catholic theologians started taking serious steps to come to terms with the "other side" of Jesus.

Karl Adam (1876-1966) is one of the first in what has come to be called his psychological school, a soteriology that draws its orientation from the words of Genesis "*Let us make man to our own image*" (Gen 1:27). This divine image, tainted by man's fall, has been restored by baptism and it is now the task of every Christian "*to configure himself more and more to the image of the new self*" (Eph 4:22-24). Every man, then, is seen as possessing radically that innermost longing, psychological quest for the image of Jesus. It is a soteriological school in quest of the "human" (soul) in Jesus.

Romano Guardini (1885-1968) is the leading proponent of what has been called an anthropological soteriology. It aspires to a comprehensive view of the total man in Jesus. The presupposition of this school is that Jesus becomes man not simply for our redemption, but also to be our model. He is seen in a more approachable way if man studies himself and Jesus in his total human environment. Its conclusion is that the more man knows himself and the more man knows Jesus as a man (anthropos in God), the better Jesus will appear as an imitable friend and the better man will be inclined and motivated to follow the steps of Jesus, somebody very much "*tempted like us in all things, but sin*" (Heb 4:15).

Karl Rahner (1904-1984) presents a soteriology that views the world in a holistic perspective of Salvation History, starting in Creation, climaxing in the Incarnation and finding its final completion in Eschatology. In this Salvation History, the moment of Jesus' Incarnation is an event dogmatized in the Chalcedonian creed stating the total openness of God to man and hence of man to God. That total openness fulfilled in Jesus is prolonged through the work of the Spirit up to the present. Hence, all of man's actions of the *past* and of the *after* Jesus' Incarnation are seen as related to that basic theological event which is the way Soteriology is interpreted and applied to present man as a continuation of that *incarnational* event from which all of the Christian life flows. Thus neither Jesus' divinity can be ignored, nor his humanity unattended.

Jean Paul Danielou (1905-1974) analyzes God's plan of salvation not as a quest of man for the perfecting image of the Creator, but rather as a manifestation of God's mystery through human history by a series of *gesta* or divine interventions that culminate in the very arrival of God's only Son among us. It is the role of Soteriology to show God's hand in man's historical events, to present to man the "signs of the times" as incarnated divine sparks to open man's heart to God.

Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-) presents a "sacramental" approach to Soteriology, a series of divine manifestations hidden in human or, more in general, in *creatural* realities commonly called in theological circles as *sacraments*. These *sacraments* are seen all throughout the Old Testament and they all lead to the utmost of the sacraments: the manifestation of God to man in person: "*Christ: the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*."⁹ This sacrament incarnated in man is born and grows in its manifestations. Furthermore it is consummated but it continues to manifest itself in the Community (itself a "sacrament").

Other theologians have developed during this 20th century a soteriology based not so much on the *ontological* Jesus, but rather on the *work* of Jesus. Thus the ideology of liberation strives to project a human Jesus fully committed to total human liberation, or a human Jesus in his ethical dimension, or a human Jesus in his ministerial commitment.

All in all, it is the first part of this twentieth century that shows us a Community awakening more and more to the "other side" of Jesus, the human side. It is the soteriology of pre-Vatican II.

Vatican II (1962-1965): A Turn Towards a Jesus "Human"

One could hardly affirm that Vatican II was an ideological council. But it would be most inaccurate to affirm that Vatican II was a council without ideas. It was very much a council with many and very rich ideas. One of Vatican II's most impacting ideas was coined in its *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* ("*Gaudium et Spes*").¹⁰ It was the idea of *inculturation*.

⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1962.

¹⁰ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* ("*Gaudium et Spes*"), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Ed. Walter M. Abbott, N.Y., 1966.

With that idea the Council wanted the Community to be not just an *invariable* and fossilized replica of its historic past, but a dynamic Community constantly inserting itself into the context of its present generation and the environment of its living situation. It was a clear and loud call for the Church to become constantly *incarnated* in the world in which it lives, a call to be “inculturated.”

It is beyond doubt that Vatican II's *Constitution on the Divine Revelation* (“*Verbum Dei*”)¹¹ is a reaffirmation of the *divine* invariable. But it is not less clear that Vatican II makes an equally forceful call to present a Jesus and a Community “attuned” to the world of today, and that tuning is the revival of the invariable *human* aspect of Jesus with the variables of religious interpretation and culture.

