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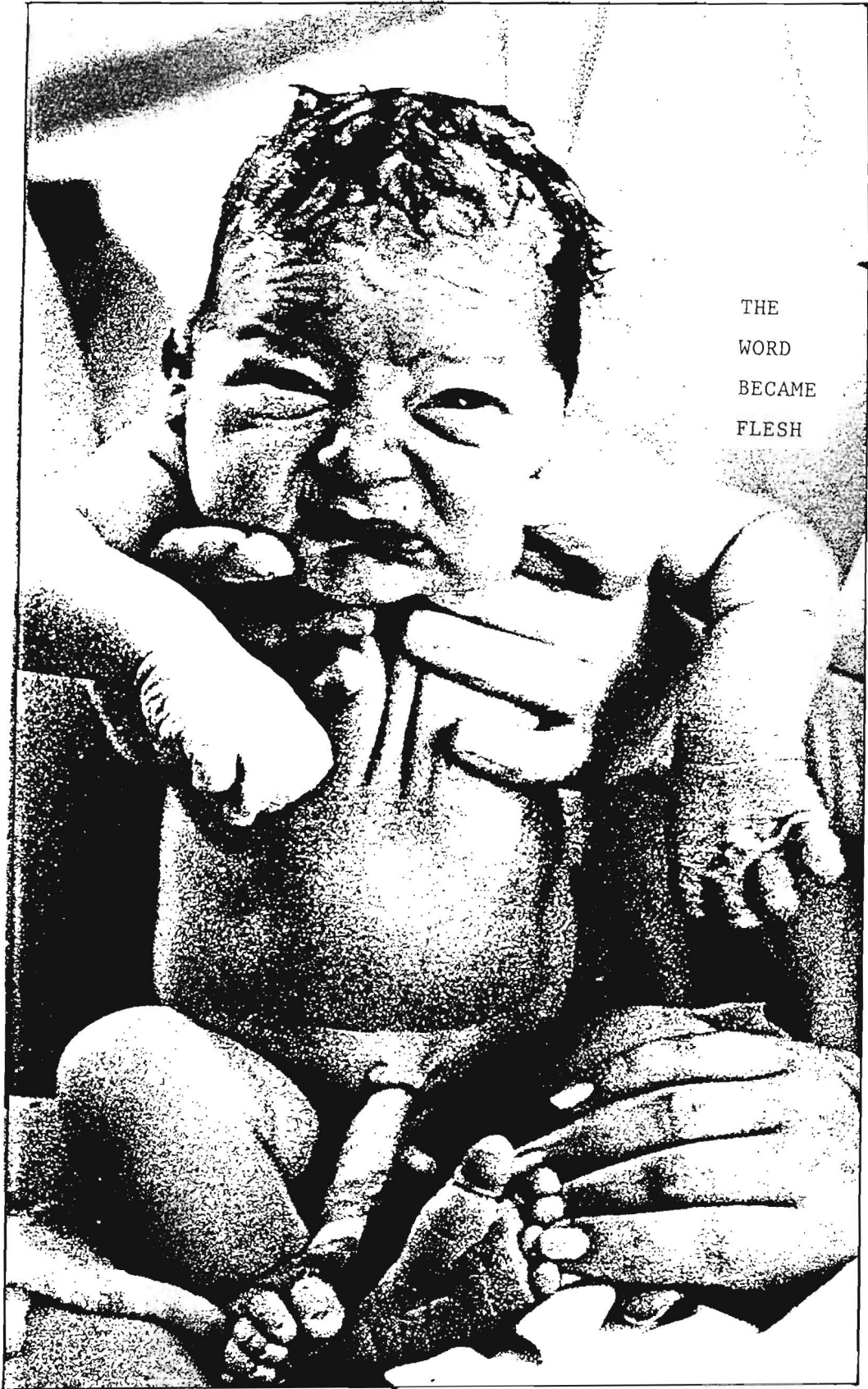
CHRISTOLOGY FROM WITHIN
A CRITICAL RETRIEVAL OF THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE
ROLE OF MARY

BY

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Submitted in full requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town,
August 2001.

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THE
WORD
BECAME
FLESH

Thesis abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to recover the significance of the humanity of Christ for our redemption. This involves exploring ways in which the issue of Christ's humanity has been dealt with in the past, identifying both shortcomings of previous Christological models and elements that can be retrieved for a contemporary paradigm. It also involves consideration of what it means, in the light of contemporary understanding, to be truly human. Although the creeds assert equally the humanity and divinity of Christ, it is often the latter which has been stressed at the expense of his humanity, leading to distortions that have had an impact on the church's understanding of Christ and hence on its praxis. The paradigm I try to develop can best be described as a Christology "from within", asserting that in the Incarnation Christ, who is the source and pattern of life, is made manifest in assuming our humanity.

In this study the Irenaean notion of recapitulation, contending that what has not been assumed by Christ cannot be redeemed, has provided both the starting point and a conceptual tool. The Gnostic context in which Irenaeus ministered required that he assert the thoroughgoing humanity of Christ in the face of docetism. This strikes a chord with docetic tendencies which have always been, and still are, in evidence in the church's understanding of Christ.

Working from the hermeneutical position of motherhood, bolstered by my experience as a woman, a nurse, and as a person of faith in South Africa, the implications of Christ's full humanity are explored. This begins with the search for the historical Jesus, making clear that, whilst they are related to and inform each other, to speak of the Jesus of the history is not to speak of the humanity of Christ. The former is sought by historico-critical methods, whilst the latter belongs to Christian confession. This leads into reflection on the Council of Chalcedon, which issued the normative statement of orthodox Christological belief. Chalcedon proclaimed both the true humanity and the true divinity of Christ, setting the bounds within which Christological

discourse, if it is to be truly Christian, can occur. The challenge for us is to restate the essential truths of Chalcedon in language and categories appropriate for contemporary life and faith. In terms of Christ's humanity this means that the notion of relationality must be taken seriously, and this in turn draws attention to the role played by Mary, who mediated Christ's humanity and gave to him his initial experience of living in relation.

Christ's assumption of our full humanity is explored further in dialogue with Irenaeus and then, "beyond Irenaeus but with him", with Balthasar and others. Among the issues explored are the significance of childhood and growth, the relationship between creation and redemption and – notably with Balthasar – the role of Mary in the Incarnation as mediator of Christ's humanity.

A central thesis is that Christ's humanity hinges on the role played by Mary, who becomes pivotal to an adequate understanding of Christ. After considering the historic and contemporary place of Mary in the three main historic Christian traditions (Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism), elements are identified that can be used in a Christological reconstruction. Inclusion of Mary's role in considering the humanity of Christ means, for example, that birthing imagery can be employed as a complement to the redemptive imagery of the cross. In this way the dissertation develops a Christology "from within", which has relevance not only for humanity but for relationships with other dimensions of creation as well.

It is as a Protestant that I approach the subject of Mary, and as the study proceeded I became aware of the ecumenical potential of a Christological approach that incorporates her role. In this way the study can hopefully make a contribution to ecumenical dialogue.

Acknowledgements

There is no such thing as a “solo feat” PhD. I have become increasingly aware of the many people who have collaborated in bringing me to this place, and I have simultaneously become increasingly grateful. I would like to take this opportunity of acknowledging those who have helped me, making no apology for elements of sentimentality as I do so.

At the outset I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the National Research Foundation for the generous bursary which made this study possible.

I have expressed my gratitude and sense of privilege to my supervisor, Professor John W. de Gruchy, many times. I now do so publicly - for the superb quality of his supervision, for ensuring that the writing of this dissertation has been an enjoyable experience, for his enthusiasm and encouragement, and for allowing this to be part of my personal journey. Inadequate though this tribute is, I ask him to accept it with my deep thanks. .

Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio began as my supervisor, before his secondment to the TRC. It is he who encouraged me to embark on this study, and his interest throughout the process has been greatly appreciated.

I first met both Professor de Gruchy and Professor Villa-Vicencio over thirty years ago. It is they who were responsible for setting me on the path of critical thought, particularly with regard to the realities and challenges of life in South Africa and for the necessity of a faith engaged with it. For this I am deeply grateful.

I extend my gratitude, too; to those who were intellectual and theological mentors to me, particularly Professors Adrio König and Marie-Henry Keane who affirmed me and encouraged me to pursue graduate theological studies.

I am conscious of a wide variety of people who in different ways have sustained me during the writing of this dissertation, giving both practical and moral support. To each one I am thankful. Among these are friends and colleagues at UCT. I think of those in the Department of Religious Studies, in particular Professor Jim Cochrane for his personal interest and for facilitating the work-in-progress seminars; Professor Henning Snyman, Libbi Downes and my colleagues in the Graduate School in Humanities and in the rest of the Faculty, for their valued support; Distinguished Professor Roger Lass for setting so much in perspective during recent months; and the members of the Bonhoeffer Circle, especially Professor de Gruchy, Chrispin Mbalazi, Robert Steiner and Gillian Walters, for fruitful dialogue and cherished friendship. Among my wider circle of friends I acknowledge the support of Rev Douglas Bax and fellow members of the Rondebosch United Church; Steve Martin, Juan Garces, Malinge Njeza, Barbara Schmid, Bastienne Klein and other friends associated with RICSA; Professor Denise Ackermann and members of the Cape Town branch of the Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians; Karl, for friendship, for travelling this path with me and for making it fun; Wilma Jakobsen and Helen and Luke Stubbs for their concern for and patience with an absent friend – I will soon be back!

A special word of thanks goes to my brother, Professor Alan Rycroft, for his wisdom, his encouragement, and for his confidence in me through all the years I have studied. My mother, Isabel Rycroft, has been baffled by my perpetual need to study, but has been supportive throughout, and I am grateful.

My indebtedness to my immediate family is great, and difficult to express. To my husband, Ken, and our daughters Carolyn, Jennifer and Jane I say “thank you” – for your graciousness in giving me this time, your patience as it has gone on from year to year, your moral and practical support, and above all for your love. The end is nigh at last.

*....Beside the cornfield that sustains us,
tilled and cared for reverently by men
sweating as they labour at their task...
beside the field that gives their daily bread
men also let the lovely cornflower thrive.
No one has planted, no one watered it;
it grows, defenceless and in freedom,
and in glad confidence of life untroubled
under the open sky....
Finest and fairest blossom,
at a happy moment springing
from the freedom of a lightsome, daring, trusting spirit,
is a friend to a friend.¹*

¹ From Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Friend*

Index

Title page	i
Thesis abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
<i>Explanation of what I'm doing and why</i>	1
<i>Overview of thesis</i>	3
<i>Hermeneutical perspectives</i>	
<i>My location</i>	6
<i>The epistemology of motherhood</i>	10
1. Lived experience as a source of knowledge	11
2. Reclaiming biblical themes	11
3. Relationality	12
4. Childhood and children	12
5. Womb and tomb as paradoxically synonymous?	13
<i>The epistemology of a nurse</i>	16
1. "Death the leveller"	16
2. The secret of life is in life itself	17
3. "The seeds of the divine and the capacities of the human heart are found in weakness"	19
<i>Living in South Africa</i>	20
<i>A preliminary note on Mary</i>	23
<i>Conclusion</i>	24
<i>Note</i>	25
PART 1	
Chapter 1 – The history and humanity of Christ	26
<i>History, faith and the humanity of Christ</i>	26
<i>Seeking the historical Jesus</i>	32
<i>Asserting the Christ of faith</i>	40
<i>A new wave of Catholic Christological enquiry</i>	52
<i>Seeking again for the historical Jesus</i>	58
<i>Christology from within: locating myself on the continuum</i>	71

Chapter 2 – Truly God but fully human	75
<i>Setting the scene</i>	76
<i>Challenges to the divinity of Christ</i>	85
<i>Challenges to the humanity of Christ</i>	89
<i>Chalcedon: end or beginning?</i>	98
PART 2	
Chapter 3 – Fully human, fully redemptive	107
<i>Irenaeus on recapitulation</i>	118
<i>Eve and Mary</i>	126
<i>Creation and redemption, life and death</i>	137
Chapter 4 – Humanity sustaining the weight of the Divine	143
<i>An instrument for every melody</i>	143
<i>Childhood and growth</i>	147
<i>Creation-redemption continuity</i>	159
<i>Mary</i>	163
<i>Mediator of Christ's humanity</i>	170
Chapter 5 – Mediator of Christ's humanity	178
<i>Development of a Marian tradition</i>	182
<i>Eastern Orthodoxy: defending the tradition</i>	198
<i>Mary in Catholicism: developing the tradition</i>	202
<i>Mary in Protestantism: suppressing the tradition</i>	222
<i>Recovering Mary/Mariology?</i>	235
PART 3	
Chapter 6 – Christology from within	242
<i>Elements for a constructive Christology</i>	245
1. <i>Genealogies</i>	246
2. <i>In birthing blood is shed</i>	249
3. <i>Embodiment</i>	254
4. <i>Relationality</i>	256
<i>Concluding methodological postscript</i>	263
Bibliography	265

University of Cape Town

INTRODUCTION

*I have come to see that the biographical dimension
is an essential dimension of theological insight¹*

Explanation of what I'm doing and why

Theology is both a scientific enquiry based on the study of historical sources, and an imaginative construction based on faith convictions. In a marriage of these two elements the aim of this dissertation is to recover the significance of the humanity of Christ for our redemption. Using as a basis the Irenaeian understanding of redemption, summed up in the dictum "what has not been assumed (by Christ) cannot be redeemed,"² I will explore the meaning of Christ's true humanity with reference to perspectives relevant to contemporary experience. Affirmation of Christ's full humanity in this way does not and need not lead to a denial of his full divinity, but it does imply a restatement of that divinity which avoids a triumphalist Christology, in keeping with what we can know of the historical Jesus. What Christ has assumed must determine both who he is and what he has done.

But why is such a recovery necessary? The answer to this question is bound up with a four-fold problematic. Firstly, there is the danger of a docetic Christ. Part of the agenda of Chalcedon and the prior Ecumenical Councils was to affirm the full humanity of Christ in the face of a Gnostic onslaught. Christianity's peculiar character hinges on the conviction that in Jesus Christ God assumed full humanity, and early on the danger of compromising that humanity was appreciated. Yet since Chalcedon the divinity of Christ has often been stressed at the expense of his humanity, frequently resulting in docetic tendencies in

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, translated by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 2000) p xviii

² This dictum sums up the Irenaeian doctrine of recapitulation, and is frequently used in this connection. However, it is attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus (380CE), speaking against the Apollinarians in defence of the contention that Jesus had a human mind: "For what he has not assumed he has not healed; it is what is united to his Deity that is saved" (Gregory of Nazianzus, Epistle 101, in *Patrologia Graeca*, Volume 37, column 181: "to gar aproslepton, atherapeuton")

Christology which have effectually separated Christ from the world. In the second place, concerted focus on Christ's divinity led to a triumphalist Christ which has had a marked impact on both Christology and ecclesiology, and the praxis issuing from them. Triumphalism has gone hand in hand with domination of people and the earth, issues for which the new global consciousness calls Christianity into account. Both a docetic and a triumphalist Christ have the effect of at once distorting his divinity and losing touch with the reality of Christ's history. Whist Christology as reflective interpretation of Christ came with the resurrection and ascension, this was predated by Christ's birth to a peasant woman and a life which culminated in his execution. A third problem lies in the reaction of Liberal Protestantism, over an extended period of time, to such one-sided interpretations of Chalcedon. This reaction was often marked by a rejection of Chalcedon in favour of the historical Jesus. The resultant attempts to reconstruct the historical Jesus led to a bifurcated Christology which separated the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith. Efforts to bring the two together again have not succeeded in positing a Christ whose *humanity* (as distinguished from his historicity) is sufficiently addressed, nor in recognising the *relationality* in which that humanity subsisted. A fourth dimension to the problematic is grounded in one of the early challenges posed by feminist theology: Can a male saviour save women?³ This issue has been dealt with in a variety of ways. It raises the question of Christ's relevance to *all* those whose experience of life was and is not his own, confronting us with the issue of representation.

If these are the four underlying problems that this thesis seeks to address, they in turn reflect a far deeper issue, alluded to already: a failure to adequately grasp the significance of *relationality*, and particularly the way in which this is expressed in Christ. It is essentially a relational Christ, therefore, that I seek to retrieve. The role of Mary becomes pivotal here as the prime mediator, not

³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) ch 5. It is interesting to note that in the thirteenth century the Dominican Albert the Great, responding to Anselm, asked whether Christ could have assumed humanity as a female. In keeping with the scholastic disputation method, the answer hinged on the weighing of a series of reasons for both "yes" and "no". Needless to say the, the final answer was "no", but the question drew attention to more subtle issues such as representation and the need to acknowledge the Christ's maternal role in imparting "new life". For a concise account of this

simply of Christ's humanity, but of the relationality which is both integral to authentic human being and a reflection of divinity. This key element, namely the role of Mary, with its implications for the way in which redemption is possible, is largely neglected in Protestant theology, the tradition in which I have been theologically nurtured. On the other hand there is the need to critically evaluate the (popular) tendency in other traditions to see Mary in isolation from Christ or to portray her in triumphalist terms. Both of these aberrations issue in a distorted Christology and hence in distorted Christian praxis.

Overview of thesis

How have I gone about dealing with the problem? There is a sense in which this thesis could be described as a "search for the humanity of Christ". Such a search, however, is grounded in the confession that this person, Jesus of Nazareth is simultaneously the "Word made flesh". In fact, these dimensions of Christ are mutually dependent. Paradoxically, the more human Christ is, the more divine, and the more he is God the more he is human. His divinity determines the type of person he is, and his humanity tells us what God is like. With this in mind I have set out to develop a Christological paradigm best described as a Christology "from within".

Part I comprises two chapters, each dealing with historical perspectives. In order to open up the problem I begin in Chapter 1 with the Liberal Protestant search for the historical Jesus. From here I move into more contemporary reactions to it and trends emerging from it, in awareness of the danger of confusing the so-called historical Jesus with the humanity of Christ. During the course of the twentieth century there was a strong move to restate Christology and to relate the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. This was partly in response to the search for the historical Jesus and partly because of the influence of Karl Barth's theology, especially Barth's effort to reinstate the primacy of revelation in the wake of the Protestant Liberalism of the previous century. It was Christologies "from above" (incarnational Christologies) in which the divine Logos assumed human flesh, and Christologies "from below", whose

debate see David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin

starting point is the human Jesus, that constituted the two main methodological approaches during the twentieth century.

These two perspectives highlight the issues discussed in Chapter 2 where I deal with the background to Chalcedon and its dogmatic Christ. Here we will consider the problem of dealing with a dogmatic statement which, separated from the historical events to which it testifies, runs the risk of docetic misinterpretation. Chapter 1 therefore highlights the shortcomings of the historic without the dogmatic, while in Chapter 2 we are faced with the danger of the dogmatic without the historical. At the same time we discover from Chalcedon the paradoxical reality that this ordinary human Jesus is simultaneously the visible expression of divinity. Chalcedon therefore declares a mystery: both the true humanity and the true divinity of Christ.

My own attempt to deal with such issues is stimulated to a considerable extent by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's question "Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?",⁴ and the way he set out to deal with this question in his Christology lectures.⁵ Bonhoeffer begins with what he calls critical or negative Christology, centring on the boundaries set by Chalcedon, followed by a constructive attempt to understand what lies within those boundaries, particularly in terms of one's own contemporary situation. As far as my own research is concerned, I have attempted to develop a Christology which takes seriously the boundaries established at Chalcedon while at the same time exploring ways of restating the significance of Jesus Christ for today.

The aim of Part II is to find a way to deal with the humanity of Christ which integrates both the dogmatic and the historical dimensions. Chapters 3 and 4 comprise theological reflection on the meaning of Christ's humanity, grounded in the contention that what he has not assumed he cannot redeem. This

Press, 2000) pp 248f).

⁴ I did not set out intending to use Bonhoeffer as a major dialogue partner. However, I have found that through this dissertation several of his insights have proved relevant to the themes being discussed. Part of the reason for this, I contend, is Bonhoeffer's concern to understand Christ in a way that was relevant to his contemporary situation – a feature that pertains, as we shall see, with Irenaeus too.

⁵ It is notes taken during these lectures that provided the source material for the publication of the book that we know as Bonhoeffer's *Christology*.

constitutes the basis of Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation, which is discussed in Chapter 3 and which opens up a variety of key issues, not least of which is the role played by Mary. Although a major concern of Chalcedon was to safeguard the humanity of Christ, ever since the Council it has in fact been his divinity that has been emphasised, sometimes at the expense of his humanity. It is my contention that a thoroughgoing appreciation of Christ's humanity - not at the expense of his divinity - lies at the heart of any Christology appropriate to our contemporary world. It is here that Irenaeus' particular value lies in providing the notion of recapitulation as a hermeneutical tool to explore Christ's humanity.

Chapter 4 takes the discussion further as we use Balthasar and others to move "beyond Irenaeus, but with him". Balthasar, as a contemporary exponent of Irenaeus, is particularly helpful in probing the implications of Christ's full humanity, and for the expansiveness of his grasp of it. Whilst these two enable us to go both behind Chalcedon and ahead of it, it is important to make clear that I embrace neither Irenaeus' nor Balthasar's theology in their entirety. There are places where their perceived lack is supplemented or supplanted by the insights of others, including a number of women theologians who, primarily through their epistemology, have drawn attention to issues relevant to Christology and particularly to humanity. Among them are Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth A. Johnson, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Anne Thurston, and Margaret Magdalen. Yet other scholars have been particularly helpful in locating my work in a broader Christological perspective. Hendrikus Berkhof, for whom an uncompromising continuity between old and new covenant, Israel and the church, comprises a theological matrix, has been invaluable in his development of a Christology from "behind",⁶ which I will show to be significant for the paradigm I wish to develop.

Chapter 4 ends with a closer look at Balthasar's Mariology, forming a bridge between this and Chapter 5 which focuses specifically on Mary and her role as mediator of Christ's humanity. Here we begin with an introduction to Mariology,

⁶ Hendrikus Berkhof grounds his Christology in the tradition of Israel and the Old Testament, seeing Jesus in the line of redemptive history "from behind." See Berkhof's *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) pp 221ff.

followed by an overview of Mary's place in the church, both historical and contemporary. Among the problems identified in this chapter are the lack of focus on Mary in Protestant thinking, and the ambiguity surrounding her person. Such ambiguity has resulted in part in polarised interpretations, and the tendency towards her divinisation in some traditions. My specific aim is to focus on Mary in her relationship to Christ, and to identify elements in the various historical trajectories of her in that relationship which may be helpful in constructing a contemporary Christology.

Part 3, comprising Chapter 6, takes the discussion further by explaining the notion of a Christology "from within", using birthing imagery as a central motif. Much of the focus of this chapter is on the significance of relationality for authentic human being, and hence also for our redemption in Christ. Research has convinced me that Mary's recovery in this particular way from within the Protestant tradition can help to promote dialogue between the churches, and so make a contribution to ecumenical theological discourse.

The reader will note that I have discussed my methodology in the concluding chapter. Some might prefer that methodological consideration be introduced at the beginning of such a dissertation. However, as the methodology of this project developed in the course of doing research, I have deemed it more appropriate to reflect on what in fact has been done, at the end. As far as the sources used in this dissertation are concerned, I have drawn both on works of seminal theology, ancient and modern, as well as standard historical and theological texts, applying accepted scholarly norms for appropriating such material.

Hermeneutical perspectives

My location

It is important to acknowledge at this point my own *sitz im leben* as this inevitably has an impact both on the way I do theology and on its content. First there is the question of my historical-geographical location. Whilst I have known

no other home but Africa I cannot escape the fact that it is Europe which to a great extent has determined the course of my socio-cultural, intellectual and especially theological development. Furthermore, it is European political, cultural and theological domination that in varying degrees shaped not only the church, but life at all levels through much of the world during the era of colonialism, not least in South Africa. The term European should, of course, be prefixed by the adjective "patriarchal", because historical enquiry into what constitutes mainstream developments (in all spheres) in Europe has been overwhelmingly male-dominated, as literary sources and historical reality testify. On the positive side, it is also true that in the area of Christological discourse this same heritage has provided some of the foundational blocks in the construction of relevant contemporary or contextual Christologies. So in this time of post-colonialism it is not only valid but imperative to acknowledge and evaluate this European past, and to decipher what is good and redeemable in it. It is for this reason that I unabashedly return to these roots to explore the wellspring of my Christology. In doing so I would draw attention also to the fact that what is discussed here represents what could be described as a somewhat elitist perspective - that of academic discourse - far removed in many respects from the popular and not insignificant piety of ordinary people.⁷

⁷ I write this on Easter Sunday 2000, from the outskirts of a small village of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Soon after sunrise today I was out walking and heard not too far away the sound of a church service in progress. I heard the rhythmic beating of drums and the sound of singing and dancing. During the twenty minutes or so that I was in earshot the same line of both lyrics and music, to the same drumbeat, seemed to be repeated over and over again with only one or two brief pauses. This group of people had met to celebrate – in a manner foreign to Western experience - the resurrection of Christ, and to meet with their living Lord. As I walked, my mind - very recently focused on this section of the dissertation - travelled back to my own ecclesiastical roots, Methodism. I thought of John and Charles Wesley, both of whose lives spanned well nigh the whole of the eighteenth century, calling people to share in the experience of a "heart strangely warmed" by Christ. In the age of reason as expressed in English Deism and the German Enlightenment it could nevertheless be said of John Wesley that "never a man did such a life's work for England". I thought, too, of what I treasure in this tradition that was "born in song", the vibrant musical heritage transmitted from generation to generation, where one consequently had and has as great a chance of encountering Christ in the singing as in the preaching. Here were two very different expressions of what might be called "popular piety", and in both, whilst it certainly has a place, proclamation as the preached Word by no means stands alone as the central element. Rather, it is the experience of Christ that is paramount. I realise, furthermore, that this and other Protestant traditions at times proclaim more in worship than they would concede to in dogma (see esp. Ch 5, pp 23f and Ch 6, pp 249ff). This observation, it seems to me, is relevant as a reference point in evaluating some of the Christological trends we will encounter as this discourse proceeds, and particularly in terms of its overwhelmingly Teutonic slant.

In the second place there is what I will call my epistemological location, which includes but goes beyond my Afro-European heritage. The way I know is shaped by several factors, the most significant of which will be discussed shortly. The challenge presents itself in trying to penetrate scholarly discourse with this dimension intact, so that my epistemology, which is what lends authenticity to the enterprise, is not sacrificed on the altar of academic acceptability. It is primarily feminist theological discourse that has convinced me that this is possible and necessary, and has provided some of the tools to do it.

It was some twenty years ago that I was introduced to feminist theological thought, and it is feminist critique which since then has shaped a great deal of my thinking and the direction of its enquiry. There is much in this critique with which I identify and which is built into who I am and the way I see things. Among the notable positive contributions feminism has made to my thinking – in addition to that already mentioned - is that the responsibility of women is not only to enhance the status of women themselves, but to work for the humanisation of all people, and through this for the well-being of all creation. Tom Driver captured the essence of this in relation to Christology:

If the churches were to turn from Christ past to Christ present-future in order to affirm the equality of women and men, Christian identity would break loose from dependence on God the Father and Christ, his Son. In fact, identity would cease to be a religious concern. *It would be replaced by collaboration with God in the nurture of life.....* Christ future is a human agent aware of coresponsibility with God in the creative preservation of life. That awareness, and the political world necessary to put it into action, is the aim of Christian feminism.⁸

Emerging from this is feminism's affirmation of the body,⁹ displacing the body-soul dualism which Christianity inherited from Hellenism, and which has

⁸ Tom Driver, *Christ in a Changing World: Towards an Ethical Christology* (London: SCM, 1981) p 141

dominated much of both its theory and praxis into the present. Adrienne Rich's 1976 challenge for feminists to build theories that "touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence,"¹⁰ is reflected in themes of contemporary feminist discourse such as embodiment, sexuality and earth-consciousness. This grounding of life and faith in its corporeal roots has had a profound effect on my theology.

In addition to this, Christian feminism has had a conscientising effect, particularly insofar as the sense of a patriarchal hijacking of the Christian faith, and therefore of life in society, is concerned. I have been alerted, for example, to the necessity of "reading the silences" – where the voices of women and other marginalised people are absent. Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion has become a useful feminist tool, that applies no less in Christological enquiry than elsewhere. It is this that introduced me to the rigorous questioning which has issued in this dissertation.

There are, however, areas of concern with regard to the feminist critique, which have honed my sensitivity to other areas of my life as hermeneutical categories. I acknowledge the danger of generalisation, recognising that there are feminist theologies rather than a single theology, and also that much contemporary women's discourse rejects the label "feminist".¹¹ Nevertheless, there are certain overall impressions left by feminism, among which is that, in its effort to liberate women from biologically and sociologically determined roles, the value of motherhood has sometimes been undermined. The result of this is a dearth of theological reflection on motherhood. And yet, as I will show, motherhood has provided a significant part of my theological hermeneutic and has considerable

⁹ In terms of "body experience", Bonnie Miller-McLemore makes an interesting observation. Carol Christ and Judith Plascow's early publication, *Womanspirit Rising* (1979), leaves the theme of "body experience" for the future. Several years later their *Weaving the Visions* (1989) deals with embodiment and erotic experience as a source of knowledge. But even here no one speaks of her own maternal experience (Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p 85)

¹⁰ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976) p 21. Cited by Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) p 82

¹¹ For example, womanist theological critique, not only of patriarchy but of feminism itself. See for example Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989)

potential for Christological imagery. I will show how “a feminist maternal theology necessarily builds on, and extends, several core premises of feminist theology.”¹²

In the end it is both an embrace and a critique of feminism that underlie all my theological enquiry, including the hermeneutical perspectives which follow.

The epistemology of motherhood

“Many theologians are mothers, but few have investigated in any depth what is learned about theology from this pivotal life experience”. So observes Bonny Miller-McLemore¹³, reflecting on her position as both mother and theologian. These words challenged me, acting as a spur to my tentative decision to explore the theme of motherhood as a tool for Christological discourse. At the same time they have affirmed my intuitive sense of the significance of motherhood in understanding God's dealings with us. I am not sure whether the need to develop a Christology “from the inside out” derives from the experience and rich imagery of motherhood, or whether such imagery resonates with what I already understand of faith, life and personhood - and therefore of Christology. Perhaps it is a two-way dynamic. At any rate, in asking myself the simple question as to why I consider the experience of motherhood so powerful a hermeneutical tool, and laying aside for a moment the notion of this dissertation as an academic pursuit, I offer a four-fold “gut-level” response.

Some of what follows, but by no means all, will be aligned with the experience of other mothers. The particularity of my experience, however, does not invalidate it as a source for reflection. Part of my intention as I proceed is to keep the motherhood of Mary in focus, hoping to gain some insight into her perspective on motherhood, into the way in which her motherhood has been interpreted, and into the resources that become available to Christological reflection through the maternal imagery she provides.

¹² Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, p 105

¹³ *ibid*, p 93

1. Lived experience as a source of knowledge

I am a mother and as such am not simply theorising about motherhood. Any theory therefore arises out of a thoroughgoing engagement/embodiment, an *a priori* of mothering. Precisely because of this, such reflection carries its own seal of authenticity as a trustworthy source of knowledge. Furthermore, as Anne Thurston notes, “whilst we are not all mothers ... we are all born from the womb of mothers. We have all shared the experience of birth...”¹⁴ - so there is a sense in which birthing imagery is inclusive of the experience of all people. Elsewhere, and with deep insight, Thurston observes that the “biological facts concerning the way in which human life is mediated through the bodies of women have profound implications for our understanding of personhood”.¹⁵ This observation also has profound implications for our understanding of the Incarnation, highlighting among other things the significance of Mary’s role as *mediator of Christ’s humanity*.

2. Reclaiming Biblical themes

Metaphors relating to motherhood are explicit throughout the Bible, and maternal themes abound in religious art and literature, particularly from the Middle Ages.¹⁶ Despite these rich resources, such imagery has not been incorporated into mainstream Christian tradition. This is one of the areas in which feminist theology has played and is playing a significant recovery role. As a result of such omission, our comprehension of God and God’s dealings with us have been at best impoverished and have most certainly been distorted. What is needed, therefore, is a recovery of some of the deepest, most abiding, and most powerful imagery for Christian theological reflection - that pertaining to motherhood. It is part of my aim, arising out of my lived experience as a mother, to try, first to demonstrate the richness of this imagery, and second to show its relevance to Christology, and specifically a Christology “from within”. What are the biblical themes related to motherhood? Whilst there may be more,

¹⁴ Anne Thurston, *Because of her Testimony: The Word in Female Experience* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995) p 23

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 15

¹⁶ Chapter 5 contains several examples, pp 207ff.

I identify the following as areas for reflection as I proceed: shedding of blood, carrying, birthing, nurturing, and also childhood itself. It comes as no surprise then that Mary should play a significant part in our discussion. Such imagery need not, nor should it, replace other imagery, but rather complement it to give a more complete picture of the whole.

3. Relationality

I will argue in the course of this dissertation the need for the *centrality of relationality* (what Bonhoeffer calls *sociality* and *community*¹⁷) in an adequate Christological paradigm. Relationship/relationality are intrinsic to motherhood: motherhood *means* relationship, and this relationship comes from deep within, beginning the moment a new life is conceived in a woman's body, and in fact preceding it in the relationship between the child's mother and father. Furthermore, human being is being-in-relationship; mother-child relating is the initial experience of community. Something that the experience of mothering has confirmed for me is that relationship is the *essential principle of all life*, and that this principle is *grounded in the very being of God* - articulated by Christians in trinitarian language. In addition, immersion in the various dimensions of motherhood has shown that relationality is both dynamic and highly nuanced - both essential features of a Christology "from within".

4. Childhood and children

The relationship implicit to motherhood is essentially that between a mother and her child. The carrying, the giving birth and the nurturing; the pain and the joy; the sacrifice that is simultaneously sacrament¹⁸ involved in motherhood, are all steadfastly directed towards children. Bearing in mind Christ's consistent and emphatic focus on children in God's scheme of things,¹⁹ it does indeed seem

¹⁷ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). Translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens.

¹⁸ Thurston, *Because of Her Testimony*, p 61

¹⁹ For example Matthew 18:1-6 and 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17.

prudent to use the resources available from motherhood to reflect on the theme of childhood. Part of my motivation for doing so is to try and retrieve Jesus' own childhood for our understanding of him as redeemer, so that his whole life "from womb to tomb" is valued for its redemptive significance, instead of only the last three years. Furthermore, looking at children/childhood directly through the lens of motherhood - and this specifically within the framework of a Christology "from within" - "makes it possible to place the child, the foetus (i.e. life's most vulnerable state) at the centre. It de-marginalises the child".²⁰ This, in a context of widespread child abuse in its various forms and the devaluation of children, seems to me to be crucial. But to de-marginalise the child is also to de-marginalise motherhood. In the symbol of Mary as mother, the situation of mothers in relation to their children is brought into focus, the suffering of Mary as mother is a poignant reminder of mothers in pain for their children (pain of losing a child, seeing a child hungry, going astray, etc)..

5. Womb and tomb as paradoxically synonymous?

In what follows I will explore twin images, namely, the *cross present in the womb* and the *womb present in the cross*, grounding them in the pattern I discern to be evident in all of life. One of my central theses is that Christ came as the incarnation of "how God does things" (the Word made flesh). In other words, in Christ we see dramatically played out before our eyes what God has been doing since the foundation of the world. Christ represents the blueprint, the pattern, that is built into the very structure of creation, the catalyst that sets creation free to attain that which God intended.

One of the things made plain in Jesus Christ is the principle of *life through death* (attested to throughout the New Testament). In order for there to be life at all, there must exist the possibility of non-life, or death as life's cessation. But the impulse for life is built into creation in its three-pronged capacity for *growth*, *regeneration*, and *compensation*, with Christ's resurrection assuring the ultimate triumph of life.

²⁰ For this insight I am indebted to Nomsa Hani, a fellow PhD student at the University of Cape

Nowhere is this dynamic more graphically demonstrated than in the body of a woman, where the dialectic between life and death, joy and pain, anticipation and dread, blessing and curse, are a significant part of what it means to be a woman. On a physiological level, this dialectic is evidenced in the monthly shedding of blood as one unfertilised egg is flushed out with the unused lining of a prepared womb, to allow for the possibility of next month's egg being fertilised and embedding itself in the wall of the womb - death as the pathway to life; blood shed in order to create the possibility for new life. The life and death tension plays itself out emotionally as well in a woman's menstrual cycle. Thurston, in relating the onset of menstruation in her daughter, asks: "How does one speak about the 'joy' of becoming a woman to a twelve year old who is and wants to remain a child?"²¹ - one type of death (to childhood) in order to make possible a new life (of another).

This introduces an issue that is deeply significant - the linking of the notion of a woman's shed blood and the pain of childbirth with Christology, and in particular with the role that Mary, representing all women and indeed all humanity (because we have all been born of mothers) played. Riane Eisler, in her provocative publication, *The Chalice and the Blade*, evokes the question: what if Christianity were to have two central images: a woman giving birth *and* a man dying on a cross?²² As if in reply, Thurston follows with a similar question: why is it that "while blood, sweat and tears are hallowed in the final event of Jesus' life they are absent from his birth?" (and goes on to suggest that the awareness that death is prefigured in birth is an awareness only available to women).²³

The consequences of embracing such a suggestion are far-reaching in terms of a Christological paradigm, particularly insofar as the humanity of Jesus is concerned. Given the consistent connection between shed blood and

Town, March 1999

²¹ Thurston, *Because of her Testimony*, p 11

²² See Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade* (London: Thorsons, 1998) pp 20/1

²³ Thurston, *Because of her Testimony*, p 26

redemption throughout the Scriptures,²⁴ and given the perennial shedding of blood that is associated with the very essence of womanhood, why is it that a woman's shed blood is never positively linked with redemption? Quite the contrary is true in Scripture: a woman is "unclean" during and surrounding any time of blood loss, a sign of impurity. Thurston's challenge about blood, sweat and tears, thus brings us face to face with a profound issue. It is my perception that, quite apart from other problems (such as the exclusion of the experience of half of the human species from our normative religious imagery), our understanding of the *nature* of redemption in Christ must surely be distorted as a result.

Fundamental to the notion of a Christology "from within" (or "from the inside out"), is the contention that the "secret of life is in life itself". Salvation does not lie in any divine incursion into our existence from the outside, but in a setting free (read "setting in right relationship") of that which already exists as potential *in us*. The menstrual cycle of every woman, carrying within it the potential for new life, surely prefigures the grand drama of life, death and resurrection to new life that we see in Christ. Every woman knows that "the ambivalent experience of menstruation is a regular reminder both of our limitations and our possibilities. We do not merely have bodies - we are our bodies".²⁵ A Christological model fashioned out of such an observation would be in no danger of docetism! Christ's humanity would be well and truly secured. In anticipation of what will follow later in this dissertation I ask whether the blood, sweat and tears associated with Jesus' birth might not be an appropriate parallel for those of his death. In summing up this section I once again quote Thurston:

"To obliterate the pain and tears at the beginning of the life of Jesus seems to me to be as little justified as the fallacious belief that Jesus did not actually suffer physical pain on the cross. In both instances we are talking about pain which has a purpose, pain which is a necessary prelude to glory..... It is here that birth and death meet as thresholds to

²⁴ See, for example, Hebrews 9:11-22

²⁵ Thurston, *Because of her Testimony*, p 12

new life. It is here that the cry from the cross and the cry from the womb yield to life, to resurrection".²⁶

The epistemology of a nurse

In terms of hermeneutical significance it is risky to isolate some elements of one's location and not others. There are, however, certain experiences or stages of life that have clearly played a pivotal epistemological role in my formation and therefore have influenced my theology. Among these is the experience of being trained and then practising as a nurse. The *nature* of this influence will become clearer as I proceed, but the *reason* for it must surely lie in the fact that nursing is by definition a specifically *hands on* enterprise, and therefore one in which *theory and praxis nearly always - or certainly should - coincide* ; one's theology *is embodied* , whether one is aware of this or not.

As with motherhood, I have become aware that the experience of nursing constitutes a significant part of the lens through which I am now able to observe, interpret and interact with reality. Part of my method in this dissertation, then, is to try and identify elements of that experience that seem to have particular hermeneutical significance. There are other themes, for example those centring around birthing and the shedding of blood, that occur in the area of interface between nursing and motherhood, and which I have shown to be directly relevant to this work. I need to clarify at the outset that, as with all the experiences referred to in this dissertation, I refer to my own perspective – aware that this is not the same as everyone else's.

1. "Death the leveller" (by James Shirley, 1596-1666)

James Shirley's poem, "Death the Leveller" paints a vivid word picture of the ultimate equality of all people, symbolised by the levelling power of death. Shirley reminds us that the rich and mighty "shall in the dust be equal made with

²⁶ *ibid*, p 27

the poor, crooked scythe and spade".²⁷ These words have journeyed with me over many years. Nowhere is the essential truth of Burns' observation more clear than in hospital wards. When people are sick the features which normally distinguish them from one another tend to fade into the background. Somehow there is an expanding area of commonality in people's hierarchy of needs, and the degree of commonality corresponds with how ill they are. I have observed that at base level we are all very much the same - equally vulnerable, hopeful and afraid; equal in our need for acceptance, understanding, and reassurance, and in the yearning for wholeness. Social and material status, age, creed, learning, virtue - none of these things can ultimately guarantee invincibility to disease and decay and disaster. One of the bitterest ironies of my life has been to look on as a brilliant doctor, in whom there was the rare blend of outstanding professional skill, deep dedication, and profound compassion, succumbed in his prime to a terminal disease.

I am not sure precisely how this observation has affected my faith or my theology. What Christological significance is there in the fact that, stripped of the tags we attach to ourselves or others attach to us, people are essentially the same? I imagine that part of the answer for me lies in a honed awareness of our common need for redemption - that, despite appearances to the contrary, we are all on an equal footing in terms of those things that are of ultimate significance. The New Testament gives negative expression to this truth, claiming that "there is none righteous, no not one, for we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). A challenge for me is to develop a Christological paradigm that articulates humanity's common condition, neither glossing over the problematic nature of our "fallenness", nor underestimating the goodness of God's creation.

2. The secret of life is in life itself

Long before I was able to offer a reasoned account of this intuited awareness, I was reciting to myself the following maxim: *the secret of life is in life itself*. Essentially this means that all that is needed for creation to attain its full

²⁷ *Famous Poems* (Cape Town: Juta, 1962) p 23

potential i.e. all the raw material, is already present within the creation. It is in the arrangement of this material - the extent to which all things are in "their proper place" (in good relationship) - that the secret of life lies. I now realise that one source of this knowledge was the observation both of people and of life processes during my years of nursing.

Three things stand out in this regard. First is the intricate and ordered detail of physical processes - the functioning of the various systems of the body, for example - that sustain and promote life. The second, allied to this, is the body's extraordinary regenerative ability.²⁸ And thirdly, there seems to be built into creation a "margin for error", a compensating dynamic that, far from indicating fallibility on the part of God, is the very reason why we can be involved in the creative process as human beings.

What I discern from these related dynamics is that they testify to *the pattern that is intrinsic to all of life*. Growth and healing take place from deep within, working from the inside out - like a wound, closing from the innermost layers and working outwards, as a combination of oxygen, a good blood supply, and sometimes antibiotic agents, promote tissue growth. A similar pattern persists in all bodily processes and indeed across the whole spectrum of nature - beginning at that place deep down where the distinction between the physical and the spiritual becomes blurred. I would venture to suggest that here we have life's blueprint; not only the generative, regenerative and compensatory capacity of all living organisms, but the fact that these processes work their way up from the depths - from the inside out, from the invisible to the visible, from the small to the large.

If this is the blueprint of life - the principle that holds it all together - then I find it difficult to conceive of an adequate Christological paradigm that is not somehow consistent with this same pattern. Furthermore, my observations in this area have nurtured a belief in the intrinsic goodness and value of the physical creation, adding impetus to the need of a Christ who affirms the continuity between creation and redemption, bringing salvation *in* and *for* creation rather

²⁸ I use the term "body" in the extended sense to incorporate mind and emotions as well.

than deliverance *from* it. Hence the need for a Christ who emerges from those secret recesses at the heart of life, the catalyst who sets in motion (or re-sets in motion) the potential for perfection (wholeness) latent in every living thing.

3. "The seeds of the divine and the capacities of the human heart are found in weakness" ²⁹

Nursing means that one is exposed, day after day, to human life at its most vulnerable. Very early on I came to discern a connection between *vulnerability* and *authenticity*: life at its most vulnerable, it seems to me, is paradoxically life at its most authentic.

This observation has led me to consider the possible theological, and more specifically the hermeneutical, significance of the condition of weakness - bolstered by Jesus' consistent focus on the *anawim*, and especially little children. I came to see how weakness (as vulnerability, limitation, dependence) unlocked in people - albeit sometimes grudgingly - a capacity to receive from others, a willingness to dismantle barriers, and an openness to new experiences and fresh ways of relating, both with people and with God. In a word, my perception was of a relationship between *human limitation* and *authentic humanity*.

Nursing is arguably the most "hands-on" profession there is - both literally and metaphorically. It is no selective immersion into the experience/s of others. Rather, it involves a journey alongside the "other" into the most intimate places of life - from the most basic levels of bodily function, to weeping with a person in pain, to praying with and holding the hand of someone who is dying. Here there was no danger either of an "ivory tower" theology or an "otherworldly" faith. On the contrary, there is *embodiment* - an earthing of faith through vital connection with the lived experience of people. There were times of awesome realisation that in certain moments of intimate communion with patients, a nurse somehow *became Christ* for them. I came also to understand something of what Bonhoeffer meant when, reflecting on his experience of internment at the hands of the Nazis, he could speak of "an experience of incomparable value", that of

viewing life from below, from the perspective of “the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer”.³⁰

What was the impact of all this on my faith, and more particularly on my theology? First, it demonstrated for me the value of the divine *modus operandi* in terms of kenosis Christology - an emptying of God in order to get alongside those situated on the very bottom rungs of life's ladder. Then too I came to realise that limitation/vulnerability and full humanity are not mutually exclusive concepts. Third, I came to question the church's triumphalist representation of a Christ coming “down from above” to “save us from sin”. This is not the type of Christ who would have anything meaningful to say to parents who'd given birth to a brain-damaged child, or to the youth who'd become a quadriplegic in a diving accident, or the thirty-year-old woman diagnosed with terminal cancer. Somehow, *in his person* - in his humanity - Christ had to experience human vulnerability, human limitation, human frustration, human disappointment, and so on. And so began my quest for a Christological paradigm that could accommodate this.

Living in South Africa

I live and write and do theology as a South African. The germination of ideas for this dissertation, and then the selection of a theme to research, took place in the early and turbulent years of our transition from the oppressive apartheid regime to a fledgling democracy. Behind this was the memory of lives broken, on the one hand among people of colour by the direct effects of apartheid – physical, emotional, social, political – and on the other by the twisted values that seeped like poison into white lives, distorting vision and hardening hearts. I became a mother for the first time soon after the Soweto riots of June 1976, and as I have watched my own children grow to maturity I have remained conscious of the many people in South Africa who were denied their childhood and youth – the “lost generation” – during those turbulent years.

²⁹ Michael Downey, *A Blessed Weakness: The Spirit of Jean Vanier and L'Arche* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986) p 109

³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) p 17

Motherhood is a poignant theme here for another reason too. Apartheid legislation, with its migratory labour system and rigid influx control laws, played havoc with black family and community life, ripping apart the matrix of black society. One of the features of this was that until 1994 many working black women could not legally live with their children, nor very often with their husbands. Women and men worked in (white) towns whilst children were cared for in rural areas by members of the extended family. In the towns black mothers, earning pitiful wages, "mothered" white children, rather than their own.³¹

In order to remain a Christian in this context, and indeed, to expect that others would want to be Christians, I need to understand Christ in such a way that these wasted years and broken lives can somehow be redeemed. This Christ had to experience it all, living through every moment of being human. He needed to come from within, covering again the ground travelled by others. In a word he needed to recapitulate human experience, "from womb to tomb".

In addition, this Christ should not be perceived in triumphalist terms. A Christ "from within", who took on every aspect of the human experience, is in a sense associated more with weakness than power, more with humility than pride. A Christological paradigm that is able to go at least some way in cancelling out the mental picture of a Christ who allowed Christians to come to a continent and ride rough-shod over people's cultures and communities and worldviews, is surely necessary.