As for the invariable of the Jewish religiosity, the Church started “rediscovering” it with the publication by Pius XII of his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), and later the *Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the Historical Truth of the Gospels* (1964). These documents gave the official impulse within the Catholic Church to the biblical studies thereby learning, once more, what constitutes the Jewish religiosity and the Jewish culture, thereby preparing theologians for a parallel *rediscovery*, the invariable of Jesus's incarnation in his Jewish religiosity, and the variable of Jesus incarnation in his Jewish culture.

Present Quest for a Projection of an “Integral” Jesus in the “Present” Culture

Thus, at this stage, in our post-Vatican II situation, we come to the point of asking ourselves, where is our Soteriology leading?

In some ways, it may be said that present Soteriology is simply trying to find modern paradigms of the formula of Chalcedon, a divine and a human Jesus in the divinity of the person. This assumption, though, is not totally accurate. For to start with, the quest goes, as we mentioned in the pre-Vatican II analysis, beyond the “ontological” Jesus. The modern quest searches for the *work*, the dynamic Jesus. It is therefore a quest for an “integral” Jesus who

¹¹ *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (“*Dei Verbum*”), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Ed. by Walter M. Abbott, N.Y.: Guild Press, 1966.

will encompass the *divine* and the *human* invariable in the *divine* person, and bring about the Jesus at work, the Jesus in his *redemptive* role, and the Jesus in his *atoning* as well as in his *proclaiming* aspects.

That is the “integral” Jesus, but modern theology is struggling to go forward, it is questing for a way to “incarnate” that “integral” Jesus. By *incarnated* —as we already mentioned— one ought to understand properly a total joining of a total (God) with another total (the human) in the ultimate perfection of a divine person. This understanding, though, is not an initial concept in Christianity, but a process of a four centuries long theological elaboration. In a simpler and perhaps less proper way of understanding the concept of *incarnation*, one could think of some kind of insertion, adaptation or molding of God to the human condition.

Now, in that process of *incarnating* the integral Jesus, theologians are searching precisely for the meaning of *inculturation* in the modern context of man. Thus the issue of discussion: *Christology and Anthropology*.

How To Go About Inculturating Christology

The issue is of the utmost importance if Christianity wishes to be truly a *carrier* of Jesus’ message. To our mind theologians ought to remain clear on the issues involved if they wish to come out with an authentic *incarnated Jesus*.

The first thing to be done, we believe, is to identify the *invariable* elements involved in such *inculturation*.

1) The “Invariables” in an Incarnated Jesus

(1) Jesus: “Divine”

We Christians acknowledge in Jesus a pre creation divinity who, in the context of salvation history, has joined us humans in our “creatural” existence as the acknowledged Son of God. As divine he is accepted to be in possession of all that is divine, in nature and in attributes. This affirmation of the divinity of Jesus carries already an acceptance of the Trinitarian understanding of the divine.

(2) Jesus: “Human”

Confessing a “human Jesus” is to accept in Jesus what is most proper to us as humans, for that and no other element

would make us truly different from others, from the non-humans. As we mentioned before, if one plays with this understanding, one would have to set aside as not humans not only ordinary animals, but also pure spirit not attached to dimensional bodies.

If then we affirm that Jesus assumes human *flesh* what we are attesting is that Jesus does not have just any kind of flesh, but a qualified type of flesh, *human* flesh. Hence the "flesh" here is the noun preconditioned by the adjective "human."

Once again, here we would reaffirm what has been said already, that attached to both concepts, "human" and "flesh", one has to grasp the objectivity that both concepts make reference to realities often present with a load of limitations in their respective field. Yet, such limitations by no means would make either the "human" or the "flesh" less human flesh, but simply human flesh.

(3) *Jesus' Work*

When it comes to Jesus' work, there is a *divine* and there is a *human* aspect to it.

The *divine* aspect of Jesus' work is our *redemption*. To redeem is to buy back. In the religious field, *redemption* is understood with reference to sin, which is an offense against God and a moral slavery, i.e., it has an objective and a subjective aspect; therefore, redemption involves at once a reparation or expiation or satisfaction (objectively) and a ransom or liberation or reintegration (subjectively). To pay for the breaking of the divine covenant, Jesus has to do it in his capacity as *divine*.