A "Christology from within" might also have relevance in the broader context of Africa. I have no wish to speak for those whose religio-cultural heritage is African, but I am doing theology in the African context and it seems appropriate to try and identify areas of common ground between differing traditions where these exist. As I see it, A Christology "from the inside out" could interface with African tradition on at least three fronts.

³¹ See my article "A white mother's story" in *Claiming our Footprints: South African women reflect on context, identity and spirituality* (Stellenbosch: EFSA, 1999) pp 196f.

In the first place, various African traditional creation myths portray the created order (animals and crops as well as people) as *emerging* from within or below the earth. The "hole in the ground" myth is one such portrayal. The "bed of reeds" myth is another.³² African theologians have pointed out how difficult it was for Africans, when presented with the Christian gospel, to identify with the spacial dimensions associated with good and evil. "Good" was located "up there" (God, heaven, light) whilst "evil" was linked to "down there" (devil, hell, darkness). In the light of the African notion of emergence, such associations were indeed confusing. This troublesome spatial valuation was reinforced by images of Christ coming "down" to earth, from God in heaven "up above". It is my contention that the idea of Christ emerging from deep within life, fortified by the power of maternal imagery (with its pictures of depth, quiet, dark), might strike a chord in the African context.

Secondly, the use of maternal imagery in constructing a Christological paradigm based on emergence (rather than incursion), lends itself to an appreciation of the cycles of life. This is significant in the context of Africa with its cyclic time concept. Here the need exists for Christianity's traditional teleological orientation to be held in tension with the less linear birth-life-death-new life circulation which in fact is the pattern of all life. Much Christian tradition, with its emphasis on salvation history, has not attempted to accommodate a cyclic conception of time in its theological/Christological paradigms.

Then thirdly, there is the African sense of community. If there is one characteristic of African life that stands out above all others, it is community consciousness/orientation. "I am who I am through other people" roughly translates the word - now widely used (and perhaps abused) - *ubuntu*. It would seem, therefore, that a Christology from within could have relevance for this reason too, underscoring the pivotal role played by Mary. Here we find community between God and humankind and among human beings themselves mediated to the world through the relationship between Christ and his mother. God was "dependent" on the co-operation of another human being (Mary) in order to bring redemption to the world. Furthermore, the notion that the

³² Gabriel Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986) pp 4ff

community between Christ and Mary is carried on in the Christian community or church, is also relevant in this context.

A preliminary note on Mary

For a Protestant to focus intently on Mary with the aim of making her an integral part of Christology, is bound to lead to controversy. I am forced to ask myself, "why do it?" Surely it would be possible to identify and develop a suitable Christological paradigm without her? An answer to such a question would need to take account of the following points. In the first place, Mary is there already. Acknowledged or unacknowledged, she is a part of Christology, because as his mother she is indispensable to Christ. This means that the key word is "identify" – to lift out and make plain for all to see something that exists already. I contend that she is there symbolically to meet a deep-seated psychological need in humanity, and she is there as an indisputable part of history – as the physical mother of the human being, Jesus of Nazareth. As such she is the mediator of his humanity. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense to remove or ignore Mary therefore is to diminish the humanity of Christ. In addition to this, her inclusion in a Christological paradigm has ecumenical potential – within Christianity itself, but also beyond its religious borders, and even beyond the borders of human life. Here she becomes *Maria pontifex*, the builder of bridges.³³ Third, the incorporation of Mary in our reflection on the Incarnation makes possible the use of imagery that is indispensable to the notion of a Christology "from within", a perspective which I consider essential for an appropriate understanding and experience of Christ, and arising out of this, for authentic Christian praxis.

³³ See for example, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), Ch 5.

Of course, a large portion of the world's Christians acknowledge Mary already, incorporating her into the essence of their faith. And here, notably in Catholicism, the historical record is in some respects possibly more dubious than that of Protestantism. But we should remember that prior to the Reformation all Western Christendom was Catholic, and together we spawned such ignominious events as the Crusades and the Inquisition. The critique which I offer will show that it is not Mary *per se*, incorporated willy-nilly into faith, who has redemptive significance, but Mary included in a very particular way. Both Protestant disregard for Mary and Catholic excesses have opened the way for a spiritualised Christology, which in turn has allowed for various forms of abuse of life. I write as a Protestant, desiring to see Mary accorded her rightful place, and eager to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of other traditions in this regard.

Mary is never to be considered or venerated alone; it is Mary in relation to Jesus with whom we are concerned. This relationship is important on various levels. First, the historicity of *this* relationship is crucial for the Incarnation. Second, in this particular relationship every mother-child relationship is recapitulated. Third, the *relationality* itself is an integral part of the Incarnation and therefore of redemption. To be human is to live in relation. All this means that Mary becomes unambiguously integral to Christological discourse.

Conclusion

This introduction has identified both the problematic I wish to address and the main tools I will use to do so. It is as a woman, a mother, a nurse and as someone critically reflecting on the Christian faith in the South African context that I set out to explore the issue of Christ's full humanity, believing that this will facilitate the construction of a Christological paradigm appropriate for contemporary needs. I need to state that at the outset of this study I had no idea where it would lead, and for a Protestant it has indeed led to surprising places, notably Mariology!

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Note

I have used gender-inclusive language as far as possible throughout this dissertation. The same does not apply in several of the quotations used. For various reasons I have opted to avoid inserting “*sic*” in each instance. One reason is that there are times when translations into English are not an accurate reflection of the original term. For example, the German word “*mensch*” is at times misleadingly translated as “man”.

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PART 1

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY AND HUMANITY OF CHRIST

This whole Christ is the historical Jesus who can never in any way be divorced from his work¹

History, faith and the humanity of Jesus

The question of Jesus' humanity is both multi-layered and finely nuanced. For this reason it is important to clarify the issues at stake, and not to confuse them. For example, there exists the danger of a subtle confusion between the historical Jesus and the humanity of Christ. The two overlap, certainly, and they inform each other. But essentially the former is the product of historical research while the latter is an article of faith. They are arrived at by different routes. The Jesus of history is approached by a scholarly route, heavily dependent on historical and literary critical methods, and reflecting the prevailing spirit of each age through which the search has passed. The modern Quest, effectively set in motion by David Friedrich Strauss,² was the result of a number of factors. Among these was the challenge of historical criticism which relegated Jesus to the realm of mythology – after the fashion of the Greek dying and rising God. Another factor was post-Enlightenment liberal theology, which considered the essence of Christianity to lie, not in the Christ of Christian proclamation, but in the man Jesus of Nazareth and his teaching. The Quest also signalled a response to another phenomenon, Pietism, with its focus on personal devotion to Jesus as the Christ of faith.

The humanity of Christ, on the other hand, belongs in the realm of faith as a credal affirmation. As the definitive statement of the church on this issue, the Chalcedonian formula states that in this one, particular, historical human being,

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, (London and New York: Collins (UK) and Harper and Row (USA), 1966) p 40

² 1808-74

University of Cape Town

divinity and humanity come together. This affirms more than that Jesus, the historical person, is the Christ, because "Christ" can be understood in a number of ways. For example, Christ can be interpreted in Jewish messianic terms as the one anointed by God to bring deliverance to the people. But this alone does not make him "Christ" in the sense of Christian dogma. Chalcedon, building on the earlier Councils, claims something more: this historical person, Jesus, whom people identify with the Christ, is the Son of God. Conversely, the other side of Chalcedon's affirmation is that this Son of God is definitively and thus truly human. What Chalcedon offers is not the result of a process of deductive reasoning or historical research. It is the declaration of a mystery. As such, its statements can only be grasped by faith. An alternative explanation for the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the Son of God is to view it as a paradigm shift resulting from the process of Hellenisation, and in particular the necessity of making the Christian gospel credible in the context of Hellenism. The extent to which this is so is debatable. However, these two explanations need not be mutually exclusive. Jews and Christians have always understood God's operation in history as overarching, absorbing, transforming, and so giving meaning to, historical contingencies. The Quest for the historical Jesus, no less than Chalcedon, was the product of both historical development and fresh perspectives.

D.M. Baillie wrestled with the issue. Is it not true that the story of the Incarnation authenticates itself to us not in "the mere picture of the Jesus of history, constructed by historical science", but in the Holy Spirit laying hold of us, applying it to our hearts and opening our eyes so that we can know it to be true?³ Certainly, replies Baillie. But what is equally true, and therefore indispensable to our faith, is that the kerygmatic claims of the church about Christ need to be connected with historical reality.⁴ Otherwise we do not know why we should say these things about this particular historical figure, Jesus of

³ D.M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973) pp 51f

⁴ We will see later in the chapter how this connection pertains in liberation theology. Sobrino sums up the position: "This manner of access to the historical Jesus...is the manner of access to the Christ of faith. In the mere fact of reproducing, with ultimacy, Jesus' practice and personal historicity...one is accepting an ultimate normativity in Jesus, and therefore pronouncing him to be something really ultimate" (Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*

Nazareth. If we do not know who it is about whom we say such marvellous things, how can we know why we say them? Whilst it is true, therefore, that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except through the Holy Spirit, it is equally true that no one can say this without the knowledge of what Jesus actually was, as a human personality, in the days of his flesh.⁵

With this series of questions and responses regarding the Incarnation, Baillie captures the essence of the Jesus of history/Christ of faith dialectic, breaking open the central issue of Christ's humanity, and exposing the various nuanced themes surrounding it. The true humanity of Christ, as concretised in the Incarnation, must be understood from the perspective of both the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, since these two perspectives inform each other.

With regard to the true humanity of Christ there exists the temptation to approach the issue, and its significance for Christianity, from an anthropological perspective. Here it is the *concept* of humanity which is important, with Christ understood simply as the fullness of all that a human being can be. Humanity, in this view, is understood as a category. It speaks of the general and abstract, reflecting an idealist position regarding humanity. Nels Ferré, commenting on such an "impersonal humanity of Jesus", described it as a sub-Christian idea introduced by marked abuse of anhypostasia⁶ in history.⁷ I am not convinced that in conjunction with a *particular* understanding of Jesus as an actual person, this criticism is entirely valid. Yet it draws attention to a subtle danger. One could say something similar about historicity: it is not historicity as an abstract concept that tells us anything about the person of Christ. Although he was in fact reacting to the eighteenth century "awe in the presence of history,"⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher,⁹ with his Christ-event notion,¹⁰ effectually treated the

(Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982) p 68)

⁵ D.M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, pp 51f

⁶ The belief that Christ had no human nature apart from the hypostatic union

⁷ Nels F.S. Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, (London: Collins, 1958) p 99

⁸ See Heinz Zahmt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harvest, 1966) pp 18f

⁹ 1768-1834

¹⁰ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, edited by Jack C. Verheyden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). This publication is a construction aided by notes taken by Schleiermacher's students during his 1832 lectures on the life of Christ.

historicity of Jesus in this way. For Schleiermacher the actual details of Jesus' life are not significant in comparison with the theological significance of that life. In a similar manner, yet much later, Rudolph Bultmann,¹¹ in his reaction to the one-sided stress on history in the quest, so focused on the *that (das Dass)* of Jesus' existence that the significance of the concrete nature of Jesus' earthly life was diminished. Beyond the fact of his existence, the only thing that mattered was *what he purposed*, not any of the details of his actual life.¹²

In contrast to this understanding of humanity and historicity as categories, is the placing of the humanity of Christ in the realm of the particular, locating him in an actual historical context. Christ, then, does not only represent the fulfilled potential of human being, nor simply call us into encounter with himself. This he does, but precisely because first of all he was a *specific* human being. It is *this* human being, born a Jew and the child of a peasant woman, who is Christ, the Son of God. What we are dealing with here is an unambiguous Christology "from below".

There are inevitable questions concerning this particularity of Christ's humanity, perhaps the most fundamental being "how can Christ represent women when he was a man?" John A. T. Robinson is particularly helpful on this point. In the first place, for Christ to assume our humanity he must have been a particular person since there is no human being without this particularity. In the second place, and following on from the point just made, it was Jesus' *normality* which made him unique, not any abnormality. He was human *just as we are*; to say that he was *the* man in the sense of having and being everything, paradoxically undercuts his humanity. Therefore, when we apply the *teleion en anthropoteti* (complete in regard to his humanity) clause of the Chalcedonian Definition to Christ, we are describing him as "complete in his humanity"¹³ – completely human. Ferré would concur that Jesus did share our human nature, but in such

¹¹ 1884-1976

¹² Rudolph Bultmann, "On the Question of Christology" in *Faith and Understanding*, ed Robert W. Funk, translated by Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) p132. Cited by Hans Schwartz, *Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p 40

¹³ John A T Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973) p 67

a fulfilling manner that we can say he represents a new creation in history:

"Humanity became *itself* in a conclusive sense in Jesus."¹⁴

Historical research cannot tell us everything about Jesus of Nazareth, neither does it deal with the humanity of Christ from a dogmatic perspective. It is able nevertheless to inform our understanding of Christ as this particular human being. And this is important; his particularity as a human being is not incidental to our redemption. The Quest, then, is important because the humanity of Christ needs to be rooted in concrete reality rather than in theological dogma alone. Ferré insists that whilst "critical history" may be limited in what it can recover in the way of many details, it nevertheless "can legitimately and must critically go at least that far in presenting the historic basis of the faith."¹⁵ Baillie sums up the position:

"On what is our Christian faith based? If we cannot find any revelation of God in the portrait of Jesus as an historical person, how are we ever to reach and accept the dogmas about Him? If we cannot get so far as to know what He was like, or if that has nothing to do with the real meaning of the story, then how can we go much farther and know that God was incarnate in Him? In short, the question of the relevance of 'the Jesus of history' raises ultimately the whole problem of the basis and rationale for our Christian belief in the Incarnation."¹⁶

What becomes clear is that there are two different ways of approaching Christ, and for our current purposes, specifically his humanity: the historical-critical route which seeks to arrive at the person Jesus, and the credal route, via Chalcedon, proclaiming the humanity of Christ in conjunction with his divinity. I am working with both of these approaches, hoping, in bringing them together, to construct a Christological model that accommodates the three common

¹⁴ Ferré, p 86. Robinson, as we shall see in Chapter 4, p 155, supports this conclusion of Ferré.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 85

¹⁶ D.M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ*, p 50

methodological paradigms – “from above”, “from below” and “from behind”, but which offers something more in addition. Hence this chapter highlights elements of the historical quest that are relevant to the agenda of this dissertation.

Likewise, in the following chapter we will consider Chalcedon – not with the intention of providing an exhaustive account of credal developments, but of drawing attention to elements which can inform and re-form our understanding of Christ’s humanity.

“Jesus”, notes Ferré, “had both full human nature and historic development, as a growing person, and also attained full human nature in the normative sense of the fulfilment of man within the right relation to God.”¹⁷ Since the assumption by Christ of our full humanity is essential to the Christian understanding of redemption, it is essential also that we understand all that is meant by “full humanity”. Those involved in the Quest for the historical Jesus can aid us in this task. Yet I will show that paradoxically even the Quest is no guarantee of avoiding docetism. Very often in the Quest the person Jesus becomes simply the embodiment of a pre-existing idea. Similarly, those interested primarily in a kerygmatic Christ slip easily into docetism for similar reasons albeit from the opposite direction.

One of my major concerns is the role of Jesus’ mother in mediating Jesus’ humanity and giving to him historical existence. This is part of the social matrix which, apart from discourse surrounding the virgin conception of Christ, is largely absent in the Quest. I contend that without understanding Mary (both as a person and as a symbol of the greater social reality in which he lived) as integral to Christological reflection, it is difficult to arrive either at an historical or a human Jesus. Mary’s virtual absence in the Quest is therefore striking, and sets a further limitation to its usefulness in arriving at an understanding of the historical Jesus and his humanity. But let us consider the Quest and its possible contribution to our investigation.

¹⁷ Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, p 94

It is against the background of the Christological debate of the last century, which itself grew out of those preceding it and anticipated the developments that would follow, that the paradigm I seek to develop in this dissertation has taken shape. Because it is impossible to understand contemporary Christological discourse without an appreciation of its rootedness in the past, we will scan some of the main features of Christological development from the Enlightenment up to the present, focusing most intently on the last fifty years. The purpose of what follows is not to present a critical analysis of the Christology of this whole period, nor to present a comprehensive history of the debate. It is rather to show, in the first place, how theology is consciously or unconsciously tied to the context in which it is being done. Theology is not the first word. It is always response. Secondly, it is to show how developments in theology are related to an issue - initially sometimes in a reactionary way - from the discourse of the past, as succeeding generations explore the boundaries of tradition in order to keep the faith vibrant. Thirdly, and on the basis of the points already mentioned, I wish to highlight aspects of Christology which emerged during the debate that can be useful in the construction of a contemporary paradigm. To use the image so effectively employed by Strauss in the eighteenth century, we will take into account the full arc of the Christological pendulum¹⁸, stopping at significant points along its course. Lastly, we will identify certain omissions from the debate – notably the relational aspects of Jesus as an historical person. Indeed, the quality of our contemporary theologising is contingent on an ongoing conversation with those who have preceded us. It is in this continuum that I would like to locate myself.

In terms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries I will do no more than try to identify some of the main thought trends emerging from this period, and which

¹⁸ David Friedrich Strauss, "Hermann Samuel Reimarus and his Apology", paragraphs 38-40 of his *Hermann Samuel Reimarus und seine Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*. Reproduced in full in Charles H. Talbert, *Reimarus: Fragments* (London: SCM, 1971) pp 44ff. The author of the Introduction is Talbert, while the remainder of the book comprises Reimarus' own writings and the response from Strauss. See later discussion.

form part of the continuous thread that is woven, as themes in a fugue, into contemporary Christological discourse.

Barth spoke quite plainly of the “all-pervasive rationalism of the eighteenth century.”¹⁹ Reason supplanted revelation. During, and in the wake of, the Reformation, revelation had been taken for granted and regarded as the source of faith. But now in the eighteenth century, what had previously been known through revelation was critically examined by reason. This inevitably raised questions concerning Christ, and notably the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Certainly it raised questions about the divine nature of the man Jesus. Fuelled by the Kantian notion of the subjectivity of experiential knowledge, and growing out of the general milieu of the German Enlightenment and English Deism, foundations were laid for what was to become known as the Quest for the historical Jesus. The significance of this development cannot be overstated. It is of direct interest to Christological discourse, observes Walter Kasper, “because of its repercussions on contemporary Christianity, the churches today, and the entire civilization and culture directly or indirectly codetermined by Christianity.”²⁰ This is a crucial point made by Kasper for it is essentially a distorted Christology which lies at the heart of many ignoble things either condoned or perpetrated by Christians through history.

The post-Reformation Protestant Orthodoxy around the time of Hermann Samuel Reimarus²¹ found itself under attack from the Enlightenment on the one hand and Pietism on the other.²² Influenced both by that prominent figure of the German Enlightenment, Christian Wolff, and by English Deism, Reimarus’ public Christian stand and private skepticism are well-known. His public teaching that natural religion was the preparation for Christianity, veiled his more convinced view that natural religion in fact replaced Christianity as reason

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London and Glasgow: Fontana Library, 1967) p 13

²⁰ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London and New York: Burns and Oates (UK) and Paulist Press (USA), 1977) p 26

²¹ 1694-1768

²² Talbert, *Reimarus: Fragments*, p 4

displaced revelation.²³ It is not surprising that for Reimarus Jesus was essentially an enlightened moral teacher rather than a supernatural redeemer, and that anyone who followed his ethical teaching was a Christian.²⁴ For Reimarus it was possible and necessary (because of the fraudulent foundations of both Christianity and Judaism) to go behind the New Testament accounts to discover a more human Jesus who would be acceptable to the spirit of the age. For Reimarus, therefore, history provided the vehicle for reason. During his lifetime Reimarus published only the material issuing from his public life and beliefs.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,²⁵ whilst not able to support Reimarus' standpoint, recognised the significance of the criticism he offered, and believed that it "must lead either to the destruction or to the recasting of the idea of revelation."²⁶ So, knowing it would inevitably cause a storm in theological circles, he went ahead and published Reimarus' *magnum opus*, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*²⁷, articulating Reimarus' real but secret beliefs. The shock waves it sent through ecclesiastical, academic, political and social circles were predictable, and it was this publication that marked the beginning of the Quest for the historical Jesus. If one considers history as a whole, trying to grasp the big picture rather than concentrate on isolated fragments of it, it is possible to discern how such a quest, limited though it might be in terms of its direct "success", helped to break open Christological discourse in a manner which could ultimately provide tools for appropriate reconstruction.

Reimarus' contribution in the context of this dissertation is precisely that he initiated what was to become a radical exploration of the boundaries of Christological tradition. From the vantage point of the present it is easy to criticise him, both for his views and for the secrecy surrounding them. Yet there were good reasons for both.

²³ *ibid*, pp 5-11

²⁴ *ibid*, p 20. See also Kasper, p 29

²⁵ 1729-81

²⁶ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) p 15

²⁷ *An Apology for the Rational Idea of God*. It was published as five fragments, generally known as the "Wolfenbützel Fragments" after Reimarus' death, between 1774 and 1778. Reimarus' whole manuscript (4000 pages) is preserved in the Hamburg Municipal Library. Reimarus

No one articulated an understanding of Reimarus more eloquently than Strauss, writing almost a century later. I quote him at this point because he makes some crucial observations, valid for this and every Christological discussion. In Reimarus' defence, Strauss considered him to be one of the eighteenth century's "most courageous and worthy representatives." According to Strauss, Reimarus discharged the century's obligations to both the Bible and Christianity. For centuries, notes Strauss, the fabric of the Christian faith had examined only its good side; in order to test the weave, the reverse must inevitably be examined as well. When "the pendulum is let loose it will swing back to the opposite side to the same extent that it has been swung out of its central position, until through swing and counterswing it gradually regains its balance."²⁸ Strauss immediately proceeds to explain that the eighteenth century demanded justice, and he applied this especially – and for our contemporary purposes, very poignantly – to the arrogance and imperialism of Christianity in the face of other religions, notably Judaism and Islam. Strauss' image is a powerful one, and its truth is something to which history bears repeated testimony.

True to the spirit of his age Lessing himself rejected the idea of revelation in favour of reason. Juxtaposing the "accidental facts of history" and the "necessary facts of reason", Lessing made his famous statement concerning the difficulty of bridging the "broad, ugly ditch" between history and reason.²⁹ He stressed the importance of "rational experiential evidence" (derived from general revelation, available to Jesus and to all people) in contrast to the "particular revelation" that had been necessary in humankind's infancy, making known what, in time, humankind could and would come to know through reason.³⁰

himself had circulated this work anonymously among his acquaintances. See Talbert, pp 18ff.

²⁸ Strauss, *Herman Samuel Reimarus and his Apology*, pp 44ff

²⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Truth of the Spirit and of Power" (1777), in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, Selections in translation by Henry Chadwick (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956) p 55.

³⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) pp 583f

Lessing's contemporary, Johann Salomon Semler,³¹ is known also for his application of the "accommodation theory" of the Greek Fathers - that is, the accommodation of the message to the situation in which it is proclaimed.³² We shall see that no matter how strongly we reject the positions held by Semler and other scholars, they identify elements that to some extent are present - and at times ought to be present - in most theologising, not least in Christology. In Semler's case we are reminded of our instinctive tendency to accommodate the message that is proclaimed to the context of proclamation, on the one hand, and paradoxically of the failure to do this adequately where we should, for example in the missionary context of Africa, on the other.³³

Despite their perceived shortcomings, Reimarus, Strauss, Lessing and Semler were concerned with genuine Christology, retaining the *sola scriptura* and *solus Christus* of the Reformation. In other words, although faith as the product of revelation was no longer taken for granted, Christ as known through the Scriptures remained central. Their concerns issued in considerable measure from a desire to present Christ and Christianity in a way that could be appealing and acceptable to people immersed in the notion of the primacy of reason. Having acknowledged this, however, it should be added that the pathway of reason alone can at best lead to a Jesus of history, but never to a Christ of faith. This would in time evoke a strong response from Bultmann, for whom the purpose of Christ's coming far superseded any details of his life that could be known.

If the spirit of the eighteenth century can be summed up as "all-pervasive rationalism", then it is possible to describe the course of the following century as an accelerating "awe in the presence of history."³⁴ This meant that the essentially historical nature of the Christian faith received new emphasis and recognition, with debate revolving around the postulate that Jesus Christ was nothing more, nor less, than the original phenomenon of the Christian faith. As

³¹ 1725-91. Remembered as the first German theologian to apply the historical-critical method to the interpretation of Scripture

³² Schwartz, *Christology*, p 16

³³ For a poignant account see Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *The Poisonwood Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999)

the search for the historical Jesus movement gained momentum, it was paralleled - or perhaps manifest in a more subtle form - in the "life of Jesus" movement of liberal Protestantism. Here it was the quest for the "religious personality of Jesus" that lay at the heart of, and which issued in scores of publications on, the theme. Based essentially on a liberal Kantian approach, this movement was influenced by a combination of Romanticism, a new interest in the "human spirit" particularly as this applied to the religious aspects of human life inspired by Hegelian idealism, and renewed attention to the New Testament sources, employing a literary approach (the form critical method).

It is with Schleiermacher³⁵ that the theological divide between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries occurred, and specifically with his 1799 publication, *On Religion, Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*.³⁶ Schleiermacher, the first to teach a course on the life of Christ (whom he never referred to as Jesus) as part of academic studies³⁷, attempted to restore the unity of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Schleiermacher wished to show the educated and cultured people of his time that what they despised in religion was merely its dispensable husk or shell, and so he asks, "why have you not penetrated deeper to find the kernel of this shell?"³⁸ To this end he based his theology on the idea of the Christ-event. Here the actual details of Christ's life are not as significant as the theological significance of that life,³⁹ which centred for Schleiermacher in Christ's growing self-consciousness which spawned his idea of the Kingdom. Schleiermacher always tacitly admitted that the divine and the human can exist in an individual Christian; the challenge for him was to account for this same conjunction in Christ. For "on the one hand we must conceive of something in Christ that specifically distinguishes him from other men, and on the other hand hold fast to the view of really human conditions of life."⁴⁰

³⁴ Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God*. See pp 18f

³⁵ Schleiermacher is commonly known as "the father of modern theology".

³⁶ Translated into English by John Oman (New York: Harper and Row, 1958)

³⁷ These 1832 lectures, reconstructed with the help of notes taken by his students, appear in *The Life of Jesus* by Friedrich Schleiermacher, edited by Jack C. Verheyden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Translated by S. Maclean Gilmour

³⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p 15.

³⁹ For example, Schleiermacher had no interest in the supernatural conception of Christ because "the indwelling of the divine can depend not on the lack of human conception but only on the absence of the sinful" (from the summary of Lecture 9), *The Life of Jesus*, p 56

⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp 81ff

Strauss, who was deeply influenced by Hegel⁴¹, responded to Schleiermacher's Christ-event notion by positing in its place the Christ-idea, maintaining that the historicity of the latter's "event" is not verifiable. In attempting to find an alternative to the old supernatural and the modern rationalistic interpretations of Jesus, Strauss posited a mythic approach. For Strauss, "the supernatural birth of Christ, the miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts...the dogmatic significance of the life of Jesus remains inviolate."⁴² Whilst according no historic value to narrative detail (since the gospel accounts are the result of post-death-of-Christ legend), he did concede to an historic core. He was careful to distinguish himself from the "rationalists", claiming that in removing Christology from its position as an integral part of systematic theology and placing it as a sub-section of anthropology, they "banish from the province of theology, that which is its essential point, and cornerstone."⁴³ Strauss, however, rejected the idea of the divine and human inhering only in a single human being, contending rather that this occurs in humanity as a whole (universal symbiosis): "...is not an incarnation of God from all eternity, a truer one than an incarnation limited to a particular point in time?"⁴⁴ – revealing again an Hegelian influence. Strauss's ideas appeared in the 1835/6 publication, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*,⁴⁵ caused the second great storm (after Reimarus), eliciting a flood of responses.⁴⁶

Up to now we have focused on the German debate, but what of the British or Anglo-Saxon responses to that debate? As far as English theology goes, the concern during the first half of the nineteenth century had been with other

⁴¹ Although Hegel was able to understand himself to be rooted in Christian orthodoxy, many who were influenced by his teachings felt less deeply rooted, understanding Christ as a *symbol* rather than in terms of the one historical person, Jesus the man. See Schwartz, pp 23-26, and James C Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Vatican II* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) pp 152-5 for accounts of Hegel's Christological thought.

⁴² Conclusion to the Preface of the first edition of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Cited by Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, p 175.

⁴³ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* edited by Peter C. Hodgson and translated by George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) p 768. First published in two volumes in 1835

⁴⁴ Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, p 780. See also the discussion in Schwartz, pp 21f

⁴⁵ 1972 publication, details above

issues - the controversies sparked by John Henry Newman finally leading to his conversion to Catholicism, for example. Strauss's *Life of Jesus* was translated into English by George Eliot in 1846, effectively heralding the beginning of the end of English resistance to dealing with the critical issues that were being faced in Europe. Charles Hennell⁴⁷ was the forerunner to a great explosion of awareness which followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 in which scholars frankly stated their views on the contemporary situation regarding Christian thought and faith. This marked the first serious attempt to apply European critical methods in England.⁴⁸ From now onwards the Bible would be treated like every other book, subject to ruthless investigation. The majority of Christians in England at this time (largely as a result of eighteenth and nineteenth century revival movements) regarded the authority of Scripture as paramount. This deepened the shock of what was happening.⁴⁹ Indeed, the threat to the Christian cause by the radical scholars of Tübingen was grave.⁵⁰ For although no one is saved simply by believing that certain events happened in the past, it cannot be claimed that the *idea* is all that matters, as if the validity of the idea would remain even if it could be proved that none of Christianity's foundational events had ever occurred at all.⁵¹

The panic caused in 1860 revealed the need for people who would carry out the work of critical investigation fearlessly, but without the philosophical (Kantian and Hegelian) presuppositions of those representing the German schools. It was necessary, in addition, to show by careful research that German answers were not the only answers to critical questions in view of known facts. In a word, "the question in England was whether theology could be 'guided along fertilizing channels', or whether it would be allowed to follow a reactionary course".⁵² This need drew a response in 1861 from Lightfoot who, together with Westcott and

⁴⁶ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 30

⁴⁷ *Enquiry Concerning the Origins of Christianity*, published in 1838

⁴⁸ Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1961* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) p 29. See also Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, pp 211ff for a useful account of the impact of *Essays and Reviews*.

⁴⁹ It should be remembered that the crisis was deepened by the shock caused the previous year (1859) with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*

⁵⁰ For an account of the Tübingen Seminary see Horton Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and his Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) ch 6, pp 36ff.

⁵¹ Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament*, pp 31/2

⁵² Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, p 210

Hort, combined their various skills to spend the next forty years with the single purpose of writing a complete New Testament commentary aimed at presenting the whole panorama of Christian truth against the setting of its historic origins. Among the things which brought these three together was their common faith in the Incarnation: in Christ God entered human life.⁵³

Asserting the Christ of faith

Meanwhile in Europe during the final decade of the nineteenth and the pre-World War I period of the twentieth centuries, challenges appeared to the "life of Jesus" movement in the form of three main critiques. These were associated with the names of William Wrede, Martin Kähler and finally Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer respectively.⁵⁴ It is possible to say that with Wrede the first wave of the Quest came to end, having begun with Reimarus; Kähler provided the impetus for the new direction of Christology; and Schweitzer leaves us with the evaluative handbook of the whole movement.⁵⁵

Wrede is the name most closely associated with the so-called sceptical critique of the Quest. Wrede's essential argument lay in his contention that the Synoptic narratives intermingled history and theology to such an extent that they cannot be disentangled. Mark's gospel, for example, was actually a creative theological interpretation of history, so that it is in fact impossible to go behind it and construct the history of Jesus. Wrede identified what for him were three fatal errors underlying liberal Protestant Christologies. First, the psychological approach to the narratives has frequently "read between the lines," foisting ideas on to the text by "psychological conjecture". Second, the parts of the gospel not acceptable to the critics were simply ignored. Third, by the time Mark wrote, a dogmatic element had crept in to colour the description of Christ's life.⁵⁶

⁵³ Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament*, pp 32ff

⁵⁴ Wrede, 1859-1906; Kähler, 1835-1912; Weiss, 1863-1916; and Schweitzer, 1875-1965

⁵⁵ As indicated in the German title of Schweitzer's definitive publication, "Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung" (Tubingen: Mohr, 1906). Translated under the title *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1968) .

⁵⁶ See Schweitzer's comparison between his own eschatological critique and Wrede's sceptical critique in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, pp 332ff

It was Kähler, the first great critic of the life of Jesus movement, who sought to bring the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith together. Kähler did not discount the significance of the historical Jesus out of hand. His critique was directed at what *modern writers* had done to him, that is, interpreted Jesus in isolation from the Christ of faith.⁵⁷ Kähler's message was simple: "the real Christ is the Christ who is preached"⁵⁸. Kähler, who might easily be misunderstood, justified his claim that the "historical Jesus" was irrelevant to faith by insisting that the "historical Jesus of *modern writers* conceals the living Christ from us" (*italics mine*)⁵⁹. For Kähler this academic Jesus is no more effective than the notorious dogmatic Christ of Byzantine Christology. Furthermore, according to Kähler, the sources we possess for a life of Jesus are reliable and accurate for the purposes of faith but not history. For Kähler it is what Christ does *now* for believers that is important; the Jesus of history lacks the soteriological, faith-evoking significance of the Christ of faith.

Kähler does not discount the importance of the historical Jesus. His essential point is that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith belong together, something crucial for what we are about in this dissertation. Whilst the Jesus of history as a purely academic construct (or reconstruction) is impotent to redeem, so also is a Christ who has not fully assumed our humanity. We recall again that either without the other in fact leaves us with a docetic Christ. Kähler unleashed a critique that was to have a profound effect on the likes of Barth and Bultmann, so that it was this position that would gradually come to dominate much of the theological scene in the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite differences between Weiss and Schweitzer in the extent to which eschatological expectation conditioned Jesus' teaching and preaching, both essentially agreed on the principle of an eschatological interpretation. For Schweitzer, "Jesus as an historical personality is to be regarded, not as the

⁵⁷ Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964) p 43. This is a translation of Kähler's 1892 publication - an expanded form of a lecture given that year "Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus" edited by E. Wolf (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1953).

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p 66

founder of a new religion, but as the final product of the eschatological and apocalyptic thought of late Judaism."⁶⁰ For Schweitzer the Jesus of history/life of Jesus movement/s were doomed to failure because "it is not given to history to disengage what is of abiding and eternal significance in the being of Jesus from the historical forms in which it worked itself out... It has toiled in vain at this undertaking".⁶¹ Just as a water plant ceases to grow and loses its beauty once it is torn from its roots in the water, contends Schweitzer, so it is with the historical Jesus when he is torn from the soil of eschatology.⁶² Jesus is real to us, not because of what we can construct of his history, but because he comes to us now in his Spirit.

The Christological concern of Adolf von Harnack differed from that of Schweitzer in that for Harnack it was the displacing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by dogma that was the stumbling block to faith rather than the historical Jesus in isolation. Although as a church historian Harnack's primary interest lay elsewhere, his work is of decisive importance in clarifying the theological situation at the time, not least insofar as Christology is concerned. His position is made clear in the publication *What is Christianity?*⁶³ based on the series of lectures he gave at Berlin University in 1899-1900. Harnack's essential message was that in order for the Christian Gospel to remain a living force in the modern world it had to be freed from dogma. This meant extracting the simple *gospel of Jesus Christ* from all the historic forms which have come and gone.⁶⁴ It is useful to consider Harnack in the context of the legacy which the nineteenth century received from the Enlightenment critique of classical Christology. Two features stand out – first, its critique of miracles in the face of the new found sense of mechanical regularity and orderliness; second, the critique of the history of dogma.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 43

⁶⁰ Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p 23

⁶¹ *ibid*, p 401

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986. Translation by Thomas Bailey Saunders. This and his *History of Dogma* are Harnack's most famous works.

⁶⁴ Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, pp 146ff. See also Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, pp 258-60

Despite what some of his other views might lead us to expect, Harnack believed that Jesus was not just an ordinary human being. Jesus knew himself to be the Messiah and acted accordingly, although Harnack insists that his message spoke only of God, never himself.⁶⁵ For Harnack the resurrection and the conviction that *Jesus lives* is the bedrock of the Christian faith. However, he made no attempt to prove the facticity of the resurrection because for him it was a matter of faith.⁶⁶ In fact, Harnack's central Christological argument was that a doctrine of Incarnation was not part of the gospel at all. It was an Hellenistic addition to an essentially simple Palestinian gospel, a theme which Harnack developed in his *History of Dogma*. The series of Christological developments that ensued were due to "the work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel",⁶⁷ so that the notion of dogma (hence Christology) owes nothing to Jesus Christ or primitive Christianity but to a specific historic location. This, according to Harnack, is what was responsible for the shift from the original soteriological focus of Jesus and the earliest church to Greek metaphysical retreat into the abstract. For Harnack, Jesus' primary significance lay in the impact he had on individuals, while the development of doctrine was in certain respects like a chronic degenerative illness. It is against this background that we turn now to Karl Barth.

Historically and theologically the twentieth century began not with the year 1900 but with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Because of certain traumatic events associated with the war policy of Wilhelm II,⁶⁸ Barth, whilst never rejecting its strengths and the importance of the issues it raised, abandoned his liberal Protestant position, grounded in "awe in the presence of history", to

⁶⁵ Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, p 144

⁶⁶ Schwartz, *Christology*, pp 29f

⁶⁷ Quoted by Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, p 258

⁶⁸ For Karl Barth (1886-1968), "one day early in August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counsellors" by signing the "Manifesto of the Intellectuals". Among these - and to Barth's horror - were almost all of his theological teachers, whom he had "greatly venerated." At this time also, Ernst Troeltsch, renowned professor of systematic theology, gave up his chair for one in philosophy. This all came as a shattering blow to Barth, convincing him not only that nineteenth century theology no longer had a future, but that he personally could no longer follow either the ethics and dogmatics of his teachers, or their understanding of the Bible and history. See Barth, *The Humanity of God*, pp 12 and 13. See also the autobiographical sketch in *Karl Barth, Rudolph*

embrace and develop a thoroughgoing theology of revelation, the Christological implications of which were profound.

Barth's theology, arising in part out of his experiences as a pastor, was always closely tied to preaching (proclamation). For Barth,⁶⁹ historical knowledge and literary criticism were of "preparatory service" to the task of theology which "is at one with the task of preaching".⁷⁰ Harnack was dismayed at Barth's position, believing that Barth had abandoned theology as a *critical* science, and even that his ideas were dangerous. Barth's theology was first made public in his famous commentary on Romans.⁷¹ Here he made clear his sense of the importance, in the first instance, of understanding the relationship between the Word and the words, and in the second, of seeing "through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible."⁷² A comparison between this and his later work⁷³ shows a considerable development in Barth's thought (for our purposes specifically as this relates to his Christology) between the nineteen twenties and the latter years of his life. In the 1920s his chief concern was to counter the inadequacies of liberal Protestantism, particularly insofar as it failed to provide adequate tools to deal with the situation in Germany surrounding the First World War. Barth posited in its place his theology of revelation in which God, not humankind, speaks the first (and last) word. Barth, concerned in 1920 to reaffirm the deity of God, did precisely this - but not from a Christological perspective. Furthermore, in line with his overall focus on revelation as the source of our knowledge of God, his Christology at this time stressed Christ's divinity, giving minimal attention to his humanity.

Bultmann: Letters 1922-1966, translated and edited by Geoffrey W Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp 153f

⁶⁹ The perspective reflected in this section of the dissertation is - because it is my own tradition - predominantly Protestant. It should not be overlooked, however, that while Barth may have been the main Protestant figure in ecclesial dogmatic Christology between World Wars I and II, equally important work was being done by his Catholic counterpart, Karl Adam.

⁷⁰ H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p 32. This volume contains the actual correspondence between Barth and Harnack

⁷¹ *Der Römerbrief*. English translation, *The Epistle to the Romans*. Translated from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960)

⁷² From the Preface to the first edition of *Der Römerbrief*, cited in the English translation, p 1.

⁷³ Most notably his multi-volumed and uncompleted *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, written, with the help of his assistant, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, over a period of many years.

It was only later that Barth explicitly acknowledged his own change of direction in favour of a thoroughgoing Christological focus which recognised that "God's deity, correctly understood, includes his humanity."⁷⁴ In Christ, insisted Barth, we are not dealing with humankind in the abstract, nor are we dealing with God in the abstract.⁷⁵ Barth confessed that with more wisdom he and his colleagues would in the early years have discerned in nineteenth century liberal Protestantism, amid that which needed to be countered, "something at work that could not be given up."⁷⁶ In other words, the humanity of Christ would not have been so completely overlooked as in fact it was.⁷⁷

Barth's turn to the "humanity of God" coincided with the ushering in of a second phase in the Quest for the historical Jesus, largely as a result of a lecture by Ernst Käsemann.⁷⁸ This time the Quest would take his divinity into account as well, seeking to relate the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. It is interesting - and not insignificant - to note that this development was paralleled in Catholic circles by the Christological renewal following the 1951 commemoration of Chalcedon. The event was marked by lively debate which issued in the publication of several important essays. The most significant for the future of Christology was that by Karl Rahner.⁷⁹ The effect was to bring back into prominence the whole history of Chalcedon and its significance for Christology.

The term *dialectical theology*⁸⁰ was in the beginning used by Barth himself of his work. Following Kierkegaard with his "absolute paradox" in which the eternal

⁷⁴ Barth, *The Humanity of God*, p 42

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p 43

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p 40

⁷⁷ D.M. Baillie contends that despite Barth's acknowledgement concerning his earlier neglect of the Word *made flesh*, "one cannot help asking whether his theology has yet done justice to it." For Baillie, if those of the "Jesus of history" movement were in danger of becoming the new Ebionites, the dialectical theologians, whilst protesting the full humanity of Christ, pay so little attention to it that they seem to be in danger of becoming the new monophysites (*God Was In Christ*, p 53)

⁷⁸ See later discussion, Ch 1, p 57

⁷⁹ Rahner's essay, originally entitled "Chalcedon, End or Beginning?", appears under the title "Current Problems in Christology" in his *Theological Investigations, Volume 1* (London and New York: Darton, Longman and Todd (UK) and The Seabury Press (USA), 1974). Translation and Introduction by Cornelius Ernst OP.

⁸⁰ Barth's theology has been described in a number of ways. In the 1920s Barth was reacting theologically to the crisis into which the world had been plunged by World War I; in so doing he critiqued the faith in history and confidence in the human spirit which characterised the nineteenth century. For this reason one name applied to his early work was *theology of crisis*.

and absolute confront us in history and time, Barth used the concepts *paradox* and *dialectic* as theological tools. The nineteenth century, with its faith in humankind and in history, did not need such concepts. It did not accommodate the notion of apparent contradictions. It was a very different situation in which Barth found himself. Furthermore, because there was no sharp divide between God and humankind, the sense of mystery had been lost in the nineteenth century, and revelation simply meant one example of a general phenomenon. This position was vehemently rejected by Barth. God is the "wholly other" one, who says "no" to our sin but "yes" to us in Christ. For Barth - reacting as he was to the trends of the past - time and eternity, revelation and history, were opposites. The danger, of course, inherent in such dichotomising is that soul/spirit are too easily set against body. This easily leads to what we observe in the "early Barth", with his minimal emphasis on the actual physical life of Jesus. Barth in effect laid stress on an unhistoric Jesus as the source of true revelation. The dialectical method was increasingly abandoned by Barth after its initial purpose had been served and as he came to a fuller understanding of the Incarnation.

The description of Barth's theology as *theology of the Word of God* is also significant. The word of God, for Barth, is *contained* in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and is *preached* by the church. But its *content* is Jesus Christ. We have noted already that the concrete foundation of Barth's theology was the preaching of the Word. For Barth the task of theology was to test the church's preaching against the sole norm, the Word of God, Jesus Christ. In Barth's theology "Jesus Christ is the touchstone of all knowledge of God in the Christian sense, the touchstone of all theology."⁸¹ For Barth the very possibility of theology is contingent on divine revelation. Barth's focus on revelation is not insignificant to the central motif of this study - a Christology "from within". In Christ we have a making visible of that which is intrinsically *there already* (pre-existence), so that Christ's coming in the Incarnation is not an incursion into our

Other names given to his theology are *neo-orthodoxy*, *dialectical theology*, and *theology of the Word of God*, each of these titles giving a clue as to the nature of his work, or - more certainly - as to how his work was perceived by others.

⁸¹ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM, 1966) p 66. This publication is the compilation of a series of lectures on the Apostle's Creed, delivered by Barth in 1946 at the

reality from the outside, but a revelation from within of God's design for all creation.

This revelation is unequivocally centred in Christ, in whom we encounter the history in which God and humankind meet together and in which the covenant between them is mutually contracted, preserved and fulfilled.⁸² This brings us to one of the key features of Barth's Christology: his doctrine of election. We are elected by God in Jesus Christ, and this election is an expression of God's will from all eternity. In Christ we have the revelation of God's election. This, insists Barth, means that "on the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of every human being, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father."⁸³ In anticipation of later discussion, I draw particular attention to this aspect of Barth's Christology. Barth's doctrine of election reflects, I suggest, the Irenaeian doctrine of recapitulation – even though there are very few actual references to recapitulation in *Church Dogmatics*. Humankind's election in Christ has to do with Christ's assumption of our humanity. Barth and, much earlier, Irenaeus, are in fact speaking about the same thing, albeit employing different categories. Where for Irenaeus Adam symbolises fallen humankind, for Barth Israel symbolises God's judgement on humankind's sin. Where for Irenaeus Christ as the Second Adam brings redemption, for Barth the church symbolises God's mercy.⁸⁴ The election of Israel that has special significance for Barth, for "what is elected in Jesus Christ ... is the community which has the twofold form of Israel and the Church."⁸⁵

The climax of the line of thought set in motion by Kähler came with the writings of Rudolph Bultmann, for whom the whole enterprise of historical reconstruction

University of Bonn, from where he had earlier been driven from his professorship by the Nazis.

⁸² Barth, *The Humanity of God*, p 43

⁸³ *ibid*, p 50

⁸⁴ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957) Edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; translated by G.W. Bromiley *et al.* pp 195ff. See also discussion on Irenaeus and recapitulation in Ch 3 of this dissertation.

⁸⁵ Barth, *ibid*, p 199. It is interesting to note the significance of Israel's election for the Czech philosopher Milan Machovec. After intensive contact with Christian theologians, Machovec concluded that the most profound idea in theology - its heart - lay in the doctrine of the election of Israel, and particularly as this was communicated by Barth. In Dietrich Ritschl, *Logic in Theology*, translated by John Bowden (London: Fortress Press, 1987) p 131

of the life of Jesus was a blind alley. For Bultmann history is not of fundamental importance to Christology. Rather, as we have seen, it is the fact *that (das Dass)* Jesus existed which is important.⁸⁶ Bultmann therefore had no interest in "Christ after the flesh"⁸⁷, but rather in "what he *purposed*."⁸⁸ He had no desire to look at history objectively but rather that people be drawn into a personal encounter with history. For Bultmann it is the encounter calling for a decision that is important, signifying the present reality of Christ. *That* he lived becomes *he lives now*.⁸⁹ In terms of Bultmann's existential interpretation of the New Testament, far more important than historical detail is proclamation or kerygma, in which Christ comes alive. This means, for example, that the significance of the cross and resurrection lies in their kerygmatic meaning - the divine acts of simultaneous judgement and salvation signified in them - rather than in their historical reality.

Bultmann's position quite clearly marks a radical move away from history. This alarmed many people, among them Bultmann's student Gerhard Ebeling, for whom the person of the historical Jesus was indispensable to Christology. According to Ebeling, if it could be shown that Christology was a misinterpretation of the significance of the historical Jesus, Christology would in fact come to an end. For Ebeling the person of the historical (*historisch*) Jesus is the fundamental basis (*das Grunddatum*) of Christology.⁹⁰ It is Ebeling's critique of Bultmann that actually sums up one of the cornerstones of this dissertation: it is precisely the historical life of Christ, which was the vehicle of his humanity, that is also the decisive factor in our redemption and therefore the heart of Christian faith.

⁸⁶ See Rudolph Bultmann, "The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul" in *Faith and Understanding*, ed. R.W. Funk (London: SCM, 1969) pp 220-246.

⁸⁷ Bultmann, "On the Question of Christology" in *Faith and Understanding*, p 132. Cited by Schwartz, p 40

⁸⁸ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, translated by Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1958) p 8. See Schwartz, p 40

⁸⁹ Bultmann's kerygmatic Christology, which begins with the presence of Christ in the proclamation, can in some respects be compared with the Catholic "mysteries theology" of O. Casel. This theology centres on the presence of Christ in the mysteries and his redemptive work in the celebration of the liturgy. Similarly, Catholic-Protestant parallels exist in ecclesial Christology in the comparison between J.A. Möhler's rediscovery of the church as the Body of Christ and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christ "existing as community." See Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 32.

⁹⁰ Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1963) pp 303f

Along these lines, Schwartz, in his evaluation of Bultmann, suggests that Bultmann “actualised the existential impact of the message to such an extent that its historical anchor was felt to be irrelevant.”⁹¹ Such a critique of Bultmann included a critique of his demythologisation programme, which called for a freeing of the message from the “false, time-conditioned impedimenta” belonging to the mythic thought world that was open to intervention from other-worldly powers, but which for us today is not an option.⁹² Yet, as Kasper points out, the form of demythologisation to which Bultmann subscribed actually posited proclamation in place of mythology as appropriate for today in order to “disclose the understanding of existence concealed in the myth.”⁹³

There are at least two respects in which Kasper is important for this discussion - first, for his illuminating analysis of the Christological scene, and second for his own specific Christological insights. In his *Jesus the Christ*⁹⁴ Kasper set the contemporary Christological situation in the context of the split between faith and life in the church, noting the extensive background to this in social and cultural history. The early writings of Hegel, notes Kasper, suggest that the dichotomy between faith and life is a form of the alienation characteristic of the whole modern era (that is, from the Enlightenment onwards). With its emancipation of the human as subject, the rest of the external world was reduced increasingly to the status of mere object, so that the world was manipulated and dominated as it was demythologised and desacralised. The ultimate result of this is that the outer world becomes trivialised and neutral, while the inner world of the individual becomes hollow and empty. In other words, the separation of external and internal worlds, and as a result, between faith and life, is ultimately detrimental to both sides. It is in reaction to this situation that voices such as those of Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (to name but a few) join in suggesting that the road travelled by the

⁹¹ Schwartz, *Christology*, 42

⁹² Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 45

⁹³ See Kasper's critique of the demythologisation programme, *Jesus the Christ*, pp 43-48

⁹⁴ It is important to note that this series of lectures was first given by Kasper in the mid -1960s and that he is writing in 1974/5. Since this time considerable attention has been given in theological and specifically Christological discourse to the problem of the dichotomisation of faith and life as highlighted by Kasper in this publication.

modern spirit leads to nihilism. The church's crisis of identity, for Kasper, has as its background this whole crisis of meaning for modern society.⁹⁵

But what does this have to do with Christology? For Kasper it is precisely here that Christology "wins a relevance beyond the narrower theological context". This is so because the "doctrine of the Incarnation has to do with the reconciliation of God and the world". The oneness of God and humanity, as it occurred in Jesus Christ, cancels neither the distinction between them (that is, God and the world) nor the autonomy of humankind. Rather, it acknowledges both the oneness and the distinction, so that truly in Christ there is both liberation and reconciliation⁹⁶ - liberation, that is, to be fully human, and reconciliation in the sense of an end to our alienation from God. Again a chord is struck with a theme central to this thesis - Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation.

In order to achieve this, contends Kasper, it is important to exclude both a unilateral kerygma-and-dogma Christology and a Christology oriented exclusively to the historical Jesus. It is therefore important to take both elements of the Christian faith with equal seriousness, asking "how, why and with what justice the proclaimed and believed-in Christ developed from the Jesus who proclaimed; and how that historically unique Jesus of Nazareth relates to the universal claim of belief in Christ."⁹⁷

With this in mind Kasper identifies what he considers to be three essential tasks for contemporary Christology.⁹⁸ In the first place what is required is an *historically determined Christology*, taking seriously the questions raised by such divergent voices as Reimarus, Strauss, Wrede, Schweitzer and Bultmann. Second, it should be a *universally responsible Christology*, not derived from human/social needs, but considered in the light of those contemporary questions and needs. Kasper reminds us that in Christology we are ultimately

⁹⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 16

⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁷ As we shall see, for Irenaeus Adam was created as a "baby", with the potential to grow to maturity as a human being. Sin brought about an interruption in that process of growth, causing Adam to go off course, and resulting in alienation both from himself and God. Christ, by recapitulating in himself the experience of being human, comes to set Adam back on course again, overcoming the alienation. See Ch 3 for in-depth discussion of recapitulation.

concerned with a Christian understanding of reality in the broadest sense of the word, and that a pluralistic approach to the various philosophies and theologies is not only permissible but necessary. Furthermore, there is no question of playing off an ontologically determined Christology of tradition against a non-ontological, usually "functional" Christology. Third, it should be a *soteriologically determined Christology*, because, insists Kasper, Christology and soteriology form a whole.⁹⁹ As we will see verified in Irenaeus' theology, according to Kasper there are soteriological motives behind all the Christological pronouncements of the early church. Both the defence of Christ's true divinity and his true humanity are intended to ensure the reality of redemption.

This brings us to the positive content of Kasper's own Christological position. For Kasper the role of the Spirit is central, suggesting that his is essentially a Spirit Christology: "salvation is participation in the life of God in the Holy Spirit through the mediation of Christ."¹⁰⁰ This "pneumatologically oriented Christology" does justice to the fact that in the New Testament Christ is frequently portrayed in terms of the central Old Testament concept "the Spirit of the Lord". *Jesus'* real identity is grounded in his unprecedented relationship with the Spirit who is the life-giving power of the Creator, and who in him (Christ) opens up the possibility of others entering into the inner life of God. For Kasper it is this one person Jesus who is the point at which the universal saving intention of God becomes real in an historical way. In view of this it is unthinkable for Kasper that the person and work of Christ can be separated.¹⁰¹ It is here that Kasper's significance for the Jesus of history/Christ of faith tension becomes clear, making sense of his call for an ontological/functional rapprochement in the new quest for the historical Jesus.

⁹⁸ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 21/2

⁹⁹ *ibid.* See footnotes on pp 253f. As we shall see, Pannenberg has reservations about understanding Christology solely in terms of soteriology

¹⁰⁰ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 253

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p 251f

A new wave of Catholic Christological enquiry

Elizabeth A. Johnson's lectures on Christology under the title, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*,¹⁰² presents a Catholic perspective on contemporary Christological development with remarkable clarity and depth. In her Preface Johnson sets out the Catholic position alongside that of Protestantism, providing a useful starting point for a consideration of Christological trends over the past fifty years. Johnson draws attention to the respective locations of the two streams in the middle of the twentieth century. While Protestant Christology had arrived at this point deeply influenced by the lively debates over Biblical matters, Catholic Christology was "heavily entrenched in an approach to Jesus Christ through dogma". In addition, the respective traditions were characterised by fundamental differences in theological anthropology. This means that Catholics and Protestants have dealt both with a different set of basic assumptions in terms of the relation of God to human beings, especially in respect of the saving work of Christ, and a different problematic. Nevertheless, notes Johnson, "In present ecumenical times, theological influence has flowed more freely across the division of the churches", and this state of affairs is especially evident in more recent Christological developments.¹⁰³

Johnson's choice of the "wave" metaphor for her survey¹⁰⁴ is important. From time to time waves overlap, setting different trends in line with each other. I can do no better than to quote Johnson's own illustration of Catholic waves of renewal, which serves to explain the difficulty in locating certain voices at particular points and in relation to the particular themes I am attempting to present in this chapter:

"The first wave in the 1950's consisted in remembering the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ, a memory stirred up by the 1500th anniversary of the ancient council of Chalcedon which had declared

¹⁰² New York: Crossroad, 1990. Originally published in South Africa as *Who Do You Say That I Am? Introducing Contemporary Christology* (Hilton: Order of Preachers)

¹⁰³ *ibid*, Preface pp ix and x

the christological dogma. A decade later biblical scholarship began to flourish, triggering critical discovery of the history of Jesus. Both of these waves overlapped as they arrived in a church that was incorporating concern for justice into its sense of mission. Before they had time to recede, a third wave formed as the voice of the poor began to be heard.....Almost simultaneously the movement of feminist theology stirred yet another wave to life....”¹⁰⁵

We have seen that the names of Rahner (1951) and Käsemann (1953) are those perhaps most directly associated with the beginnings of contemporary Christological thought. On the Catholic side, Rahner’s essay for the 1951 Chalcedon commemoration, entitled “Chalcedon, End or Beginning?”¹⁰⁶ was, together with others that appeared alongside it, destined to have lasting influence, and inaugurated the first wave of Catholic Christological renewal. With special reference to Chalcedon, Rahner spoke of the self-transcendence of all formulae, not because they are false but because they are true, retaining their significance and remaining alive to the extent that they are expounded.¹⁰⁷ It is here that Johnson’s point of a different problematic for Catholics and Protestants becomes evident. For Rahner and his colleagues the challenge was to break open the Catholic approach to dogma and the formulae in which dogma is preserved, as if Christ could be exhaustively and definitively known.¹⁰⁸ Rahner is clear about the nature of preservation in such formulae. He contends that the preservation of something unique that has taken place once and for all, is only true historical preservation if it allows us to live and interact with the questions raised by the statement, which in itself is only a *statement* and not an explanation.¹⁰⁹ This is a point crucial to our understanding of Christ’s humanity in our contemporary world.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, p x

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, pp x and xi

¹⁰⁶ See further discussion in Ch. 2, pp 99ff

¹⁰⁷ Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol 1*, pp149-51. For further discussion see Ch 2, *Chalcedon: end or beginning?*

¹⁰⁸ See Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, pp 19ff

¹⁰⁹ Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol 1*, pp 149-51

The main concern of Rahner and his colleagues was to show how the dogma of "true God and true human" in one person is to be understood for faith today in terms of contemporary philosophical methods and categories. Furthermore, Rahner was concerned to show that the Chalcedonian formula cannot be imagined as a summary of everything we can know about Christ from Scripture. There must be more to say if we are speaking about the inexhaustible richness of God's presence with us. There are passages in the New Testament which present a different picture of Christ from that contained in the Chalcedonian formula, at any rate in terms of how this has been understood and interpreted by the (Catholic) church.¹¹⁰

What is interesting is that, albeit via a completely different route, Catholic Christological discourse joined that of Protestantism in directing its focus to the New Testament and what is said about Christ there. How does the Jesus Christ of Scripture relate to the Christ of the creeds?

This leads to some of the positive content of Rahner's Christology. Rahner juxtaposes, by way of example, the different pictures of Christ's Lordship contained in the New Testament and the Chalcedonian formula. In the former (both the Synoptic Gospels and Paul, especially in Phillipians 2:6-11), Jesus becomes Lord in the course of, and because of, his life. The latter, on the other hand, presents a doctrine of metaphysical Sonship. Is the first formulation merely primitive, enquires Rahner, and made obsolete by the latter? Or does it perhaps say with a clarity that eludes classical Christology something about the connection between Christ as a manifestation of God and the way in which this manifestation occurs (born of a woman, etc)? It is in this context that Rahner questions the actual nature of Christ's mediatorship, warning that a Christology that fails to grasp these connections would be in danger of becoming a mythology.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰*ibid*, pp 154-6

¹¹¹*ibid*

This first wave of modern Christological thought – Catholic and Protestant - manifested itself, according to Kasper in three major approaches.¹¹² These are: the *anthropological* approach, of which Rahner is representative; the *cosmological* approach, associated primarily with the name of Teilhard de Chardin;¹¹³ and the perspective of *universal history*, linked to scholars such as Moltmann and Pannenberg.¹¹⁴

The *anthropological* approach, with which we are chiefly concerned here, tried to confront the challenge of modern atheistic humanism. For Rahner, who calls his approach a “Christology from below”, Christ is the absolute expression of anthropology. In other words, in him we see true humanity. The Incarnation of God is the unique and highest instance of the essential realisation of human reality, taking nothing away from humankind’s autonomy and originality. Others, for example Dorothee Sölle, more inclined to anthropological reductionism, understood Christ as a mere model for authentic humanity.¹¹⁵

We remain with Rahner’s anthropological approach to Christology - in part for Rahner’s own insights, but more particularly for Kasper’s response to them.¹¹⁶ According to Kasper, Rahner’s Christology “from below” extends the approach of what has always been a transcendental Christology. Despite frequent misunderstanding of his approach, it remains true that for Rahner the content of Christology is not derived *a priori* from human thought and experience as it is with Kant, as if it could be made to work by methodological abstraction from the historical Jesus Christ. Rahner’s transcendental Christology “from below” develops in three steps. The first involves humankind’s sense of being referred

¹¹² Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, pp 17ff. Balthasar offers a critique of all three perspectives, contending that each sets Jesus Christ in a predetermined philosophical or ideological scheme of reference, evidence in each case of a diminution of faith that eventually results in a mere philosophy or ideology. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln, 1963). Cited by Kasper, p 18

¹¹³ Here cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis find fulfilment in Christogenesis. This perspective has in recent years been popularised by such writers as Matthew Fox. See, for example, Matthew Fox, *The Coming of The Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988).

¹¹⁴ Premised on the notion that each human being is woven into the whole complex historical fabric of humankind. In addition, the meaning and salvation of humankind becomes a question of the meaning and salvation of history as a whole.

¹¹⁵ It was Sölle who used the term “Christofascism” to describe the political direction of all attempts to place Christ at the centre of social life and history (Driver, Introduction, p 3)

¹¹⁶ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, pp 49ff

beyond itself to inconceivable mystery, and this implies the sense of finitude which is only possible if one has a preconception of the infinite. In the second stage there is the hope that this mystery in fact offers itself as the fulfilment of human existence. For this to be so, divine self-communication is necessary and this needs to be historically mediated, requiring both an absolute redemptive event and an absolute Redeemer. This leads to the third step, the principle of the Incarnation, towards which humankind – by virtue of human nature – is always en route. This means, for Rahner, humankind's openness to the self-communication of absolute mystery. The problem then is not that all of this can and does happen, "but how, where and when the One is present of whom all that can be asserted."¹¹⁷

By now it is clear how Rahner's Christology is formulated as a self-transcendent anthropology - the basic formula of all his theology. It is here that he grounds his well-known theory of the anonymous Christian, in terms of which Christology represents the unique fulfilment of anthropology. It follows that everyone who fully accepts her or his life as a human being has thereby also implicitly accepted Christ. For Rahner this means that it is possible for a person to encounter Jesus Christ without being aware of having met the one whom Christians call Jesus of Nazareth.¹¹⁸ Although, notes Kasper, this enables Rahner to make the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ comprehensible in a new way - one not requiring the radical demythologisation of historical Christianity - it does nevertheless raise certain questions. The basis of these questions, and hence the essential problem of Rahner's approach, lies in the "constitutive tension between historical reality and transcendental possibility."¹¹⁹

Kasper draws attention to the criticism most frequently levelled at Rahner: the weakening of intersubjectivity as a phenomenon precisely because of his approach to subjectivity. There is, notes Kasper, no such thing as a person "pure and simple". People always and only exist in the network of I-you-we

¹¹⁷ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 49

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that in recent years this position of Rahner's has been criticised as a manifestation of Christian arrogance by some of those engaged in dialogue with people of different faith traditions.

¹¹⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 50

relations. This position was expounded years earlier by Bonhoeffer in his doctoral dissertation, published as *Sanctorum Communio*.¹²⁰ Drawing on insights derived from social philosophy, Bonhoeffer is clear that “human spirit is possible and real only in sociality” – human sociality precedes human individuality.¹²¹ In his *Christology* lectures Bonhoeffer would go on to apply this to Christ, too. Christ is Christ, contends Bonhoeffer, not in relation to himself but in relation to me or us – *pro me* or *pro nobis*. Further, this *pro me* is not an effect emanating from Christ, but the *essence*, the being of the person himself. In other words Christ cannot be conceived as a being in himself, but only in his relationship to me or us - existentially, in community.¹²² In a word, to be human means to be-in-community: “the discovery of genuine personal identity is only possible in community, that is, through ‘the other’”.¹²³ This understanding, which accords with the African concept of humanity, has certain specific implications, spelt out by Kasper:

“A child’s consciousness is awakened with its mother’s smile; the freedom of the individual arises from an encounter with the freedom of other individuals..... That means that being addressed, being approached, being asked to respond comes first, and not – as Rahner suggests – questioning. Even the finely-nuanced transcendental problematics of modern philosophy is not a ‘self-evident’ starting point, for it is mediated through the entire history of Western philosophy and the history of Christianity”¹²⁴

In the course of this dissertation I will explore the implications and necessity of Jesus’ full humanity with particular reference to how this relates to the role

¹²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). English edition edited by Clifford J. Green and translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens. This is the most recent English translation and is Volume 1 of the series *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*.

¹²¹ *ibid*, p 33

¹²² Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 47. Note that in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer speaks of the “collective person” (e.g. pp77ff), so that the “me” of *pro me* refers to both the individual and community

¹²³ John W. de Gruchy, “*Sanctorum Communio* and the Ethics of Free Responsibility: Reflections on Bonhoeffer’s Ecclesiology and Ethics” (unpublished paper, 2000), p 4. See also *Sanctorum Communio*, p 33

played by Mary his mother. It was she who facilitated Jesus' first experience of being-in-community, and thereby called him into personhood. It is not difficult, in view of this, to understand the significance of Kasper's response to Rahner. Two issues strike me in particular. First is the fact that human life is always life-in-relationship, and usually the beginnings of human community or intersubjectivity lie in the mother-child relationship. Second, human life begins with response, not questioning, and this response principle is built into the whole experience of being human. If Christ recapitulated in his own life the full experience of humanity, then for him, too, this meant initially life-as-response and with it, life-in-relation.

Seeking again for the historical Jesus

Käsemann's 1953 lecture¹²⁵ effectively ushered in the post-Bultmannian era and with it the second wave of modern Christological discourse.¹²⁶ Käsemann, a pupil of Bultmann, called for a resumption of the liberal Quest for the historical Jesus but on the changed premises of the modern age. In justification of this call, Käsemann pointed out that for the past two hundred years critical historical research had tried to free itself from the dogmatic strictures of the ecclesial authorities. Now at the end of it all came the realisation that reliance on dogma and the Christian tradition cannot simply be cast off. Käsemann was aware that because we know little about Jesus' development, knowing about the life of Jesus in the traditional sense is no longer possible. But he also acknowledged that we can only know about Jesus through the "proclaiming interpretation" of the early Christian community.¹²⁷ Schwartz summarises the three reasons why, according to Käsemann, it is important that we continue to ask about the Jesus of history – each of them important to the agenda of this thesis. In the first place there is, as Bultmann emphasised, the singularity of the salvific event in Jesus – the *that* of Jesus. Second, this event – God's self-disclosure – took place in

¹²⁴ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 50. This position would have been supported by Barth with his contention for the primacy of revelation.

¹²⁵ Delivered in Marburg and entitled "The Problem of the Historical Jesus". Published as an article of the same title in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, translated by W.J. Montague (Napierville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1964)

¹²⁶ We are speaking here from a Protestant perspective.

¹²⁷ Schwartz, *Christology*, p 49

space and time, within history. It therefore has incarnational quality. Third, the question of the historical Jesus is the question of the continuity between Jesus and us.¹²⁸

Käsemann's lecture stimulated commentaries from other students of Bultmann on the Protestant side, for example Fuchs, Bornkamm, Conzelman, and Ebeling. It was soon taken up by some Catholic theologians as well, for example, Hans Küng. The essential message of Käsemann and his contemporaries was that if Christological confession has no connection with the historical Jesus then belief in Christ would be no more than ideology; a general worldview without any historical basis.

In his evaluation of these developments Kasper shows the importance of taking both elements of the Christian faith equally seriously and asking how, and on what justifiable grounds the proclaimed and believed in Christ relates to Jesus of Nazareth. Conversely he asks how this "historically unique Jesus of Nazareth relates to the universal claim of belief in Christ,"¹²⁹ conceding a fundamental problem in a Christology with its midpoint in the cross and resurrection. This problem lies in the relationship of resurrection and the exaltation Christology expressed in it, on the one hand, to the descent Christology expressed in the notion of incarnation, on the other. Revelation occurs not only in the earthly Jesus but also in the resurrection and the giving of the Spirit. The dialectical relationship between dogma and history, and the Christology of reciprocity issuing from it, is summed up for Kasper in Romans 1:3, where we read of Jesus Christ "descended from David according to the flesh and designated son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead". This double designation presents the same Christ both *kata sarka* (according to the flesh) and *kata pneuma* (according to the Spirit). Of crucial significance for Kasper is the realisation of the theological relevance of the historical aspect – a vital but at the same time unresolved issue.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ *ibid*, pp 49f

¹²⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 18 and 19

¹³⁰ *ibid*, pp 34-37

What has been said above places us squarely in the area of “two stages Christology”. Apart from this Romans passage the idea is evident in various places in the New Testament epistles, without doubt finding fullest expression in Phillipians 2:5-11. Far from being incidental to the current discussion, this line of thought, developed in varying ways and, extending into the Kenosis Christology of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, is relevant. It represented something already articulated by Chalcedon: an awareness of the relationship between the two stages (descent and ascent) of Christ, and his two natures. It is Barth who was ultimately most successful in his attempts to re-unite the two Christologies, but even his effort reveals itself as inadequate because of Barth’s failure to include any reference to the historical Jesus.¹³¹ In the early 1970’s Jüngel made an attempt to compensate for this by building on Barth’s Christology to include the historical quest in the overall dogmatic approach to his Christology.¹³² For Kasper this means the debate has been brought full circle and that “the approach of the classical two-natures and two-states christology is ready for a new synthesis.”¹³³

Is there any way in which the Christological paradigm I am trying to develop accommodates both, and contributes to the “new synthesis”? A Christology “from within” hinges on the notion that in the Incarnation the pre-existent “Truth” was made visible in Christ. The pattern of all life was made manifest in this one, historic person, Jesus of Nazareth. The glory of the resurrection (ascent) was possible, not because of the cross alone, but also because of all that preceded it both in the pre-existent Word, and then in its visible expression in Christ’s conception and through his whole life (descent). Livingston is helpful in expressing this in Hegelian terms: “The *implicit* unity of God and man is made *explicit* in Christianity in that the foundation of Christianity is laid on the *historical fact* of the Incarnation.”¹³⁴ For Hegel the reality of what happened here cannot be grasped by historical research alone. The most this can do is to “place him (Jesus) in the same category with Socrates and others”. A grasp of the

¹³¹ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV, 1, pp 140-70; Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 36

¹³² See E. Jüngel, “Jesu Wort and Jesus als Wort Gottes. Ein hermeneutischer Beitrag zum christologischen Problem” in *idem*, *Unterwegs zur Sache. Theologische Bemerkungen* (Munich, 1972), pp 126-44. Kasper, p 36

¹³³ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 36

"Absolute Truth" behind the historical person is what is important.¹³⁵ The historical reality of the Incarnation, giving expression to this Truth, had to be: "it *must appear*..... in the sensuous form appropriate to Spirit which is human."¹³⁶ Hence Hegel, whilst we may not agree with his Christology in its entirety, employs categories which take seriously both the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ, both the divine and the human, both his descent and ascent. Most importantly, he articulates the idea that what God did in Christ was an emergence of the *implicit* into the realm of the *explicit* - another sense of a Christology "from within".

Let us return to the new Quest for the historical Jesus, grounded in the "changed premises of the modern age". This search for the historical Jesus was undertaken, not in bypassing the kerygma, but through the medium of the primitive Christian message. Among the notable voices of the renewed Quest was that of Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose Christology is expounded most comprehensively in his *Jesus - God and Man*.¹³⁷ For Pannenberg the essential question is this: "Must Christology begin with Jesus himself or with the kerygma of his community?"¹³⁸ We have already noted that since Kähler, the latter position dominated Christological thought - at least for the first half of the twentieth century. Pannenberg concurs with Kähler in protesting against setting the figure and messiahship of Jesus in opposition to apostolic teaching as it is found in the gospels, although as we shall see, their respective ways of dealing with this problem differ considerably.

Whereas Kähler, and Schleiermacher before him, adopted Christian proclamation and experience as their point of departure¹³⁹, for Pannenberg - making allowance for the relation of New Testament texts to their respective situations - "only on the basis of what happened in the past, not because of

¹³⁴ Livingston on Hegel, , *Modern Christian Thought*, p 152

¹³⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree (New York, 1944) pp 325/6. Cited by Livingston, p 153.

¹³⁶ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp 324f. In Livingston, p 153.

¹³⁷ Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977. Translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p 22.. Second edition. Translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe.

¹³⁹ "the real Christ is the preached Christ" - Kähler

present experiences, do we know that Jesus lives as the exalted Lord."¹⁴⁰ Christology, for Pannenberg, is concerned both with the *unfolding* (in the community's confession of Christ) and the *grounding* of this confession (in the activity and fate of Jesus in the past).¹⁴¹ In this way Pannenberg takes seriously both the issues raised by the nineteenth century historical quest, and the twentieth century response to this - the kerygmatic Christ. For him, therefore, to "test and justify Christological statements about Jesus, Christology must get behind the confessional statements and titles of the primitive tradition, reaching the foundation to which these point, which underlies faith in Jesus."¹⁴² In addition, Jesus' relationship to God is of critical importance, so that for Pannenberg statements about Jesus taken independently of his relationship to God can only result in a "crass distortion of his historical reality."¹⁴³ If the human history of Jesus, contends Pannenberg, is the revelation of his eternal sonship, we must be able to perceive the latter in the reality of the human life (cf Hegel).¹⁴⁴

Pannenberg's Christology endeavours to bring together three elements: the human life of the man Jesus based on the apostolic accounts of that life; the present Christian confession and experience of faith in Christ as Lord; and, holding the two together, the way in which Jesus is related to God. For Pannenberg, the universal significance of Jesus, derived from God, cannot be replaced by talking about Jesus as the fulfilment of humanity. It is for this reason that Jesus' relationship to God must be discussed first.¹⁴⁵ To this end Pannenberg understands the task of Christology to be the establishment of a true understanding of Jesus' significance from his history, which can be described comprehensively by saying that in this man God is revealed.¹⁴⁶ Rowan Williams captures the essence of this position. "One way or another", contends Williams, "we have to deal with what the human story of this figure means - what is the identity of Jesus in the framework of a reality whose whole

¹⁴⁰ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, pp 23f and 28

¹⁴¹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) p 282.

Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley.

¹⁴² *ibid*

¹⁴³ Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, p 36

¹⁴⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol II*, p 325

¹⁴⁵ Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, p 49

structure is held to be significant? Where does he belong in a story of the world as coming from and relating to God?".¹⁴⁷

In describing his approach Pannenberg distinguishes between Christologies "from above" and those "from below", locating himself clearly in the latter. Christologies "from above" (incarnational Christologies) were far more common in the ancient church.¹⁴⁸ Pannenberg notes that there were also, however, impulses in the direction of Christology "from below" in the ancient church, the Middle Ages, and in the theology of Luther. And in the nineteenth century Albrecht Ritschl became the first modern scholar to build his Christology on the divinity of the historical man Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁴⁹ For Ritschl, God is not revealed merely in historical facts, but "by faith"; he saw the hermeneutical interdependence of history and faith.¹⁵⁰ "We can discover the full compass of his (Christ's) historical actuality solely from the faith of the Christian community."¹⁵¹ Yet Ritschl is clear that despite this, such discovery is always based on "the greatest possible exactness to the historically certifiable characteristics of his active life".¹⁵² The Ritschlian school, notes Pannenberg, continued up to Wilhelm Herrmann, and on into contemporary scholarship in the work of Althaus, Brunner, Ratschow, Ebeling and others.¹⁵³ Christologies "from below" came into their own in the last few decades of the previous century in the form of liberation theologies. These theologies, however, differed somewhat in that their starting points have been the existential situation of the "poor", with Christ interpreted in relation to human suffering.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, p 30

¹⁴⁷ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden (USA) and Oxford (UK): Blackwells, 2000) p 80

¹⁴⁸ Beginning as early as Athanasius of Alexandria and becoming determinative for the future history of Christology, to reach a climax in modern times in the theology of Barth. Pannenberg makes an interesting and relevant point concerning the early development of Christologies "from above". He shows that in the context of Christian mission to the Gentile world, with its popular polytheistic ideas (cf 1 Thess 1:9f), it was necessary that Christianity acquit itself adequately in terms of its claim regarding the divine status of Christ, whilst at the time professing its monotheistic belief. See Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p 278

¹⁴⁹ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, pp 33ff

¹⁵⁰ Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, p 250f

¹⁵¹ Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, III, translated by H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macaulay (Edinburgh, 1900) pp2-3. Cited by Livingston, p 251

¹⁵² Albrecht Ritschl, *Instruction in the Christian Religion*, translated by A.M. Swing, in *The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* (New York, 1901) p 200. Cited by Livingston, p 251

¹⁵³ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p 36

Most Christological constructions “from below” centre around the life and work of Jesus. For Pannenberg, in contrast, it is the resurrection which is decisive: both the historical reality and the significance of the resurrection bring together and throw light on the three elements noted above. It is the resurrection of Christ that explains and authenticates his pre-Easter history,¹⁵⁴ and at the same time reveals the way in which this history is related to contemporary Christian experience articulated in the confession of the church. Furthermore it is in the resurrection that Jesus’ relationship to God is made clear, confirming his earlier claims. Indeed, Pannenberg goes so far as to claim that “Jesus’ unity with God was not yet established by the claim implied in his pre-Easter appearance, but only by his resurrection from the dead.”¹⁵⁵ Once it is authenticated in the resurrection, Jesus’ unique relationship with God becomes the basis on which he becomes for us the Christ of Christian confession.

A word should be said here about Pannenberg’s understanding of the resurrection as an event. Without trying to explain the “how” of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead - yet being careful to present the many theories that surround it - it is important for Pannenberg that we are here speaking of an historical event. Pannenberg contrasts his position to that, for example, of the early Barth who spoke of the resurrection as a non-historical event which reveals the whole life of Jesus, consummated on the cross.¹⁵⁶ It was only later that Barth would concede that this same non-historical event was also a particular event in Jesus’ life. It is difficult not to concur with (the later) Barth at this point, perhaps even linking him with Rahner and his anthropological Christology. One of the foundational premises of this dissertation is that in Jesus Christ, the one who is the source of all life and the pattern after which it is fashioned, assumed creatureliness and thereby made visible God’s plan both for humankind and all creation. We are speaking here of the Christ-event as a revelation of God’s “will”, - which consists in the actualisation of all the potential in creation - so that in Christ we see both the (non-historical) pattern of life *and*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, pp 112f

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p 191

¹⁵⁶ See *Church Dogmatics* IV,2, pp 122ff and 140ff

the demonstration of this in the (historical) life of this one person.¹⁵⁷ This echoes Hegel's contention that in Christ the implicit becomes explicit in the historical fact of the Incarnation. I will try to show how this understanding is accommodated by Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation in Christ.

This leads to another issue, problematic for Pannenberg, which he deals with at some length - that of understanding Christology exclusively in terms of soteriology.¹⁵⁸ This tendency dates as far back as the Apologists; we see it in Irenaeus; in the Reformers, notably Melancthon; and it has dominated much Christological discourse ever since. Pannenberg contends that "almost all Christological conceptions have had soteriological motifs. Changes in the soteriological interest in man's understanding of salvation explain, at least in part, the different forms Christology has taken at different times". In other words, a soteriological motivation lies behind all Christological theory¹⁵⁹ so that Christology is a function of soteriology (Bultmann).

Pannenberg proceeds to explain what he considers to be the danger of a soteriological starting point for Christology. When Christology is understood solely in terms of soteriology, can we be sure that we have spoken of the real Jesus Christ at all? Do we not simply project on to the figure of Jesus our human desires, etc?¹⁶⁰ We are faced here with the issue of the "person and work" of Christ, and of the way in which the two have been separated - a position rejected not only by Pannenberg but by most contemporary Christological scholarship.

With the "above" and "below" contrast freshly in mind, it seems apposite to reflect further on the significance of the historical Jesus for various liberation theologies, showing how he becomes here the Christ of faith. Interest in the Jesus of history assumes a quite different, yet vital, form from that of mainstream Eurocentric discourse. Jon Sobrino is helpful in setting out the

¹⁵⁷ See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 2 (London: James Nisbet and Co Ltd, 1957), Ch XVI, par "Non-historical and Historical Expectations of the New Being" (p 100ff) and "The Symbol of 'Christ', Its Historical and Its Transhistorical Meaning" (p 102ff)

¹⁵⁸ See Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, Ch 2, "Christology and Soteriology", pp 38ff

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 39

Christological position of liberation theology. Of crucial importance is the profession of Christ's true humanity and efforts to restore to that humanity the theological importance it deserves. Liberation theology does this "in the same way as the gospel does – by *telling Jesus' story...*, giving the history, by historicizing (even though this historicization remains at the service of faith) his actual life."¹⁶¹ However, this is not an attempt to write a biography of Jesus; it means understanding the human nature of Christ as Jesus' history. One of several approaches might be adopted as points of entry – important events in Jesus' life, or Jesus' attitudes, to name but two. Of particular importance to liberation Christology, notes Sobrino, is the *partisan* quality of Jesus' humanity. To the "concretion" of Jesus' humanity (a particular human being in a particular place with particular characteristics) is added this partisan note: he becomes the universal human being from the perspective of the poor. This is because "the poor and poverty have been selected by God as the privileged loci of divine manifestation". Yet the partisan quality of Jesus' humanity does not exclude the *universalization* of Christ.¹⁶² In other words, Sobrino suggests that the partisan nature of Christ's humanity is the way to *his becoming* the Christ of faith (Sobrino: the "eschatologization of Jesus-the-human-being").¹⁶³

Ruether, representing a feminist liberation trajectory, has shown how a return to the Jesus of the synoptic gospels, once he is stripped of later masculinisation, is revealed as "a figure remarkably compatible to feminism".¹⁶⁴ In this way a hermeneutical circulation is at work in the various contextual Christologies, the constant to-and-fro between context and the life of Jesus and back again, leading to new interpretations of his significance for contemporary needs and hence to new experiences of him as the Christ of faith.

Liberation theologies did more than re-define the meaning of "above" and "below" in relation to Christology, and more than consciously expand the meaning of "incarnational". The emphasis shifted from Christ's origin to his

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 47

¹⁶¹ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, p 30

¹⁶² *ibid*, pp 31f

¹⁶³ I would challenge Sobrino and others to speak of "weakness" rather than "poverty" and "the poor" as the privileged locus of divine manifestation.

human existence. In posing a challenge to the church with regard to those whom the church, and with it, society in general, had marginalised, these theologies heralded the dawn of a new theological consciousness. Looking back on the Christological scene from a position of historical advantage, one sees how through the various liberation trajectories the kernel of Christological tradition began to be broken open, bringing Christology into dialogue or confrontation with the spirit of the age, and forcing it to face the challenges presented by that age. In secular terms this would be described as the transition from modernity to post-modernity. Prior to this, and predating the Enlightenment right back into the New Testament, (patriarchal) Christianity possessed a certainty about Christ, about the nature of truth and the world, and about the unique position of the church in the economy of the salvation of that world. It was within the parameters set by these basic tenets that the debates on which we have reflected in this chapter took place. The pendulum, however far it swung, nevertheless had a fixed, unidimensional course. The last quarter of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of a violent shaking of the Christological pendulum.

Post-modernity itself is not an easy term to define, nor is it necessary in this context to do so. Gustavo Gutiérrez warns that “to speak of ‘the postmodern world’ is a superficial response and of little help.”¹⁶⁵ What is important, however, and less difficult, is to identify some of its distinguishing features. Bearing in mind the overarching effect of globalisation, it means ambiguity and pluralism, and allied to these, the absence of a Christian “grand narrative”. Yes, there *is* a Christian narrative – but as will become clear as the dissertation proceeds, it is not “grand” in any triumphalist sense. Furthermore, previous certainties – even scientific ones – are no longer that certain, and certainly not that absolute. The implications of post-modernism for Christian theology, and for Christology in particular, have been significant. Mark Kline Taylor captures the essence of what he calls the “postmodern trilemma”, manifest in three demands that we try

¹⁶⁴ *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp137/8

¹⁶⁵ From *The Power of the Poor in History*. Quoted by Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990)p 23

to respect simultaneously: to acknowledge some sense of tradition, to celebrate plurality, and to resist domination.¹⁶⁶

These last two points bring us to post-colonialism – associated with post-modernity, but an easier term to define because it is an historical reality. Post-colonialism is posing tremendous challenges to the Christian faith. Who is Christ in a world where the locus of Christianity is shifting from the white, male West, to the so-called Third world? And with increasing global sensitivity to, and appreciation of, cultural and religious diversity, the notion of the exclusivity of Christ is having to undergo radical re-evaluation.

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a major Christological shift, manifest most clearly in the onus placed on Christians to restate belief in the uniqueness of Christ within the framework of the new global consciousness. Tom Driver situated this task in the realm of ethics, insisting that to find a Christology liberating in a world of relativity is the ethical task of the contemporary church.¹⁶⁷ Already in 1973 Hendrikus Berkhof suggested that God's revelation in Christ was normative but not exclusive.¹⁶⁸ In 1974 Ruether, in her incisive study of the roots of Christian anti-Semitism, cites Gregory Baum in speaking of the folly of the notion of "fulfilled messianism" and of the ecumenical promise in "unfulfilled messianism", the former leading to Christian exclusivism and imperialism, the latter facilitating inclusivity.¹⁶⁹ Ruether has contended that "if Jesus is to serve as our paradigm of man, then he must not be seen simply as a finalization of an ideal, but one who reveals to us the structure of human existence as it stands in that point of tension between what is and what ought to be".¹⁷⁰ Along similar lines the notion of the centrality of Christ has been increasingly contested in recent decades, with renewed

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*, p 23

¹⁶⁷ Driver, *Christ in a Changing World*. See especially Ch 4, "Critique of Christ as Once for All", pp 57ff.

¹⁶⁸ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, p 194

¹⁶⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) p 19

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 18

questioning as to what we do or can mean by the notion of Christ as centre and by the uniqueness of Christ.¹⁷¹

It is against this backdrop that the observations of Pricilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison are relevant in the context of contemporary Christological trends.¹⁷² First, quoting Andrew F. Walls, they note that already in 1976 it was possible to speak of a “complete change in the centre of gravity of Christianity, so that the heartlands of the Church are no longer in Europe, decreasingly in North America, but in Latin America, in certain parts of Asia, and... in Africa”.¹⁷³ Pope-Levison and Levison go on to note that this *change in the centre of gravity* from the First to the Third World is not only demographic but also theological.¹⁷⁴

The second change in the Christian faith is a *change in the model of conversation* from monologue (learnt from the Enlightenment) to dialogue between text and interpreter/context, between present and past, and between one theology and another. Since Schweitzer’s critique of the search for the historical Jesus it has become evident that what the Bible says is determined in large measure by what the interpreter *asks*. Schweitzer speaks of the “rationalistic bias” which causes each age to project on to Jesus the ideas that belonged to its own time. “The consequence is that it creates the historical Jesus in its own image.”¹⁷⁵ Speaking of the Germanic spirit with its historical pride and rationalistic bias, Schweitzer (prophetically) speaks of a time that will come when theology will rid itself of these things.¹⁷⁶ The point is that “there does not exist any exegete or historian as purely autonomous as the Enlightenment model promised.”¹⁷⁷ The text does not simply speak. There is

¹⁷¹ See, for example, Driver’s opening up of this question in Ch 3 of his *Christ in a Changing World*. See also Paul F. Knitter’s post-modern approach to this issue in his *Christ and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996), especially Ch 4, “Uniqueness Revised” for a revisioning of Christ’s uniqueness in the contemporary world.

¹⁷² Pricilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Westminster (UK) and Louisville (USA): John Knox Press, 1992) pp 12ff

¹⁷³ Andrew F. Walls, “Towards Understanding Africa’s Place in Christian History”, in *Religion in a Pluralist Society*, ed. John Pobee (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976) p 180

¹⁷⁴ Pope-Levison and Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts*, p 12

¹⁷⁵ Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p 312

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷⁷ Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Quoted by Pope Levison and Levison, p 15

always dialogue between text and interpreter, and today this is being acknowledged and harnessed as a conscious *conversation model* is adopted.

A third change noted by Pope-Levison and Levison – and allied to the former – concerns the understanding of the “*historical*” *dimension of Christian truth*. Every truth is received and interpreted in a particular context, implying, as Schweitzer seems to suggest, that the history we see is contingent on the historical situation from which we look. There can be no entirely objective reading of history, let alone the history of the man Jesus.

To these points I would add a fourth. Theological dialogue in this age of plurality and the call to holism, is increasingly being broadened to *include those of other disciplines and other religions* as partners. This, together with the two points preceding it, may well represent changes that were anticipated earlier – by Schleiermacher, for example. However, their full force was only now becoming evident.

A contemporary effort to pursue the search for the real Jesus, taking into account the needs and sensibilities of our contemporary situation, is the Jesus Seminar.¹⁷⁸ Among the names associated with this movement are those of Marcus Borg¹⁷⁹ and John Dominic Crossan.¹⁸⁰ I do not intend an in-depth discussion of the work of the Seminar here, but its importance to contemporary Christological discourse cannot be overlooked. This applies especially to the task of relating the historical Jesus to the Christ of Christian confession and so to arrive at a fuller understanding of his humanity. It is worth noting a particular emphasis of Borg because of its relevance to the agenda of this dissertation. According to Borg there were two primary categories in Jesus’ life – Spirit and culture.

¹⁷⁸ Of the Westar Institute in the United States

¹⁷⁹ See Borg’s *Jesus – A New Vision: Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991). Borg also edited *Jesus at 2000* (Boulder: Harper Collins, 1997), a collection of essays emerging from a 1996 symposium commemorating the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ

¹⁸⁰ See for example, John Dominic Crossan’s *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994)

Borg contends that within scholarly circles, Jesus' relationship to the world of the Spirit is seldom taken seriously.¹⁸¹ Yet "Jesus was, historically speaking, a Spirit-filled person in the charismatic stream of Judaism."¹⁸² What distinguished Jesus from other charismatics of his day, with their remote and detached lives, was his deep involvement in his culture and (consequently) in socio-political issues.¹⁸³ What strikes me as significant is that both Spirit and culture are in fact mediated to Jesus through his mother, Mary. Is it not true that the virgin conception is deeply symbolic of the Spirit's action from the very start in Christ's life? And does not the young Jewish girl give to him the cultural milieu in which he will grow up and minister?

This is an appropriate point at which to note again minimal attention given to the role of Mary and his greater social context in the debate surrounding the historical Jesus. It is surely Mary who is the guarantee of both his historical reality and his humanity. I contend that it is not possible to approach an understanding of Jesus' humanity without also considering the role of his mother.

Christology from within: locating myself on the continuum

Let us return to Elizabeth Johnson's wave metaphor, recalling her observation that modern and contemporary Christological discourse, both Catholic and Protestant, has occurred in more or less sequential waves over an extended period of time. Johnson noted the significance of the quick succession of waves, overlapping the mainstream trends or, to alter the metaphor slightly, perhaps encountering them head-on as they approach from opposite directions, creating the effect of a rip tide - as the church responded to issues of justice: poverty, the feminist critique, ecological abuse; and more recently to the challenge of globalisation in its many facets. Johnson sums up the situation:

Thus pressures, needs, and new scholarship both inside the

¹⁸¹ Kasper being among the notable exceptions.

¹⁸² Borg, *Jesus – A New Vision*, p 25

¹⁸³ *ibid*, p 79

church and in the wider, tightly knit, anguished world have conspired together to create wave after wave of new insight into Jesus Christ. As with all waves, these are not always clearly separated from one another; as waves will do, they are collectively changing the shape of the landscape¹⁸⁴

This brief historical overview has been necessary to establish my own location in relation to the Christological discourse of the modern, and now the post-modern, era. On the one hand I see myself in unambiguous continuity with it. As Rahner has shown, it is question and debate, and exploring the boundaries of tradition, that are the sign of vibrancy and faith¹⁸⁵ – not blind assent to dogmatic tenets that are set in stone. For this reason I have considered the issues raised by the various voices – those mentioned here, and many others which are not. A mistake, I believe, is to assume that the different approaches and different answers to the same questions are necessarily mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, I have seen with renewed clarity that all Christological discourse attempts to understand the relationship between the Jesus who lived as a person and the Christ of the church's proclamation, the Christ of faith. Essentially this has to do with the central problem of Chalcedon: the mystery of that individual who was both truly God and truly human, the humiliated one and the exalted one. Each generation and each changed situation requires that these issues be restated in terms which are comprehensible and meaningful, just as each perspective is, at least in part, a response to the context out of which it emerges. Looking back it is possible to see this dynamic at work in the various periods from the enlightenment to the present. We see it now at its most incisive in the age of globalisation, and with it religious and cultural pluralism, demanding a restatement of some of the central tenets of the Christian faith. At the same time each generation builds, wittingly or unwittingly, on what has gone before. Part, then, of the continuity with the past in which I locate myself consists in conversation with those who have grappled with Christological issues in the past. Here on this Christological continuum the different strands or

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, Preface, p xi

¹⁸⁵ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol 1, p 153

fragments are woven together to form a strong cord – like themes in a fugue.¹⁸⁶ What this image conveys most clearly is that each strand of Christological thought plays its part in the quest, not for the “historical Jesus”, but for a fuller understanding of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand there is discontinuity in my location and in the paradigm I will develop. This is necessarily so, in part because every person’s perspective is a unique one, and in part because of perceived inadequacies in what has gone before. The complement of this is that Christ – in the mystery of the Incarnation – is so immense and multi-faceted that an infinite number of perspectives can be accommodated in Christological discourse, though not all are necessarily helpful.

In terms of the paradigm itself, I recognise the need for a fourth, hitherto (to my knowledge) unexplored one – that of a Christology “from within”. I have no intent to disclaim the other approaches, or to minimise their respective and combined worth. However, the changed circumstances of today have convinced me that an alternative model is required. In developing it I have found Irenaeus’ notion of recapitulation particularly useful.

If one is to take recapitulation seriously then the historical Jesus is indispensable because it is only *in* history that such recapitulation of human experience could occur. We have seen that there are limitations to what we can know via this route, so that independent of the kerygmatic Christ the picture is bound to be distorted. In the next chapter we will focus on the Christ of faith as we discuss the developments surrounding Chalcedon. With Bonhoeffer I recognise the need for the boundaries set by Chalcedon, but at the same time wish to explore what is possible and necessary within those boundaries. My proposal of a Christology “from within” takes from Chalcedon the reality of

¹⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer uses this musical image with striking effect in trying to derive meaning from the perceived fragmentariness of life. We may apply what he suggests Christologically. There are some fragments, suggested Bonhoeffer, that are only worth throwing into the dustbin, and others whose importance lasts for centuries because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments that must be fragments. “I’m thinking, for example, of the *Art of Fugue*” – where the wealth of themes are welded “into a harmony in which the great counterpoint is maintained from start to finish”. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, p 219.

Christ's humanity and develops it around Irenaeus and the continuing development of his thought in Balthasar. In proceeding I will highlight a key element that is neglected in the Quest: the place of Mary in the Incarnation.

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CHAPTER 2

TRULY GOD AND FULLY HUMAN

The Council of Chalcedon synthesised the paradox to which the affirmation of Christ's true divinity and true humanity had led. It maintained God's transcendence and therefore the distinction of natures in Christ; it maintained God's immanence and therefore the inseparability of the natures of Christ¹

In the previous chapter we explored the notion of Jesus as an historical human being in relation to the humanity of Christ. We considered the swing of the Christological pendulum – from the Reformation emphasis on revelation and faith, to a Jesus arrived at through reason aided by historical criticism, followed by a swing again to the kerygmatic Christ. We saw in the second half of the twentieth century a growing awareness that in fact the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith cannot be separated. Each informs the other. We concluded that whilst an intellectual/rational quest can in certain respects inform our understanding of the humanity of Christ, it is able to do so only to a limited extent.