The human aspect of Jesus' work is "to lead by example and by proclamation." In the divine plan of salvation for humans, the leadership by example of Jesus is a leadership of suffering, the leadership of the cross, the atonement. *Atonement* is the act by which one makes amends or satisfaction in order to bring about a reconciliation.

The leadership of proclamation is the teachings of Jesus. In a gospel language, the proclamation of the Kingdom. This proclamation is the *Jewish* aspect of Jesus. And, it was said already, by *Jewish* we mean the people of Israel as a nation and as the Chosen People of Yahweh. As the Chosen People of God, the Jews have a peculiar history unequal by any other nation. It is upon God's initiative that

He selected Abraham as his tribe and then favored him and his descendants with special attention guiding them, protecting them, correcting them and giving them their basic law and teachings through the action of Moses and the Prophets. This is the religious aspect of the Jews, an *invariable* aspect in their relation with Yahweh. And it is in this religiosity Jesus will be born. There is, though, as we will see, a *variable* aspect to this proclamation that we should not forget.

2) *The "Variables"*

Granting the *invariable* elements in the *incarnated Jesus*, then theologians have to work in earnest to see to it that a clear picture is delineated of what is "variable" in that incarnated Jesus and therefore subject to a constant process of *inculturation*.

(1) *The "Human" in a "Concrete Nationality" with its "National" Identity*

There is nothing variable, of course, in the *divine* element of Jesus. But there are variable elements in his *human* element. It is true that Jesus is human, is *flesh* —and is a concrete flesh, *Jewish flesh*. But it is in that *concreteness* where theologians ought to strive to make a clear distinction, for while it is true that Jesus incarnated in Jewish flesh, there is in that Jewish flesh an aspect of *invariability* and an aspect of *variability* involved.

"Invariable" in Jesus as a Jew is his concrete aspect of attachment to the Jewish religiosity, linking the Jews as Chosen people with Yahweh's special concern and providence. But there are, besides, other aspects of Jewish flesh. One has the variability of the religious *interpretation*, as well as the variability of the nationality as a secular element of culture.

And it is precisely along these latter aspects that one can foresee an "inculturated" Jesus interpreted differently in that secular aspect of the religiosity, and likewise a nationalistic way of projecting Jesus, say, as a Filipino Jesus, without rejecting the Yahwehistic religiosity of Jesus.

(2) *The "Proclamation" with a "Modern" Philosophy (Culture) Vocabulary*

In the proclamation of Jesus, we have said, there is the aspect of *continuity* of the Kingdom between the teachings of the Law and

the Prophets and the teachings of Jesus. Of that aspect, Jesus said clearly, "I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill and to perfect it" (Mt 5:17). That "proclamation" is invariable. But attached to that proclamation is first the *secular* interpretation by the Scribes and the Pharisees. Then we have seen such an interpretation elaborated by the Community in the passing of the centuries. It was the *Hellenization*, the *Westernization* of the Gospel. It is the other aspect of the Jewish people, the aspect whereby the Jews interpret the divine invariable through the passing of the time, combining such interpretation to sooth their geographical and political environment. It is the *secular* and *nationalistic* aspect of Judaism. It is the language, the customs, the traditions, the ways of expression. Those are variables in the *incarnated* Jesus.

It is here most of all that theologians have to analyze how the Yahwehistic "religiosity" was incarnated into the Greco-Roman interpretation, how it was "Hellenized" and later on "Westernized" and hence, how it could be now "modernized" (or, for instance, "Filipinized") in terms of culture and vocabulary, without having to lose in the process the "biblical" flavor for the sake of the Western (or the Filipino) flavor.

Recommendations – While Theologizing

As a way of conclusion, we would like to add some tips or sort of recommendations to be taken into account while "theologizing":

- Remaining conscious of what is "invariable" at the level of the divine and the human;
- Being aware of what was "variable" and "enriching" and may be wise to absorb it;
- Being aware of what is "variable" and may "preferably" be "changed" in the field of modern philosophy and in the field of "national" culture;
- Proceeding slowly, because cultural changes take time. Making sure that the "substitute" outweigh in objective value to the "substituted." And proceeding with *objectivity* not with *resentment*. □

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