The Chalcedonian Definition, as the normative statement of Christological orthodoxy, approaches Christ and the Incarnation from a different perspective. It is a statement of faith and not only the fruit of intellectual pursuit; it seeks to proclaim and preserve rather than to explain and analyse; it presumes mystery rather than attempting to debunk it; it sets boundaries within which Christological discourse can take place rather than breaking through them. The Definition announces the paradoxical reality that this truly human person, Jesus of Nazareth, is simultaneously God in the flesh. But whilst concern to establish the true humanity of Christ was a central concern of Chalcedon and the ecumenical Councils that preceded it, ever since then it is Christ's divinity that has been stressed, often at the expense of his humanity. As Sobrino observes, "no detailed analysis of Christ's true divinity is necessary here. This is not where the danger of abridging the totality of Christ resides. We do need a theological analysis of his humanity".² However much Hellenism sought to compromise the humanity of Christ, the

¹ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, p 29

church was never without those who recognised its importance. Irenaeus, for example, as early as the second century was insisting that redemption is only possible if Christ assumed our full humanity.

As with the last chapter in relation to the Quest/s, our concern is not to chronicle the entire debate or sequence of events leading up to Chalcedon. Rather, it is to draw attention to aspects of it which can generate a heightened appreciation of the humanity of Christ. I will show that the theological context of the early centuries which required such a Definition, has contemporary sequels which shape Christology and in turn have an impact on Christian praxis. It is my contention that a refocusing on the humanity of Christ facilitates a Christological paradigm appropriate to contemporary needs.

Setting the scene

The date was the 17 October 451 CE. The place was the Oratory of St Euphemia, Chalcedon, situated across the Bosphorous from Constantinople in what is modern-day Turkey. Here twenty three bishops of the church assembled with a number of imperial commissioners to broker, at the insistence of the Emperor Marcian, a new formula of Christological belief. The result a week later was the document known as the Chalcedonian Definition, which ever since then has been the normative statement of orthodox Christological dogma in the church.³ The proceedings of Chalcedon and the years of debate and decision that led up to it have been extensively chronicled and analysed, with no need of repetition here. Yet because of its definitive status - if for no other reason - Chalcedon must be taken into account in any serious Christological discourse. For our purposes this pertains particularly insofar as Christ's status as truly divine but also truly human is concerned. Indeed, the question with which we are ultimately concerned deals with what it means to say that Christ was "truly human", and why this should be so pivotal.

² *ibid*

³ The Chalcedonian Definition was and is accepted by all the historic Christian communions except the so-called Oriental Orthodox churches (Coptic, Ethiopian, Syrian, Armenian) and the Assyrian church.

We began in the previous chapter by considering this issue from a historical-rational perspective, asking what there is to be learnt about Christ's humanity from the protracted debates surrounding the Quest for the historical Jesus, and how this person relates to the Christ of faith. One of the things that emerged is that the humanity of Christ cannot be arrived at either by an exclusively historical-rational route, or by an exclusively kerygmatic route. Both inevitably lead to docetism.

We now approach the same issue, that is, the meaning of Christ's humanity, from a different perspective – from the point of view of Christian confession. In doing so we acknowledge entry into an area of mystery. Yet this mystery is clothed in historical particularity. Because the church has said nothing essentially new about Christ since Chalcedon, and because this Council encapsulates the decisions of the earlier ecumenical Councils, it is at this point that we enter. After all, as Grillmeier observes, “ If we are to proclaim the *Mysterium Christi* in the language of our time, we must first have understood what the Fathers wanted to say in the language of their time.”⁴ A complicating factor, however, is that the mystery articulated at Chalcedon emerges from a set of very human and as such fallible dynamics. For example, Grillmeier, in making the above observation, unwittingly unveils a serious flaw in the Council. Truly, this is the voice of the “fathers”. The voice of the “mothers” is silent. As a woman, therefore - and in the company of many others - I approach Chalcedon, and indeed each of the Councils and the discourses surrounding them, with a measure of “hermeneutic suspicion”. The fact that debates were conducted and decisions made without the meaningful contribution of women casts doubt both on the process and its outcome in the Definition. Although a feminist critique is not the specific agenda of this dissertation, it will nevertheless surface from time to time and certainly underlie the discourse.

Another (related) disturbing factor is the power struggle evident among the various parties participating in the debates, and the personality conflicts - both in some cases only thinly disguised as theological discord, and clearly serving a number of

⁴ Alloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, translated by J.S. Bowden (London: Mowbray and Co., 1965), Introduction p xxiii

personal and imperial agendas.⁵ A third problem lies in the capitulation of the Synod to imperial pressure (the unity of the church was considered vital to ensure the unity of the Empire), retreating from its commitment to create no new formula over and above the creeds of Nicaea (325 CE) and Constantinople (381 CE).⁶ The dynamics at work here, aptly defined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as *patri-kyriarchy*⁷, reveal disturbingly hegemonic tendencies.

In addition to acknowledging the problems noted above, a question must be asked about the validity of a statement arising out of a very particular context, in terms of it being binding for all Christians - and would-be Christians - of all time. It was, after all, the Hellenistic concept of *logos* that facilitated the notion of a coming together of the divine and human in Jesus Christ – the central concern of Chalcedon. The question demanded of us, notably in our post-modern world, is this: how binding can and should such a formulation be on people from other philosophical and cultural traditions who would be Christians? Or in the words of Hans Küng: “May we demand that a Muslim or a Jew accept the Hellenistic councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon? What would the Jew Jesus of Nazareth have done? The question is not a trivial one, not for Arabs who would be Christians, or for Africans in the same position.”⁸

Let us reflect a little further on the contextual dynamics of the Christological controversies and the Councils which sought to settle them. Gonzales offers some important insights in this regard, suggesting that whilst at first glance it appears that the “original gospel was abandoned for the sake of vain philosophies and dogmatic minutiae,”⁹ in reality the situation was far more complex. If Christianity is the message of the Incarnation then, in order to enter the Hellenistic world, it *had* to be Hellenised; to preserve its original formulation would mean it would never have penetrated the world around it. However, this creates a dialectical situation because Hellenism was not only a general cultural attitude; it also had a content that could endanger the faithfulness of Christianity to its original message.

⁵ e.g. Cyril of Alexandria. See Justo L. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought, Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), p 363ff

⁶ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p 480

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p 36f.

⁸ Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1987), p 129.

Classical Greek philosophy, notes Gonzales, was a major factor in the formation of the Hellenistic mind which essentially understood God in static terms, that is, as the Unmoved Mover. How could this be reconciled with a God who lives in active relationship with history, becoming a part of it in Jesus Christ? And how could God enter the world of matter, when matter was considered evil? The tremendous difficulties in reconciling the God of Jewish-Christian tradition with the Greek concept of God are reflected, as we shall see, in the various problems (concretised in the tension with those trends considered by the church to be heretical) that the Councils, for our purposes notably Chalcedon, sought to address. Ironically, although the development of doctrines may appear to have been an unwarranted Hellenisation of Christianity, it was those branded “heretics” who actually proposed the most radically Hellenised forms. The church in fact set limits to the influence of Hellenistic philosophy by condemning them with the use of Hellenistic tools.¹⁰ Here again, however, we need to be cautious. Such a simplistic summing-up masks the fact that the church’s concern to curb heresy was frequently an effort to suppress the creative thinking, often involving women and other laity, that might challenge male hierarchical ecclesiastic control.¹¹

Despite the reservations precipitated by these and other problems, I have come - on a long and a tortuous path - to appreciate something of the remarkable achievement of Chalcedon in its affirmation of both the full humanity and the full divinity of Jesus Christ. This it does in such a way as to set the bounds within which Christological discourse (if indeed it is to properly be called Christian) can occur.

These boundaries beg to be explored. They also prove to be versatile and rich in the potential to accommodate themselves to contemporary demands and needs, and in so doing to withstand some rigorous and inevitable critique. Indeed, a great number of Christians experience their faith at these very boundaries, straddling the borders of tradition. For them, the boundaries are the centre, posing a challenge to

⁹ Gonzales, Justo L., *A History of Christian Thought Volume 1*, p 393

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 394

¹¹ Lisa Isherwood notes that the term heresy comes from the Greek *haireisis*, which means “act of free choice”. In other words heretics introduced free choices or options into the Christian faith, and these were frequently described as “defects”. See Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ: Exploring the*

those – myself included – situated near to the eye of Christian orthodoxy. Marian piety is a case in point. There have always been those whose experience and understanding of Christ is both inseparable from and contingent on the Virgin Mary. Among such, not least in the contemporary situation, are those who explicitly accord Mary the role of co-redemptrix.¹² Without necessarily adopting this position, is there not something to learn from it, something that could inform our Christology?

My appreciation of Chalcedon has led to an improved grasp of the complex and nuanced nature of the dogmatic problems facing the church, and of the issues it was consequently required to address. Available patristic literature, both primary and secondary sources, reveals how the issues were seldom self-contained, but rather spilled over into each other and operated on varying levels. I mention this because, in isolating aspects of the debate for discussion here, and because of the greatly summarised form in which they are presented, there is the risk of creating the impression of simplicity – a far cry from the reality.

Another factor that has influenced my approach to Chalcedon is the challenge to approach the formula not just dogmatically but doxologically. In other words, to imagine it sung or chanted as an act of praise, rather than analysed in order to be understood; to allow the statement to address us aesthetically instead of rationally; or - to employ contemporary jargon - to approach it with the “right brain” instead of the “left”. We are, after all, squarely in the realm of mystery here. This is one of the areas in which the Eastern Orthodox traditions have something valuable to teach those of us from the West, as do African Christians across the entire ecclesiastical spectrum, who intuitively sing as an act of worship the things they profess to believe. The Ave Maria, too, recited by Catholics the world over every day, is an example of a doxological approach to something deeply mysterious.¹³

Significantly, it is precisely where the doxological element decreases that the risk of heresy, with its over-emphasis on the rational, increases.

Christologies of Contemporary Liberation Movements (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), pp 2ff, and Elaine Pagels penetrating study, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979)

¹² Leonardo Boff is one notable example.

¹³ In a later chapter we will look at Balthasar's treatment of the Ave Maria in his publication *The Threefold Garland: The World's Salvation in Mary's Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982)

Fourthly, freedom to acknowledge not only the theological achievement of Chalcedon but also the problems both inherent in and precipitated by it, somehow hones my receptivity to it. There are, for example, feminist scholars who are critical of Chalcedon's shortcomings and yet are simultaneously able to retain an appreciation of what the Council signifies. I cite Julie Hopkins as a case in point. Hopkins acknowledges the very real problems associated with the Council and particularly the prescriptive aftermath of its decisions. It meant, for example, the effective silencing of many heterodox theologians. It also issued in an edict by the Emperor that any army officer opposing the Chalcedonian dogma would be stripped of his rank. During Holy Week of 457 the Patriarch of Alexandria (who opposed Chalcedon) was lynched by a pro-Chalcedonian mob. Jaroslav Pelikan, on whom Hopkins draws, notes in addition that non-theological factors played an even greater part in the post-Chalcedonian Christological debate, "ranging from mob rule and athletic rivalry to military promotions and domestic intrigues of the imperial household"¹⁴. Despite all of this Hopkins can conclude:

"Nevertheless, it would be facile to explain away the dogma as a purely politically motivated piece of mumbo-jumbo, or a product of male clerical or imperial hubris. There is at the heart of the dogma an extraordinary and radical belief, namely that the divine nature was united with, whilst remaining distinct from, the human nature of the Jewish prophet Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, the classical Greek dualism between divine spirit and human body had been transcended"¹⁵

The point is that the fallibility of people does not necessarily falsify the concerns that they share. Indeed, the truth emerges from within the murkiness.

In what follows I will outline the essential issues involved in the Christological debates which culminated, although they did not then cease, in the Council of

¹⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) p 266/7; Julie Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p 86

¹⁵ Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, p 86

Chalcedon. It should be noted that my treatment of Chalcedon parallels the agenda and method of this dissertation. This cannot be a comprehensive account of the controversies and their resolution. My concern is rather to draw attention to issues relating to the humanity of Christ. The earlier controversies in the church, addressed at the Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431), were primarily concerned with questions relating to the divinity of the Son and the relation of the Son to the Father and the Spirit. But a third question remained: how are divinity and humanity related in Jesus Christ? It is this question that was the essential concern of Chalcedon.

Three points should be noted as we proceed. In the first place the Councils aimed, from a theological point of view, to deal with trends that were considered heretical. Now, heresy has less to do with *false* teaching than it does with *over-emphasis on one aspect* of teaching; it has less to do with the construction of a whole new theological area than it has to do with stepping over the boundaries of accepted tradition (orthodoxy). A sobering consideration for a Protestant such as myself is that heresy has perhaps also to do with *ignoring or underplaying certain issues* all together. If so, the possibility exists that a Christology stripped of the recognition of Mary's role in the Incarnation might in fact face in the direction of heresy. In the second place, we will notice the *dialectical* nature of the struggle to establish orthodox belief, which was and is located in the area - or perhaps along the line - of tension between *apparently* opposing positions. The significance of the dialectical nature of the dynamics we are considering, with its ultimate "both/and", cannot be overstated. Thirdly, the outcome of Chalcedon can best be described as *negative Christology*, establishing the parameters of what can be said about Christ. These were based primarily on the tome of Pope Leo insisting on the unity of the human and the divine in Jesus Christ, but at the same time distinguishing between his two natures.¹⁶ The Council was not so much concerned to give positive content to Christological belief but to eliminate the possibility of heresy, setting in place the boundaries within which Christological discourse can occur. These boundaries, described as the West's answer to the East, were fixed by the acceptance both of Christ's true humanity and his true divinity. However, having reached what was essentially a compromise solution, the Council members could

not go on to say how this could in fact be so or what this new human being could be like.¹⁷

Bonhoeffer, whilst himself employing the term *negative or critical Christology* with respect to the boundaries set by Chalcedon, is quick to add that here we are in the realm of a mystery which must remain mystery. Bonhoeffer speaks, therefore, of the “incomprehensibility of the person of Jesus Christ”¹⁸ - an incomprehensibility which, despite attempts to render it comprehensible spanning the entire Christian era, nevertheless remains intact. The negative or critical Christology of Chalcedon, by means of its skilfully crafted and apparently contradictory formulations,¹⁹ “aims at delimiting a sphere within which this element of incomprehensibility must be allowed to remain.”²⁰ Such Christology is critical, according to Bonhoeffer, because it must test any statement about Christ with regard to this limitation, decreeing not what *may* be said about Christ, but what *may not* be said in such a way as to expose any attempt which interprets either the full personhood or the full Godhead of Jesus at the cost of qualifying either one or the other.²¹

Yet as I have indicated, there is a great deal within those boundaries, and along them, which begs to be explained and reworked so that Christology can address itself more adequately to the changed circumstances of today. The Christological statement emerging from Chalcedon was primarily concerned to address three related areas of dispute in the church: those pertaining to the *divinity* of Christ, to his *humanity*, and to the relationship between his divine and human *natures*. I shall approach Chalcedon thematically, attempting to show why these particular issues, which manifested themselves in trends which in some cases spanned centuries, were so important and how they relate to each other. In focusing on the theological issues I do not wish to minimise the significance of concurrent socio-political and cultural dynamics. Indeed, as with our contemporary situation, existential reality was pivotal then in shaping Christology. With others I ask whether the negative

¹⁶ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (editorial supervisors), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol XII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) pp 38ff. See also Grillmeier, pp 530ff

¹⁷ Schwartz, *Christology*, pp 157f

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 77

¹⁹ “unconfused” (*asynchytos*); “unaltered” (*atreptos*); “undivided” (*adihairesis*); “unseparated” (*achoristos*)

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 77

²¹ *ibid*, p 87

nature of some of these dynamics does not in fact attenuate the theological achievement of the Council. And if not, in what way can Chalcedon be embraced and appropriated for a relevant contemporary Christological paradigm? Conversely, I find myself aware of what can only be described as the miracle of Chalcedon - that at a different level another dynamic was operative, overarching the intrinsic difficulties and shortcomings of the process and the personalities involved in it. What this means is that in Chalcedon we are encountering a multi-levelled phenomenon - the human dynamics, the theological concerns, and the overarching "providence" that some would attribute to the Spirit of God.²²

Two questions lay at the heart of the Christological debates that culminated in and continued even after Chalcedon. First, is Jesus Christ, the Saviour, identical with God or is he some kind of semi-God? And second, if he is divine, how is this divinity related to his humanity? It is tempting to imagine that these concerns had little to do with existential reality, and certainly such questions, from our contemporary vantage point, may seem irrelevant.²³ Chalcedon and the statements of the other ecumenical Councils sound very much like abstractions of Christ from real life. In fact, the opposite is the case. We will look at this from two perspectives.

First, let us consider the general religious milieu of the early church, which was Hellenistic. Here semi-gods abounded, emissaries that often came to the aid of humans. But, since they were subject, as any creature is, to the laws of nature, their help could only be temporary. If Jesus can provide lasting salvation he must truly be divine. Yet this option posed the danger of polytheism, which was anathema to the monotheistic Judaism out of which Christianity had grown. Further, if Christ was divine he could not be human according to Hellenistic thought. But on the other hand, if Christ was divine and had not really assumed

²² Theologian and musicologist, Jeremy Begbie, explains this dynamic in terms of the multi-levelled nature of music. Each layer is made up of a series of tensions and resolutions, and each successive layer both overarches and incorporates those below. Over all is the grand theme which takes all else up into itself and takes the music towards its climax/conclusion. Errors do not ruin music, but can be turned into "passing notes", made to fit and ultimately make the piece more beautiful. Similarly, music allows for improvisation, into which newness is built. It seems to me that these four elements – different levels, errors, improvisation, overarching theme – lend themselves to analogous application re the dynamics of Chalcedon (Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

²³ Schwarz, *Christology*, p 137ff

human nature, he could not redeem humanity because he would be aloof from it. But then again, if he were human, did this not pose a threat to his divinity?²⁴ The second perspective is that of heresy. Bearing in mind the ecclesio-political dynamics at work, there is nevertheless truth in the suggestion that much heresy began with an abstract view of divinity and humanity (i.e. they were philosophically speculative) and tried to work back from this to an understanding of Christ. But this is not possible. Such attempts inevitably result in a one-sided understanding of Christ and this, as we have seen, lies at the root of heresy. Far, then from abstracting the notion of Christ, Chalcedon and the earlier creeds are careful to root him in reality - hence, for example, his conception and birth of a real woman, his suffering and death at the hands of real people, and so on.

The issues at the heart of the protracted Christological debate drew responses from a variety of sources. One early thinker who grappled with the issues concerning Christ's humanity and divinity and how they were related in the person of Jesus was Origen (185-254), who addressed the fear of polytheism in a way that people such as Irenaeus (c130-c200) and Tertullian (160-225) had not been able to do adequately. Origen's theological acuity enabled him to hold the oneness of Father and Son (i.e. Christ's divinity) and Christ's subordination to the Father (his humanity) in dialectic tension. However, notes Schwarz, "his successors did not exhibit the same skill. The resulting problems were either of the right-wing Origenist type which short-changed the independence of the Son, or of the left-wing Origenist type which minimised the Godhead of Christ"²⁵ - Arius, for example.

Challenges to the divinity of Christ

The challenge to Christ's divinity came predominantly in the form of Ebionitism and Arianism, albeit from very different perspectives. The roots of the former lay among the Jewish-Christians, while the latter reflected a measure of Gnostic and thus Hellenistic influence.

For the most part the religious milieu in which Christianity took root and spread, with the undergirding of Hellenism, was receptive to the idea of a transcendent

²⁴*ibid*, p 138

Son of God. The exception to this was the Jewish-Christian community where, as Grillmeier notes, “everything spoke against such a teaching”.²⁶ Here the tendency in some circles was to rank Christ among the prophets, as a person specially endowed by God. The name given to these Jewish-Christian groups was “Ebionites”²⁷ - although the origin of this name has never been conclusively established. The root word has to do with poverty, the poverty of the Ebionites being variously associated with their intelligence, the law which they followed, their opinions about Christ, and their “understanding, hope and deeds”.²⁸ J.A. Fitzmyer, however, suggests that the name Ebionite probably means “follower of Ebion”.²⁹

Whatever the origin of their name, the Ebionites had two main concerns: a strict monotheistic belief in God and, stemming from this, stress on the humanity of Christ. Jesus, for the Ebionites, could not be a manifestation of God on earth because Israelite thought allows for no change in God. In other words, the Creator cannot become a creature. Jesus remains God’s creature, and only a creature. His relationship with God lay not in an identity of being, but in a qualified relationship, for which his baptism had special significance. It is here, as Jesus demonstrates his obedience to God’s will, that he *becomes* the Son of God. The Ebionites, then, were adoptionists, with divinity belonging not to Christ’s substance, but as a result of the Spirit taking possession of him. Bonhoeffer notes that in Ebionitism the emphasis is on preserving the boundary between Creator and creature. Whilst considering Ebionitism a heresy, Bonhoeffer nevertheless considers it superior to other forms of heresy like docetism (see later discussion) because it keeps its focus on Jesus as a real person.³⁰

²⁵ *ibid*, p 142

²⁶ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p 76

²⁷ Strauss, in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ch 3, pp133ff, includes a fascinating account of Ebionitism, showing that there were in fact two branches of this movement – the “simple” Ebionites (of Jewish origin) and the “speculative” Ebionites who showed Gnostic tendencies. Interestingly, according to Strauss it was only the former group who were known to Justin and Irenaeus, although the two groups probably co-existed. One interesting point of difference – discussed by Strauss with reference to their respective attitudes to the genealogies of Matthew and Luke – is their approach to Old Testament prophecy. The “speculative” Ebionites held to the idea of a two-fold prophecy, the one male and pure (Adam-Abel), the other female and impure (Eve-Cain). They rejected the Davidic line of the prophetic tradition, and hence also the genealogies of Jesus. Both branches of Ebionitism, however, held that Jesus was an ordinary human being, the son of Joseph and Mary, on whom the Christ descended, making him the Son of God.

²⁸ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p 76

²⁹ Grillmeier, quoting J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Qumran Scrolls, the Ebionites and their Literature*, in K. Stendahl, *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York: 1957), p 209

³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 85-87

Lest we be too hasty in labelling Ebionitism as a heresy and writing it off without further ado, let us consider for a moment what seems to me to be a contemporary parallel of this position. Carter Heyward, as part of her call for a relational Christology, grounded in the relational nature of God, and in relation as the fundamental human experience, considers that in the development of Greek Christology the significance of the voluntary character of the divine-human covenant was lost. The Council of Chalcedon, argues Heyward, in order to preserve the unity of humanity and divinity in Christ, compromised the possibility of a voluntary union between the human Jesus and the divine God.³¹ The point here is that, as in Ebionitism, so also with Heyward, Jesus was not ontologically but existentially, through choice, related to God. This option for relationship, for Heyward, is essential if our redemption is to be meaningful for us.³² Heyward's point, if we consider Christ to be human in the fulfilled sense of what humankind is destined to be, cannot be lightly dismissed. However, this understanding of the relationship between God and Jesus approaches subordinationism, a form of which gained enormous and enduring popularity through the teachings of Arius.

Arius, a highly respected elder from a parish in the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, lived between about 250 and 336 CE. The polyphony of cultures and philosophies that came together in Alexandria had a profound effect on local thinking, not least on Arius, whose teaching grew out of one of the extreme left-wing branches of Origen's Logos theology: subordinationism – that is, the Son was subordinate to the Father. Arius' main concern was to safeguard the position of a unique and transcendent God, the unoriginate source of all reality.³³ As such, the essence/being of God cannot be shared; whatever else exists must have come into existence not by communication of divine being but by an act of creation. Arius denied the *homoousia* of the Son whom he considered to be a creature who

³¹ *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982)

³² If one is to be thoroughgoing in asserting Christ's full humanity - the "assumption" of our entire human condition in order for it to be redeemed - then we cannot lightly toss aside Heyward's argument. If human relationship with God is voluntary and if Christ is completely human, then it could follow logically that his relationship with God was also a matter of choice. See also later discussion.

³³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A. and C. Black, 1980), p 227ff

had a beginning (“there was when the Son was not”),³⁴ so that there was when God was not yet Father. The Word is not “truly” God; nevertheless, if he is called God this is by “participation of grace.”³⁵ The net result of Arius’ teaching, according to Kelly, was that the Son was reduced to a demi-god; even if he transcended all other creatures, he himself was a creature in relation to the Father.³⁶ It is here that Gnostic influence on Arius is particularly apparent.

Opposition to Arius came chiefly from Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, for whom the Son pre-existed as the Logos of God and as such was equal to God. In 318 Arius and his followers were excommunicated. Seven years later, after the interim Council of Antioch which pursued the issue of Arian heresy, the Council of Nicaea³⁷ officially condemned Arianism and Arius himself was decisively banned. According to the Nicene Creed the Son was “begotten, not made” and (at the request of Constantine) the term *homoousios* (same substance) was included to counter *homoiosios* (similar substance), indicating that the Son was of the same substance as, and not a similar substance to, the Father.³⁸ Athanasius was to insist against Arius that Jesus was divine throughout the incarnational process, in which there must be direct and real union of God with humanity so that the one who “has filled all things everywhere...takes a body of our kind”.³⁹

Predictably, the Council decision did not settle the controversy, but in fact set it in motion, because it did not deal with the question as to precisely how *homoousios* was to be interpreted. Alexander’s successor in Alexandria (328), Athanasius, a symbol of Nicene theology, held that if Christ were not fully God, then our salvation could not be absolutely secure; only God can create, therefore only God can redeem.⁴⁰ The ongoing popularity of Arianism even after Nicaea is attested by the

³⁴ See the letter of Arius to Eusebius (ca 321) and “The Arian Syllogism” in Bettensen, *Documents of the Christian Church* p 55-57.

³⁵ Arius, *The Thalia of Arius*, quoted in Jean Combray, *How to Read Church History, Volume 1* (London: SCM, 1985), p 89

³⁶ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p 230

³⁷ The Council of Nicaea was convened by Constantine who considered it his duty to remove error and propagate the true religion – but who also feared that a divided church would offend the Christian God and bring down vengeance on the Roman Empire and Emperor! (See Schwartz, p 143)

³⁸ Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 275

³⁹ See Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word” 8 in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (editorial supervisors), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p 38

⁴⁰ Athanasius in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol IV, pp 37ff

fact that Athanasius was forced to resign as bishop precisely because of his opposition to this teaching. Arianism was to persist in posing a challenge to the idea of Christ's divinity for many years to come.

It is interesting to note that these two main streams of challenge to the divinity of Christ emerged from diametrically different positions - the one from non-speculative Judaism, the other from highly speculative Middle-Platonism. Conversely, we shall see that as with Arianism in relation to his divinity, one of the two main challenges to Christ's humanity, docetism, also grew out of Hellenistic Logos theology, with of course the opposite result to Arianism. What this suggests - and we shall see it again in monophysitism and Nestorianism with regard to the natures of Christ - is that it is often in efforts to preserve one area under threat that another area is over-stressed and ultimately distorted. The pendulum swings, as we noted from Strauss, as far in the one direction as it does in the other, creating a persistent tension. With this reminder of the dialectical process continually at work in this area of mystery where any attempt at precise definition is bound to be confounded, we turn to consider the pre-Chalcedonian challenges to Christ's humanity in the form of docetism and Apollinarianism.

Challenges to the humanity of Christ

"The New Testament takes for granted the fact that Jesus was a real human being. It is stated as something quite obvious that Jesus was born of a human mother; that he grew up; that he knew hunger, thirst, weariness, joy.....God-forsakenness, and finally, death. In the New Testament the reality of the corporeal existence of Jesus is seen as an undisputed fact."⁴¹ The situation described by Kasper stands in sharp contrast to that encountered by the church after its introduction to Hellenism. Then for the first time the humanity of Christ was questioned, posing probably the most serious crisis the church had ever had to sustain, and often more dangerous than the external persecution of the first centuries.⁴² It is with this in mind that we consider these challenges to the

⁴¹ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 197. We shall see how each of these things related to Jesus' humanity are linked in Irenaeus with Mary's mediation.

⁴² Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p 198

humanity of Christ which had to be taken into account by Chalcedon. We begin with docetism.

Docetism, remarks Grillmeier, is an attempt to solve the problem of the Incarnation and the suffering of the Son of God on a dualistic-spiritualistic basis, so that the humanity and suffering of Christ are not real but mere semblance. He further notes that docetism (from the Greek *dokeo* - "to seem") does not refer to the name of a definite sect.⁴³ It appears rather to have been a trend, dating possibly to the very beginnings of Christianity, which manifested itself in a variety of forms and settings.

As with the Ebionites and the Arians, docetists affirmed the radical divide between Creator and creature, but in contrast to the former two they positioned Christ on the side of divinity. Christ only *seemed* to be human. The humanity and sufferings of the earthly Christ were apparent rather than real. Jesus Christ was understood in docetism as a manifestation of the Godhead in history, his humanity being a "cloak and veil", the means which God uses to address humankind. Christ's humanity, then, is of no consequence in itself. Bonhoeffer observes in his *Christology* lectures that this heresy is "as old as Christianity itself and still flourishes today"⁴⁴. It receives its force from two elements. First - and here docetism's Greek roots manifest themselves - it is grounded in an abstract idea of God i.e. a claim to understand and define God ("idea") independently of humanity and especially of God's revelation in Jesus Christ ("phenomenon" or "accident"). Second, docetism in Bonhoeffer's understanding is propelled by a particular conception of redemption i.e. redemption from individuality so that the unity and original condition of the human race can be restored. Christ (Logos) in this view assumed human nature with *sarx* and *psyche* but not with *nous* - which is what makes a person an individual. In this case, as Bonhoeffer notes, the Incarnation is not complete, and "if the incarnation was not complete it did not take place at all, and redemption was jeopardised"⁴⁵. Bonhoeffer is categorical in summing up his position:

⁴³ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp 78f

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 79

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p 80

'Who is he?' He is not the one adopted by God, he is not the one clothed in human characteristics. He is God who became man, as we became man. He lacks nothing belonging to man.⁴⁶

Bonhoeffer proceeds to describe modern forms of docetism which, he contends, persist wherever a particular religious idea is held and then applied to Jesus, so that in effect the Incarnation has simply become a means to an end,⁴⁷ with Christ's humanity merely incidental to who he actually was. Ritschl is cited as an example. For him Christ was designated as God only through the value judgement of the community. And from Ritschl on, according to Bonhoeffer, the whole of liberal theology is to be seen in the light of docetic Christology in that it understands Christ as the support for or embodiment of particular values, ideas or doctrines. This means that his actual *personhood* is not taken seriously even though - ironically - it is this very theology that has so much to say about Jesus the man. It confuses the real with an ideal person, making him into a symbol.⁴⁸ It is at this point that the Irenaean doctrine of recapitulation (paradoxically pre-dating Chalcedon by almost three centuries), with its unqualified insistence on the full humanity of Christ, is so significant for contemporary Christology.

Let us leave docetism at this point and move on to consider the other main threat to belief in Christ's humanity - Apollinarianism. Apollinarius (alt. Apollinaris)⁴⁹ of Laodicea (ca 315-392 CE) was a friend of Athanasius and a fierce opponent of Arianism. He openly taught that Jesus was in fact less than a complete human being. Apollinarianism did not begin with Apollinarius. The ideas contained in this line of Christological thought originated much earlier, but there is no doubt that Apollinarius himself contributed significantly to the development and systematic evaluation of the ideas contained in it.⁵⁰ Gonzales describes Apollinarius as a "skilled orator and a true scholar not without a sense of humour", and interestingly,

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp 106f. The German word used by Bonhoeffer which is translated "man", is the gender-inclusive "mensch". See Volume 12, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, Berlin 1932-1933* (Gütersloher: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1997) p 340.

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 83

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p 84. Refer also to discussion in Ch 1, p 30.

⁴⁹ Bishop of Laodicea c. 360 CE

⁵⁰ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p 329

a great and influential defender of Nicene faith.⁵¹ In order to defeat Arianism, Apollinarius tried to develop a Christology capable of demonstrating precisely *how* the immutable Word (Logos) of God could unite with mutable humanity,⁵² that is, the way in which God and humanity are conjoined in Christ (it is precisely his efforts to penetrate the “how”, of course, that could lie at the root of what became his error). In his refutation of Arianism, Apollinarius found himself in the position of being at the same time concerned not to set his arguments in line with Antiochene theology which, he felt, drew too sharp a divide between the divine and the human in Christ.

Apollinarius himself was a Logos theologian, a representative of what is known as Logos-sarx (flesh) theology of the Alexandrian school. This theology contrasted with that of the Antiochene school, known for its Logos-anthropos (human) theology. Whilst Logos-anthropos theology (later to be endorsed by Chalcedon) held that the divine Logos was united to a full person, not just a human body, Apollinarius and the Logos-sarx theologians contended that Jesus was flesh and spirit but that in him the soul’s place was taken by the Word (Logos). Jesus was therefore incapable of sin because only a human soul is capable of sin and error.⁵³

One of the problems with Apollinarius’ teaching is that in attempting to explain *how* the human and divine are united in Christ, he in fact suggested the opposite - there was no *real* human-divine unity in him. This means that there was no *real* Incarnation of God. Apollinarius then, represented another form of adoptionist Christology i.e. Christ had an “accidental” relationship to God. This teaching was problematical for those who insisted, with Apollinarius’ chief antagonist Gregory of Nazianzus (d 389 CE), that since the human soul was the seat of sin, Christ, in order to redeem us, must also have had a human soul. “What has not been assumed cannot be restored; it is what is united with God that is saved.”⁵⁴ If Christ had no human soul, he was not truly human, and human salvation was not possible. This more or less encapsulates the combined testimony of Apollinarius’ critics, for whom clarity in the debate came (as it did in other situations) with

⁵¹ Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 355

⁵² *ibid*, p 356

⁵³ See, for example, Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, pp 353ff

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus. See Introduction, p 1

soteriological concern, that is, human redemption. This concern for Christ's full humanity as integral to Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation, predated both Nazianzus and others who shared it. It was the Eastern church, notably in the persons of the Three Cappadocians,⁵⁵ that perceived a hidden danger in Apollinarius' Christology in relation to their understanding of the Christian doctrine of salvation, insofar as it effectually denied Christ's full humanity. It was mainly on the basis of objections raised by the Cappadocians and other theologians that Apollinarianism was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Kelly, in setting out the objections that were advanced against Apollinarianism, cites one in particular which, in the context of this dissertation is striking. The position is summarised thus: "... the rejection of a normal human psychology clashes with the Gospel picture of a Saviour who developed, exhibited signs of ignorance, suffered and underwent all sorts of human experiences."⁵⁶ Such development and limitation is integral to being truly human, but of course presents a challenge when applied to Christ. Yet, with Irenaeus and others, I will argue that such assumption by Christ of our full human condition is critical to redemption, and indeed to the continuing relevance of Christ in the world.

We have considered the threats to both the divinity and the humanity of Christ, exemplified in the four broad theological trends discussed above. The Chalcedonian Definition, following the positions adopted at both Nicaea and Constantinople, is clear in its unqualified proclamation of both his divinity and his humanity. A third issue remains: how are Christ's divine and human natures related? This question has relevance for our purposes here because *how* Jesus experienced his humanity is contingent on the relationship between the divine and human in him. And this in turn raises the question of how *fully* human he actually was. As a way into this debate we will consider a further two positions, *monophysitism* (meaning "one nature") and *Nestorianism* (after Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople). In doing so, however, we should bear in mind that the personalities and discourses surrounding the humanity and divinity of Christ were and are very often carried over into the issue of his nature/s as well. Indeed, Bonhoeffer contrasts monophysitism and Nestorianism in order to demonstrate the

⁵⁵ Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa

importance of Christ's full humanity for "saving history."⁵⁷ In a word, the monophysites undermined the notion of Christ's two natures, while the Nestorians appeared to undermine the unity of the person of Christ, and were consequently accused of a too radical two-nature doctrine.

Monophysitism grew out of the Logos-sarx concerns of the Apologists to preserve the real Incarnation of God in the flesh and the unity of will in Christ. Christ, in this view, could not have two active substances/natures side by side because this would mean he could never be *in* God but only *alongside* God. It is once again soteriological concern that lay at the heart of a theological position: to maintain the possibility of unity between God and humanity in redemption, the oneness of humanity and divinity in Christ was essential. For the monophysites Christ's human nature was wholly assumed by God and thus divinised. Christ did not assume human nature but slipped it on like a garment, only experiencing humanity (hunger, thirst, temptations, feelings, etc) because he willed to. This teaching, contends Bonhoeffer, contrasts with what we find in the Scriptures, where Jesus was an individual person with all the properties and limitations of humanity.⁵⁸

Because of the metaphysical logic of the monophysite argument, both before and after Chalcedon, the "one nature" position held great appeal, and continues to be the position of the Oriental Orthodox churches to this day (not, of course, the Assyrian church, which is "Nestorian") – even though the label of monophysite is rejected and is probably inappropriate. The opposition to monophysitism was not because of any logical flaw in the argument, but took the form rather of a simple restatement of the church's confession that Jesus was a real human being and as such he must have assumed full human nature, body and soul. On this basis Chalcedon was eventually to reject the monophysite position, declaring that if Christ's full humanity and full divinity were both to be stressed, regardless of logical difficulties, he must be understood to have two natures which are "without confusion and without change" (Chalcedonian Definition).

⁵⁶ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p 296

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 88

⁵⁸ *ibid*, pp 88f

J.L.M. Haire makes a number of interesting observations concerning modern (and widespread) forms of monophysitism from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. Haire identifies a common feature among thinkers such as Hegel, Schleiermacher and Ritschl, and then later of the likes of William Temple, Charles Gore and even D.M. Baillie. All - wittingly or unwittingly - in some measure teach a divinisation of humanity, so that Christ in effect has a human-divine nature and not two distinct natures. Each one identifies some characteristic of Christ that is the vehicle of divinity. For Hegel it is the mind; for Schleiermacher it is deep and noble passion; Ritschl finds it in an enlightened conscience; for Temple it is the concept of personality; while for Baillie it is grace. It would seem, according to Haire, that such approaches are based on the presupposition that human being at its best is itself divine. Challenging these positions Haire asks: "Must we not say both that Christ is the second Adam and so the only truly obedient man, and also, and before this, that he is the word and son of God? And if we do this, are we not reaffirming the doctrine of the two natures?"⁵⁹

If in monophysitism Christ's human nature was so absorbed and transformed by the divine as to form one single nature, (so-called) Nestorianism represents the other end of the spectrum – a radical separation between the natures. Whilst Nestorius, the monk who in 428 CE became patriarch of Constantinople, is usually associated with arch-heresy, there is a measure of consensus among commentators that justice was not done to him. I mention this at the outset of a discussion of Nestorianism to underscore the complexity of a situation which might easily be treated in too simplistic a manner.

In the first place, Nestorius' own personality militated against justice being done. He was authoritarian and (ironically, in view of later developments) intolerant of anything that smacked of heresy.⁶⁰ Second, like Irenaeus long before him, Nestorius was a pastor, ministering in a context which not many years before was still pagan. Third, he was in a victim of circumstances. The controversy which he sparked was actually occasioned by his attempt to play a mediatorial role among his people, some of whom favoured and some of whom opposed using the title

⁵⁹ J.L.M. Haire, "On Behalf of Chalcedon" in *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth*, edited by T.H.L. Parker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956) pp 98ff

⁶⁰ Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, pp 363f

Theotokos (Mother of God) for Mary.⁶¹ Nestorius ultimately found himself unable to support this term because, he insisted, Mary was the mother of the “instrument” or “temple” of divinity but not of God. His preferred title for her was *Christotokos* and not *Theotokos*. The mistake that Nestorius made - and this seems to me crucial, as indicated earlier - is that he took an issue that belonged on the kerygmatic/doxological level and placed it on the speculative/rational level. This led Nestorius into problematic insights concerning the person and work of Christ, without having the necessary tools to deal with them.⁶² On the other hand the church failed to see that the issues raised by Nestorius called for deeper consideration of the adequacy of Christological terms and concepts in use at that time. No real attempt was made to listen to or understand Nestorius, and he was in fact blatantly misrepresented.

The *Theotokos* controversy culminated in a victory for Nestorius' arch-rival, Cyril of Alexandria, at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE. Here the term *Theotokos* was accepted and Nestorius was officially condemned. In terms of our agenda the theological implications of the *Theotokos* title for Mary are significant, and will receive attention in due course. For now, however, we note that the *Theotokos* issue simply served to trigger Nestorius' main concern, which was to provide a clear distinction between the two natures of Christ in the face of heretical tendencies of his time, real or imagined.⁶³ But he was also eager to maintain the unity of humanity and divinity in Christ, and was in fact merely objecting to the fusion of two natures into one. His was not strictly a “two persons” doctrine as he is accused of, but because of clumsy theology he was unable to articulate what he really believed with respect to the unity of Christ.

Nestorius was a Logos-anthropos theologian, opposed to Apollinarius and the monophysites, and thus concerned to preserve both the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. But Nestorius' two natures doctrine was also promoted to defend, not only the Biblical testimony to the full humanity of Christ (Bonhoeffer), but also the Greek notion of a wholly transcendent and impassible God, so that whilst

⁶¹ See Ch 5, pp 190ff for a fuller discussion of *Theotokos* and of the context in which Nestorius ministered

⁶² Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp 370 and 388

⁶³ *ibid*, p 380

facilitating recognition of the limitations and suffering of Christ, it could leave divinity unaffected. In effect, it was argued, this meant that Christ existed as two distinct people, one human and one divine, both with a life of their own. Nestorius' doctrine of the natures of Christ, then, was positioned at the extreme of the "two natures" spectrum, ultimately to be perceived by the Chalcedonian Fathers as beyond the boundary of orthodoxy.

Bonhoeffer's summation of the Nestorian understanding of the two natures in relation to the monophysite stance is useful in highlighting the difficulties of the respective positions.⁶⁴ For the Nestorians, notes Bonhoeffer, the idea of a substantial union between Christ's two natures was an insult to the Creator; the only union was therefore a voluntary one. Both positions (monophysite and Nestorian) in fact speak of a voluntary union - for the former, God voluntarily experienced humanity in Christ; for the latter, the man Christ entered into voluntary union with God. On the one hand, then, we have the divinisation of humanity, with Christ's human nature so swallowed up by the divine that ultimately it was expressed in identity between God and Christ. On the other we have humanity and divinity so divorced that it is not possible to conceive of a unity in the person of Christ or speak seriously of the Incarnation of God. At best we have the ethos of a servant who has elevated himself as he conformed to the will of God. Recall at this point the position of Carter Heyward regarding the voluntary relationship between Christ and God. Would she be considered a Nestorian?⁶⁵

The controversy over the natures of Christ reached a climax when the old monk, Eutyches of Constantinople declared: "My God is not of the same nature as I am. He is not an individual man, but man by nature. His body was not *soma anthropon* but *anthropinon*."⁶⁶ It seems that for Eutyches Christ's body was not made of the same substance as ours i.e. it was deified in such a way that he was no longer

⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, pp 88ff

⁶⁵ Is it not possible to understand Christ's union with God existing on two different levels? On the one level there is the hypostatic union, whilst on another there is a voluntary union. In my understanding this voluntary union would occur as a consequence of the development of relationality in the human being, Jesus. This I consider to be in line with the Irenaeian notion of recapitulation, with Christ becoming all that we are destined to be (cf Phil 2:6-11). I will show that in this latter sense the role of Mary, his mother, was crucial.

⁶⁶ Quoted by Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 90. See Eutyches Confession of Faith and the Letter of Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, to Pope Leo in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol XII, pp 34f

consubstantial to us. Eutyches was in fact eventually accused of the opposite heresy to Nestorius - that of confounding (confusing) the natures of Christ - but the monk provided the catalyst that was to set in motion the sequence of events that eventually culminated in Chalcedon.

Chalcedon: end or beginning?

“.....we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly (hu)man, the same consisting of a reasonable soul and body, of one substance with the Father as touching the manhood (humanity), like us in all things apart from sin; begotten of the Father before all ages as touching the Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as touching the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one person and one subsistence.....” ⁶⁷

When it was eventually formulated the Chalcedonian Definition, drawing heavily on the tome of Leo and letters submitted by Cyril, addressed itself both to the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, as well as to the issue of the natures of Christ. It also endorsed the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, having built on the foundations established there, in terms particularly of the humanity of Christ and the relation of the three Persons of the Trinity.

For Bonhoeffer, Chalcedon's peculiar character lies in the way it cancels itself out, showing the limitations of the very concepts it uses simply by using them. For example, it speaks of "natures", but immediately shows the concept of "natures" to be inadequate. Similarly, it demonstrates how formulae, when we speak of the Incarnation, can only be used paradoxically and in contradiction. It is, for

Bonhoeffer, no longer possible to say anything about the “substance” of Jesus Christ, or his “natures” - in other words, to ask “how?”. Rather - and here we approach the crux of Bonhoeffer’s Christology - the question to be explored in relation to Christ becomes “who?” Furthermore, he rejects the (understandable) position that Chalcedon represents a compromise solution after a prolonged and at times bitter struggle between theologians. He prefers to see it as a remarkable achievement, its negative Christology setting boundaries to what may be said about Christ, ensuring, as we noted earlier, that the mystery “is left as mystery” to be understood as such.⁶⁸ The sort of compromise that Bonhoeffer would in fact allow for accords with position of a modern exponent of the situation that pertained at Chalcedon:

It was indeed a compromise. The church finally admitted that while it must affirm that Jesus Christ was truly divine and truly human, it cannot positively assert how he could be such. It could only state, and so it did, how one should not talk about that unity.⁶⁹

Tibor Horvath makes a similar point to that of Bonhoeffer, relating the outcome of Chalcedon to the Hellenistic challenges faced by the church. What Chalcedon does, notes Horvath, is to sublimate the Aristotelian logic of “yes” or “no” by the logic of analogy, overruling the logical incompatibility of “God is God and not human” and “Christ is human and not God”. This it does by explicitly stating that at the same time that Christ is not God, but human, he is not human, but God. From now on the “either-or” is substituted with a “both-and” – not only human but also God, and not only God but also human. In this new hermeneutic Horvath identifies a universalising principle, far-reaching in its Christological implications for post-colonial sensibilities. Paradoxically (in view of Chalcedon’s overt aim of setting bounds), no worldview or system can be alien to a Christology except in its exclusion of others. There is no human language or culture in which Christology is not to be expressed, otherwise the validity of Jesus the real human being and real

⁶⁷ This translation is taken from T.H. Bindley, *Oecumenical Documents of the Faith*, Methuen, 1906. Quoted in Cornby, *How to Read Church History*, Vol. 1, p 98

⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 91

⁶⁹ Schwarz, *Christology*, p 158

God as ultimate reality and meaning is challenged.⁷⁰ This is a crucial insight, not least for those of us living in multi-cultural South Africa.

Let us now turn to Rahner's watershed essay of 1951, which – as we noted in Chapter 1 - was destined to have a lasting impact.⁷¹ As this title of Rahner's essay suggests, Rahner's concern is that the church understand the Chalcedonian formula, and indeed all dogma, not as an *end*, in the sense of all that may be said, but as a *beginning*. He laments the stagnancy of the (Catholic) church's Christological dogma, mediated in neo-Scholastic style through the deductive logic of church manuals.⁷² In speaking of Chalcedonian Christology, Rahner introduces his theme by discussing the nature of a formula, noting at the outset that every formula transcends itself, not because it is false but because it is true.⁷³ It is on this basis that he suggests that Chalcedon should be regarded not as an end but as a beginning, an emergence. In what way can this be so?

In the first place, a formula retains its significance and remains living by being expounded. Neither the abandonment of a formula nor its "preservation in a petrified form" does justice to human understanding.⁷⁴ The preservation in such a formula of something unique that has taken place once and for all, is only true historical preservation if it allows for the type of reflection that may even cause us temporarily to depart from the formula, only to return to it with renewed understanding.⁷⁵ It should be remembered, writes Rahner, that a formula does not resolve but preserves. In other words, a formula is a statement, not an explanation; the questions surrounding it remain. This leads Rahner to the interesting conclusion that controversies concerned with Christological issues (sadly lacking, he notes, in the contemporary Catholic church) are in fact a sign of vitality and faith, an indication, in other words, that people are in dialogue with the questions.

⁷⁰ Tibor Horvath, *Jesus Christ as Ultimate Reality and Meaning: A Contribution to the Hermeneutics of Conciliar Theology* (Ontario: URAM, 1994), p 28. Horvath's point has a bearing in the issue of representation, which we will consider in Ch 4.

⁷¹ Rahner's essay, under the title *Current Problems in Christology*, appears in his *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I.

⁷² See Elizabeth A. Johnson's useful analysis of Rahner's essay in *Consider Jesus*, p 19ff

⁷³ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I p 149.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p 150

Rahner went on to suggest that the problem of heresy was not the only reason for the Councils. They came about also because where there is the “theoretical precision and existential vitality” that issues from comprehending things within the whole content of personal spiritual being, new ages do not find it adequate to live on the “old clarity”. Indeed, the unique position that each of us has in history provides the perspective from which we have to consider God's eternal truths if they are to be incorporated into the totality of our personal experience.⁷⁶

Chalcedon should also be a beginning from the point of view of Biblical theology, and here Rahner introduced the notion of transcendental hermeneutics (reminiscent of Kant, Dilthey and Heidegger): the acknowledgement that the church's Christological dogma can never claim to be an adequate condensation of Biblical teaching. This suggests that we cannot imagine the Chalcedonian formula as a summary of *everything* we can know about Christ from Scripture. There *must* be more to say if we're talking about the inexhaustible riches of God's presence with us. There are passages in the New Testament that present a different picture of Christ from that contained in the Chalcedonian formula. For example, the Synoptic gospels and also, albeit expressing it slightly differently, Paul, suggest that Jesus becomes Lord in the course of his life, death and resurrection (e.g. “he humbled himself.... And therefore God has highly exalted him... etc” - Phil.2:6-11). Is such theology made obsolete by the Chalcedonian doctrine of metaphysical Sonship?, enquires Rahner. Or is it perhaps only made *apparently* obsolete because of the limited way in which we understand and express Christological truth in the Chalcedonian formula? Is the first formulation (Scripture) merely primitive and, especially in terms of its messianic language, specifically related to the Jews? Or does it say with a clarity that eludes classical Christology something about the connection between Christ as a manifestation of God and the way in which this manifestation occurs (born of a woman, etc)? It is in this context that Rahner questioned the actual nature of Christ's mediatorship, warning that a Christology which fails to grasp these connections would be in danger of becoming a mythology.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p 150 and 153

⁷⁶ *ibid*, Vol.I, p 153

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p 154-6

Rahner is dealing with critical issues here. At the heart of what he suggested is the multi-levelled nature of Christian truth. Chalcedon represents the definitive, undergirding and overarching truth about Christ. Furthermore, we are speaking here of “non-verifiable knowledge, requiring an openness, generally described as a *sacrificium intellectus*.”⁷⁸ This is an article of faith, which evokes – or should evoke – a doxological rather than a speculative response from us. It is in this sense the *cantus firmus* of the Christian faith, the recurring theme that holds everything together. But beneath this are other levels, those in which we seek to relate this Christ to existential reality.

I am intrigued by the parallels between, or perhaps complementarity of, Bonhoeffer’s and Rahner’s assessments of Chalcedon. Both, approaching in a sense from opposite directions (Protestant and Catholic respectively), and responding to different situations, nevertheless suggested something essentially the same. Both would hold to the mystery of the Incarnation, acknowledged in the Chalcedonian formula. Both, similarly, would contend that all a Christian (or the church) can say about Christ should be within the parameters set by Chalcedon. Yet both issued the imperative that we go beyond Chalcedon – Bonhoeffer with his famous, and oft-discussed question, “who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?” and Rahner by his insistence that a formula retains its significance by remaining living, by being expounded. The aim of this dissertation is to do precisely this – to seek new clarity on who Jesus Christ is and needs to be, for us, in our “unique position in history” at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Let us take up once more Elizabeth Johnson’s comments on Rahner’s essay, introduced in the previous chapter. Johnson goes on to suggest that the stimulus of 1951, later bolstered by Vatican II (1962-5), encouraged the church to consider afresh the question “Who do you say that I am?” in the context of the modern world. Johnson goes on to identify three shifts in the modern intellectual history of Europe that have had a particular influence on Catholic theology, and therefore on Christology, since the 1951 commemoration.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, p 42

⁷⁹ Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, pp 12ff

The first shift is identified with the name of Immanuel Kant, and places the attention squarely on the human person as a free subject in the process of becoming, so that correspondingly human experience becomes an important norm for human knowing.⁸⁰ This brings into question (especially significant for Catholics) the dominance of authority and tradition, and gives rise to an interest in the founding experiences of the faith, most notably in Jesus as a genuine human subject with his own personal traits and life story. One of Rahner's calls, representing one level of the Christological truth, is precisely for renewed attention to the *human* life of Jesus in order to understand him as redeemer - a theme central to this thesis.

A second shift involves a turn to the negativity of so much human experience - the Holocaust, for example, or colonialism, the greed of capitalism, apartheid, the ecological crisis, to which we could add the recent genocides - all of which have evoked a new sensitivity both to the irrational and to human pathology, individual and social. The Christological impact of this shift, suggests Johnson, is a recovery of the relevance of Jesus' ministry and particularly the social and political implications of his preaching on the reign of God. I would, in continuity with the line taken by Johnson, explore the possibility of an alternative Christological paradigm that dethrones the hegemonic, triumphalist motif that has characterised Christian history. It is here that the notion of a Christology "from within", sanctifying all of life, and operating out of a position of apparent weakness, seems apposite. Mc Fague, basing her judgements on Teilhard's essay, "Cosmic Life" in *Writings in a Time of War*,⁸¹ calls for a holistic paradigm, integral to which is a sensibility to the notions of interrelation and interconnections - both of which I will show to be accommodated in my paradigm.⁸²

A third shift involves globalisation. Christologically, such a shift in consciousness gives rise inevitably to questions relating to the notion of Christ's uniqueness in the context of encounter with other world religions, posing a challenge to our understanding of mission. I would add to this the Christological questions, subject

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Consider Jesus* p 12

⁸¹ Trans. By Rene Hague (London: William Collins Sons, 1968) p 25. See Mc Fague, *Models of God*, p 9

⁸² And both of which, in Jesus' own life, were given with stimulus by his mother, facilitator of his first experience of relationality.

of much contemporary discourse, relating to post-colonialism, particularly insofar as cultural sensitivity in relation to Christianity is concerned. Is there a way, or are there ways, of understanding Christ that capture the essence of what Chalcedon requires but at the same time incorporate meaningful epistemological elements of a particular context – reflecting less of the Western model/s which have dominated up to now? This is where we see the relevance of Küng's question (and where Rahner's concession to overstepping the boundaries for a time if need be) might conceivably come into play. Must we indeed demand that Muslims or Jews or Africans accept the Hellenistic Councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon?⁸³ These Councils dealt with Christological issues that emerged from within the context of Hellenism. Would the issues threatening to Christianity be the same in these other contexts? These are vital questions which need to be addressed in any Christological study, even if we eventually return to the universal validity of Chalcedon, precisely because what is contained in its Definition transcends the human dynamics which on one level gave rise to the debates in the first place.

Against this background we consider the central problem identified by Rahner, Balthasar and others during Chalcedon's anniversary celebration. This was not with the confession itself but the way the dogma had come to be taught and understood. For theology had forgotten the mystery of salvation which was being safeguarded in the language of this doctrine, and had made its concepts too clear and its ideas too distinct. In terms of Christ's natures, the fact was overlooked that these categories point to a mysterious reality – “a holy mystery, a class by itself, and in no way comparable to human or any other kind of nature.”⁸⁴ Here, as elsewhere, we hear the voice of Bonhoeffer in that of Rahner. Too often those speaking of Christ's two natures – including theologians – implicitly thought of each one comprising 50% of the whole picture. Whereas Chalcedon, defying all human logic, had actually confessed the divine/human ratio as being 100/100.⁸⁵ With Luther, Bonhoeffer would say, ‘You should point to the whole man Jesus and say, “That is God.”’⁸⁶

⁸³ Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions*, p 129

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, p 20

⁸⁵ *ibid*

⁸⁶ Quoted by Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 81

It seems to me that, far from being of service to us at this point, the logic-words partnership to which the Western mind is so attuned, ultimately becomes a stumbling block. Rahner and his contemporaries are reflecting on Catholic experience. In this respect the Protestant situation is little different, albeit the words and even the logic may at times differ. Is there any other way that we can approach the mystery of Christ's two natures, allowing, with Bonhoeffer, the mystery to remain as mystery, yet at the same time satisfying our need to understand more about the "who?" we are encountering in Christ?

Jeremy Begbie provides fascinating insights in his regard, suggesting that music has theological powers which frequently transcend the power of words. Indeed, notes Begbie, there are those who consider music to be intrinsically superior to words, with one stream of nineteenth century thought going so far as to contend that music is the ultimate key to the metaphysical momentum of the universe. A particularly illuminating insight derives from the contrast between the effect of visual and aural conceptions of space, with the emphasis falling on music's ability to mix sounds. In terms of the former, Begbie shows how in visual images there is often merging or hiding (blocking), and therefore indistinction - for example, when two colours occupy the same space on a canvas. With sound, on the other hand, when two notes are played on the piano or are sung together, neither need exclude or hide the other. In fact, each remains clearly distinguishable. This means that when people experience the mixture of sounds like this, they are introduced to a kind of space in which things do not exclude or obscure each other, but interpenetrate while being perceived as distinct. Begbie, using the Trinity as an example, goes further to speak of the intractable problems that have arisen because the church has too quickly capitulated to visual conceptions of space, whereas the audible order of sound enables the interpenetration of three (persons of the Trinity) without exclusion or merger, and opens out a much more adequate conceptuality. In the context of our present discussion, the relevance of this musical analogy is obvious in helping us to accept the possibility (note: not "understand the reality"), even given the limits of our human capacities, of how Christ can be 100/100 divine and human.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ See Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The points made here were also used as illustrations in seminars conducted by Begbie in Cape Town, September 1999.

In contrast to the Quest, Chalcedon approaches the Incarnation from the perspective of faith, retaining the mystery intrinsic to it. Yet we should not misunderstand the concern of Chalcedon. The contrast does not lie in the notion that whilst the Quest concerns itself with the Jesus of history, Chalcedon is dealing with the Christ of faith. On the contrary, Chalcedon treats both the historical and the kerygmatic with equal seriousness. Indeed, the dogmatic formula of Chalcedon is grounded in historical fact - his conception and birth of a woman, and references to the physical and political dimensions of his death at the hands of Pilate. We saw how in the long run the Quest led to a similar conclusion regarding the necessary interaction between the historical and kerygmatic. The difference lies rather in the respective starting points of the two approaches to Christ and Christology, the one speculative and deductive, the other the declaration of a mystery which, in any subsequent Christological discourse, should both remain intact, setting bounds to what may be said.

Essentially Chalcedon has to do with the humanity of Christ because without humanity the notion of Incarnation cancels itself out. Of particular relevance for our purposes, then, is Chalcedon's declaration of Christ's birth of a woman, who through this, was designated "mother of God." The aim of this chapter has been to establish that humanity dogmatically, taking into account that this human being was also "the Word become flesh." It is against the background of these first two chapters that move on to explore further the humanity of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

FULLY HUMAN, FULLY REDEMPTIVE

*What God has already expressed or given of himself
in the pattern of the created order reaches its culmination
in the life of Christ, who fully expressed that design for
humanity in the divine image of which he is such a perfect
reflection¹*

My use of the expression Christology “from within” suggests a Christology, or rather a Christ, who emerges from deep within life. The idea of emergence is significant, alluding to God’s creative Word assuming physical form, not as an incursion from above or from without, nor as the “transmutation of a highest being,”² but as the becoming visible and tangible of the very integrating principle of life. In this, Christ does not bring anything new that was not intrinsically there before, coming rather both as testimony to the full potential latent within all life, and as the catalyst that frees creation to reach that potential. The Word made flesh, then, is “no mere miraculous incursion of divine power, essentially unconnected to the pre-existing pattern of the human creation” - there was already latent in Adam an “integrating focus”.³ Yet paradoxically it is also true to say that Christ was indeed a new creation of God, in whom we are elected to be part of that same new creation. Viewed differently, Christology “from within” is consistent with the orthodox understanding of the descending character of the Incarnation. In fact, this paradigm, taking Christ back to embryonic life in his mother’s womb (life at its most vulnerable), intensifies the sense of mystery in the “Word made flesh”, as articulated by Chalcedon.

¹ David Brown and Ann Loades, *Christ the Sacramental Word* (London: SPCK, 1996) p 3. Barth expresses something very similar: “He (Christ) is Himself the work of God in and on the world, and the Word in which this work declares itself to the world” (*Church Dogmatics* IV, 3, p 711).

² Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, edited by Carl E Braaten (London: SCM, 1968) p 46

³ Aidan Nichols on von Balthasar re. Irenaeus, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998) p 69

In terms of his humanity, I accept Jesus Christ to be the person *par excellence*, the person who is all that a human being is destined to be and therefore has the potential to become. In other words, Jesus is a (the) self-actualised human being. I do not limit this fulfilled potential to human life alone. It is my contention that Jesus, by beginning his earthly life as the fusion of two cells and growing - as every person does - through each evolutionary stage and state of life, first as an embryo and then as a rapidly developing foetus, brings fulfilment and/or redemption to all of creation as well. Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his exposition of Irenaeus' theology, expresses this in his assertion that the Word made flesh has the power to "give every emergent thing scope within itself to bring it to its own fullness" .⁴ This belongs to the cosmic dimension of the Incarnation, something Paul was able to grasp when he claimed that "in him all fullness dwells" (Col 1:19) and "in him all things hold together (cohere) and have their proper place" (Col 1:17). Or, in Balthasar's words again, we might speak of the "integrating power of Christ."⁵

In this sense Christ does not introduce anything essentially new. If he comes to bring to fulfilment that which God destined from the beginning, then it follows that there must be some sort of continuity between creation and redemption. Christ comes to make real that which existed before as (impaired) potential. Furthermore, human creation and redemption cannot be separated from that of the rest of the created order. In fact, the creation is the vehicle in which humankind is carried - or, to use a more organic metaphor, the womb which gives it life. Yet as surely as we claim that in Christ nothing is essentially new, just as surely - and here lies the paradox - in Christ everything is new! Every birth is something new and distinct; each person is more than the sum of genetic material received from both parents. Similarly, in Christ there is a new creation.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1984) p 52

⁵ *ibid*, p 53

A notion which strikes me as particularly useful for this understanding of Christ is that of recapitulation, emerging out of the early Patristic tradition, notably in the theology of Irenaeus. Taking up Paul's notion in Romans 13:9, and using Ephesians 1:10, Irenaeus' central contention is articulated, as we have seen, by Gregory of Nazianzus: "that which has not been assumed (by Christ) cannot be redeemed."⁶ The Incarnation - the becoming fully human of Christ - is therefore pivotal to Irenaeus' theology in respect of the redemption of humankind. Jesus Christ takes on (assumes) every phase and every aspect of human life, but whereas we fail in reaching our destiny, Christ is successful. In other words, everything that God intended us to be is recapitulated and therefore recovered, redeemed, *and made new* in him. The coming of Christ as recapitulator is for Irenaeus the very basis, not only of our redemption, but the redemption of the whole cosmos as well.⁷

It is not without certain misgivings that I turn to Irenaeus. For one thing, he is an exponent of the ransom theory of the atonement, which, because of its dualistic basis, is problematical.⁸ Then, insofar as his Eve-Mary contrast would help to pave the way for what was to become a "not-so-thinly veiled masculine condemnation of feminine sexuality,"⁹ I clearly have a further problem. This leads also to the observation that Irenaeus' context understandably sets bounds to his comprehension of what it means to be fully human. For example, he lived at a time when the role of a man and a woman in procreation was, wilfully or otherwise (given the misogynist position of the Fathers), not well understood. Reflecting a patriarchal milieu, the belief was that only the male played a part in passing on life (soul) to the unborn child. The female merely gave it flesh, whilst the entire being of the child was believed to be present in the sperm of the male (humuncleos).¹⁰

⁶ Bettensen, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p 64

⁷ cf Romans 8: 18ff. See Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 45

⁸ See Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor: An historical study of the three main types of the idea of the Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1965) pp 16-35 for an exposition of Irenaeus' understanding of the Atonement.

⁹ John Spong, *Born of a Woman* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992) p 211

¹⁰ Spong, p 10. Ruether provides some interesting background to this paradigm, which reflects the Hellenistic roots of much Christian dogma. Aristotle developed the view of female impotency

This means that for Irenaeus and others it was quite possible - indeed imperative (because sin, belonging to the "spiritual" dimension of humankind, was also passed on through the male) - for Jesus to have no human father but still to be fully human. This understanding of humanity would today be questioned – even though the belief persisted for centuries.¹¹ A further area of limitation concerns Irenaeus' cosmology, particularly his acceptance of the historicity of Adam, Eve and the Fall. This enables Irenaeus to do something impossible for us: to ground his understanding of the Incarnation in a series of direct analogies or parallels (with which I will deal later), beginning with Adam and Christ. In addition to this, even given the bounds of his context Irenaeus is not entirely consistent with his own teaching. He stops short of a thoroughgoing recapitulation in Jesus Christ, a grasp of which would have been available to him even in a second or third century context.¹²

Nevertheless, Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation is a useful tool with which to forge a Christology that meets the criterion of a Christ who comes from deep within life, both as its critique from within and as the one who puts right what has gone awry. Here we see demonstrated in Christ how God's grace is synonymous with God's judgement; how God's medium of creation becomes its means of redemption. Irenaeus' stress on the full humanity of Jesus Christ - that is, on a thoroughgoing incarnation – lies at the heart of his theology. This is as crucial today albeit in different circumstances as it was to Irenaeus. It is not surprising then to find that many theologians since Irenaeus, recognising the significance of Christ's humanity, have built on the foundations of the recapitulation doctrine,

suggested in Athena's speech in the *Eumenides*. Here, procreative or generative power belongs solely to the male seed. The female herself actually comes about through a maternal failure of sorts: female matter is not fully formed by the male potency (hence the "misbegotten male"), resulting in a defective being, "lacking in full rationality, moral will, and physical strength, and thus unsuited to autonomy" (Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, pp 729-775 and *Politics*, p 1254). In line with the Hebrew myths, Aristotle thus deprives femaleness of generative power, demoting them to being "passive receivers and/or subverters of a transcendent male potency" (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982) p 184)

¹¹ cf Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* III.31.5 and III.28.1 and 3. Cited by Robinson, p 50.

¹² For example, whilst Irenaeus lays much store by Jesus' obedience and temptations, and also to human growth, he does not give specific attention to the childhood of Jesus in terms of his own human development, growth and relationality.

even when they have not specifically named it as such. They have done so from the vantage points of their own historical and theological locations.

Balthasar, for example, sets out a more contemporary account of the necessity of Jesus' humanity, reflecting a somewhat updated understanding of what it means to be human. A penetrating and deeply significant insight of Balthasar is found in his honed attention to the significance of Jesus' childhood. According to Balthasar, a perfected (read mature, fulfilled) human being is paradoxically always a "spiritual child", being perpetually renewed by the spirit.¹³ Balthasar quite logically appeals to Jesus' own oft-repeated exhortation to people to accept little children, to become like them, and even to be born again - because "of such is the Kingdom of heaven."¹⁴ To this point I will return in due course.

With fascinating insight Bonhoeffer, notably in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, weaves the notion of recapitulation, which he described as a "magnificent conception",¹⁵ into his theology. Most of Bonhoeffer's later Christological reflection took place in the context of his extended incarceration in Nazi Germany and this is reflected in the aspects of recapitulation that he emphasises. Bonhoeffer draws attention to three points relating to this theme, bolstering his refrain of Christ as centre. These are brought together in one particular passage of a letter written to Eberhard Bethge from prison a week before Christmas in 1943.¹⁶ First, as recapitulator Christ "will bring again" things that we "have missed", in the sense that nothing is lost in Christ. Second, that which is recapitulated in Christ will not only be restored but transformed. In other words, there is a distinct eschatological dimension in Bonhoeffer. Third, in this same passage Bonhoeffer specifically warns against "sublimation", a spiritualising and

¹³ "...for us the Word of God was *made a child like us (coinfantiatum)*, not now so that we could win back Adam's threatened childhood, but... that we might become the 'synthetic child' " (Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol II, p 86. See also Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad*, p 72)

¹⁴ See for example Matthew 18:1-6; John 3: 3ff

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p 170

¹⁶ *ibid*, pp 169f

denial of the flesh, drawing attention to the difference between sublimation and restoration in the Spirit.

A still more contemporary and somewhat less orthodox exposition of Jesus' humanity is to be found in J.A.T. Robinson, who discourses at length about how the destiny of humankind is fulfilled in the person, Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁷ Robinson supports, but goes beyond, Irenaeus in his understanding both of the necessity of Jesus' humanity and what it means to be human. Particular attention is paid to the psychological and moral development of Jesus as an integral part of his humanity - indispensable for Christ to have been "fully human". Robinson quotes J.H. Newman's insight that in this life, to be human is to change often - but unlike Newman, Robinson applies this insight to Jesus himself.¹⁸

I do not consider it co-incidental that it is women who have communicated to me most graphically what it means for Jesus to have been fully human, drawing out the meaning of thoroughgoing recapitulation in Christ. The implications of the Incarnation are frequently woven into their entire work, testimony to the current appreciation of body life, a theme closely connected to eco-consciousness.¹⁹ It is interesting to note how the ancient Goddess traditions are often an integral part of such work. I have drawn also on the work of women who, whilst representing a more orthodox approach nevertheless do not shy away from the implications of Jesus being "fully human". Among these are Margaret Magdalen, who draws on the fruits of contemporary interdisciplinary research in setting out to explore what this meant for Christ.²⁰ Weaving in and out of the various dimensions of Jesus' context, Magdalen paints for us a picture of the implications of full humanity for his earthly life, not least for those close to him, and notably his mother. With a blend of scholarly acumen and creative speculation, Magdalen enters the social,

¹⁷ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 80. Quoting J.H. Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Longman's, 1848) p 40

¹⁹ I cite Sallie McFague and Rosemary Radford Ruether as obvious examples here. See McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1993) and Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

religious and psychological worlds of Jesus. Of specific interest to me is the attention paid to the pre- and neo-natal life of Jesus, which of course is closely intertwined - both physically and emotionally - with that of Mary his mother. I do, however, find my views diverging from those of Magdalen (and, for that matter, Balthasar) at one significant point, that concerning the virgin conception of Jesus. Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Anne Thurston, both introduced to this discussion already, have also provided invaluable resources for an appreciation of what it means to be human. The insights of these and other women will be integral to the development of a Christology "from within".

I have found echoes, and some direct references, to Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine in the work of several other scholars as well, for example Pannenberg. Their insights deserve to be woven into the dialogue that I hope to establish with those already mentioned. What is striking about recapitulation is that we are dealing here with a highly nuanced concept, able to expand to include every dimension of reality. The implications contained in the notion go beyond anything Irenaeus himself could have envisaged. In dialogue with Irenaeus and others I therefore wish to recover this concept in a marriage of orthodox Christian tradition and a contemporary understanding of life, especially human life.

There are several layers to my method of dealing with Irenaeus. In the first place, I will try to allow him to speak for himself, in a pre-critical way, acknowledging that he does not have the advantage of contemporary insights. I recognise that in this I cannot be entirely successful because there is inevitably selection as I decide what to use of him. Second, I will go on to approach Irenaeus in a critical way, in ways that go beyond him but - again in a critical sense - in continuity with him. Where does this continuity lie? It lies in the *hermeneutical decision forced on Irenaeus by his context*. Irenaeus' concern, as we shall see, was to defend Christ's humanity against the docetic teaching of Gnosticism. For Irenaeus our redemption is contingent on Christ's assumption of our full humanity. In a similar way it is

²⁰ *The Hidden Face of Jesus* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1994)

Christ's humanity, and with it an enquiry into what it is that constitutes "full humanity", that is the agenda of this dissertation. We saw in the discussion of Chalcedon that docetic tendencies persist in Christology today, allowing for distortions which have a negative impact on Christian praxis. What we share with Irenaeus, then, is that our context helps to shape our hermeneutic. The suggestion that the continuing relevance of Irenaeus' theology lies precisely in the fact that it emerged from his grappling with the concrete situations he faced, issues a challenge in terms of our own theological reflection. A corresponding area of continuity with Irenaeus insofar as my own approach is concerned is to accept the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments both as foundational and normative for the Christian faith. It was true for Irenaeus, and no less so for us, that a relevant Christology is able to grow out of the interplay between context and scripture. The "method within the method" for this critical approach is to enter dialogue with others who themselves use or echo Irenaeus, (and whose own contexts helped to shape their theology) examining how they use him (Bonhoeffer, von Balthasar, etc). Third, will I add my own reflections on Irenaeus and recapitulation, taking the doctrine further in the direction in which I perceive it to be logically headed, recovering and reworking various themes within it for their contemporary relevance. In particular I will focus on the one who was the mediator of Christ's humanity – Mary, his mother.

Irenaeus himself was not an original thinker. He nevertheless had the remarkable ability to co-ordinate the thought of his predecessors, collating all that belonged to the primitive period (the Old and New Testament scriptures, the various parts of the New Testament itself, together with the various authorities of the church) into a single harmonious whole.²¹ In a word, Irenaeus regarded himself as custodian of the apostolic tradition. To Irenaeus tradition did not comprise a collection of beliefs, "but a means of living contact with the sources of life, indeed

²¹ Gustav Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959) p xvi

with the Life himself".²² The reality of this becomes evident as one reads Irenaeus, and it is this which led Balthasar to say of him that "his utterance derives not from academic or pious knowledge, but from a creative sight of the glowing central core."²³ This, as we shall see, becomes eminently clear in his use of the concept recapitulation, with which he attempts to embody in a single term the whole biblical proclamation concerning Christ. Whilst it should be noted that Irenaeus is not always clear in his exposition, at times raising speculative issues which are refuted by "reasoning in which rhetoric is stronger than logic",²⁴ he has had a lasting impact as the most quoted Christian writer of the period after the New Testament and before Augustine.

The fact that Irenaeus' theology grew out of a situation of intense pastoral engagement - something reflected in the practical concern of his writings - undoubtedly contributed to his effectiveness as a theologian.²⁵ Indeed, it has been suggested that Irenaeus' greatness appears all the more clearly when one realises how fully it was by concentration on the problems of his own day that he made his permanent contribution to Christian thought.²⁶ Irenaeus ministered at a time when Christianity was still an outlawed religion in the Roman Empire, and this meant fierce persecution of Christians.²⁷ Then, as an Easterner working in the West, Irenaeus was uniquely able to bring to his theology a blend of insights and elements from both the emerging Eastern and Western traditions. Of significance, too - and bolstering, it seems to me, the credibility afforded by his pastoral engagement - is the fact that Irenaeus' mind was set in a strongly biblical cast,

²² Cyril C. Richardson *et al*, *Early Christian Fathers*, Vol 1 (London: SCM, 1953) p 350

²³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol. II, pp 31f

²⁴ Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p 344

²⁵ Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor around 130 CE, and worked in the "overseas mission field" as priest and later bishop (178 CE) of Lugdunum (later to become Lyons) in the south of France. Lugdunum, dubbed the "little Rome", was a thriving metropolis, a city of both strategic and commercial importance that had been established in 43 BCE as a Roman military colony. In time it attracted people - and hence ideas, culture and religion - from diverse parts of the Roman Empire. It is a combination of this context, his response to it, and his personal gifts that help to set Irenaeus apart as one of the great theologians of the early patristic period.

²⁶ Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p 344

reflecting an unspeculative Hebraic mind. This feature is evidenced, for example, in the fact that Irenaeus, whilst uncompromising on the reality of both Jesus' humanity and his divinity, never attempted to explain *how* this might be so. Some might contend on this score that the practical demands of his context left little time for the luxury of speculation, although it is also possible that (as Chalcedon would do some centuries later) Irenaeus accepted the need to allow the mystery of the Incarnation to remain as mystery.

The theological milieu of Irenaeus' ministry was that of Gnosticism,²⁸ and it was from within this context that as a pastor he set out to defend the Christian faith of his flock against heretical teachings. This he does in a number of works, the most important of which is his *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies), in which Irenaeus reveals a profound knowledge of the Gnostic traditions he sought to counter. The significance of the Gnostic setting of Irenaeus' pastoring and reflection cannot be overstated if we are to appreciate his Christology. This milieu determines the two-fold backdrop to well nigh everything he has to say. In the first place, Irenaeus is at pains to identify the ultimate God - the God of our salvation - with the Creator.²⁹ In the second place, and allied to the previous point, Irenaeus demonstrates the intricate involvement of this God with the creaturely (physical) order. It is not surprising then that he should be concerned to articulate his understanding of Christ in a way that most clearly conveys the twin notions that in Jesus Christ it was *God* who became a real *human being*; the Creator, from within the creation, rose up as a part of it. The significance of this can be grasped only with an understanding of some of the key elements of Gnostic teaching, which, as we saw

²⁷ Indeed, Pothinus, the bishop whom Irenaeus succeeded, died in the persecution of 177 (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p 411)

²⁸ For an account of Valentinian Gnosis as encountered by Irenaeus, see Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol II, p 33ff. Irenaeus' own description of this system is found in *Against Heresies* I.i - viii. The edition of *Against Heresies* with which I am working is Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). On occasions, particularly when referring to other commentators, different editions may be cited.

²⁹ *Against Heresies*, II.ii.4; II.iii.1; IV. vi. 2.

in the discussion of Chalcedon, would continue over an extended period to have an impact on theological thought.

Although Gnosticism manifested itself in a variety of forms, the Gnostic systems³⁰ were nevertheless held together by a number of essential tenets, the most relevant for this discussion being contained in the points which follow. One common feature of the Gnostic systems is that they found orthodox Christianity, with its straightforward creed, too simple. They offered a far more complex answer to the riddles of the universe. The Gnostics embraced a thoroughgoing dualism in their understanding of the relationship between God and the physical creation. God is spiritual and therefore good. Matter is physical and therefore evil. God could therefore have no direct dealings with the material order - least of all as Creator. Creation took place at the hands of one of the lower level emanations from God, known as demiurges. Salvation, in terms of Gnostic understanding, was to be found in freeing oneself as far as possible from the physical world and entering a plane of spiritual being, access to which was gained by special initiation. This, of course, categorised people as inferior and superior. Essentially our humanity is something from which a person sought deliverance in order to be saved. Clearly then, for Gnostics the idea of the Incarnation was an absurdity.

Such belief systems obviously had an impact on Christology, piercing its very heart - which explains Irenaeus' overriding concern to provide an adequate counter. The Gnostic attack on orthodox Christology was two-pronged: either Jesus was a real human being and therefore not God, or he was God and not a real human being, but rather an apparition. For Irenaeus (and others) the Christian faith was held together by the reality of the eternal Word of God made human. In this way Irenaeus anticipated the concerns of the ecumenical Councils. The Gnostic attack encountered by Irenaeus undermined primarily the humanity of

³⁰ Grillmeier notes that in contrast to the older "material" forms of Gnosticism, these systems had an experiential element which stirred the world of the time more and more, and manifested itself in pagan, Jewish, Jewish-Christian and Christian forms (Grillmeier, p 80). See also Balthasar, *GL II*,

Jesus, and it was in reaction to this that his doctrine of recapitulation was developed.

Irenaeus on Recapitulation

“But when he was incarnate and became a human being, he recapitulated in himself (*in seipso recapitulavit*) the long history of the human race, obtaining salvation for us, so that we might regain in Jesus Christ what we had lost in Adam, that is, being in the image and likeness of God (*secundum imaginem et similitudinem esse Dei*)”³¹

For Irenaeus Christ is the turning point of history. Christ's work has a double character - that of banishing sin and death on the one hand, and of establishing new life for humankind on the other. It is in order to explain what happened in Christ that Irenaeus makes use of the term recapitulation (*anakephalaiosis*). This expression is found in Roman 13:9 (“that which was contained in the Law in many parts, is now summed up (recapitulated) in the one law of love”) and in Ephesians 1:10 (“... a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up (recapitulate) all things in Christ”). Although this concept was referred to by Justin, it was Irenaeus who exploited the possibilities contained in it.

Before considering Irenaeus' appropriation of recapitulation let us look briefly at the background of this term. It derives in Greek from the substantive *kephalion* meaning the chief point or summary, and translates into Latin as the noun *capitulum* (head), the sense of which is “that which is the whole being of a thing”. The *capitulum* is the whole which contains the parts, and in which the parts have unity. The verb form of the Latin translation has the sense of “to collect together

pp 33-42; Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp 344-6; and Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp 22-8

again.³² The term enjoyed currency outside the New Testament in both secular and religious settings.³³ In terms of its secular usage, it denoted what is first, supreme or extreme; what is prominent, outstanding and determinative - meaning that a person's head (*capitulum*) is not just one member among others but also the first and chief member that determines all the others. Significantly, it also denoted the "whole man", the "person" - so that in the *capitulum* we in fact meet the person. Similar usage is adopted in the Septuagint.³⁴

In Hellenistic and Gnostic circles the term had special significance, influenced by speculations concerning the aeon and the first man-redeemer. In a Gnostic adaptation of other aeon myths in Gnosticism, the concepts and vocabulary associated with *capitulum* are put in the service of this first man-redeemer myth, which is anthropologically-soteriologically orientated. Here the concept of *capitulum* paradoxically contains both an element of basic superiority over the body and also unity with it.³⁵

Within the New Testament itself *capitulum* is used to refer both to the literal head, for example Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3ff in relation to propriety in worship, and (especially) to a woman covering her head. In the same passage Paul uses the term in a dual sense to refer as well to man as "head" (*capitulum*) of the woman.³⁶ But the term assumes decisive significance in Ephesians and Colossians when it is used in the context of the relationship between Christ and the church.

³¹ *Against Heresies*, III.xviii.1 (The version quoted here is from *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 211, ed. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 342.1-344.13). I use this alternative translation at this point because of its clarity in articulating the essence of recapitulation.

³² Heinrich Schlier in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p 675

³³ *ibid*, pp 673ff

³⁴ John Lawson, citing Gustav Molwitz, in *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: Epworth Press, 1948) p 140

³⁵ Schlier in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, pp 676f

³⁶ *ibid*, p 680

All these nuances in meaning, which make the term “rich in allusion and significance”³⁷ are important. Given its New Testament usage, together with the broader links particularly in secular life and in Gnosticism, it is not surprising that Irenaeus recognised the potential in the concept as a means of articulating his understanding of the gospel for his particular audience. It helps to explain how Irenaeus is able to use the same notion of recapitulation to refer both to Christ as Head and as the one who repeats what has gone before in order to gather it all together. It also explains how he can use the term to denote that this gathering together is not merely a summing up of the original, but makes a qualitative difference as well. This means that the recapitulation leads to more than what originally was, with the prominent element sometimes being not the repetition, but the affirmation and confirmation implied in it.³⁸

Lawson notes that Irenaeus exercises a certain liberty in his use of this Pauline term. For Irenaeus the fundamental meaning of recapitulation is “going over the ground again” (repetition) - but it is never *only* repetition, always something more. Its essence lies in the fact that as recapitulator Christ went through all the same stages of life as Adam (he covered the same ground as Adam), but with the opposite result, bringing it all to a successful conclusion. Applying this concept to every aspect of Jesus’ life, for Irenaeus the Incarnation “sums up” (recapitulates) what God has always been doing for people.³⁹ By the same token Christ sums up (recapitulates) all that humanity is destined to be for God. As we have noted, a cornerstone of Irenaeus’ understanding of redemption in Christ is that what has not been assumed (by Christ) cannot be redeemed (in us):

“...on what basis could we be sharers in adoption as God’s sons?

We had to receive, though the Son’s agency, participation in him.

The word, having been made flesh, had to share himself with us.

³⁷ *ibid*, p 681

³⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V, xxix, 2 and III, xxi, 10. Quoted by Schlier in Kittel, p 682

³⁹ This brings to mind the Hegelian notion of the Incarnation as the concretisation of what always was – the intrinsic becoming extrinsic. See Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, pp 152f.

*That is why he went through every stage of human life, restoring to all of them communion with God*⁴⁰

The significance of this is profound, collectively and historically. Bonhoeffer is helpful in drawing attention to the broader dimensions of recapitulation in Christ. Referring back to the discussion in Chapter 1 on the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, we note that Bonhoeffer is unyielding in his commitment to the historical concreteness of Jesus, and not just to his historically redemptive benefits. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer places great weight on God's becoming human as the decisive event in history – the axis on which world history turns. Bonhoeffer connects the embodiment of God in creaturely form with the cosmic efficacy of redemption.⁴¹ "If God in Jesus Christ", writes Bonhoeffer, "claims space in the world... then in this narrow space He comprises together the whole reality of the world at once and reveals the ultimate basis of this reality."⁴² This, according to Charles Marsh in discussing Bonhoeffer, is precisely what Irenaeus understands by recapitulation: "When Irenaeus uses the term *recapitulation* he intends to denote that the entire scope of creation is gathered up into the Incarnation of God."⁴³

The extent of this great paradox of the Incarnation is captured by Richard Crashaw, a metaphysical poet of the Baroque period:

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span!
Summer in Winter, Day in Night!
Heaven in earth, and God in man!
Great little One! Whose all-embracing birth

⁴⁰ *Against Heresies* III. xviii.7. See also III. ix. (italics mine)

⁴¹ Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of his Theology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) pp102f

⁴² Quoted by Marsh, p 101 (cf Julian of Norwich's "hazelnut" experience – see Ch 5, p 213).

⁴³ Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 104

Lifts Earth to Heaven, stoops Heaven to Earth ⁴⁴

Irenaeus describes how Christ became an infant for infants, hallowing our birth by his birth; a child for children; a youth for youth, etc, “not despising or evading any condition of humanity”.⁴⁵ Then also, “He became what we are in order to enable us to become what he is”,⁴⁶ and on a similar note, “He who was the Son of God became the Son of Man, that man might become the Son of God.”⁴⁷ As Wingren points out, for Irenaeus Jesus was much more than the bearer to earth of some mysterious substance. Indeed, in the birth of Jesus the very *source of life is made manifest* - and it is thus that in Irenaeus’ thought Creation and Incarnation are held together.⁴⁸ This, of course, is what lies at the heart of a Christology “from within”, and will be developed further as we proceed. What I will show, in developing this paradigm, is that Mary plays a pivotal role in the Incarnation, not least because it was in her womb and with her consent that, in Charles Wesley’s words, we find “God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man”.⁴⁹

We come now to the crux of the doctrine of recapitulation. Irenaeus understood Jesus’ full humanity both to be essential for salvation and to necessitate him passing through, or taking on (assuming), every experience that is common to humankind. On the basis of this Irenaeus is able to apply the notion of recapitulation to every aspect of Christian doctrine, orientating it to the consummation. This theme therefore recurs throughout his writings. Furthermore, for Irenaeus Christ has been recapitulator from the very moment of his birth and there has not been a time since then (nor will there be until redemption is complete) that he has not been active in creation as recapitulator.

⁴⁴ Richard Crashaw, “The Shepherd’s Hymn” in *The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1950*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) p 314. Quoted by Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 51

⁴⁵ *Against Heresies* II.xxii.4.

⁴⁶ *Against Heresies* V. Preface. Cited in Kelly p 172

⁴⁷ *Against Heresies* III.ix.1

⁴⁸ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, pp 83f

⁴⁹ Methodist Hymn Book, No. 142

Had Irenaeus had the advantage of our contemporary understanding of pre-natal life, he might have understood that who Jesus was (and was to become) began to take concrete shape from the moment of his conception, not his birth.⁵⁰ In this case Mary, as his mother, would have played a pivotal role right from his conception, affirming the Vatican II statement that the “union of the mother and the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ’s virginal conception up to his death.”⁵¹ While Irenaeus recognises Mary’s significance for Christ’s genuine human experience, he does not give attention to the actual ongoing relationship between them.

Recapitulation means the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation within history, involving a continuous process by which the “*dipositio*” of God is manifested by degrees, rather than in a single episode at one particular point in time.⁵² The first and most significant event, on which all else is contingent, is the birth of Jesus - when the Son of God became an actual human being. The continuous process in which Christ’s work of recapitulation is unfolded involves a time sequence with an orientation to the future. In the context of a debate surrounding the extent to which Irenaeus conforms to a Pauline interpretation of the cross, Lawson cites support for the position that in Irenaeus Christ’s death was no more than a part of his humiliation. In fact, the cross was *an* event in his earthly life, not *the* event.⁵³ As I understand Irenaeus, this process involves a “depth” dimension as well as a chronological one, reaching inwards and outwards to embrace every single aspect of human life. There is nothing, then, in human life or in the history of humanity that is not recapitulated in Christ.⁵⁴ Irenaeus is helpful on

⁵⁰ If the Incarnation is the making visible of what God has always been doing, then the effects of recapitulation must predate even his conception. This has profound relevance for pre-Christian contexts, as has been noted by writers such as Justin S. Upkong, who refers to the notion of *Logos Spermaticus* as well as New Testament references to the pre-existence of Christ. See Upkong’s article “Christology and Inculturation” in Rosino Gibellini (ed), *Paths of African Theology* (Mayknoll: Orbis, 1994) pp 42f

⁵¹ Austin Flannery, OP (General Editor), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975) p 416 para. 57

⁵² Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, p 80

⁵³ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, p 187. Citing Beuzart

⁵⁴ This claim raises the question as to how Christ, in recapitulation, could redeem those experiences of human life that were not his own. His particularity is the issue here. Paradoxically,

this point, too, in the construction of a Christology “from within”. If the birth of Christ is the most significant event of the Incarnation, and if the cross is *an* event rather than *the* event, then why should birthing imagery not be at least as central to Christianity as that evoked by Christ’s death? After all, the equal weight given to the two events by both Matthew and Luke in their birth and passion narratives, making good what is missing in Mark, provides New Testament backing for such a consideration. This is supported by the fact that John bases his whole gospel on the Incarnation.

This leads us to yet another integral feature of Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation. Facilitated by his unquestioning acceptance of the historicity of the Genesis creation account/s,⁵⁵ Irenaeus draws up an intricate and intriguing set of parallels or analogies between the human story and how this is recapitulated in Christ, linking with each other various elements in Genesis and the Gospels. These analogies are far more than a matter of style in Irenaeus. He emphasises that in order for Christ to recapitulate and hence redeem the *whole* of human existence, every aspect of (fallen) human existence must be paralleled in what was assumed by Christ. This process, and the rationale behind it, is intricately described by Irenaeus.⁵⁶

In a word, every detail of what went wrong in Adam (through disobedience) is set right in Christ (through obedience). Since Irenaeus makes frequent reference to Adam, it is important to note that he uses the term both as a collective reference to humanity, and to refer very specifically to a particular historical human being. Irenaeus’ primary analogy, then, is between Adam and Christ. At every point where the former made a wrong choice, the latter counter-balanced this with the correct choice⁵⁷. As with Adam, Christ is both a particular historical person and the one who symbolises the whole of the new humanity. The analogy goes back to the

in order to be *truly* human he had to be a *particular* human being. This issue will be dealt with in the next chapter.

⁵⁵ See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp 171f

⁵⁶ *Against Heresies* III.xxi.10 and xxii. 1-2

origins of Adam and Christ - Adam was born of the newly-formed virgin earth; Christ was born of the virgin Mary. The analogy is continued in Eve and Mary on to whom, for reasons that will become apparent, a good measure of Irenaeus' focus is shifted with regard to recapitulation. The disobedience of a woman (Eve) provided the historical occasion of the fall, whilst the obedience of another woman (Mary) provided the occasion of the Incarnation of the one who recapitulated the circumstances of the fall. It is primarily in this sense that Mary is central in the Irenaeian scheme of things, although he also gives considerable attention to the fact that in giving Christ flesh, Mary mediated to him the fullness of human experience. The subject of food appears in yet another of Irenaeus' analogies - it was through eating the forbidden fruit that corruption entered the world, and it was through resisting the temptation to eat food offered by the devil that this corruption was removed by Christ. In his contrast between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane, Irenaeus goes so far as to draw an analogy between the trees involved in the fall/redemption drama - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the instrument of humankind's fall whilst the "tree" of Christ's cross became the instrument of redemption⁵⁸.

It is tempting to be patronising towards Irenaeus for the apparent naivete of the basis on which he is able to draw these parallels. It seems to me, however, that they represent an effective effort, within the parameters of the scientific, social and religious worldviews available to him, to underscore the thoroughgoing recapitulation of the human experience that occurred in the Incarnation of Christ. Part of the challenge for us is to critically evaluate the symbolism implicit in these analogies. Balthasar goes even further than this with his observation that Irenaeus' "balanced formulas (analogies)..... do not refer to a merely aesthetic harmony and symmetry, but to the unique theological relation of promise and fulfilment, which is at the same time that of fall and redemption"⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, p 150

⁵⁸ See for example *Against Heresies* III.xviii.7 and V.xxi.2. Cited by Lawson pp 150-152

Eve and Mary

The significance of the person of Mary and the role she played in the Christological drama will unfold as a focal point of this dissertation. For this reason I would like to look more closely at the Eve-Mary analogy as found in Irenaeus, but also venturing behind and beyond the specific Irenaean context. For Jaroslav Pelikan, with Eve and Mary Irenaeus “came to the most innovative and breathtaking of his parallels.”⁶⁰

“And just as it was through a virgin who disobeyed (namely Eve) that mankind was stricken and fell and died, so it was through the Virgin (Mary), who obeyed the word of God, that mankind, resuscitated by life, received life. For the Lord (Christ) came to seek back the lost sheep, and it was mankind that was lost, and therefore He did not become some other formation, but He likewise, of her that was descended from Adam (namely Mary), preserved the likeness of formation, for Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality. And Eve (had necessarily to be restored in Mary), that a Virgin, by becoming the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience”⁶¹

Irenaeus goes so far as to proclaim that “so also did Mary... by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation both to herself and the whole human race.”⁶² She did this, as the “second Eve”, by coming to undo Eve’s wrong, so

⁵⁹ Baithasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol.II, p 51

⁶⁰ Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, p 42

⁶¹ Irenaeus, “Proof of Apostolic Preaching”, 33 (translated by Joseph P. Smith, revised). Quoted by Pelikan, pp 42f.

⁶² *Against Heresies* III.xxii.4. It should be noted that this statement, cited in *Lumen Gentium*, has been problematic for Catholic/Protestant dialogue.

ensuring that “the knot of Eve’s disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary.”⁶³

Pelikan notes that during the second and third centuries the parallels between Mary and Eve were the primary focus for the consideration of two major theological issues: the *meaning of time and history*, and the definition of *what it means to be human*.⁶⁴ We begin with the meaning of time and history. It is significant that with Christianity came the idea of history as an arena in which both a providential God and responsible human activity can be at work. Neither of these could be thought of apart from the other, and the framework within which Christianity (and of course Judaism) conceived of such co-operation was the Covenant, in which both parties, divine and human, are mutually engaged. It was Eve and Mary who, for Irenaeus, were destined to become key players in the human dimension of this dialectic.⁶⁵ Insofar as Mary is concerned, the tension between God’s grace and human co-operation has been a constant source of debate in the church, and has often been a distinguishing factor in Catholic and Protestant approaches to Mary. For Irenaeus, Mary’s wilful co-operation (her assent) is necessary for recapitulation as a contrast to Eve’s disobedience and hence refusal to co-operate with God.

Irenaeus’ primary analogy - that between Adam and Christ, based on Romans 5:12, 15 and 1 Corinthians 15: 45,47 - gives rise to certain problems, especially in terms of the latter passage where the *man* Adam is contrasted with the *heavenly* Christ. The central problem concerns the necessity for the analogy to be between two authentic human beings. It is at this point that a corrective is found in the

⁶³ *Against Heresies* III.xxii.4, also V.xix.1. Bonhoeffer, interestingly, understood the relationship between Eve and Mary in a more dialectical, or even complementary, way. He concludes his brief exegesis of Genesis 3:20 (entitled “The Mother of All That Lives”) with this comment: “Eve, the fallen, wise mother of humankind – that is the one beginning. Mary, the innocent, unknowing mother of God – that is the second beginning.” (*Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) p 137f.

⁶⁴ Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, p 39

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p 41

contrasting models of Eve and Mary.⁶⁶ We will see also how we are confronted here, not only with two authentic human beings, but precisely because of this, with the guarantor of the humanity of Jesus Christ, a point to which we shall return. In other words, the corrective lies in the contrast between the “calamitous disobedience of someone who was no more than human, Eve, and a saving obedience by someone who was no more than human, who was not ‘from heaven’ but altogether ‘of the earth’, Mary as the Second Eve”.⁶⁷ The human actions of both Eve and Mary issue from free will and not as a consequence of coercion either by the devil or by God.⁶⁸

The matter-of-fact way in which Irenaeus speaks of this parallel is indicative of familiarity on the part of his audience with the idea, that is, the juxtaposition of Eve and Mary. It suggests the existence of an earlier tradition, and that it was natural in the second half of the second century to look at Eve and Mary in relation to each other.⁶⁹ This contrast, as we shall see, lent itself to stereotypical definition of “good” and “bad” womanhood, and has had largely negative consequences for women ever since.⁷⁰ For once introduced, the Eve-Mary dialectic took on a life of its own, lending itself to “homiletic zeal”, being “developed and repeated in seemingly endless ways by the itinerant preachers of the day.”⁷¹ Among the outcomes persisting to the present day certainly in the West, has been the plethora of psychological comparisons between the two women arising out of the disobedience-obedience models.⁷² Eve, regarded in an exclusively negative light, is considered irrational, emotional, vulnerable, headstrong, sensual and

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p 42

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p 43

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p 44

⁷⁰ This has been a recurring theme in feminist discourse. See, for example, Spong's exposition in *Born of a Woman*, pp 210f.

⁷¹ Spong, *Born of a Woman*, p 210

⁷² Jung offers a psychological interpretation of Mariological developments, which can be interpreted as the projection of a (collective) male *anima* on to an “official” personification. Interestingly, he also sees this *anima* as mediator between this world and the next. Jung contends that when the *anima* is thus projected she tends to fall apart into a double aspect, the one good and the other evil, such as Mary and Eve. (*Man and his Symbols* (London: Aldus Books, 1964) pp 186f).

independent. Such negative interpretations of women, embodied in Eve, gave rise to the misogynous stereotypes that would become deeply embedded in the Christian tradition and beyond it. Pelikan notes that the same medieval thinkers responsible for such stereotypes also presented a counterpoise to them in the embodiment of Mary, through whom women can find redemption. Mary is thus both the descendant and the vindicator of the First Eve, crushing the head of the serpent and vanquishing the devil by her obedience. The very qualities of humble, obedient submission (to a male God) are considered virtuous in Mary and therefore in all women. Although the possibility seemed to elude Irenaeus, the very fact that the creation myth ascribes sin's entry into the world to the woman, speaks right from the outset of woman as scapegoat for sin. Our concern for now, however, is to accept Pelikan's observation that for Irenaeus the central issue was that God's providence (ultimately manifest in the recapitulation in Christ) overrides misused human freedom, and it is Mary who symbolises this.

Mary, as the Second Eve, also represents a critique and corrective to the ancient cyclic theory of history, that is, belief in the endless re-iteration of "typical situations", symbolised by the wheel. To this understanding of history, exemplified by the philosopher Porphyry, Augustine would much later respond in speaking of "the faith of Christians that, notwithstanding all appearances, human history does not consist in a series of repetitive patterns but marks a sure, if unsteady, advance to an ultimate goal".⁷³ This is an important point. Irenaeus' belief was specifically described in terms of *recapitulation* and not *repetition*. Whilst the ground was covered again in Christ (hence it was Adam who was recapitulated in Christ and Eve in Mary), it was not simply a case of "history repeating itself", but of history reaching its goal, of humankind's destiny being fulfilled in Christ.

Nonetheless, although it has always been the uncompromisingly Christian perspective, such a one-sidedly teleological orientation has not been without

⁷³ Cited in Charles Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944) pp 483/4. Summarising Augustine in Book XII, *City of God*.

negative consequences. I will contend that contemporary Christology needs to recover a sense of the cycles of life, which exist and play a positive role, alongside that of the goal-orientation of “salvation history”. A Christology “from within”, making use of the maternal imagery provided by Mary and her child, facilitates this.⁷⁴

We have discussed the significance of the Eve-Mary analogy for the meaning of time and history, and move on now to the other major area - perhaps for Irenaeus, *the* major area - in which the parallel has relevance: *what it means to be human*, specifically in relation to the full humanity of Christ. Irenaeus is the first large-scale exponent of the Eve-Mary parallel. He is at the same time one of the early sources from whom we learn of the hesitancy among certain groups to ascribe full humanity to Jesus (docetism), and who in his own person went on, as we have seen, to rigorously defend that humanity. Among the heretical notions of Gnostic groups such as that of Valentinus, was the following idea. Jesus was born, and not only conceived, virginally. That is, Mary’s hymen remained intact at Christ’s birth; she suffered no birth pangs; and the birth required no effort from Mary, the child passing through her as water passes through a tube.⁷⁵ This not only made Jesus not quite human but also cast doubts on Mary’s own humanity.

In contrast to this came Irenaeus’ insistence that in order for Christ to redeem us he had to participate in every experience common to human beings. The physical birth of Jesus of a real woman was of paramount importance for Irenaeus as defence of Jesus’ humanity,⁷⁶ and hence of human and cosmic redemption. Although, as Pelikan notes, the most important intellectual struggle of the first five centuries (as it has indeed been throughout the whole history of Christianity) was

⁷⁴ The historical character of Israelite and then also Christian religion was in part a reaction to the widespread fertility cults of the Goddess. Later in this dissertation we will consider the possibility that the persistent and irrepressible popularity of Mary has partially represented a human need for the feminine in God. Along with this would go the need to incorporate female experience in comprehending the divine and in the divine plan for human life. See Ch 6, pp 245ff.

⁷⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, vii, 2 and III, xi, 3. This notion, which continues to have support to this day, will be discussed in Ch 5.

⁷⁶ *Against Heresies* III. xxii

the identity of Jesus Christ with the Creator,⁷⁷ it is also true that during the second and third centuries the central issue (in the face of docetism) was whether Christ as the “divine person” was human in the truest sense of the word.

The New Testament scriptures testify to two decisive events relating to the humanity of Jesus Christ: his birth and his passion/death. It is significant, therefore, that when the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed was eventually formulated (and later confirmed by Chalcedon), both these events were specifically linked to other human beings (the only others mentioned) - Mary in the case of his birth, and Pilate in the case of his death. The mention of Christ's birth “of the Virgin Mary”, emphasised that it was a genuine human birth. If salvation depends on the true and complete humanity of Jesus in life and death (as for Irenaeus it must), then equally his humanity is dependent on his being truly born of a truly human mother. Pelikan makes an interesting observation concerning Mozart's last sacred composition. The composer set to music the fact that it had been these two events, “being truly born of the Virgin Mary” and “being truly sacrificed on the cross for mankind” that guaranteed both human salvation and the presence of the “true body” in the eucharist.⁷⁸

According to Irenaeus, then, Mary is both the Second Eve (because by her virginal voluntary obedience she set right Eve's original virginal disobedience) and the principal guarantee of Christ's genuine humanity, as a human being who gave real birth. As a creature herself she was the one through whom the “Logos Creator had united himself to a created human nature”.⁷⁹ The importance of this last point cannot be overstated, for it is pivotal to both Christ's humanity and his ability to redeem us. The mediatorial role of Mary in the humanity of Christ (and at least on one level we can say of Christ, “the more human, the more divine”) constitutes a central theme of this thesis. In a later chapter we will return to this discussion of Mary, raising various other questions. Not least of these concerns the insistence

⁷⁷ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 48

⁷⁸ *ibid*

of Irenaeus and others on her virginity, as well as the implications – particularly for women - of contrasting her in such a categorical way with Eve. For now, however, we return to the specific content of Irenaeus' theology by summing up his Eve-Mary paradigm in this extrapolation of Paul in Romans 5:19:

“As by one woman’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (woman) shall many be made righteous through the one to whom she gives birth.”⁸⁰

This, then, is an overview of some key features of Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation.

We now focus in a little more depth on some of the particularly relevant issues for the purposes of this dissertation. Just as an appreciation of Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation is fundamental to understanding his theology, so also is a grasp of his anthropology pivotal in understanding his concept of recapitulation. It is to this, therefore, that we now turn.

The scripturally based anthropology expounded by Irenaeus to counter that of the Gnostics hinges on three essential beliefs. First, his approach is non-dualistic. Among the implications of this is the notion that our salvation lies not in deliverance *from* our humanity, but in being set free *for* humanity – in other words, to be truly human, as Christ was. Second, for Irenaeus all people are equal. There is no elite group, set apart from others by the acquisition of some esoteric knowledge, not available to all. Before God and each other all people are on an equal footing. Third - and this is closely linked to the previous points - in Irenaeus there is continuity between creation and redemption. There are times when Irenaeus' own teaching might appear to contradict this, but a closer reading

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p 51. Quoting Irenaeus, *Imago Dei* 129,71

⁸⁰ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 15

reveals a profound grasp, not only of human nature, but also of what we might term the divine *modus operandi*. I will return to this important point shortly. For now it is sufficient to know that on the basis of these few foundational beliefs Irenaeus constructs his anthropology.

Irenaeus makes frequent reference to the creation of humankind (“Adam”) in the image and likeness of God. The fact that he sometimes distinguishes between image and likeness is not relevant to our present purposes.⁸¹ Suffice it to say that for Irenaeus God’s *image* is something for which fallen humanity must strive, whilst God’s *likeness*, consisting in our moral capacity and our ability to exercise freewill, is something which belongs to every human being regardless, and is never lost. What is relevant is Irenaeus’ contention that human beings are not actually created in God’s image - this image is in the Son, by whom and in whom humankind was created. This image, therefore, is not something intrinsic to humankind, but rather it is the direction in which we are to grow, that is, towards Christ.⁸² In other words, this is the destiny of humankind - to become like Christ. Stated another way we might say that for Irenaeus Christ represents humanity as it was destined at creation to become.

If we were not created in the image of God but rather with this image as our destiny, it comes as no surprise that the idea of *growth* or development is integral to Irenaeus’ anthropology.⁸³ Although Irenaeus’ teaching is not always unambiguously clear,⁸⁴ the general impression one receives from his writings is that of a belief that Adam was not created perfect but as a child who could develop and grow into the image of God which is Christ. In due course we will see how this theme is taken further by Balthasar. Humankind’s initial condition, that is, as a

⁸¹ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, discusses Irenaeus’ use of “image” and “likeness” on pp 200ff, drawing extensively on the work of Ludwig Duncker, *Des heiligen Irenäus Christologie in Zusammenhange mit dessen theologischen und anthropogischen Grundlehren* (Göttingen, 1843).

⁸² Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 165

⁸³ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* (pp 26ff) discusses Irenaeus’ idea of growth.

⁸⁴ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, (pp 207ff) gives attention to the debate surrounding this issue.

child who needs to grow, is not sinful but belongs rather to what it means to be created⁸⁵ – although Irenaeus acknowledges that this very condition predisposes humankind to being led astray by the deceiver.

Let us pause here for a minute. For Irenaeus the Incarnation, in order for it to be fully redemptive, meant that Christ had to experience every stage of what it is to be human. This, as we have seen, is the essence of recapitulation. In due course we will challenge Irenaeus' contention that human experience extends from birth to death by insisting that it reaches further back than this into the womb. But for now the important point to grasp is that the childhood of which Irenaeus speaks has a dialectical dimension to it. Although in one sense we must grow out of childhood and into maturity, in another sense, as we shall see, the state of childhood contains all the "raw material" human beings require to grow into the image of God. There is a sense in which the condition of childhood (and before this, life as an embryo and then a foetus) is a condition of weakness, impotence. And yet, paradoxically, "the seeds of the divine and the capacities of the human heart are found in weakness."⁸⁶ So, whilst we need to leave one type of childhood behind, there is another type that we must retain and nurture – "except you become like little children you cannot see the realm of God."⁸⁷

What all of this tells us is that Irenaeus did not believe in original perfection. His concept of paradise was rather that of a pristine beginning in which humankind's freedom was as yet unactualised.⁸⁸ Berkhof observes that the Hebrew term translated "good" in English (Genesis 1) is correctly interpreted, not as "perfect" but as "suitable for its purpose". This gives support to Berkhof's belief in the provisional nature of things as we know them, one of the cornerstones of his

⁸⁵ See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.xxxviii.1

⁸⁶ Downey, speaking about Jean Vanier and L'Arche in *A Blessed Weakness*, p 109

⁸⁷ See Matt 19: 13-15 and Mark 10: 13-16.

⁸⁸ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p 173

theology.⁸⁹ Adam's growth to maturity is part of the continuing creativity of God, and in order to become fully human (to reach maturity; to attain the full measure of Christ) and so share in the divine glory, Adam had to exercise his free will.⁹⁰ Sin, for Irenaeus, is an interruption in humankind's growth towards maturity, that is, a stumbling block to development, because of disobedience. It is not a loss of certain perfections.⁹¹ Christ comes to set Adam back on course again. We will see how this dynamic is explained by Bonhoeffer using the musical concept of *cantus firmus*. For now we allow Tillich to sum up Irenaeus' position:

Adam is fulfilled in Christ; this means that Christ is the essential man, the man Adam was to have become but did not actually become.... Here we have a profound doctrine of what I call *transcendent humanism*, a humanism which says that Christ is the fulfilment of essential man (sic).... Adam fell away from what he was to have become. The childish innocence of Adam has been lost; but the second Adam can become what he was to become, fully human. And we can become fully human through this full humanity which appeared in Christ.⁹²

If *growth* is one of the areas in which the dynamic character of recapitulation is evidenced, then *conflict* is another. The conflict between God's power and that of the devil is important to Irenaeus, the defeat of the latter being a significant element in the whole drama of Christ's recapitulation.⁹³ The opposition between God and the devil is real, just as is Christ's victory over the devil. Even though ultimate victory is assured, the devil scores numerous temporary victories and this means ongoing struggle in the meantime⁹⁴. In this sense for Irenaeus, until

⁸⁹ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, esp. pp 169-71

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p 189

⁹¹ Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 165

⁹² Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 45. Italics mine.

⁹³ *Against Heresies* V. xxi

⁹⁴ Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought*, p 169

recapitulation is complete the *growth* of humankind will always be characterised by *conflict*: on the one hand humankind as a growing being is enslaved and tangled, on the other hand humankind is liberated and given new possibilities in life.⁹⁵

Irenaeus verges on a dualistic understanding of this relationship - but I think he stops just short of it, even though his cosmology reflects that of his milieu. What is important is that in positing the opposition between God and the devil, Irenaeus averts the necessity of setting God and humankind in opposition to each other. In a Gnostic context such as that in which Irenaeus found himself, and particularly with his insistence on the full humanity of Christ, this is significant.

Growth through conflict is an important motif, recurring throughout the scriptures and pre-eminently in Christ himself. Robinson, as we shall see, takes up this theme in relation to Christ, noting several incidents and experiences of conflict faced by Jesus. When conflict/enmity is recapitulated in Christ, in contrast to Adam we see obedience and life emerge triumphantly from precisely those situations which in Adam's case led to disobedience and death. For example, notes Wingren, in the temptation narrative, every single point is elucidated from the perspective of the recapitulation of Adam.⁹⁶ By implication then, conflict itself is not sinful. It simply belongs to being human and is associated with our freedom of choice. The significance of it in Irenaeian terms is that for recapitulation to be thoroughgoing it was necessary that Christ, too, grow in the same way as all human beings. Conflict is integral to this.

Wingren observes that a key to understanding Irenaeus' use of recapitulation is to recognise that he is continually thinking in terms of action and function – of movement in other words. In creation humankind is in the process of development, a growing child with a destiny towards which she is moving. This is in contrast to understanding humankind as something static, unmoved, perfectly good from the

⁹⁵ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, pp 125f

⁹⁶ *ibid*, citing Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.xxi.1-3

beginning. Humankind's (Adam's) recapitulation in Christ means renewed growth (in the direction of Christ) so that the function of creation can reappear.⁹⁷

Creation and redemption, death and life

I have noted Irenaeus' stress on the continuity between creation and redemption. This is demonstrated partly, as we have seen, in the attention he gives to the idea of growth, and also in his understanding of sin as an interruption to that growth. In this sense we have Irenaeus speaking of Christ completing creation, taking it towards its goal. But I have also alluded to the fact that Irenaeus' teaching is not quite as unambiguous as these comments might suggest. With equal firmness he states that through Adam came death and the loss of what humankind had at the beginning. In Christ's recapitulation that which has been lost is restored, so that Irenaeus actually appears to be speaking about a reversal. The ideas of "loss", "death", "reversal", "restoration" certainly give the impression of discontinuity between creation and redemption. How is it possible to hold these apparent contradictions in Irenaeus together in his understanding of recapitulation?

The key lies precisely in his notions of childhood and growth, both of which receive from him extensive attention.⁹⁸ For Irenaeus humankind's initial condition is life as a child. The distinctive characteristic of a child is to *grow* and *become*, both of which are for Irenaeus the immediate consequence of God's act of creation: "But created beings, and all who have their beginning of being in the course of time, are necessarily inferior to the one who created them. Things that have recently come into being cannot be eternal; and, not being eternal, they fall short of perfection for that very reason. And being newly created they are therefore childish and immature...".⁹⁹ It is possible, therefore, for Irenaeus to speak with ease about the dialectical notions of identity (continuity) and change

⁹⁷ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, p 126

⁹⁸ *ibid*, pp 26 ff

⁹⁹ *Against Heresies* IV.xxxviii.1. See also Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, p 32

(discontinuity) - the same but also not the same; nothing new and everything new. This dialectic pertains in Irenaeus even without the complication of sin.

With regard to sin, or the fall of Adam, Irenaeus co-ordinates two separate expressions: through sin the first person lost her/his natural character and childlike mind, and through sin the first person lost the “garment of holiness” which s/he possessed through the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the gift of the Spirit at our creation is childlikeness. So for Irenaeus sin marks the loss of the childlike innocence with which we were created, and it is in this sense that sin incurs death. What is important to remember is that for Irenaeus there is a connection between the physical (mortality) and the ethical (freedom to obey or disobey);¹⁰¹ in the context of the cross physical resurrection follows ethical goodness, whilst our death follows ethical disobedience. Central motifs for Irenaeus, then, are death and resurrection. Since, however, with Irenaeus we do not find the notion of “states” of humankind (prior to Augustine’s controversy with Pelagius there was in fact little suggestion of such “states”), for Irenaeus the notion of death itself must have carried within it the continuity/discontinuity dialectic.¹⁰²

In view of this, it is apposite at this point to enquire about the meaning of death. This is particularly relevant because of Irenaeus’ strong links with Paul, in whom the life through death motif resounds, reaching a climax in his comprehensive treatment of the theme in I Corinthians 15. What in fact happens when a seed “dies”? Is it not that the outer casing withers and ceases to be, so that the inner life can burst through it? This tallies, it seems to me, with Irenaeus’ interpretation of sin as an interruption to growth, and with Christ as the “catalyst” which frees us to grow once again. For Irenaeus, recapitulation in Christ means a *resumption of*

¹⁰⁰ Alt. “robe of sanctity”. *Against Heresies* III. Xxiii. 5

¹⁰¹ See Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, pp 29f

¹⁰² *ibid*, p 28

contact with the source of life. The source of life becomes the means to it, giving assurance of a successful “end” - redemption.¹⁰³

Perhaps the most useful image used by Irenaeus in explaining his sense of the relationship between creation and redemption is that of the potter and clay. Irenaeus asks the very logical question as to why, in order to create a new Adam, God did not take fresh dust from the ground but chose rather to form him from Mary. Irenaeus answered that this was so in order that what was formed should not be different from that which had been created, but rather recapitulated, with the likeness preserved.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the scriptural account was not intended to make negative statements about the continuity of the flesh. Reflecting on Irenaeus, Robinson comments that whatever the “new creation” may mean, therefore, it does not mean making a start *ab initio* with totally different material, but in remoulding the same clay with incalculable new possibilities (cf Jeremiah 18:1-11).¹⁰⁵ Here then we have the nub of Irenaeus’ belief in the continuity/discontinuity tension between creation and redemption, underscoring his belief in both the necessity and reality of the real humanity of Jesus Christ.

In subsequent chapters I will attempt to evaluate the doctrine of recapitulation in terms of my understanding both of Irenaeus himself and those whom I have engaged as partners in dialogue with him. My aim is to show how the doctrine of recapitulation can be recovered and reworked in support of a Christology “from within.” To accomplish this I will focus on the meaning of Christ’s humanity with special reference to the role of Mary as the mediator of that humanity. In doing so I hope to take the discussion on recapitulation in Christ “beyond Irenaeus, with Irenaeus”. Bearing in mind that Irenaeus himself took the notion of *recapitulation* beyond its Pauline origins, and that Paul himself had adopted the concept from

¹⁰³ The “crucifixion” followed by “resurrection” motif is the pattern of all life, social as well as physical – communities desecrated by an earthquake slowly pick up the pieces of their lives and begin to live again; the horror of Nazi concentration camps was followed by the opening of the camp gates in 1945; in 1994 apartheid officially ended in South Africa and its first democracy was born. This is part of the pattern I identified in the Introduction, based on nursing observations.

¹⁰⁴ *Against Heresies* III. xxi.10.

secular usage, the possibility of our continuity with Irenaeus must indeed be real. It is recognition of the principle that context determines hermeneutic which, in part at least, sets Irenaeus free for contemporary relevance. To move further than Irenaeus yet with him, also presupposes a decision of solidarity with him in *faithfulness to the scriptures* of both Old and New Testaments and to the *earliest Christian traditions*. As it was for Irenaeus, so for us it is the interplay of context and received tradition that can give the concept of *recapitulation* meaning for today.

We have already referred to the fact that Gnosticism constituted one of the overriding features of Irenaeus' context. This meant that as a Christian pastor and apologist he was faced with the challenge of asserting the *full humanity of Jesus Christ* in the face of claims to the contrary. Hence, for example, the emphasis on the fact that Christ was born of a real woman, Mary. In line with the need to demonstrate Christ's humanity, Irenaeus was faced with a parallel challenge: that of demonstrating the *continuity between creation and redemption*. For Irenaeus this involved, in contrast to Gnostic teaching, continuity between the Old and New Testaments, and this in turn had implications for the idea of *salvation history*. Whilst the context in which we theologise is very different to that of Irenaeus, it is as true to suggest that now, more than at any other time in history, there exists the need to emphasise the importance of physical life, hence of incarnation. Sallie McFague captures the seriousness of the situation in her terse observation:

"... Christianity is *par excellence* the religion of the Incarnation and, in one sense, is about nothing but embodiment..... In another sense...Christianity has denied, subjugated, and at times despised the body, especially female human bodies and bodies in the natural world".¹⁰⁶

Irenaeus' cosmology, as we have seen, allowed him a hermeneutical licence not available to us. Because, for example, the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 was not

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 49

¹⁰⁶ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God*, p 163

questioned, he is able to construct his system of analogies or parallels to demonstrate the meaning of recapitulation in Christ. This means that in Irenaeus we find a literal man, Adam, a literal Eve, serpent, tree, garden, etc. linked by way of analogy and with a sense of eschatological fulfillment, with the literal man, Jesus, Mary as the second Eve, and so on. From our contemporary perspective we see in Irenaeus a blending of myth and history, meaning and fact. How then are we able to use Irenaeus? I offer two suggestions.

The first concerns what Irenaeus was attempting to do in this linking process. It seems to me that a primary aim here was to firmly establish a relationship between creation and redemption. The first Adam has to do with the original creation, the second with redemption. But the first Adam is not lost in the second. Rather, he is actually recapitulated in Christ the human being, and so redeemed. In other words, the creation is taken up into the sphere of redemption; it does not stand in opposition to it. Now, whilst other means to achieve this may also be appropriate, the Irenaean principle of creation-redemption continuity is as important for contemporary Christianity as it was in the Gnostic context of the second century, not least because of the current crisis in ecology resulting from a devaluation of the physical world.

The second way in which Irenaeus can be of use to us has to do with understanding his categories in a symbolic way. These symbols need to be reworked and re-interpreted in the light of our contemporary situation – much as we use Scripture. In one sense we need to demythologise Irenaeus, but in another sense the myth should remain intact, because the meaning lies *in* the myth, not apart from it. John Riches captures the spirit of what I am suggesting in his comments on Balthasar's theology. Where Balthasar appeared to be at his most mythological, there he touched most closely the nerve of contemporary

theology.¹⁰⁷ In other words it is not the demythologisation of New Testament thought that is needed, but a transformation of those myths in contemporary witness to Christ. On this note we turn to our selected dialogue partners, notably Balthasar, to explore further the implications of a thoroughgoing doctrine of recapitulation from a contemporary perspective.

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¹⁰⁷ John Riches, "Hans Urs von Balthasar" in David F. Ford (ed), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford (UK) and Cambridge (USA):

PART 2

CHAPTER 4

HUMANITY SUSTAINING THE WEIGHT OF THE DIVINE

*The Son of the Father allows himself to
be borne into a human womb, and so the
heavens open up in a new way and reveal
a threefold life in God¹*

An instrument for every melody

Irenaeus, contends Balthasar, does no more than “extend Biblical thinking.”² Balthasar takes this thought further as he develops various Irenaean themes, often with striking insight. He reflects directly on the theology of Irenaeus, and then, with the notion of recapitulation as a kind of *cantus firmus*, proceeds to dance in a variety of creative directions, giving rich and refreshing content to different aspects of the Incarnation. This is possible because “the concept retains a characteristic plurality of internally analogous levels which give it its unprecedentedly fertile richness, though it is a richness it must have if it is to express the centre of the mystery and not reduce it to a philosophical proposition.”³

Whilst Balthasar’s reflections on Irenaeus comprise more than his doctrine of recapitulation, it is with this that we are primarily concerned. I have selected a number of broad themes, prominent in Balthasar’s writings, which develop the notion of recapitulation: childhood and growth, his dialectical interpretation of the relationship between nature (creation) and redemption, and his understanding of Mary. It is Balthasar’s attention to Mary that provides the link between the first and second parts of this dissertation. Before considering

¹ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland: The World’s Salvation in Mary’s Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) p 27. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis.

² Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol II, p 53

³ *ibid*, p 51

these three themes there are certain things that must be said about Balthasar's thought in general as well as his overall treatment of Irenaeus.

It would be to misrepresent Balthasar if I failed to draw attention to his primary interest, and hence to the lens through which he scrutinises and interprets the whole content of Christian faith: theological aesthetics. In Balthasar, for whom beauty is a central motif, the concept of salvation history, centred in Christ, is the "art of God."⁴ Indeed, for him, Irenaeus' principal contribution to theological aesthetics is his "historical aesthetic", that is, his account of history as a wonderfully ordered whole. Balthasar is struck by the exquisitely integrated quality of the Irenaeian theology of redemption, held together by the notion of recapitulation. For him Irenaeian thought is a "circling within the broad unbroken sphere to which every mystery of the inner divine life and of salvation history belongs",⁵ exhibiting the beauty of their harmonious reciprocity as it does so.⁶ Having described the relationship between Irenaeus and Justin as "that of genius to man of ability",⁷ Balthasar comments that with Irenaeus comes "the miracle of a complete and organised image in the mind of faith."⁸ "The word of God", wrote Balthasar, "walked through time. As he walked, everything was word and revelation of the Father, but also revelation of the truth of human existence His humanity is an instrument upon which every melody can be played."⁹ This metaphor, echoing the Irenaeian themes of recapitulation, is also a reminder that reflection on Christ can and should give rise not to one but many Christological perspectives .

Bonhoeffer similarly makes use of musical imagery in reflecting on Christ in developing the notion of Christ as *cantus firmus*. He suggests that "where the *cantus firmus* is clear and plain, the counterpoint can be developed to its limits: the two are 'undivided and yet distinct'...May not the attraction and

⁴Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, p 74.

⁵Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol II, p 43

⁶ Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad*, p 69

⁷ "like that of Mozart to Christian Bach.." (*The Glory of the Lord*, p 31)

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *Das Ganze im Fragment*, p 268 and *Man in History*, p 243. Cited by John Saward, "Youthful Unto Death: The Spirit of Childhood", in Bede McGregor OM and Thomas Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1994) p 144.

importance of polyphony in music consist in its being a musical reflection of this Christological fact and therefore our 'vita Christiana'?"¹⁰ For Bonhoeffer the reality of God and the reality of the world and with it, human experience, are not only brought together in Christ but everything is transformed and brought to fulfilment as Christ recapitulates our earthly experience. Recapitulation, then, is a concept which explains, for Bonhoeffer, the way in which Christ is our *cantus firmus*.¹¹

One of the central features of Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation is that Christ is recapitulator until the consummation. This means that during his earthly life Christ recapitulated human experience, but also that *recapitulation in Christ continues in the world today*. It means as well - and this is a point grasped by Bonhoeffer - that recapitulation will reach its climax when Christ "brings again" our human experiences to redeem them. Bonhoeffer is careful to note that it is not we but Christ who will "bring again" what is past¹² (echoing the promise of Joel 2:25: "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten..") This poses a question concerning the way in which Christ acts as recapitulator *now* - a point to which we shall return.

According to Balthasar, if recapitulation lies at the heart of Irenaeus' theological aesthetics, that heart itself possesses a centre - the "still centre", the mid-point of the Incarnation: *a humanity capable of sustaining the weight of the divine*. This is "God-enabled God-bearing which resumes and brings to perfection the origin, structure and history of humanity".¹³ In Jesus Christ the invisible Archetype of this humanity is seen on earth, the Creator's work only properly being seen at this mid-point, the God-man in his crucified and risen glory.¹⁴ In Christ the creature's absolute source becomes the visible image of God in creaturely form. In Balthasar the "creaturely form" of Christ is such that he gives "the whole of man scope in himself", even to the extent of assuming

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, p 303

¹¹ Refer back to Ch 3, pp 110f

¹² Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, p 171

¹³ Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad*, p 70

¹⁴ *ibid*

humankind's death into himself.¹⁵ And so again we hear the refrain: Christ the source of life rises up from within life to become a part of it - Christology "from within" – from the inside out.

I need to emphasise that conversation with Balthasar does not imply agreement with every aspect of his theology. Indeed, notably in his treatment of Mary, there are aspects which are deeply problematic. These problems can be traced back to Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference and woman as the *answer* to man, the one who *gives form* to man, and *sets boundaries* for man – but who, *in herself* has no place of her own, no form.¹⁶ In their illuminating article on sexuality in Balthasar, David Moss and Lucy Gardner¹⁷ warn that "given that Mary and woman will be identified with each other, the logic of this structure clearly reveals the constant threat to Christology posed by any Mariology".¹⁸ Thus cautioned, I nevertheless consider there to be much in Balthasar's thinking that can contribute to a fuller Christological understanding.

It is difficult to draw a sharp divide between Balthasar's treatment of childhood, the nature-redemption relationship, and Mary. They interweave and nurture each other in their common focus on the divine drama of the Incarnation. Yet because of their direct links with the Irenaeian themes I am exploring in this dissertation, each will be dealt with separately, Balthasar's insights being bolstered and at times challenged by those of others as we proceed.

¹⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol II, pp 52f

¹⁶ See *Theodramatik: Die Personen des Spiels 2: Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1978) (TD II/2) p 264 and *Theo-drama: Persons in Christ*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) (TD 3) p 287. For an illuminating account of Balthasar's understanding of Mary, femininity and women in relation to the church, see Paul McPartlan's essay, "The Marian Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the ordination of women" in *Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism* edited by William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster: Gracewing, 1997)

¹⁷ David Moss and Lucy Gardner, "Difference – The Immaculate Concept? The Laws of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Modern Theology*, July 1998, Volume 14, No. 3, pp 377-401

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 382

Childhood and growth

"It takes the Incarnation to show us that being born has not just an anthropological, but also a theological, eternal significance, and that to be from the generative, life-giving womb of another is the ultimate, unsurpassable beatitude. The "meaning-logos" that is "with God" is the product of a love that is prior to anything else we can think and is always wanting to give itself away; it is the fullness which owes its origin to an infinitive emptying of the paternal womb. "¹⁹

"...the mission of the child in the order of salvation is to embody, embryonically, the completion of the Christian life..."²⁰

We have seen that childhood, development and growth are key notions, not only in Irenaeus' anthropology but also in the greater scheme of his doctrine of recapitulation. Christ is recapitulator from the very moment of his birth when for Irenaeus he assumed our humanity. By becoming an infant, then a youth, and then an adult, Jesus sanctified each of these stages of human life. In relation to Christ as a person, however, Irenaeus does not actually speak of growth to maturity. His discourse about childhood and growth is limited to that of humankind (Adam). Adam was not created perfect (mature), but as a child who needed to grow, and who by so doing would conform more and more to the image of God that is in Christ. We saw that sin, for Irenaeus, is an interruption in that process of growth, with Christ coming to set Adam back on course again. Yet if Christ was to recapitulate the whole of human existence then the process of growth must have been part of his experience too.

Furthermore, I question, as indicated earlier, the Irenaean notion that Jesus' humanity began with his birth, rather than with his conception. These are points at which Balthasar steps in, implicitly urging Irenaeus to more

¹⁹ Balthasar, "Jesus as Child and His Praise of the Child" in *Communio* 22, (1995) p 633. Quoted by Robin Maas, "Christ as the Logos of Childhood: Reflections on the Meaning and Mission of the Child" in *Theology Today*, Vol 56, No 4 (January 2000) p 457

consistency with his own categories as he reflects on the idea of childhood and humanity in relation to Jesus. Journeying with Balthasar means that we find ourselves encountering the paradoxical notion of growing *out of* (one type of) childhood and *into* the (“now-unthreatened”) childhood that is in Christ.²¹ To this important point we will return in due course.

John Saward traces the course of Balthasar’s childhood theme, noting that it is “omnipresent” in his writings.²² In what follows I draw on Saward’s analysis in order to capture something of the significance of childhood for Balthasar, using the latter as a gateway to my own reflections on the theme in the context of Christology, particularly the mother-child relationship, which is pivotal to this dissertation.

Echoing the maxim, “that which has not been assumed cannot be redeemed”, Sayward boldly expounds Balthasar’s understanding of recapitulation in Christ, taking Jesus’ humanity back to his pre-natal life rather than to his birth:

“When we affirm that God the Son became man, we mean not only that in the Blessed Virgin’s womb he assumed a complete human nature, but also that he entered upon the whole human adventure - from conception to the last breath. Human life is development in time...”

“When he lives out a complete human life from womb to tomb, all the ages and stages of human existence receive new meaning.”²³

For Balthasar the beginning of metaphysics is to be found in the child’s experience in her mother’s womb and then arms, of being admitted into a sheltering and encompassing world. “A baby is called to self-consciousness

²⁰ Maas, “Christ as the Logos of Childhood”, p 458

²¹ Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, p 72

²² Saward in McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ*, pp 140-142

²³ *ibid*, p 145. Referring to Balthasar, *Das Ganze Fragment*, p 268 and *Man in History*, p 243f

by the love and smile of his mother”, writes Balthasar²⁴ - echoing the similar point made by Kasper in his critique of Rahner. Indeed, for Balthasar the bond between mother and child is the very beginning of I-Thou relating. It is important for Balthasar that it is not human childhood in isolation that is exalted by the incarnation of the Son of God, but childhood and motherhood together. Yet he is aware that the mother-child relationship does not always fulfil its calling, noting that “any kind of tension in this sacred realm opens up wounds that cannot be healed in the child’s heart.”²⁵ He sees, however, Mary and Jesus as the model of this relationship, the “unique, incomparable pair that places every mother and child relationship within the radiance of eternal grace.”²⁶ Whilst I appreciate this coupling of mother and child in interpreting the Incarnation - and indeed, will pursue the theme - I nevertheless consider that Balthasar is in danger of romanticising the relationship. Indeed, if both Mary and Jesus were truly human, then the relationship would hardly have been without the normal stresses characteristic of any parent-child relationship – something which in itself is part of Christ’s recapitulation of our human experience.

Nevertheless, this understanding of Jesus in terms of his mother I consider to be deeply significant. This is something that Irenaeus did not really exploit.²⁷ And it impresses on me the significance of Mary’s role not only as God-bearer, but as a human mother to a human child. The Christological significance of this cannot be over-stated, even though it has often been ignored. Traditionally, we are led to view Jesus’ life in two rather distinct parts: the first thirty years of “preparation” and the last three years of “ministry”, culminating in his death and resurrection. Hence, the Christ who saves us is specifically the adult Jesus. What does this say to children? What does such a Christianity offer in terms of the value of children to society, and consequently of their self-esteem? Perhaps most pertinent of all, what does this say about the value of an unborn child in an increasingly wide context of abortion on

²⁴ “Uno sguardo d’insieme sul mio pensiero”, *Strumento internazionale per un lavoro teologico: Communio* (1989), p 41f in Saward, p 147.

²⁵ *Wenn ihr nicht werdet wie dieses Kind*, p 14. In Saward, p 148

²⁶ *Das Ganze Fragment*, p 270; *Man in History*, p 245. Saward, 148

²⁷ Except insofar as Mary mediated to Christ human experience, as we have already noted.

demand? It seems to me imperative that, with Balthasar, we reclaim Jesus' childhood and early experience of relationality, acknowledging that they fall within the wider ambit of his redemptive significance for humanity.

In the Irenaean tradition it is to the extent that Jesus assumed the state of childhood and human relationality that these states can be redeemed. For Balthasar, "much of what is deepest in man, because of his alienation from God, is submerged and forgotten. Only through the Incarnation is it brought back to the light of remembrance and human self-understanding."²⁸ What Balthasar seems to suggest, then, is that it is because Christ became a child that our childhood can be reclaimed and re-instituted at the centre of our lives - in accordance with Christ's own imperative for us. In this case, too, Christ enables us to be what he requires, because he becomes what he requires us to be.

Pursuing this theme further, and alongside Irenaeus' postulation of Adam as a child who needs to grow, Balthasar contends that for Jesus the state of early childhood is clearly not in any sense "morally indifferent and inconsequential". On the contrary, "the child's way of being human, which for the adult is submerged, represents a kind of pristine zone, ...A sphere of pristine wholeness". In fact, since the child cannot at first distinguish between the parents' love and that of God it is not only a sphere of wholeness but a time of holiness.²⁹ Sayward sums up Balthasar's position: "... if the eternal Word becomes a child, then the child becomes the framework of providential revelation, the full expression of eternal truth and eternal life."³⁰

Consistent with this theme, Balthasar insists that "if we take the incarnation of God's Word seriously, then we have to say that Jesus, like every other human child, learnt slowly and gradually: not only human language and human behaviour, but also the religion of his people."³¹ But Balthasar is more radical even than this in his treatment of the theme. Paradoxically, as we have seen

²⁸ *Wenn ihr nicht*, p 18 in Saward, pp 143f

²⁹ Saward in McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ*, pp 143f

³⁰ *ibid*, p 144

in passing, for Balthasar Jesus is a child forever, “youthful unto death”:
“Jesus, grown man that he is, has never left the ‘womb of the Father’. Even now, as incarnate, he ‘rests’ in it; in fact, it is only because he is the One who rests in the Father’s womb that he can make a valid revelation of the Father.”³² So, for Balthasar, “the generation of the Son is eternal, transcending all succession, abiding in the perpetual now of the Godhead.” He is a “child who cannot grow out of being a child.”³³ In other words, Jesus’ perpetual childhood derives from his relation to God; his childhood is relational in character (a state of mind and heart) rather than chronological (a stage of life).

It is not difficult to discern the impact of Balthasar’s aesthetic interest at this point - something which at first glance may not seem Christologically relevant. Is there not a link between his insistence on Jesus’ perpetual childhood and the notion of play as being intrinsic to the divine artistry? Aesthetic categories are sensual ones, so it follows that the whole drama of redemption can be understood as a dimension of God’s “artwork”. This is an essential element of a Christology “from within”: Christ rises up from within life as Lord of the dance of life - indeed, as we have seen, the Word of God walking through time as the “instrument upon which every melody can be played”. Such metaphors, introducing joy and levity into otherwise heavy theological categories, lend themselves to an understanding of the essential goodness of creation and hence of the possibility of a paradoxical continuity between creation and redemption - made concrete in the human life of Christ. Meister Eckhart captures the spirit of the dynamic I am describing:

“In the core of the Trinity
the Father laughs
and gives birth to the Son;
the Son laughs back at the Father
and gives birth to the Spirit

³¹ *Homo Creatus Est*, p 168f. Saward, p 149

³² *Ibid*, p 179, in Saward, p 150

³³ *Ibid*, p 177, in Saward, p 150

The Trinity laughs
and gives birth to us”³⁴

My sense of Balthasar, however, is that, despite the close attention he gives to Jesus’ childhood and growth, and to the fact that Christ recapitulated human experience “from womb to tomb”, he nevertheless leaves us without a sense of the specifically practical implications of Christ’s growth to adulthood, and hence of his humanity. Perhaps this is because Balthasar’s main interest, as we see in his appreciation of Irenaeus, is a theo-dramatic one; perhaps it is because he is approaching childhood from another perspective, associated with Christ’s injunction that we become as little children. Yet an understanding of what it means to be truly human is crucial to appreciating a Christology “from within”, and it is for this reason that we turn to other scholars to supplement the insights of Balthasar.

Ferré continues to challenge us in terms of Christ’s humanity – and ours. He introduces his discussion of Jesus as “true God and true man” by making four simple assertions about Christ’s humanity in relation to ours. In the first place, Christ is as fully human as we are. In the second place, in his humanity Christ shows what it means to be human. Third, Christ demonstrates what is more than human in the genuinely human.³⁵ And lastly, Christ is the human being who first conclusively fulfills the conditions of humanity. That is, he is the first true human being. In Christ’s humanity, therefore, human nature requires redefinition, in such a way that our understanding of the term “natural” shifts from our humanity to Christ’s. But this is only valid if Jesus shared our ordinary human nature to begin with and was genuinely part of our history.³⁶

In making these assertions Ferré is clearly situated in the realm of Christian confession rather than historical fact. It is through faith that the Christian believes that in *this* person humanity reaches fulfillment.³⁷ There is no

³⁴ Meister Eckhart, quoted by Joseph G Donders and Elizabeth Byrne, *Original Joy: Free the Playful Child in You* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1990) p 24

³⁵ Bringing to mind Rahner’s “transcendent anthropology”.

³⁶ Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, pp 74-76

³⁷ cf Sobrino, in Ch 1

historical proof of it, and yet belief in the truth of this confession lies at the very heart of Christianity. The idea of Christ as *the* self-actualised human being can be supported by what we know of the life of Jesus, but never conclusively proved by it. It remains, therefore, an article of faith.

Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 1, there is much that we can know about the person Jesus to affirm our belief in him as the Christ of faith. Moreover, as we saw then, it is *this particular person*, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ of faith.

Robinson offers penetrating and at times, controversial insights into the meaning of Jesus' full humanity. The questions raised here, and Robinson's exegetical response to them, remain critical for ongoing discussion. Robinson deals with two issues which are especially relevant to the Irenaean doctrine of recapitulation: the idea of Jesus as *a* human being and the idea of him as *the* human being.³⁸ For Robinson the truth of the latter is contingent on the truth of the former. Jesus could be *the* human being because he was first of all *a* human being.³⁹ Particularity is essential to being really human – being left- or right-handed, one's psychological profile, nose shape, blood type and so on. Furthermore, if Jesus was genuinely human with his flesh his "own and sole,"⁴⁰ then he must have been as unrepeatable in his genetic make-up as any other human being.⁴¹ For Robinson and Ferré, in contrast to both Balthasar and Magdalen, this makes a literal interpretation of the virgin conception problematic.⁴²

The essential problem with a biological interpretation of this term is that it separates Jesus' full humanity from ours. If Jesus was conceived virginally (by the "Holy Ghost", and not by the fusion of egg and sperm), then he is no

³⁸ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, chapters 2 and 3

³⁹ *ibid*, p 40, quoting D.M. Baillie: "It is...nonsense to say that He is 'Man' unless we mean that He is a man" (*God Was in Christ*, p 87) cf Barth: "The Word did not simply become 'flesh'... It became Jewish flesh....The pronouncements of the New Testament....relate always to a man who is seen not to be a man in general, a neutral man..." (*Church Dogmatics* IV, 1, p 166)

⁴⁰ Andrew of Samosata, cited in Cyril, *Apol. Adv. Orient. II* in Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 51

⁴¹ See Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, pp 97f

longer fully one of us. In this case “He is discontinuous with us from the start”, argues Ferré. Such a conception implies that he was “God ready-made”, so to speak, and therefore exempt from the power of sin. God merely became a human organism without assuming human nature. Any theology which “insists that God was fully present from birth may in upholding one truth, the primacy of God’s coming throughout the whole event of the Incarnation, deny the other, the need for real growth in grace and wisdom.”⁴³

Robinson proceeds to draw attention to the area of growth and development – crucial to the meaning of being human, as we have seen in both Irenaeus and Balthasar. The fact that the New Testament refers only once to Jesus’ development, and appears to have little interest in it, cannot be an indication that it did not occur, contends Robinson, but rather that the concern of the New Testament is something quite different. Indeed, if Jesus was truly human then growth and development must have continued throughout his boyhood years. The one Biblical indication we do have in this regard is found in Luke 2:40 and 52. Jesus’ development is described here using the Greek word *prokoptein*, which means to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering.⁴⁴

Irenaeus, as we have seen, understands the growth of Christ as the recapitulated Adam to be a growth through conflict, the image provided by the Greek term lending itself to such an image of growth. Magdalen has significant thoughts on the subject:

Without a contest, without a possibility of losing, there is no victory. A world good through and through, without trials, without temptations, is a milk-sop world, a world of happy children who never grow up. It would have no cowards, but no heroes; no sinners but no saints; no failures but no triumphs, no hazards and no ecstasy. It would be

⁴² This interpretation was also problematic for Schleiermacher (*The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928) p 403.

⁴³ Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, p 101

⁴⁴ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 80. Here Robinson notes Barth’s enjoyment of this image, as cited in *Church Dogmatics* I, 2, p 158

boring, tepid, monochrome. In such a terrible world there would be no way for people to prove their love⁴⁵

The essential point Magdalen is making is valid: it is the pattern of life (part of God's justice?) that maturity comes through struggle.

This leads into other dimensions of human experience that are common to any person, and therefore to Christ as a human being, but which become problematic in respect of him as *the* human being, the one who is *wholly* human. Limitation and change of mind are among these. Both are intrinsic to growth and development – physical, emotional, social, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual – and there is New Testament evidence of Jesus grappling with them. An obvious example would be Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:25-30). Here we have a case, contends Robinson, of Jesus (in the tradition of many others before and after him) rethinking things, and in fact being changed by the world he sought to change.⁴⁶ Magdalen is unabashedly frank in her assessment of the situation. We have Jesus, she contends, struggling with fears, prejudices and misconceptions, "attitudes dictated by Jewish culture and tradition". He needed to "disentangle himself from the influences that had helped shape his own assumptions and freely choose his course of action based solely on love."⁴⁷ Newman's dictum, quoted earlier, is apposite: "here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."⁴⁸

Balthasar, Robinson, Ferré, Magdalen and others join in contending that Jesus did not begin his human life with a transformed nature. He was not born "perfect". This is one way in which Christ recapitulated our human experience – beginning with "our full, common pedagogical nature and ending with human nature perfected by its right relationship to God".⁴⁹ We have seen how

⁴⁵ Magdalen, *The Hidden Face of Jesus*, p 173. It is with some reserve that I quote Magdalen at this point, since it is possible that she may be interpreted as showing insensitivity to those whose lives comprise struggle and little else.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, pp 84/5

⁴⁷ Magdalen, *The Hidden Face of Jesus*, p 171

⁴⁸ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p 40.

⁴⁹ Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, p 77

Irenaeus describes this as growing into the image of God. What is being suggested is that the idea of *growth* lies at the heart of what it means to be human, and that such growth was necessary for Jesus too, in order to recapitulate our condition.⁵⁰ Indeed, for Ferré, in Jesus there is no finality because growth is eternal, so that it is even questionable whether we can say that Jesus stopped growing after the resurrection.⁵¹

It is now that the question of Jesus' sinlessness arises. What becomes clear when we accept human development as a process of growing towards or into wholeness/maturity, and especially when we consider a dynamic such as that recorded in the Mark 7 passage, is that the distinction between what constitutes sin and what does not is sometimes blurred. In fact, a great deal of the drama of human life is played out in the misty terrain between struggle and sin. Jesus was no stranger to this, as the New Testament account of his temptations attests. With regard to the sinlessness of Christ, Robinson cites a concern of Carl Jung. Christians, contends Jung, too easily split what he calls Christ's dark or shadow side off into the "irreconcilable anti-Christ, so that Christ becomes identified with only one half of his personality", instead of allowing that Christ overcame the separation by taking the unacceptable into himself and transcending it.⁵² Perfection (*teleiōsis*) is not to be found in the absence of evil, but rather in wholeness, completion, and individuation.⁵³ It is the goal of maturity into which even Jesus had to grow if he was truly incarnate and therefore truly able to recapitulate human experience.⁵⁴

So then, given the particular hereditary characteristics with which Jesus was endowed, in combination with the context in which normal human

⁵⁰ There are a number of classic studies which deal with human psychological/spiritual development, some of which are immensely informative for our discussion. Among these are the following: Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1971), James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), and Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Lives of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990)

⁵¹ Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, p 77

⁵² Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, pp 85-7

⁵³ *ibid*, p 86, quoting Carl Jung, *Aion*, pp 41ff.

⁵⁴ See also Ferré on Jesus' sinlessness, *Christ and the Christian*, pp 110-4

development would have taken place, we have a true human being, who at the same time is described by Christians as *the* human being – “perfect”.

Robinson now moves into a second distinction, that between a *perfect* human and being *perfectly* human, and thence into the critical and related question of how Jesus can be a genuine product of the process of becoming and being human, *and* the clue to its total significance.⁵⁵ For, he contends, “if he is to be the Christ, he must point beyond himself. He must.... be the clue to the nature of both man and God. He must be a representative figure...”⁵⁶ Our concern is how Jesus, as a particular individual, can be representative of all humankind, the clue to its very nature. What does it mean, asks Robinson, “to see this ideal of normality and universality in any one individual, and what relation does it bear to the Jesus of history?”⁵⁷

The idea, not uncommon in Christian thinking and devotion, that Jesus was complete and perfect in every respect has had a powerful influence in separating him from ordinary humanity, making him unique precisely because of his abnormality. To understand Jesus’ uniqueness in this way, notes Robinson, paradoxically undercuts his humanity. The point is that the particularity inherent in all creatureliness (to be one thing and not another belongs to the essence of physical existence) is amongst human beings also a value-laden reality. Hence, if we consider the notion of Jesus as a perfect person, what is meant? It means, *a priori*, that we have in mind a particular set of characteristics which we as individuals or a society consider perfect (in the sense of “the ultimate”). This implies that if Jesus was, for example, snub-nosed in a context where aquiline features were favoured, or had been born with a hare lip, or was shorter in stature than the stereotypical ideal – in a word, if any of these things (or others) pertained, he could not be “a perfect” person. For this reason alone, then – even without the issue of his sinlessness – it becomes farcical to try and attach to Jesus the label of “a perfect specimen”. The norm in the scriptures is that a person should be

⁵⁵ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 66

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p 67

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p 68

God's true woman or man, not the complete person of renaissance humanism, "the all-rounder of whom it could be said, 'You name it, (s)he's got it'."⁵⁸

This leads us into Robinson's second alternative: understanding Jesus as *perfectly* human, that is, fully, wholly human; mature. The patristic term for this quality in Christ's humanity is *teleios anthrōpos*. To be a "universal" person is not to have every human quality but to be the sort of person of whom we recognise *in* the individual that which transcends the individual (Rahner). We see in Christ what *each* of us could be in our own unique way.⁵⁹ It is in this sense, argues Robinson, that we should understand the adjective "perfect" when we think of Jesus, perhaps applying to him what was once said of Martin Buber: "...he has reached the limits of his own being.... And through this has made the universe transparent".⁶⁰

The notion of sociality or being-in-community will be discussed more fully in the section dealing with Balthasar's understanding of Mary. It is dealt with there because of the particular role Mary would have played in facilitating Jesus' primary experiences of relationality. But it is important to mention the subject here too because it is an essential component of what it means to be human. Authentic human being is neither individual nor communal *to the exclusion of each other*. Rather, as Bonhoeffer so aptly expresses it, "God does not desire a history of individual human beings, but the history of the human community. However, God does not want a community that absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of human beings."⁶¹ For Bonhoeffer, human sociality in fact precedes human individuality since the discovery of individuality is only possible in community, that is, through the "other". This, of course, is in line with Kasper's observation that a child is awakened to consciousness through the love and smile of its mother.

⁵⁸ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 70

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 73

⁶⁰ Aubrey Hodes, quoting HJ Heydorn's remark in *Martin Buber: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Viking, 1971) p 67. Quoted by Robinson, p 73

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, p 80

The idea of being-in-community is not incidental to the Christological paradigm that is being developed here. A Christology “from within” underscores the individual/social dialectic by its very nature. Christ did not become flesh (human) *alone*. He did so through the primary agency of his mother, but then also through his father and others who constituted the social matrix of his nurture.

The idea of growth is associated with continuity – a progressive, unbroken process. How is this accommodated in the context of redemption?

Creation-Redemption continuity

We saw that one of the themes arising out of Irenaeus’ Gnostic context and incorporated into his doctrine of recapitulation is that of the continuity between creation and redemption. Christ comes, not to discount or nullify what God originally created (symbolised by Adam) but to take this same creation to maturity/fulfilment (in the New Adam). My understanding of a Christology “from within” requires that this theme be regarded with utmost seriousness. Balthasar is useful at this point, notably through his debate with Barth regarding the *analogia entis* and the nature of the knowledge of God. It should be noted that Balthasar was profoundly influenced by Barth, whose theology, according to Riches, remained one of the fixed points by which he set the course of his own work, and to whom he owed his vision of a comprehensive Biblical theology.⁶²

Balthasar’s point of departure and the aim of his theological enquiry, summed up in the one word beauty, influences his understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption. For Balthasar, it is the triune God who is the creature’s absolute source, and in whom inheres what Irenaeus terms “the substance of creatures and the pattern of his artefacts and the beauty of the individual life-form”.⁶³ For Balthasar the humanity God has made according to

⁶² Riches in D. Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, pp 238 and 243.

⁶³ Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, p 70. Irenaeus quote from W.W. Harvey (ed), *Sancti Irenaei, Lugdunensis, Libros quinque adversus haereses* (Cambridge 1857); II, pp 212f.

the divine image and likeness is called to communion with Godself – as the perfect artwork, remade through the visible image, Jesus Christ, in which the invisible archetype is seen on earth.⁶⁴ It was, moreover, Balthasar's conviction that nowhere is humanity ever wholly bereft of the grace of God, and this is reflected in his lifelong search for the fruits of this grace in the works of philosophers and poets outside of the Christian tradition. This endeavour is directed towards learning to see things "as they are in themselves, whole and entire, and in so seeing to perceive the reality of being in all its entirety and concreteness."⁶⁵ Against this background, then – Balthasar's sense of the essential beauty of creation – let us consider the dialogue between himself and Barth.

We know that for Barth, with his insistence on the primacy of revelation, there exists no such thing as "natural theology". It is only through God that God can be known. Sinful human beings can never reach a knowledge of God. Indeed, in their search for a reality to worship they in fact create an idol. God alone can break down the barriers of our sin and ignorance. God does this exclusively in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, opening up human beings for knowledge of Godself, in the same act demonstrating his existence.⁶⁶ In contrast, Balthasar's thought reveals a deep tension in his understanding of the relationship between the created order and the redeeming God. This is linked to the tension between monergism (which had considerable influence on Barth) and synergism in his theology.⁶⁷

This has implications for the place of Mary in the theology of Barth and Balthasar. The Protestant tenet of "grace alone" meant for Barth that redemption comes alone through Christ, without any human co-operation, and is based on discontinuity between creation and redemption. This means that our relationship to God is an analogy of faith, not being. And Mary therefore could only have been a passive agent in the Incarnation. Balthasar's

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ Riches in D. Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, pp 238 and 243

⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II, 1, pp 33ff. Cited by John Thompson, "Barth and Balthasar: An Ecumenical Dialogue" in *The Beauty of Christ*, p 175

synergism, on the other hand, allowed for God's grace and human co-operation in redemption, as well continuity between creation and redemption. This facilitated a co-operative role for Mary in redemption.

Although Balthasar went a long way in agreeing with Barth – contra Catholic neo-Scholastic theology prior to Vatican II – he felt that Barth accorded little place to human co-operation on the basis of prevenient grace. For Balthasar, creation along with reason is embedded theologically in the order of grace and forms the starting point from which we come to a true, deeper knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. Through God's grace that is the ground of creation, then, "creation and we as creatures are Christologically orientated."⁶⁸ There is something in creation that helps us to know God, but that something is the action of God's grace in the creaturely realm.⁶⁹ Balthasar disagrees with Barth in the latter's attempts to derive a doctrine of creation from Christology. This, for Balthasar, would lead to a theological "stretto", a squeezing of the doctrine of creation through the straits of Christology. Yet equally Balthasar is also concerned to avoid the charge that Christian theology is predetermined by a prior doctrine of being and nature.

For Barth, on the other hand, creation and redemption are related through the covenant. Creation is the outer ground of the covenant and the covenant is the inner ground of creation.⁷⁰ This meant that for Barth there is no point of contact between creation and redemption on the basis of prevenient grace, as there is with Balthasar. In other words, for Barth there is no *analogia entis* but only an *analogia relationis*.⁷¹ This point is important in trying to get to grips with the Protestant position on Mariology. The traditional critique of Catholic theology from the Reformation perspective is predicated on rejection of the *analogia entis* in an effort to avoid idolatry (in this case Mariolatry). Balthasar accepted part of this critique i.e. the necessity to avoid idolatry. But, contended Balthasar, this critique is based on a misconception of what it

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p 172. This is all related to the different approaches of Barth and Balthasar to the doctrine of analogy.

⁶⁸ Thompson in *The Beauty of Christ*, p 176

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, 1, Ch 9, par 41, pp 94ff

(*analogia entis*) can be. Balthasar's position on the *analogia entis*, based on that of his teacher Pryzwara, differs from that of traditional Catholicism in that it affirms Christology and not creation as its basis.⁷² This makes it possible to develop Mariology *within* Christology.

My own assessment of this debate between Barth and Balthasar leads me – given the foundational premise of this dissertation – to question what exactly is meant by “grace”. Bearing in mind the inescapable indirection or analogical nature of religious language is it not possible in some way to equate the grace that is prevenient with the Christ who is at the centre of life and who, as its creative and integrating principle, in time became incarnated as part of that very creation? In this way, so it seems to me, it becomes unnecessary to regard Barth and Balthasar's positions as mutually exclusive. An alternative way to consider the respective positions of Barth and Balthasar is to do so in terms of the dialectical continuity/discontinuity between creation and redemption. In this case Balthasar focuses on the continuity and Barth on the discontinuity. Such a situation – that is, the both/and of continuity and discontinuity – becomes more understandable if we again employ the musical analogy, understanding the relationship on different levels. On one level, symbolised in music by the many tensions and resolutions that forms the beat, there certainly is discontinuity. But overarching these lower levels is that which holds the piece together, drawing it on to its conclusion, and including everything in its ambit.⁷³

For both Barth and Balthasar the relationship between creation and redemption is revealed most plainly in the Incarnation. Balthasar would leave Barth at this point to insist that it is through Mary, by whose willingness and in

⁷¹ Thompson in *The Beauty of Christ*, p 177

⁷² This theme is discussed by John W. de Gruchy in his *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp 115ff.

⁷³ An intriguing feature of physical life is that of constant *change and renewal within a single organism*. The cells of the human body, for example, are in a continuous process of death and replacement, so that after a number of years every single cell has been replaced, and yet it is the same person – everything new but nothing new.

whose body humanity and divinity came together, that the Incarnation was possible.

Mary

One outstanding feature of Balthasar's thought, notes Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis,⁷⁴ which has a profound effect on his understanding of Mary, is what may be called his "concentric vision".⁷⁵ What this means is that Balthasar treats no subject in isolation from other subjects naturally bound to it, but sees them as interacting concentric circles. (This, of course, is one of the reasons why it is with hesitance that I separate the themes Mary, childhood, and the creation-redemption relationship for our discussion). These circles all have a common centre which is the determining source of this vision, namely, the Paschal mystery: the presence of the cross at the crib⁷⁶ or "the cross present in the womb." This centre permeates all of Balthasar's theology, reflecting his theological obedience to the actual manner in which God has chosen to redeem humanity, a manner reflecting the very interior nature of God's own self. Balthasar approaches Mary, then, exclusively in relation to the redemptive mysteries of her Son. To do other than this would in fact be *Mariolatry*. It is small wonder that Balthasar, as we have noted, is struck by a similar circling which he finds in Irenaeus.⁷⁷

For Balthasar the circle of Christ and the circle of Mary are utterly inseparable. The question as to which circle contains the other goes back at least to the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, at which the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God or God-bearer) was affirmed for Mary: the Creator by his nature contains Mary his creature, who by grace comes to contain the Creator.⁷⁸ It is here that Balthasar locates the central paradox of Christianity, a paradox vividly portrayed in the icon known as "Our Lady of the Sign", in which Mary is shown to be offering Christ to the world from a mandala (window to heaven) on her

⁷⁴ Leiva-Merikakis is the translator of Balthasar's *The Threefold Garland*.

⁷⁵ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 9

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol. II, p 43

⁷⁸ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 10

breast. This mandala consists of concentric circles, and out of it emerges Christ. Then Mary herself is surrounded by a larger mandala.⁷⁹ She contains but is also contained. It is interesting that several of Charles Wesley's hymns suggest something very similar – for example:

Who gave all things to be,
What a wonder to see
Him born of his creature and nursed on her knee!⁸⁰

Whilst for Balthasar the uncreated Lord cannot have a mother, the redeeming Lord must. Mary is the human mother who “gave God his heart and thus made God's suffering and our redemption possible.”⁸¹ By her very nature Mary is incapable of being an end in herself, and yet through her obedience and her resulting conception of the Son of God, Mary becomes the “cause of salvation” both for herself and for all humankind (Irenaeus). Mary, for Balthasar, is already what we *may be*, and as the physical mother of the God-man she provides the indispensable “chamber for the espousals” of God and humankind.⁸² This notion is central to Balthasar's theology, as Mary connects, brings together, and points beyond herself. It is this feature of Mary that leads Macquarrie to describe her as “the meeting-place for a great many Christian doctrines”, almost like a railway junction “where many lines meet and connections are made”.⁸³

The most significant feature for Leiva-Merikakis of Balthasar's Mariology is its devotional milieu. “His theological understanding of Mary's role in the economy of redemption does not remain at the level of speculation, but

⁷⁹ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, pp 10 and 11

⁸⁰ *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, edited by G. Osborn, VII, 81. Used in J.A. Kay's selection, *Wesley's Prayers and Praises* (1958). Cited by Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p 186

⁸¹ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 11

⁸² *ibid*, p 13

⁸³ John Macquarrie, *Mary for all Christians*, second edition (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2001) p 58

unconditionally occurs in the context of prayer⁸⁴. This is why his reflections on Mary centre around the rosary (rose garland/ "rosenkranz") - showing that we are here entering the realm of mystery.⁸⁵

Balthasar's writings are rich in Marian material. His delicate, reverential treatment of her as someone of great beauty – like a treasure - (described perhaps most comprehensively in *The Threefold Garland*), is consistent with his overarching theme of theological aesthetics. He appears to stand in awe of Mary - or perhaps wonder. This, as Leiva-Merikakis has noted, underscores Balthasar's sense of the absolute mystery of the Incarnation, together with the humility that this evokes in return.

For the purposes of this dissertation my interest in Balthasar's Mariology centres on its relation to recapitulation, and therefore to the humanity of Christ. I make no claim, therefore, to offer an exhaustive analysis of his treatment of Mary, and neither am I able to embrace his Mariology, nor the rest of his theology, in its entirety. Yet Balthasar offers some remarkable insights regarding Mary, and my concern is to use these - hopefully without doing violence to his intact picture of Mary - to demonstrate her pivotal role in the whole drama of the Incarnation. I do so without losing sight of the fact that Balthasar throughout seems unaware of the ambiguity that surrounds the person and the myth of Mary, particularly in relation to the position of women. In due course this matter will receive closer attention (ch 5).

Balthasar's Mariology grows essentially out of three related and sequential themes: Mary's assent to God; her role as mediator of Christ's humanity; and the establishment and guarantee of community through her.

Mary's assent is her "yes" to God. This has been described as the "Marian watermark"⁸⁶, giving her the status of multifaceted archetype of humanity and

⁸⁴ In Balthasar's own words his theology is "kneeling theology", rooted in meditation and prayer. Yet, notes Riches, it is not without intellectual rigour and a critical eye (See Riches in D. Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, p 252).

⁸⁵ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, pp 13f

⁸⁶ Roten in *The Beauty of Christ*, p 125

“archetype and source of the Church”⁸⁷. Mary’s assent has a two-fold result. First, her reception of the Word was so unconditional that the Word “staked out a space in a human being in order there itself to become man (*human*), as the child of a mother”.⁸⁸ Balthasar goes on to suggest that in the meantime Christ’s repose in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18) has taken on the form of “warmly nestling in the arms of his Mother.”⁸⁹ Second, the mother’s precedence ahead of us does not imply her isolation but rather the opening up of the possibility of us too becoming assenters, the possibility of the Word reaching us and of us reaching God in the Word.

In a nutshell, then, Mary’s assent - her “yes” to God - creates *possibility* for us. Furthermore, Mary’s consent is one that is expanded wider and wider, culminating in the passion where she is being asked to say “yes” to the unimaginable torture of her child.⁹⁰ But her assent also creates a *reality* in the community established by Mary: “the community which binds God to man in her when he becomes a child is the foundation of a community which binds us all together as children of God, a community which we call God’s Church.”⁹¹ Mary is the first cell of the church.

The happening that occurs between the mother and the Son is for Balthasar the very centre of the event of salvation.⁹² It is in Mary that God and humankind are brought together. It is in her, too, that human relationality is established in the interaction between mother and child. Indeed, Christ’s very first experiences of human relationality were with his mother. Mary, understood in this light, is the mediator both of Christ’s humanity and of community: God-human community and community between human beings.

Balthasar is at pains to establish Mary right at the centre of the church. In fact, he quite unabashedly *identifies* her with the church. She is the “ecclesia

⁸⁷ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 22

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p 20

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p 49

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p 82

⁹¹ *ibid*, p 21

⁹² *ibid*, p 21

immaculata”, the “spotless Church who completes our imperfect assent.”⁹³ My Protestant sensibilities make it difficult for me to accompany Balthasar quite so far down this particular road, but there are two points of deep significance that I wish to extract for our understanding of recapitulation. The first concerns being-in-community with other people and the definitive status this has for our humanity. The second concerns representation - how it is possible for Christ to represent those whose experience is not his own, and to go on representing people today.

“Mary’s answer (to God’s eternal Word) must now resound from the world, and indeed, from two persons, the Mother and the Son, for there is no such thing as an isolated human being. One is only human with others; the only humanity is co-humanity.”⁹⁴

I write in the context of Africa. Here the deep sense of community is captured in the notion of *ubuntu*⁹⁵ and summed up in a modified and contextual form of the Cartesian maxim⁹⁶ to read: “I belong therefore I am”. The notion that the “only humanity is co-humanity” therefore strikes a familiar chord. The significance of what Balthasar postulates is that the humanity which is recapitulated in Christ must include being-in-community with others. To be human means to be human for and with others. This brings to mind Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Jesus as “the man for others”, as well as his vision of sociality, to which we have already referred. Balthasar contends that now the divine Son is a Son of Man, no one can any longer bypass one’s fellow human being in one’s “yearning for revelations”. God’s supreme revelation to the world comes in the form of a person. The context in which these assertions are made is that of the shepherds who, in their search for truth, found it in particular persons at a particular place - Mary, Joseph and the child in the stable⁹⁷. God encounters us in our fellow human beings.

⁹³ *ibid*, p 34

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p 31

⁹⁵ “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (a person is a person because of people)

⁹⁶ “I think therefore I am”

⁹⁷ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 48

This is a Christological theme which is currently receiving increasing attention both intellectually and in Christian praxis. Graham Ward offers some useful insights in his analysis of the Christology of Luce Irigaray,⁹⁸ issuing a challenge to modern trends which redefine Chalcedon in terms of the individualism of Hegelian subjectivity. In answer to the questions, “where does Christology begin?” and “where does the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth reveal itself as meaningful and relevant for us?” Ward points to the anti-Hegelian trajectory of Irigaray and others – Balthasar included. Here Christology is rooted in a dialogical understanding of personhood, “constituted only in the participation within an economy of desire for and by the other”.⁹⁹ Personhood (including Christ’s personhood) is contingent on the space between the self and the other. Hence Christology cannot begin with, or consist in, Christ’s self-actualisation (as the Word made flesh) in isolation from others. This would be revelation without reconciliation. Rather, Christology must be explored in terms of the interpersonal, the intersexual and not in terms of the self-contained Cartesian *ego cognito*. Indeed, Christology reveals itself in the reconciliation “between” us. This, moreover, makes Christology an ongoing event, not a defined state.¹⁰⁰

Ferré, addressing the issue of Jesus’ growth, identifies three fundamental characteristics of human nature: a drive to selfhood, a desire for others, and a need for God.¹⁰¹ Initially each of these human drives is determined by self-interest. Through moral struggle and even alienation from God and fellow humans, one can reach a level – as did Christ – of “mature participation”. Here the drives of self, when fulfilled by being directed aright by the Spirit and motivated effectively by Him, make the self social in God and men, even while making the self an ever more real and growing person”.¹⁰² Ferré concludes from this that in some way sociality lies at the heart of being both truly human and truly Godly.

⁹⁸ Graham Ward, “Divinity and Sexuality: Luce Irigaray and Christology” in *Modern Theology*, Volume 12, No.2, April 1996 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) pp 221-237

⁹⁹ Ward citing Irigaray, p 230/1

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 231

¹⁰¹ Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, pp 80-2

What I find it astounding is that, despite such penetrating insights into the nature of true (mature) human being – in this case specifically as it relates to sociality – Ferré, Bonhoeffer, Robinson and others make no mention of those who facilitated such sociality or being-in-community for Jesus. It simply is not true, as Ferré seems to suggest, that we learn sociality through the Spirit working in us. This may be a factor, but essentially we learn – as Jesus learnt – sociality through people, through the “space” between “me and the other.” It is Magdalen who, beginning with Jesus’ pre-natal life and tracing the course of that life into adulthood, draws attention to the role played by Mary, Joseph and others in his development and nurture.¹⁰³

With such an understanding of the meaning of personhood, together with a grasp of the way God is revealed in Christ, the pivotal role of Mary becomes very clear. Mary mediated Christ’s personhood both by giving him physical life and as the one who initiated him into relationality. Without her agency recapitulation could not have occurred. Mary should also be understood symbolically in respect of relationality. For, as Gavin D’Costa contends, “the event of Jesus is itself utterly relational depending, as it does, on Mary. That, in turn, ... is relatedly dependent on the holy women and men of Israel, and finally relationally dependent on the earth... Hence, the event of Jesus is itself *not* the isolated story of one man.”¹⁰⁴

Irenaeus insists both that Christ recapitulates the whole of human experience, and that he is recapitulator until the consummation. In response to this we must ask the question, already alluded to when we spoke of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of recapitulation: how can Christ recapitulate experiences of life that were not his? This forces us to journey *with* Christ’s relationality as this is symbolised in Mary, *back into* the paradoxical area of his particularity. It is Mary who mediates both to Jesus, and this is seen pre-eminently in the

¹⁰² Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, p 93

¹⁰³ Magdalen, *The Hidden Face of Jesus*. See especially Part 1, “Fully Human”.

¹⁰⁴ Gavin D’Costa, *Sexing the Trinity: Gender, Culture and the Divine* (London: SCM, 2000) p 28. Moltmann’s expression “community in generations” is apposite here (Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future* (London: SCM, 1989), translated by John Bowden) p 11).

Christ-Mary-church connection. It is at this point that the notion of being-in-community and representation overlap, the one leading into the other.

Mary's significance for community, and her association with the church, becomes even clearer when one speaks metaphorically of the church as the "Body of Christ". Mary was responsible for giving Christ his human body, which enabled him to live in relationship with humankind. In this sense she is, for Balthasar, the essence of the church. But her role as mediator of Christ's body in the world continues in the mystical Body of Christ, the church, through which Christ continues to live in relationship with humankind. Employing Irenaeus categories, then, recapitulation in Christ continues today in the church, where "Christ exists as church-community" (Bonhoeffer, new translation), representing humankind in and through the community of believers. Whilst essentially agreeing with Bonhoeffer, I nevertheless challenge the idea of Christ's ongoing presence being confined to the church and those who self-consciously acknowledge him. I contend that Christ is present, being "represented" *wherever* being-in-community fosters healed and whole relationships.¹⁰⁵

Once again, therefore, we are drawn inescapably into the notion of relationality. Christ is mediated to others through the relationships which people have with each other. He did not have to be *everything* that every human being could possibly be. He did, as we saw earlier with Robinson, show in his own particular, unique life what is possible for every person in his or her unique life.

Mediator of Christ's humanity

Christ's humanity - his *full* humanity - according to Irenaeus, is essential for salvation. I have indicated my agreement with Irenaeus on this point, but also argued that as we move "beyond Irenaeus, with Irenaeus", the Christological task facing us involves taking into account the meaning of "full humanity" in

terms of contemporary knowledge and insights. Insofar as Mary is concerned, it is her role as mediator of this humanity that places her, Balthasar contends, at the very centre of the drama of redemption. "To become human" he states quite simply, "is to become the child of a mother."¹⁰⁶ As the Word becomes human through Mary's agency, the whole event of salvation is exteriorised as the Son seeks to make the Father's "primal goodness graspable to the world."¹⁰⁷ We have considered Mary's role in this mediation specifically as it relates to sociality. But for Balthasar there still is more to this mediation and hence to Mary's role in redemption.

As he prays with the rosary Balthasar meditates on the successive stages of the Word becoming incarnate through Mary. It is to these reflections that I now turn. As I do so I wish in passing to restate the central theme of this dissertation, namely Christology "from within", in which Christ is understood as the source/principle of life made manifest. Without employing these particular categories, Balthasar seems to affirm such a notion, giving expression to it on both a natural and a religio-cultural level. As to the former, and in the context of the Son's journey from exaltedness to lowliness, Balthasar asserts that "... he bears witness to the Father that the descent into unrecognizability corresponds precisely to the triune design"¹⁰⁸ - like the flower bears the seed which falls into the ground and "dies", only to be reborn to new life. In terms of the latter, i.e. from a religio-cultural perspective (echoing CS Lewis' "myth that became fact" or "true fairy tale"¹⁰⁹), von Balthasar contends that "everything which had been image, symbol, ceremony is now surpassed interiorly by the reality, the lived reality which is what the many sacrifices always intended."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ One cannot live sensitively in the context of Africa without being aware of the enormous sustaining and energising power of community life.

¹⁰⁶ Balthasar, *the Threefold Garland*, pp 30f

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p 36

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, , p 49

¹⁰⁹ CS Lewis, *Undeceptions* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971) Ch 5. We shall refer to this again in Ch 5.

¹¹⁰ *The Threefold Garland*, pp 54f

It strikes me that in different places Balthasar alludes to the Incarnation both as interiorisation and as exteriorisation.¹¹¹ Is this not part of the paradox - the mystery - of the Incarnation? In order to become manifest in the world, Christ's Lordship becomes veiled. In order to exercise real power, the Word relinquished all power. The Word entered the dark recesses of the woman's womb in order to become visible to the world - exteriorisation through interiorisation; interiorisation through exteriorisation; the dialectical both/and of the Incarnation.¹¹²

As he focuses on Mary's assent to God, Balthasar traces its consequences through successive stages, the most notable for our purposes being the following: conception, carrying, birthing, nurturing, releasing/offering, suffering. It is noteworthy that throughout his reflections Balthasar is conscious of the tension between the uniqueness of *this* child and mother, and what is common to *every* child and mother. This tension underscores an essential feature of recapitulation, one to which attention has already been given: it is only through being a *particular* person (with the limitations imposed by this) that Christ could in the first place be a *real* person. And conversely, it is only insofar as he shared (recapitulated) *common* human experience that he could in fact be *the* human being, representative of all others.

Mary conceived... Fruitfulness is a favoured theme in Balthasar, and this becomes particularly obvious in relation to Mary. In comment on Balthasar's predilection for the notion, it has been noted that for Balthasar fruitfulness is the keystone not alone of God's logic, but also of God's "hermeneutics": "be fruitful and multiply". Fruitfulness has indeed been described as the "last word" on Balthasar's anthropology, so that the fruitfulness of Mary becomes for him the ultimate realisation and model of anthropology¹¹³. Mary's fruitfulness, for Balthasar, was contingent on her consent, so that in a sense the world's salvation is contingent on that same "yes" to God. Furthermore,

¹¹¹ *ibid*, cf p 36

¹¹² Is this not part of what is symbolised in the mandalas of "Our lady of the Sign", referred to earlier?

¹¹³ Roten in *The Beauty of Christ*, p 136

Mary is "not only the pipe from the well through which God's gift has flowed; she and God together are the source."¹¹⁴

Mary carried.... Incredulously, Mary now bears what she lets herself be borne by. Balthasar regards the carrying of Jesus in his mother's body with utmost seriousness, grounding his very humanity in the experiences in his mother's womb: "Every child must begin by letting itself be borne". "Now he is undergoing his first, physical training as he is carried about bodily." It is important at this point to note that Balthasar repeatedly draws analogies between the physical and the spiritual in the Incarnation¹¹⁵ - for example, between his being "borne" (carried) by Mary and being "borne" by the will of the Father and driven by the Spirit.¹¹⁶ In Mary, then, we have the centre of salvation "living and growing within her own centre, eventually to emerge from her".

Mary birthed and nurtured.... The tension between particularity and universality in Balthasar is once more evident as he comments that in the Incarnation we have "...the same miracle which occurs at every birth: from one being we suddenly have two".¹¹⁷ He notes too that from every new person there radiates something of God's uniqueness since the depths of generation and conception "reach all the way down to the eternal life of God."¹¹⁸ I consider this tension to be consistent with my own paradigm of a Christology from within - that in a unique way the pattern/principle intrinsic to all life, grounded in God, is made visible in Christ.

Balthasar reflects in some detail on the nurturing that the child receives from his mother. To me this is important, as is his attention to the period of Mary's actual pregnancy - her carrying of the child. This is in contrast to the creeds,

¹¹⁴ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 44

¹¹⁵ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, pp 37f

¹¹⁶ Of particular interest to me is the regularity with which a similar dynamic operates throughout history, both in literature and art. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the "spiritualisation" of the milk that Mary offers from her breast - see further discussion on this topic in Ch 5

¹¹⁷ *ibid*, p 43

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, pp 43f

as also to Irenaeus, where we see a leap from Jesus' conception to his birth, and then, with brief comment on his experience as a human being, from his birth to his passion and death. In this respect Balthasar symbolises the more contemporary awareness that who a person is and will become is markedly affected by both pre- and post-natal experiences, taking the child right through childhood and adolescence. Part of my central thesis is precisely this: that Mary played a key role in redemption by virtue of the role she played as Christ's mother - his bearer, birther, nurturer:

"She will have to be a mother to her child, physically and spiritually feeding him with her milk, educating him and introducing him to the world of men but above all to the world of God"¹¹⁹

For Balthasar Mary is never only the mother/nurturer of Jesus. This mother-child relationship is always, in his mind, carried through to the church. The physical blends with the mystical, the human with the divine. This is why Balthasar can say that "God's Word ... is drunk from the breasts of the Church. It is here that we are nourished like the child Jesus at his Mother's breast."¹²⁰ As I show in the following chapter, the symbolism of Mary's breasts and milk ("Maria lactans") is a favoured theme in medieval art and literature.

What of the child to whom Mary was mother? Balthasar's sense of the mystery of the Incarnation is in evidence here, too: "how his eternal and divine consciousness entered into this near-consciousness proper to a child is a mystery which we will never penetrate."¹²¹ Such acknowledgement serves to highlight the extraordinary challenge facing Jesus' parents in their task of parenting this extraordinary child. This is perhaps an appropriate moment to comment on Balthasar's understanding of Joseph's role in this drama. Mary is obviously prominent in his reflections - mainly because of the peculiar

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p 44

¹²⁰ *ibid*, p 46

¹²¹ *ibid*, p 49

circumstances of her child's conception and her unique role in the drama of redemption, but in part also because the advent of any child is marked by experiences exclusive to mother and child. Balthasar nevertheless incorporates Joseph in the parental task and experience of nurturing and of trying to understand the child Jesus.

Mary released and offered..... "The body that takes upon itself the sin of the world is a 'fruit of your body', as the Hail Mary prays". "The mother's body", continues Balthasar, "cannot help but feel what is done to her 'fruit'. Because in a mysterious way Mary communes with the sufferings of her Son, she experiences in her own manner what is the sin of the world". Balthasar, having asserted this, is clear that Mary is not thereby a "redemptrix" on equal footing with her Son. Her role is rather that of assenting to whatever God wants to do.¹²²

It is against this double background - Mary's *co-suffering* with her child as the *assentor* to God's plan of redemption - that we can attempt to understand her release and offering of him. This began the moment she said "yes" to God's plan (the cross present in the womb), but also in the very reality of becoming a mother like any mother: "In the act of being born there begins the act of dying.... Mothers cling to their children so that they will not go away from them and be drawn closer to death.... She can accompany her fleeing child a piece down the road for as long as the child needs her, but this must happen already in renunciation."¹²³

We see the release and offering when his father and mother brought the infant Jesus to the temple to be offered to God. We see it again when he was twelve years old and stayed back in the temple to discourse with the religious leaders after the Passover in Jerusalem, causing his parents anxiety and reacting precociously towards them when he was found. Mary and Joseph, according to Balthasar, had to learn what it means to "possess as if one did

¹²² *ibid*, pp 80f

¹²³ *ibid*,, p 45

not possess" (1 Cor 7:30),¹²⁴ and we know that Mary "pondered these things, storing them in her heart". From here on Mary's experience was one of painful and progressive release and offering of her Son. He distanced himself from her and her family ("who is my mother?" and "who are my brothers?") setting his course steadfastly on what he perceived to be God's will. Macquarrie ventures an interesting suggestion at this point. "Both Mary and Jesus were required, by their respective vocations, to bring their love for each other to the highest possible level."¹²⁵ This culminated for Mary in the most extreme form of offering and release, an experience that no parent should have to face: the cruel death of her child. For Balthasar Mary's final, although perhaps not most painful, release of Jesus was when he ascended to heaven.¹²⁶

Mary suffered..... It is difficult to sever Mary's suffering from the progressive relinquishing of her child, but there is a sense in which this relinquishing reached a climax on the cross. Balthasar speaks of Mary's "hidden participation" in the passion of Christ.¹²⁷ This position gains support from Macquarrie, for example, who speaks of "the parable of perfect unity and conformity with Christ, of the most complete identification and participation with him in his passion."¹²⁸ Macquarrie goes on to refer to Kierkegaard's perception of Mary's relation to Christ's suffering. Here Mary's suffering cannot be understood as only a natural grief at the sight of Jesus' death, but as a sharing in his self-emptying, as if Mary herself were sharing something of what Christ expressed in his cry of dereliction from the cross.¹²⁹ A similar identity of Mary's suffering with Christ's was expressed early in the last century by Pius X, who spoke of the "community of suffering and will between Mary and Christ," while Benedict XV a few years later, declared that "she has thus suffered with her suffering and dying Son and has almost died with him."¹³⁰ This is one way in which Mary appears as the prototype of the

¹²⁴ *ibid*, p 63

¹²⁵ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, Second edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977) p 397

¹²⁶ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 118

¹²⁷ *ibid*, p 69

¹²⁸ Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p 397

¹²⁹ S Kierkegaard, *The Last Years*, pp 38-40, 111. Cited by Macquarrie, *Principles*, p 397

¹³⁰ Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition* (London: Collins, 1968) pp 186/7.

Translated by S.H. Hooke.

church, "which must share in the suffering of Christ and must ... finally give up itself altogether as a distinct association if it is to be resurrected and transfigured..."¹³¹

There is a great deal more to Balthasar's Mariology. What I have attempted to do here is to demonstrate, by means of some of the sensitive and perceptive insights which he provides, the indispensable role that Mary plays in the reality and fullness of Christ's humanity - his assumption through the Incarnation of all that makes us human.

In drawing this section to a close I find myself left with one strong impression of Balthasar's understanding of Mary and her relation to Christ: the tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the human and the divine. Here was an ordinary Jewish girl who falls pregnant, bears a child, raises him to adulthood, releases him to independence, and finally witnesses his murder. This could be the story of any woman and any person. Thus Mary mediated the true humanity of Christ. But superimposed on this picture is that of a particular young woman selected by God to fulfil a unique task; at God's initiative to conceive a child who would be the Incarnation of the Word; to carry him in her womb, give birth to him and nurture him in preparation for an extraordinary task - that of redeeming the world through the recapitulation of human experience in the One who could be *the* human being precisely because he was a human being.

¹³¹ Macquarrie, *Principles*, p 397

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CHAPTER 5

MEDIATOR OF CHRIST'S HUMANITY

I say, then, when once we have mastered the idea, that Mary bore, suckled, and handled the Eternal in the form of a child, what limit is conceivable to the rush and flood of thoughts which such a doctrine involves? What awe and surprise must attend upon the knowledge, that a creature has been brought so close to the divine Essence? It was the creation of a new idea and a new sympathy, a new faith and worship, when the holy Apostles announced that God had become incarnate; and a supreme love and devotion to Him became possible, which seemed hopeless before that revelation. But, besides this, a second range of thoughts was opened on mankind, unknown before, and unlike any other, as soon as it was understood that that the Incarnate God had a mother.

John Henry Newman¹

My aim in this chapter, building on what has gone before, is to develop further the idea of a Christology "from within", by giving particular attention to the role of Mary. This will be both directly in terms of her relationship to Jesus, and in terms of the redemptive imagery of which she can be the source. I need to emphasise that the agenda of this dissertation is Christological and not Mariological, so that Mary will be considered in a particular way, specifically in her relationship to Christ. In trying to establish Mary's position in Christology, I

¹ A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., on his Recent Eirenicon (Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1886) p 88. In *Mary – the Second Eve* from the writings of John Henry Newman, compiled by Sister Eileen Breen, F.M.A. (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1982) p 38

have asked a number of prior questions. Who is this woman who was the mother of Christ?. How has she been perceived and constructed through history, and why? In the light of today's understanding of what it means to be human, is there perhaps a need to revisit the role of Mary in Christ's life? Are there fresh questions we need to ask? We saw how Balthasar painted a doxological picture of Mary for us.² But in it he raises issues which beckon us beyond what he himself could have envisaged. Some of these have already been addressed; others will surface as we proceed.

At least two things become evident as one reflects on Mary. She is in the first instance among the most popular and powerful subjects of creative and affective activity in Western history, portrayed and experienced in many different ways. Mary Daly underscores this with a telling reference to the historian Henry Adams, writing at the turn of the last century. On a trip to Europe, Adams' perception was that the great cathedrals were built not to the glory of God but to Mary:

Symbol or Energy, the Virgin had acted as the greatest force the Western world ever felt, and had drawn men's activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done³

Adams, essentially a conservative man, was convinced that the main civilising force in Western history had been "the Virgin", contending that "all the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres."⁴

There are numerous examples of the dogged persistence of Marian devotion, not least where efforts have been made to stamp it out. Among these is the

² Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*

³ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918) pp 388/9. Quoted by Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1991) p 91

shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in England.⁵ But it is possible to go much further back in history to discover the prominence of Mary in Christian tradition. Tavad notes, for example, that the celebration of Christmas, which existed in Rome as early as 336 CE, was at first celebrated largely as a feast of Mary the mother of Jesus.⁶ An indication of the ongoing popularity of Marian piety is to be found in the numerous reports of visions of Mary and miracles attributed to her, in a wide variety of contexts.⁷ Another indication is a return, not least among young Catholic people, to the radical Mariology of Tridentine divines such as Louis de Montfort.⁸

Secondly, Mary's person is surrounded by ambiguity. Such ambiguity is two-fold. On the one hand there is no clear-cut, uncontested explanation of Mary, Mariology or the cult of Mary. On the other, she is not consistently portrayed either as a passive, benign instrument or an active player in the drama of redemption. Each age and each context has produced its own complex of factors which have played their part in determining the reality and shape both of the figure of Mary as a person and of Marian devotion and discourse. A still more profound level of ambiguity lies in Mary's relationship to women. Mary, as we have seen, is described by Irenaeus as the "New Eve", paralleling Christ as the "Second Adam". Can she be seen, therefore, as a positive symbol, affirming through her participation in God's redemptive plan

⁴ Adams, *ibid*, pp 388f. See further comments by Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade* p 138

⁵ Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen* (New York: St Martins Press, 1995) pp 155ff. The shrine of *Our Lady of Walsingham* was built, possibly in the eleventh century, as a replica of the holy family's house in Nazareth. Its desecration in 1538 was part of the Protestant iconoclastic campaign in England, yet it remains a place of contemporary pilgrimage for different Christian traditions.

⁶ George Tavad, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996) p 59

⁷ *ibid*, p 249. See Richard Rutt's article "Why should he send his Mother? Some theological reflections on Marian apparitions" in *Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, edited by William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster: Gracewing, 1997) pp 274ff

⁸ St Louis Grignon De Montfort (1673-1716) was a French "home missionary". Since his canonisation midway through the twentieth century, he has received increasing attention, not least because of his view that in the Last Days Mary would have a special and glorious role (see Rutt's article, p 280) De Montfort's most renowned work is his *True Devotion to Mary* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1941). Among his other publications are *The Secret of the Rosary* and *The Secret of Mary*.

the intrinsic value of women? Does she in this way represent a liberative trajectory? Or is there a sting in the tail here, stripping woman of the initiative and independence symbolised by Eve, and making her into woman created and maintained in the image of man, placing herself (as the female creature) at the service of a male God? - passive, benign, dependent, and with a biologically determined value? Has Mary contributed to the distorted image of women through history or does she offer hope? In a word, enquires Ruether, whose side is Mary on?⁹

The person of Mary is associated with a profound mystery. The idea that God's eternal Word should, through the agency of this ordinary woman, become human, defies the boundaries of normal rational thought. The notion of Mary's physical motherhood has, since the earliest days, drawn attention to "her condition of being a sacred vessel which, like the Ark of the Covenant, was incomprehensibly the bearer of the true God."¹⁰ It is this enigma that has contributed to the legend, myth and extra-Biblical speculation which has grown up around the mother of Jesus.

All of this awakens a strongly intuitive sense of Mary somehow being pivotal to the development of an appropriate contemporary Christology.¹¹ This sense is based on an *unambiguous* reality: Mary is the mediator of the humanity of Jesus Christ. The next affirmation, admittedly a theological faith claim, follows inevitably. She, as a person - including, but not limited to, her body - is the meeting place between God and humankind, and in this sense God's plan of redemption was and is contingent on her participation. Such a

⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1975) p 37.

¹⁰ Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London and New York: Cassel, 2000) p 30, citing art historian Yrjö Hirn.

¹¹ I use the words "construct", "develop" and "paradigm" with caution. Paradigms, it has been suggested, are the constructions of academics - of theorists - and have little to do with the experience of ordinary people. I do not fully agree with this. Paradigms *exist* - whether we realise it or not. All human activity takes place within given paradigms. The task of the theorist is to *name* these existing paradigms, and to discern ways in which the "givens" of life can provide material for the evolution of more life-enhancing paradigms within which to live.

suggestion is a contentious one, but also pregnant with transformative potential and ecumenical significance.

Even though our focus is specifically on her role as mediator of Christ's humanity, we have to locate that understanding within the broader context of the development of Mariology. For our purposes, then, we will consider how the role of Mary has been regarded in the historic church traditions, namely Eastern Orthodox¹² (the cradle of what was to become common Christian tradition), Catholic, and Protestant. My intention is to identify elements from each which may inform our understanding of her role and thus be integrated into a Christology "from within."

The development of Marian tradition

To the outsider (and to many of those on the inside) the status of Mary must constitute one of the most puzzling features of Christianity. On the one side there is the high Mariology of the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, where attention to Mary varies from popular veneration to being designated as co-redemptrix.¹³ On the other side of the spectrum is Protestantism, whose Mariology is identifiable by its absence, and sometimes by overt suppression of devotion to the Virgin. Nevertheless, Tavard reminds us that all of the Christian positions draw support from scripture. Protestants stress the human

¹² There are two families of Orthodox churches, the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox. Our discussion concerns the former, found mainly in Eastern Europe, each one independent in internal administration, but sharing the same faith and in communion with each other. Having developed historically from the Church of the Byzantine Empire, and theologically from a dispute over the inclusion of the *filioque* clause, the Orthodox tradition bases its faith to this day primarily on the dogmatic definitions of the seven Ecumenical Councils. The Oriental Orthodox churches on the other hand, reject the Christological decisions of Chalcedon, and accept the findings of only the first three Councils. See E.A. Livingstone (ed), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp 130 and 373.

¹³ The designation of Mary as co-redemptrix has been one of the most debated and divisive issues in the ecumenical history of the church. There is, however, a great deal of debate about what it means and how it is to be understood, even within the Catholic church. I will be referring to Mary as co-redemptrix in various different contexts in this chapter, and while I do not accept some of the Catholic understandings of the term, it is one that requires critical appraisal and possible retrieval.

aspects of Mary the mother of Jesus, as related in the Synoptic Gospels, whilst Eastern Orthodox and Catholics, using the supernatural elements suggested in Matthew and Luke's account of the Annunciation and Nativity, accord her a unique place among the disciples. From here the status for Mary escalates.¹⁴ In view of this common recourse to Scripture, is it possible then that Mariology could be a source of ecumenical understanding rather than division?

The chronological divides created by the great schisms, as well as developments leading up to the proclamation of the Marian dogmas, help to create a framework for our discussion. This more or less co-incides with the Marian positions of the three main traditions. Up to the East-West schism of 1054¹⁵ the churches of both East and West contributed to the growth and intensifying nature of Marian devotion. Hereafter Mariological developments became a Western or Catholic phenomenon – not least because Eastern Orthodoxy, recognising only the first seven Ecumenical Councils, has not substantially added anything to its dogmatic teaching since Nicaea in 787. The Protestant Reformation constitutes the next significant Mariological divide. Formally dated at 1517 in association with Luther,¹⁶ this marks the beginning of a Protestant position on Mary - or lack of one. In the meantime Catholic Marian devotion continued unabated and even intensified. It is significant, then, that in the contemporary church, despite the polarised nature of regard for her, the Virgin Mary provides one of the key resources for ecumenical dialogue and discussion, something which we cannot afford to overlook.¹⁷

¹⁴ First comes Mary's elevated role in John's account of the Cana wedding, then as the model of discipleship and perfect redemption at the foot of the cross, assuming her unique status in humanity as a whole, and going on to identify her as the "woman in heaven" of Revelation 12:1-2. See Tavad, p 57

¹⁵ 1054 is the year ascribed to the Great Schism of the church, although in reality this was a prolonged process.

¹⁶ although it, too, was a process spanning several decades, involving many personalities and eventually taking various forms

¹⁷ See for example Max Thurian's classic *Mary, Mother of All Christians* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964); Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment*, ch X; Jaroslav Pelikan,

Within the Protestant tradition Marian resources are scant. In fact, according to fellow Protestant Beverley Roberts Gaventa, prior to her own study practically no substantive scholarly Mariological work – particularly by women – had emerged from a Protestant context.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, in contrast to other areas of contemporary discourse, the subject of Mary continues to reveal the sometimes sharp divide between Protestants and the two other historic streams of Christian tradition. In setting out the respective ecclesial positions on Mary we will in a sense be looking at a triptych – viewing each tradition as separate and with its own distinguishing features, yet able to identify elements of continuity which carry over into each, most clearly in the notion of Mary as *Theotokos*. From here it will be possible to extract insights for developing further a Christology “from within” with a specific focus on Mary as the mediator of Christ’s humanity.

The history of Mariology clusters mainly around the four well-known themes: Mary’s virginity, her designation as *Theotokos*, her Immaculate Conception, and her Assumption (or Dormition in the Orthodox tradition). Other themes which have surfaced from time to time – some of them tangential and not infrequently apocryphally based¹⁹ – issue from or feed into the four essential

Ch 5, “The Heroine of the Qur’an and the Black Madonna” in *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*; George H. Tavard, *Introduction*, p 8, and Ch 15, “Goddess or Woman?”, pp 249f in *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*; William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (eds), *Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*.)

¹⁸ See Beverley Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) Preface, p ix

¹⁹ Many of these themes, honed in the various stories of Mary’s life (many legendary and imaginative), have their source in the second century apocryphal Gospel of James, a widely influential document. This book, also known as the “Protevangelium” of James, is based on events associated with Christ’s birth as related in Luke’s Gospel. A well-known legend recorded in James is that concerning the midwife at Jesus’ birth, Salome, whose hand was burnt when she inserted it to check the state of Mary’s hymen (James 19:3-20:4). Other accounts in James describe events in Mary’s life in a series of striking parallels with gospel accounts of events in Jesus’ life. The *Church of the Saviour in Chora*, Istanbul contains a detailed mosaic depiction of Mary’s life, from her conception to her dormition, based on the “Protevangelium” of James. I recall being startled by its similarity to the gospel accounts of the life of Christ. Examples of Marian parallels include the story of Mary’s conception after the angel’s visitation with her mother, Anna (James 4:1ff), paralleling the Lukan account of the angel’s encounter, first with Zechariah and later with Mary; and the dilemma she

concerns. The first two of the main themes (Virginity and *Theotokos*) belong to common Christian tradition, whilst the last two, insofar as their proclamation as dogmas is concerned, are specifically Roman Catholic developments. It is her declaration as *Theotokos* that has constituted the greatest area of constancy in the various traditions, and which therefore has the greatest ecumenical potential as well as theological significance. This understanding of Mary has also lain at the heart of debates and developments concerning the tension between Mary's (and therefore Christ's) humanity and physicality on the one hand, and her association with divinity on the other – paradoxically also sharpening the divides between the traditions.

A tension has always existed in Mariology between what is specifically new and Christian, and the influence of pre- and extra-Christian traditions. In his précis of the development of Marian devotion Küng is adamant in his reference to the various factors that have played their part in shaping it. In the first place, and noting the biblical sources, Küng refers to the mutual influence of Marian piety and the art, literature, customs, feasts and celebrations of which Mary is the subject. Secondly, there are many extra-biblical factors – goddess cults, theological and ecclesial rivalries and antagonisms, and even personal interventions by individuals, which have played a role in its growth.²⁰

In tracing the course of Mariology through history my particular concern is to take note, with each new trend and/or development, of the impact it has had on perceived notions of Mary's relationship with Christ. Indeed, with even the most radical forms and periods of Marian devotion it is Mary's ability to help people experience Christ that is the avowed objective:

presented to the priests in the temple when she was twelve years old (James 8:2), paralleling Jesus' return to the temple after the Passover when he, too, was twelve. See Robert W. Funk (ed), *New Gospel Parallels*, Volume Two, John and the Other Gospels (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985)

The more we honour the Blessed Virgin, the more we know Jesus Christ, because we honour Mary only that we may the more perfectly know Jesus, since we go to her only as the way by which we are to find the end we are seeking, which is Jesus.²¹

But more is at stake. Responding to the issue of Mariology as a problem for Protestantism, Kenneth Leech, a contemporary Anglo-Catholic scholar, insists that “attitudes to Mary are a decisive test of Christological orthodoxy.”²²

There are few references to Mary in the New Testament.²³ The first of these comes from Paul, whose single reference is to the human birth of Jesus “from a woman” (Gal 4:4). In the Synoptics she is mentioned only once during the public life of Jesus, and this in a somewhat negative context (Mark 3:21ff). John’s Gospel mentions her twice, the first time at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry at the wedding feast at Cana, and then again with John at the foot of the cross.²⁴ The infancy narratives of Matthew and especially of Luke thus “form the comparatively slender foundation for the essentials of Marian piety and Marian theology which began at an early date with the typological relationship between Eve and Mary.”²⁵ Sarah Jane Boss reminds us that Luke’s Gospel contains information that could only have been known to Mary, so that traditionally Mary herself has been considered

²⁰ Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London: Collins, 1977) p 459. Translated by Edward Quin

²¹ Introductory quote in de Montfort’s *True Devotion to Mary*

²² Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality*, p 365

²³ See Raymond E. Brown et al (eds), *Mary in the New Testament* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2000) for a significant ecumenical consideration of portrayals of Mary in the New Testament.

²⁴ Because it lacks Synoptic support, the historicity of this latter Johannine reference is called into question, although according to Küng it has considerable theological significance as symbolic of the church “at the moment of complete faith”. (Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p 458)

²⁵ Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p 458.

the source of Luke's material.²⁶ Indeed, the Marian statements surrounding the infancy narratives, suggests Küng, provide little material for historical study but a great deal for proclamation²⁷ - a position held by much contemporary scholarship.

As the event of pivotal importance in Mary's life, the Annunciation is also the initial and decisive event of the Incarnation, setting the whole redemptive drama in motion. It has been the most popular subject of artistic and theological activity on the theme of Mary,²⁸ and the way the Annunciation has been interpreted is the wellspring of all Mariological tradition.

Furthermore, the Annunciation is the event remembered by millions of Catholics throughout the world every day as they recite the rosary. It also symbolises an issue which perplexes philosophers and theologians alike in all three of the Abrahamic traditions: the relationship between necessity or divine sovereignty and human freewill.²⁹

Perhaps most profoundly, the Annunciation lies at the heart of the ambiguity that impacts on the position of women, and with them other marginalised groups. Ruether, for example, considers the Annunciation from the perspective of a feminist critique of patriarchal Christianity, essentially the masculinity of God. To conceive of divinity in exclusively male terms "allowed the female to appear only as the receptive and/or mediating principle of the male sovereignty... The feminine, then, can appear in Christian theology only as an expression of the creature, not as an aspect of God.....the good feminine is a spiritual principle of passive receptivity to the regenerating powers of God."³⁰

²⁶ Sarah Jane Boss, "Mary" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, edited by Adrian Hastings, et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p 414

²⁷ Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p 458

²⁸ See Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, pp 81ff, and Balthasar's reflections in *The Threefold Garland*

²⁹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 83

Yet, despite the consistency with which the Annunciation has consciously or unconsciously been interpreted in this way, it is not the full picture. For, as Pelikan reminds us, it has often been noted that “obedience that is open to the future should be defined as the supreme activity, not passivity”. The title “handmaid of the Lord” is therefore far more complex than many of its interpreters have supposed.³¹ This alternative tradition, which grounds Mary squarely in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament,³² hardly shows her to be “passive”. Instead, it actually grounds the liberative trajectory identified in Mary, both for women and other oppressed groups. Such a tradition is seen in the medieval portrayal of the Virgin as *Mulier Fortis*, the woman of valour, applying to her the words: “A woman of valor who will find?”³³

It is this second reading of the Annunciation that has grown out of early Greek Christian thought, grasping the paradoxical notions of Mary’s divine predestination to be the mother of Christ and the necessity of her assent in order for God’s will to be executed. Furthermore, if this was how God’s grace operated in the “most shattering intervention into human life and history ever launched by God”, then it must be true of how the grace of God always operates – respecting human freewill at the risk of disobedience.³⁴ When the Annunciation is understood in this way, and particularly if one accepts that the gender of God is not a factor in the dynamic, it is possible to see Mary not as the woman who is the creature, but as the human being called into partnership with God. Following this logic it becomes possible to accord enormous value to, and appreciate the indispensability of, the role played by Mary in the Incarnation.

³⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p 139

³¹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 84

³² This tradition frequently links Mary with the quotation from Joel in Acts 2: “And on my servants and my handmaids I will pour out in those days my Spirit”, followed by the promise “and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17). On this reading Mary, present with the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), first prophesied in response to the angel Gabriel, and then again in the revolutionary words of the Magnificat.

³³ From Proverbs 31. See Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 91

Julian of Norwich was to draw attention to the dimension of hope for the oppressed derived from the Annunciation. In her first “showing” one of Julian’s visions was of “our Lady, St Mary”, at the moment of the Annunciation. In this vision Mary appeared, not as the “queen of heaven”, but in surprising simplicity. Paradoxically, Mary’s greatness lay precisely in her deep humility and simplicity. Julian sees that “the soul is highest, noblest, worthiest” precisely when it is “lowest, humblest, and gentlest”.³⁵ This type of greatness for Julian reflects the greatness of God who in humility appears in the Incarnation itself, choosing to be born of a common woman. Because of this there is now a permanent bond between God’s own being and humanity.³⁶ And along with this, great value is accorded to people who can come to God with nothing but their humility.

The main outlines of Marian theology, and with it the seeds of subsequent developments, were already clear by the second century – and this is indicative of such ideas being in popular circulation for some time before. Scholars speculate on the possible reasons for what was a growing emphasis on Mary. One suggestion is that in the context of the Logos Christology which sought to make Christianity compatible with Hellenism, Jesus became a remote, heavenly figure, while the more intimate, human figure of Mary compensated for the seeming lack of humanity in Christ. But it is also true that emphasis on Mary grew as a by-product of Christological emphases themselves.³⁷ In this case the question of how one saw Mary became diagnostic of one’s understanding of the nature of Christ, for, as John of Damascus would later point out regarding Mary as Mother of God, “this name embraces the whole mystery of the dispensation”.³⁸ In fact, our

³⁴ Pelphrey, *Revelations of Divine Love*, pp 86f

³⁵ *A Lesson of Love: The Revelations of Julian of Norwich*, edited and translated by Father John-Julian OJN (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1988) p 154

³⁶ Brant Pelphrey on Julian’s *Revelations of Divine Love*, in *Christ our Mother – Julian of Norwich* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1989) p 106f

³⁷ Leech, *Experiencing God*, p 366

³⁸ John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith III*, para. XII. In *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IX, edited by W. Sanday (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p 56.

understanding of Christ and particularly of his humanity is contingent on our grasp of the mediatorial role played by Mary, his mother.

During the second century the main doctrinal issue to emerge, alongside the linking of Eve and Mary, was the notion of Christ's virginal conception. Significantly, this was largely in defence of his humanity. Ignatius, who died around 107, had already taught that the virgin conception of Christ was not merely an incidental fact, but something of relevance to the Christian faith. This led to the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity³⁹ - an issue around which there is and always has been, lively debate. The virgin conception of Christ and his "virgin" birth coupled with Mary's perpetual virginity, continue to be undisputed teachings in both official Orthodox and Catholic traditions. Mary's perpetual virginity was proclaimed by the fifth General Council of the church in 553. She was a virgin when Jesus was conceived, remained a virgin while giving birth, and continued to be a virgin throughout her life (ante-, in- and post-partu).

Yet, since the early Patristic period, there was debate about the meaning of the terms "virgin birth", "perpetual virgin", and with it "bodily integrity". Do they simply mean that Mary refrained from sexual intercourse throughout her life? Or that Jesus' birth itself was a miraculous event, effortless and painless to both mother and child, and leaving Mary's hymen intact? Rahner has discussed the matter at length in a chapter entitled "Virginitas in Partu,"⁴⁰ basing his discourse on a controversial publication by A. Mitterer⁴¹ who used the tools of modern science to analyse the concepts of motherhood and virginity. Rahner traces the doctrine and its interpretation to its patristic roots⁴² whilst simultaneously dealing with contemporary issues, before

³⁹ See Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, p 123

⁴⁰ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4 (London and New York: Longman, Dartman and Todd (UK) and The Seabury Press (USA), 1974)

⁴¹ *Dogma und Biologie der Heilige Familie* (Vienna, 1952)

⁴² Clement of Alexandria, writing near the end of the second century, suggests that most people believed that Mary experienced normal childbirth and that her perpetual virginity

summing up his own position. After showing that the actual meaning of the doctrine is, with some notable exceptions, left open, he concludes thus:

We must ask in return whether we are clear about what virginal means when applied to the birth. The presence or absence of pain has undoubtedly nothing to do with virginity ... But no one can seriously maintain that the notion at least of "bodily integrity" has anything to do with virginity, except insofar as this is connected (also) with sexual intercourse, but not as it is connected with birth.⁴³

In defence of his position Rahner concludes with some leading, and for our purposes, relevant questions. If the normal biological processes associated with childbirth are considered "unfitting"⁴⁴ for the Incarnation, why should other physical processes, such as the signs of pregnancy and the suckling of the child (which tradition has no hesitation in ascribing to Mary) be considered less "unfitting"? And - for our purposes, most importantly - Rahner asks of those holding to the more radical understanding of *virginitas in partu*, "does one not come then to a docetic idea of the birth?"⁴⁵ These are critical issues for our understanding of Christ's humanity since they force us to consider the extent to which Christ actually "assumed" our human

referred to the absence of intercourse. A few, including himself, took the other position, believing that her virginity and bodily integrity referred to childbirth as well (Stroma VII, 16 in A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Anti-Gnostic Fathers*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p 511). Tertullian, on the other hand, graphically defends the true birth of Christ against Marcion, insisting that it is of the essence of Christianity, and without which redemption is not possible (*De Carne Christi*, 4-5 in Henry Bettensen (translator and editor), *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) p 125). See also Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, p 149. A further example of divided opinion over this issue can be traced to clashes in Italy during the fourth century, where the more questioning West grappled with the notions of the virgin conception and birth.

⁴³ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, p 156

⁴⁴ One of the processes cited as being "unfitting" is the afterbirth (usually named as *sordes*)

⁴⁵ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, p 162

condition in order to redeem us. We are forced even further than this to ask what it is that actually defines us as "human".⁴⁶

The question of Mary's perpetual virginity is not an issue in most Protestant contexts. Here, the minor role accorded to Mary is usually limited to a tacit acceptance of her human function as the mother of the Incarnate Word.⁴⁷ Once Mary has given birth to the Christ-child, her role effectively ceases. It is of little consequence therefore whether or not she goes on to lead a normal married life. The virgin conception, on the other hand, whilst officially embraced as a doctrinal tenet in the majority of Protestant traditions, is questioned by its more liberal thinkers. It was the Enlightenment's rationalism which first queried the miraculous nature of Christ's conception, whilst today the situation has broadened to include other issues. A question that I would ask, along with many contemporary scholars, would again relate to the meaning of being "human". What is it that constitutes a human being in the first place, if it is not the fusion of male and female gametes, each bearing the genetic material that provides the blueprint for what the individual has the potential to become? Is the experience of normal human conception not necessary if Christ was to assume *each* stage of our human experience? For as Robinson has contended:

For us, to belong in every respect to the human race, Jesus must have been linked through his biological tissue to the origin of life on this planet and behind it to the whole organic process reaching back to the stardust and the hydrogen bomb...⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Pannenberg has a useful section on the background to the idea of a virginal conception, emphasising its relation to the humanity of Christ, in *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions* ((London: SCM, 1976) pp 71ff.

⁴⁷ This is not the case in high Anglican (Anglo-Catholic) traditions, where a correspondingly high Mariology is sometimes found. See Anna Williams' article, "The Language of Reality: The Mother of God in the Anglican Tradition" for a useful analysis of contemporary Anglo-Catholic approaches to Mary.

⁴⁸ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 54

Reflection on Mary's role in mediating humanity to Christ in time gave rise to Marian piety, which began as an Eastern development in the third to fourth centuries. It was during this period and that immediately following that Mary was first invoked in prayer and her name introduced into the liturgy. In addition, Marian legends were related and hymns composed, churches named after her, and feasts held in her honour. The transition from the Mary of the New Testament to the Mary of Christian piety was seen most clearly in the change from "Mary, mother of Jesus" to "Mary, mother of God" in the fifth century.⁴⁹

And so our attention turns to the second, and really the most important, Marian theme, the single enduring area of agreement in most Christian traditions: Mary as *Theotokos*, usually translated "God-bearer" (Latin: *Deipara; Dei Genitrix*). Yet as the place where Mary's association with the divine is brought most clearly to the fore, it also occasions deep controversy,⁵⁰ making the title *Theotokos* at once the most comprehensive and problematic term for Mary emanating from the Eastern church.⁵¹

Whilst *Theotokos* appears in some manuscripts of the work of Athanasius (296-373), there is no convincing evidence that it was actually used by him. However, as Pelikan notes, it was characteristic of Athanasius that he tended to align himself with the orthodoxy of popular devotion, thus vindicating it.⁵² It is therefore not impossible that the term was actually in popular use by this time, the first completely authenticated instance of *Theotokos* - despite

⁴⁹ Council of Ephesus, 431. Tavard notes that apart from the *Theotokos* issue, the fourth and fifth centuries were marked, with exception of Ambrose with his special interest in virginity, by great sobriety among the Fathers on Marian issues. (Tavard, p 62).

⁵⁰ See discussion in Ch 2 regarding the Chalcedonian rejection of the radical two-nature doctrine of the Nestorians, who contended that Mary was the mother of Jesus the human being but not of God the Word. The Council insisted that whilst Christ had two distinct natures, they formed a unity, and that to deny that Mary was the mother of God was to deny the divinity of Christ.

⁵¹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, pp 55-7

Newman's insistence on very early usage⁵³ - dating from Alexandria around 319, in the context of the Arian controversy. Eventually to be proclaimed by the Council of Ephesus in 431, there is a sense in which the *Theotokos* was the inevitable culmination of the debates and decisions of the previous Councils. Both Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381 were concerned in part to defend the true humanity of Christ against those who undermined it – Arius at Nicaea and Apollinarius at Constantinople. By calling Mary the woman, *Theotokos*, mother of God, it was Christ's humanity (because of being born of a woman) and not claiming divinity for Mary that was being affirmed.

Yet for Nestorius the term *Theotokos* posed precisely the danger of Mary's deification, and certainly of her elevation to a position above that of her son. It is for this reason that he preferred the title *Christotokos*, mother of Christ.⁵⁴ Cyril's response was that *Theotokos* was not an ascription of divine status to Mary: "We... who call her Mother of God have never at all deified any of those that are numbered among creatures.... And we know that the Blessed Virgin was a woman as we..".⁵⁵ In other words, we have here the assertion of the truth, not of Mary's divinity but of God's humanity because, for Cyril, "the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God because of her was born 'according to the flesh' that holy body with a rational soul."⁵⁶ However, the context in which Nestorius pastored cannot be overlooked as a source of possible misunderstanding in this regard, and the issue therefore was of concern to him.

⁵² *ibid*, p 59-61. Indeed, there are indications from Athanasius of both early commemoration/observance (*mnēmē*) of Mary and – more profoundly - an understanding of her as part of the history of salvation (*chreia* or ministry).

⁵³ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p,145

⁵⁴ The Antiochians would also have preferred *Christotokos*

⁵⁵ Epistle of Cyril to Nestorius in Percival, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. XIV, p 198

⁵⁶ *ibid*

The city of Byzantium had been dedicated to the goddess Rhea, protector of and provider for the city.⁵⁷ As the Magna Mater, the divine mother had been the focus of religious devotion throughout the Roman Empire. As the status of the Virgin Mary rose, she began to assume the basic roles of the goddesses, and by the fifth century there were reports from Arabia of a priesthood of women who in fact worshipped Mary as Goddess, offering sacrifices to her as the Queen of Heaven.⁵⁸ Although Eastern Orthodoxy rejected this, encouraging rather the veneration of the Virgin, it nevertheless constituted a real pastoral threat in Constantinople, where Nestorius served.

Pelikan is somehow able to dismiss in a single sentence something which other scholars regard with greater seriousness: that of a possible link between the notion of Mary as *Theotokos* and corresponding divine mother-son motifs in pre- and extra-Biblical traditions. Pelikan is uncompromising on this point, insisting that the history of the title *Theotokos* for Mary “does not in any direct way corroborate the facile modern theories about the “mother goddesses” of Graeco-Roman paganism and their supposed significance for the development of Christian Mariology.”⁵⁹ Pelikan goes on to explain that the term *Theotokos* was apparently an original Christian creation arising in the language of Christian devotion to Mary as the mother of Christ, eventually to receive theological justification.⁶⁰ This latter point is important, but I would contend that whilst the term itself may be specifically Christian, we cannot on this premise alone discount the possibility of common ground with other traditions with respect to the ideas behind it.

⁵⁷ Byzantium was the site of an ancient Greek city, and chosen by Constantine for his capital during the fourth century. Rhea was later also identified with other divine mothers such as Athena, Cybele and Isis.

⁵⁸ Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, p 314

⁵⁹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, pp 57f

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 58

Among the observations of Eisler is that the concept of a mother who gives birth to a divine son is in fact a recurring religious theme.⁶¹ One of the most striking examples of the divine mother-son motif, and bearing strong resemblance to artistic depictions of Mary and the child Jesus, is the portrayal of the Egyptian Goddess Isis with her son Horus seated on her knee and nursing at her breast.⁶² Another example is that of Cybele and her son Attis, whose death and resurrection were celebrated in Rome each spring from 204 BCE.⁶³ It is difficult to refrain from drawing parallels between these mythical themes (found in various other religious traditions as well) and that of Mary and Christ. Is this perhaps an expanded form of C.S. Lewis' description, already referred to, of the Incarnation as "the myth that became fact"?⁶⁴ Would it be too speculative to suggest that in this way something residing in the collective human psyche is made real, recapitulated in physical, historical form?⁶⁵ In this connection I have been interested to discover in both literary research and in dialogue with contemporaries that one of the reasons for Marian devotion is that she provides a tender, gentle side to God.⁶⁶ Kenneth Leech succinctly sums up the situation:

For the cult of Mary grew as the use of feminine images

⁶¹ Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, p 140

⁶² Housed in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore. Another piece shows Isis cradling the lifeless body of Horus in her lap, in a similar way to which Mary was later depicted in Michelangelo's *Pieta*.

⁶³ David Leeming and Jake Page, *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) p 83

⁶⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Undeceptions*, Chapter 5, pp 39ff.

⁶⁵ For Carl Jung, myth consists of events that are continually repeated and can be observed over and over again. Myth is something that *happens* to us as we long for the experience of connection, of feeling related to something larger than ourselves. With this in mind we are left asking what it is in the divine mother-son motif that meets such a need. See Wallace B. Clift, *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) p 83. See also Donald G. Dawe, "The Blessed Virgin and Depth Psychology" in McLoughlin and Pinnock, *Mary is for Everyone*, Ch 8 for an account of Jung's understanding of the significance of Mary.

⁶⁶ In my own neighbourhood lives a young Catholic family committed to the distribution of Marian literature with the express purpose of helping people, through the mediation of Mary, to have a more intimate relationship with Christ. Among the reasons given for the importance of Mary is that she helps us to understand God as gentle and loving rather than severe and judgemental.

for God declined.... So the Mother of God replaced
God the Mother.⁶⁷

It was John of Damascus in his great exposition of the Orthodox faith, who some three centuries after Chalcedon, would capture the significance of understanding Mary as the *Theotokos*. In this fuller version of the earlier reference, John claimed that "it is with justice and truth that we call the holy Mary the Mother of God. For this name embraces the whole mystery of the dispensation. For if she who bore Him is the Mother of God, assuredly He who was born of her is God and likewise also man.."⁶⁸

Eastern forms of devotion gradually moved to the West,⁶⁹ but were not established there without opposition. Ambrose gave considerable attention to Mary, especially to the connection between Eve, Mary and womankind. Linked to this was a focus on the virtues, indeed the indispensability, of virginity for the church.⁷⁰ Ambrose is quoted in *Lumen Gentium*, describing Mary as "a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ."⁷¹ But there was little attempt to include Mary in a devotional way. We should note that Augustine, more or less contemporaneous with Ambrose, mentions no hymns, feasts, or prayers to Mary. From the sixth century, however, Marian piety took root in the West, and this was symbolised by the introduction of Mary's name into the canon of the Mass. It was the seventh century that saw the composition of the well-

⁶⁷ Leech, *Experiencing God*, pp 365f

⁶⁸ John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith III*, 12 in Sanday, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IX, p 56. Tibor Horvath S.J. in his *Jesus Christ as Ultimate Reality and Meaning* makes the following observation: "The concept of an infinite God obviously excludes the idea of a mother of God. But instead of subordinating Jesus Christ to the obvious meanings of words and terms, the council of Ephesus rather subjected concepts and terms to the reality of Jesus as God-man, and thus professed again Jesus Christ as the only true ultimate reality and meaning as well as the only final hermeneutical principle" (p 26)

⁶⁹ For example, in the second half of the fourth century Ambrose, amid considerable opposition, introduced Eastern musical styles for chanting the psalms. See Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, p 132

⁷⁰ Chidester, p 124f and Kim Power, "Ambrose of Milan: Keeper of the Boundaries" in *Modern Theology*, April, 1998, pp 28f

known Akathistos Hymn, which is really a reflection on the vision of the *Theotokos* of the actions and attributes of God. The seventh century saw in addition the first, scriptural, part of the Ave Maria. During the following century the first feasts in honour of the Virgin in the West were instituted, but it was only towards the end of the tenth century that legends about the miraculous power of Mary began to be circulated.⁷²

Let us now reflect on how this common tradition has been carried over into contemporary times in the three historic Christian traditions – Orthodox, catholic and Protestant.

Eastern Orthodoxy: defending the tradition

Here we find the greatest and most consistent continuity with the ancient theological positions on Mary. She occupies a place of singular importance, and Orthodox piety has historically treated her with “unequaled warmth”.⁷³ She features prominently in celebratory feasts, hymnody, iconography and liturgy - so much so, comments Nikos Nissiotis, that there “is no Christian theology without continuous reference to the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation”.⁷⁴ Interestingly, though, she is the subject of very little literary Orthodox theological reflection – perhaps precisely because of her prominence in worship. She is experienced doxologically rather than dogmatically, in the elaborate language inspired by icons.⁷⁵ Those, however, who have written about her are careful to distinguish Orthodox understanding of Mary from the inexplicable Protestant disregard for her, as well as from

⁷¹ Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, p 419

⁷² See Tavard, pp 77/8; Küng, *Christianity*, p 454

⁷³ Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p 78

⁷⁴ Nikos Nissiotis, “Mary in Orthodox Theology” in *Mary in the Churches*, edited by Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1983) p 25. Cited by Gaventa, p 15

⁷⁵ See the comments explaining the Orthodox position by Mary Ann deTrana in her article “Letters of Paul VI and John Paul II on the Virgin Mary: the evolution of a dialogue” in McLoughlin and Pinnock, *Mary is for Everyone*, pp 182 and 183f.

later developments in Roman Catholic teaching - although there are significant points of concurrence in the latter two positions.

There is no question about Eastern Orthodoxy's central, and in a sense only (because all else is entirely contingent on it) Mariological concern: the notion of Mary as *Theotokos*. If the *Theotokos* constitutes the nub of Orthodoxy's Mariology (and thereby lays the ground for its Christology as well), then this focal point is both inspired by and inspires the icons that are synonymous with Orthodox worship and theology.⁷⁶ A distinctive feature of Eastern Orthodoxy, reflected in its iconography, and not least in its portrayal of the *Theotokos*, is an almost total absence of doctrinal development over the centuries.⁷⁷ Faithfulness to the Scriptures and patristic tradition regarding Christ and Mary is an avowed concern of Orthodox iconography – even where certain apocryphal stories (the presentation in the Temple, for example) are taken for granted. This partly explains Orthodox resistance to new dogmas; the Spirit can be trusted to lead believers into an understanding of the *Theotokos*.

This also helps to explain Eastern Orthodox divergence from Catholic Mariology, especially in rejecting the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. One reason given for this is the Orthodox concern for Mary's mortality. With regard to the Immaculate Conception, Orthodox understanding links original sin with mortality.⁷⁸ And mortality is one of the cornerstones of true humanity. It follows then that if Mary was born without original sin, she was not mortal and therefore not fully human. This in turn would impact on Christ's own humanity, replacing it with a form of docetism. The notion of her Assumption is likewise believed to compromise Mary's mortality and therefore her humanity, and so is rejected on similar grounds.

⁷⁶ See Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, pp 65-76 for a useful discussion of Orthodox iconography.

⁷⁷ It is possible that this actually pertains more in theory than in practice, however

⁷⁸ See Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, p 15

Orthodox Christians celebrate instead the Dormition (falling asleep) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the feast of which is celebrated on the 15 August. There are nevertheless significant areas of convergence in Orthodox and Catholic Mariology, notably in the emphasis on Mary as *Theotokos* and her perpetual virginity.⁷⁹ Since Vatican II mainstream Catholics (those informed by the Council) have shared the Orthodox insistence on understanding the title *Theotokos* Christologically, that is, integral to the theology of the Incarnation rather than as a distinct theological category.

Distinctive to the Eastern Orthodox position is that whilst Mary is regarded as the mother of God, she is simultaneously fully identified with humanity in all its weaknesses – another reason for Orthodox rejection of the Immaculate Conception.⁸⁰ As *Theotokos* she is aligned with the incarnate Logos,⁸¹ while the title *panhagia* (all-holy one), aligns her with the church as the first of all humanity to attain that to which every creature is summoned.⁸² Orthodox

⁷⁹ There have always been a few dissenting voices with regard to Mary's perpetual virginity, even among the Fathers. Tertullian and St Basil are examples. The same is not true of the *Theotokos*.

⁸⁰ "The dogma of the Immaculate Conception is foreign to the Eastern tradition, which does not want to separate the Holy Virgin from the sons of Adam" – Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (James Clarke, 1957) p 140. Cited by Macquarrie, *Mary for All Christians*, p 53.

⁸¹ A notable departure from the essentially reserved Orthodox position regarding official formulations came in the form of the nineteenth and twentieth century development of "sophianism" or "sophiology", with which the names of Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) and Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) are associated. Wisdom (sophia), in this view, exists both in eternity (as the Logos) and time (in creaturely form as the Virgin Mary and societal form as the church). This tradition goes far back in history. For example, the cathedral of Constantinople, rebuilt by Emperor Justinian (527-565), was dedicated to Hagia Sophia. Similarly, the eleventh century cathedrals of Kiev and Novgorod were also dedicated to Hagia Sophia. Wisdom (Sophia) in these instances is not the Logos but the Virgin Mary. It should be noted, however, that these speculative sophiological developments did little to influence the "traditional patristic sobriety" of official Orthodoxy, and certainly had little influence beyond the confines of Russia. See Tavad, pp 78/9. I am not sure that Tavad is correct in dismissing the connection between Mary, the Spirit and the church so lightly, and suggest that it is a theme with ecumenical potential that could be explored.

⁸² Pelikan raises an interesting issue regarding Mary's humanity and "divinisation". Once Nicaea had issued its declaration against Arius, a qualitative distinction was established between Christ and every other human being, even the highest of the saints. What is indicated in Athanasius' Mariology is that the creaturely predicates applied by the Arians to Christ were now taken up and applied, within orthodoxy, to Mary. For example, she "progressed" morally (*prokopē* = moral progress; the same word that Arius used of Christ). She triumphed over struggles and doubts towards perfection, thus becoming the highest of

theology accommodates this apparent tension by affirming both simultaneously.⁸³ Understood this way Mary is situated in the context of the church and especially the communion of saints, which, of course, is akin to the distinctly Protestant notion of the priesthood of all believers (see later discussion). Mary shared fully, as a “distinctive and elect person”, in the process of giving birth to Christ as “the unique personal revelation of God in history.”⁸⁴

Of particular significance for our current purposes is the Eastern Orthodox belief that the bond created between the *Theotokos* and Christ is not severed at birth, but “continues in the same degree that the divine and human are inseparably united in Christ.”⁸⁵ It is for this reason, notes Gaventa, that Orthodox icons of the Incarnation usually depict both Mary and the infant Christ.⁸⁶ This Orthodox claim is significant, not least because it situates the relationship between Christ and Mary clearly within a trinitarian framework. The motherhood of the mother of God is eternally connecting her with her Son, guaranteeing at the same time his eternal sonship.⁸⁷ This notion has profound implications for Mary’s relationship with Christ in the course of his

the saints. For Athanasius, even a creature (in this case Mary) could become worthy of worship through the indwelling Creator. See Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p 64

⁸³ Such proclamation of mystery echoes the Chalcedonian statements regarding the humanity and divinity of Christ. The Orthodox tradition reflects appreciation of the doxological character of such professions of faith.

⁸⁴ Nissiotis in *Mary in the Churches*, p 26

⁸⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988). Cited by Gaventa, p 16. This brings to mind the poem by Henry Vaughan, entitled “The Knot”. In this poem Vaughan imagines the relationship between Christ and Mary as a love knot, one in which the two strands are so intertwined as to become inextricable, so that “she who would think of the God-Man must also think of the God-Bearer” (Anna Williams, “The Language of Reality: the Mother of God in the Anglican tradition”, p 2).

⁸⁶ Gaventa, *Mary. Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, p 16

⁸⁷ This understanding underscores – and incarnates – the trinitarian pattern of relationality. The same pattern is, I contend, naturally evident in mother-child relating, where the child is apart from, but always a part of, the mother. In this sense Mary is always “mediatrix of the Mediator”, the “first cause of a second cause proceeding from itself” (Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*, p 185). Of interest in this connection is a painting in the National Gallery, London, by Murillo (1617-82) depicting the Trinity as the Holy Family, and entitled *The Two Trinities*.

earthly life, and of her definitive role therefore in redemption.⁸⁸ In Orthodox theology the central moment of the Incarnation is the “virgin birth” (conception), through which God reveals the futility of human notions of creativity and self-sufficiency – a position embraced, among others, by Barth.⁸⁹

The widening gap between East and West eventually came to a head with the Great Schism in 1054. Whilst the immediate cause of the Schism was disagreement over the *filioque* clause, in reality this was the culmination of a lengthy period of strained relations involving various issues. Most significantly the Schism marked the end of common Christian tradition, the effects of which are as evident in Mariology as elsewhere. Without a doubt it is the two subsequently proclaimed dogmas that distinguish Catholic Mariology most sharply from those of both Eastern Orthodox and Protestant traditions. But there were numerous other trends and developments spanning many centuries which began prior to the split, that now formally set Catholic Mariology on its own course.

Mary in Catholicism: developing the tradition

The Catholic position on Mary, in partial continuity with the common tradition, is grounded squarely in the four main church proclamations about her, concerning her maternity (*Theotokos*), her virginity, her conception, and her assumption to heaven. The roots of Catholic Mariology as contained in each of these proclamations go back to the Fathers, some as early as the second century, although of course - notably with the two most recent dogmas - there

⁸⁸ This is one of the reasons why I consider that the image of Mary giving birth to Christ should be included as a redemptive metaphor alongside that of Christ dying on the cross.

⁸⁹ Barth's position is discussed in the section on Mary in Protestantism. In the context of Eastern Orthodoxy the relationship between Mary and the Spirit is significant. It is at Christ's conception that these two came together, and in a sense Mary took over the role of the Spirit in the Incarnation. The linking of Mary and Sophia/Spirit therefore comes as no surprise in Eastern Orthodoxy.

was by no means historical consensus on them.⁹⁰ Even for some Catholics these particular doctrines are both unnecessary for salvation and, in view of both Orthodox and Protestant rejection of them, a potential stumbling block to ecumenical dialogue.⁹¹

It is tempting, particularly as a Protestant, to discuss Catholic Mariology in a purely academic way, and to judge it accordingly. But this would be to do an injustice to the Catholic position, which is far more complex and deep-rooted than outsiders often appreciate. To illustrate this point I draw attention to two (related) issues. The first is the nature of the Catholic understanding of dogma. The second is the non-academic,⁹² experiential reality of Marian devotion – “popular piety”, we could say, bearing in mind that this is by no means a universally monolithic entity.

It is Newman's famous essay⁹³ which spells out and sums up the Catholic understanding of dogma. When a new dogma is proclaimed by the pope, it is simply recognition of something that has always been, but which the church has taken time to understand. Interestingly, “new” dogmas usually affirm what has in fact been a reality amongst ordinary people for a long time,

⁹⁰ This is an issue which is approached very differently from a (conservative) Catholic and a non-Catholic perspective. The Catholic response to what others might describe as “lack of consensus”, would be that until a doctrine is “definitely decided” and proclaimed as such by the Pope, issues relating to it can be freely debated. Once the doctrine is proclaimed, however, debate must cease. So, for example, Bernard and Aquinas were free to discourse about the Immaculate Conception because, whilst their debate did not alter the truth, the doctrine had not actually been proclaimed as such. Newman adopts a slightly different position in respect of the case in point, contending that Bernard and Aquinas took the phrase ‘Immaculate Conception’ in a different sense to that in which the church now takes it i.e. they understood it to refer to Mary's mother, whereas the doctrine as it now stands relates specifically to Mary (*Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman* (Longman, Green and Co., 1893) p 120. Taken from the compilation of excerpts from Newman's works by Breen, *Mary – The Second Eve*).

⁹¹ See Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, pp 190-1. See also Küng's acerbic comments in *Christianity: Its Essence and History*, (London: SCM, 1999) pp 455-7.

⁹² This is not to suggest “un-academic”. Marian devotion is not confined to any one social or intellectual class of people, nor to a specific geographical area. This, however, does not alter the fact that in certain countries, and notably among the poor, – Latin America, for example – Marian devotion is not only widespread and on the increase, but also intense.

⁹³ Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

confirming in this way the Spirit's working in the church. We have seen how this applies to the title *Theotokos* for Mary. Relating this to the Immaculate Conception and Assumption dogmas, Catholics would insist that here too we simply have recognition of what always pertained.⁹⁴

With regard to the second matter – Marian piety – we should note that academic discourse frequently belies both the intensity and extent of historical and contemporary popular⁹⁵ devotion to the Virgin. Here the margin between veneration and worship is at times drawn faintly, although devotees are clear in asserting that veneration of Mary draws believers closer to her Son, Jesus, and is not therefore an end in itself. Certainly this is the official Catholic position on the matter, as spelt out by Vatican II: "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's' virginal conception up to his death.." and "...there is but one mediator....'the man Christ Jesus... who gave himself a redemption for all'. Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power."⁹⁶ Furthermore, "no creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer... The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary....so that encouraged by this maternal help they may the more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer ." ⁹⁷

For de Montfort, whose Marian writings are considered by some to be unsurpassed, two things were clear. First, Mary is a "mere creature". Second, God "never had, and has not now, any absolute need of Mary". Nevertheless, having willed to use Mary in the divine plan of redemption, she remains

⁹⁴ Essentially, for Newman, there is no such thing as new doctrine. Truth does not change, but our grasp of the truth unfolds gradually as more and more of it is revealed to us. Accordingly, revealed truths "though communicated to the world once for all... could not be comprehended all once by the recipients, but...have required only longer time and deeper thought for full elucidation" (Newman, *Essay*, pp 29/30)

⁹⁵ I use "popular" here in the sense of "of the people"

⁹⁶ Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, p 418

⁹⁷ *ibid*, p 419

(because God “will not change His conduct in the eternal ages”) a part of it. Indeed, “it was only through Mary that God gave His only-begotten Son to the world”. Understood in this sense Mary is necessary for salvation; she is the gateway to Christ. Therefore those who disregard Mary cannot experience salvation. The reason for drawing attention to de Montfort is that it is precisely his position, supported by subsequent papal endorsement,⁹⁸ which constitutes an important resource for the current return of Marian fervour among many Catholics.⁹⁹

In discussing the development of a common ecumenical tradition we dealt with Mary’s perpetual virginity and with the title *Theotokos* as applied to her – two of the four Catholic Mariological cornerstones. We must now consider the other two – the Immaculate Conception and Assumption dogmas. If the transition from Mary, mother of Jesus to Mary, mother of God, marked the noteworthy fifth century Mariological development, then it was paralleled in the period that followed up to the twelfth century by another significant shift – from Mary’s past motherhood of Jesus to her present (elevated) role as ever-virgin Mother of God and Queen of Heaven. Whilst the older church Fathers had still spoken of Mary’s faults, she now began to be credited with perfect sinlessness even before birth.¹⁰⁰ This specifically Western trend culminated several centuries later in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This was not of course to suggest a virginal conception for Mary herself, but that from the moment of conception she was preserved by grace from the stain of original sin. Interestingly, in other respects Mary was regaining more human features, especially with the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi, for whom scriptural testimony was important.¹⁰¹ Hence we begin to

⁹⁸ e.g. Leo XIII and Pius X

⁹⁹ de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, p 11. De Montfort’s Marian position was a radical one. God’s salvation comes to the world in Christ through Mary. It is contempt for, or indifference towards “Our Lady” that is the infallible sign of heretics, schismatics, and other reprobates (p 18).

¹⁰⁰ Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p 460

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* It was Francis in the early thirteenth century who first introduced the familiar manger scene in order to emphasise the humble conditions experienced by both mother and child at

see in Marian devotion a compassionate (motherly) intercessor, as well as a figure of eroticism. To these themes we shall return.

By the eighth century the Eastern church had an annual feast celebrating the miraculous conception of Mary.¹⁰² This feast, introduced into English Catholicism in the eleventh century, and then to the rest of Europe, celebrates something subtly different from the Immaculate Conception. In the former, Mary's conception itself was the miracle. In the latter, the miracle lay in the belief that Mary was conceived without sin, and this was to remain a specifically Western belief, although even here not accepted by all. Aquinas, for example, contended that Mary was indeed born without the stain of original sin, but that she had been sanctified in the womb, not conceived without sin.¹⁰³ Duns Scotus, on the other hand, would during this same century become the first great theologian to actually defend the Immaculate Conception, with his contention that to be preserved from sin was a more excellent form of redemption than to be cleansed from it.¹⁰⁴

The Councils of Basel (1438) and Trent (1545-1563) gave attention to the issue of the divine grace evident in Mary's life, proclaiming her to be free of personal sin. Although many notable people both before (e.g. Bernard, Aquinas, and Bonaventure) and after the Council (e.g. the 1644 prohibition of the term by the Holy Office of Rome) denounced the doctrine, Trent nevertheless constituted the background to the eventual dogmatic

Jesus' birth: "For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs..." (Celano 1.84, Thomas of Celano, *St Francis of Assisi*, translated by P. Herman (Chicago, 1968): 75-6. Cited by Chidester, p 307)

¹⁰² According to legend, Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, had been childless. Then Mary was miraculously conceived and later dedicated to the Temple (Gospel of James, second century)

¹⁰³ Macquarrie (*Mary for All Christians*, pp 52f) cautions against citing people like Aquinas as being against the Immaculate Conception. Aquinas' position, for example, is misleading because his argument is grounded *biologically* and not *theologically* (being based on the question of when a human being is actually formed), and we now know the biological inadequacy of its root. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, edited by Timothy McDermott (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1989) pp 513f.

proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception. In 1830 the apparitions seen by Catherine Laboure, indicating that Mary was indeed conceived without sin, led to the striking of the popular Miraculous Medal, and eventually in 1854 Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The final Marian dogma to be pronounced by the Catholic Church, the Assumption, is linked to the Immaculate Conception, being in a sense the inevitable outcome of it. It has its roots as far back as the fourth century, from which time there are various accounts of Mary's death or dormition. By the sixth century Emperor Maurice was celebrating Mary's dormition with the already mentioned feast in Byzantium, and by the end of that century John of Damascus was preaching on the subject. Once again the Eastern and Western traditions differ in their understanding. In 1950 Pope Pius XII, in the *Munificentissimus Deus*, defined the doctrine of her Assumption, linking it directly with her conception. The dogma declared that the Blessed Virgin Mary "having completed her earthly life, was in body and soul assumed into heaven in glory". This is not accepted by Eastern Orthodoxy, where it is believed that when Mary died her body was taken to paradise, to be re-united with her soul on the Last Day. The feast in honour of Mary's Dormition continues, as we have noted, to be celebrated annually.

As with other dogmas, there are various interpretations of the Assumption. Rahner, for example, understands it in terms of the eschatological nature of the event of the Incarnation, and with it the present reality of redemption. As symbol of the church, Mary is also symbol of the redemption (which includes resurrection) that is *present* reality in Christ. Protestant resistance to the Assumption dogma stems, according to Rahner, from Protestantism's focus on a theology of the cross to the exclusion of a theology of glory.¹⁰⁵ Rahner

¹⁰⁴ Boss, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, p 415

¹⁰⁵ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Volume 1* (London and New York: Dartman, Longman and Todd (UK) and The Seabury Press (USA), 1974) pp 215ff

contends that understood eschatologically it becomes obvious to conceive of Mary already bodily ascended to heaven.

For a very different approach to the Assumption dogma, we turn once more to Ruether.¹⁰⁶ As with other Mariological themes, Ruether has linked the Assumption with Mary's relationship to the church. What is done with Mary, symbol of the church, reflects the self understanding of a hierarchical, patriarchal, triumphalist church. For Ruether "the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary symbolizes the Church triumphant, ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of Christ. Christ receives Mary (the Church) as his bride and crowns her as Queen of Heaven. From above, she reigns at his side over all."¹⁰⁷ Ruether continues by suggesting that the "assimilation of Christ into the Constantinian cosmic Pantocrator equates this eschatological Reign with the present reign of Christian hierarchical authorities... Mariology becomes a tool of ecclesiastical triumphalism."¹⁰⁸ This is a radically different reading of the Assumption and the other Mariological dogmas, wherein Mary is easily "spiritualised" as a model for Christians and forerunner of the redeemed creation. This feminist reading, applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to developments within a kyrio-patriarchal church, is one to be taken seriously in a Christological reconstruction which incorporates the role of Mary.

It is apposite at this point to consider the theme of Mary as Queen of Heaven. Mary's designation as *Theotokos* inevitably had the effect of elevating her, paving the way for later developments. Among these was the concept of Mary as Queen of Heaven, a popular theme during the late medieval period and a subject reflected in much of the art of that time. Depictions of Mary as Queen of Heaven are derived, in part at least, from secular hierarchical structures, which are interestingly also evidenced in the Bible. By way of

¹⁰⁶ *Sexism and God-Talk*, ch 6, pp 139ff.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p 144

example, Mary's greeting by her cousin, Elizabeth, as "mother of my Lord" (Lk 1:43) employs an Old Testament expression meaning queen-mother. This lends poignancy to Hackett's observation that the Council of Ephesus which was to proclaim Mary *Theotokos* met in a church built on the site of the temple of Artemis where a many-breasted statue of the goddess had long presided over a fertility cult. This temple, notes Hackett, was probably only destroyed around 390CE, not many years before the Council sat.¹⁰⁹

Yet whilst regality might be one element in the portrayal of Mary as Queen of Heaven, it was not the only one. The text of Jacopi Torriti's thirteenth century mosaic in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome,¹¹⁰ depicts Mary as "Queen of Mercy" and Christ as "King of Justice", stating that "Mary chose the better part... mercy is better than justice". Mary, as Christ's Queen, intercedes before him on behalf of the people. The popular Marian hymn, the *Salve Regina*, derives from this period as well. In it Christians pray for salvation through the merciful intervention of Mary.¹¹¹ Here again we detect hints of the recurring theme – Mary standing in to meet the need for a female or at least, tender, dimension to God. The particular interpretation provided by Torriti's artistic portrayal of the Queen of Heaven reflects parallel trends in the spirituality and literature of the time.

It is interesting that such a distinction between Mary and Christ, which extended into the seventeenth century, is strongly repudiated by contemporary Mariologist René Laurentin who described it as "a dangerous gangrene". This myth set "masculine brutality" against the "unfailing tenderness of the mother who protects her children against the anger of the male." For Laurentin, the suggestion that while Jesus wishes to condemn,

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* Küng adopts a similar position to that of Ruether, contending that "papalism and Marianism go hand in hand as typical of the Roman Catholic paradigm" (*Christianity: The Religious Situation of our Time* (London: SCM 1995) p 456).

¹⁰⁹ Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen* p 23, cf Nestorius' later concern.

¹¹⁰ It is interesting that this church, too, is built on the site of a temple dedicated to a goddess, in this case Cybele

Mary wishes to save, is blasphemous, and that when “we feel a special confidence in her as our merciful Mother”, that mercy is nothing but a sharing in the mercy of God.¹¹²

Let us turn our attention now to the late Middle Ages, because it is here that we find a series of remarkable, and for our purposes relevant, Christological and Mariological developments. The ethos of Gregorian Reform (eleventh century), with its focus on the Eucharist as the source of supernatural power, and elevated status and controlling authority of the priesthood, is reflected in early medieval art. Here, God is depicted as judge and king; Christ as a prince reigning from the throne of the cross after defeating Satan; Mary as Christ’s queen (Queen of Heaven). The fundamental dramas of religion are cosmic in scale, with wars between Christ and the devil or saints/angels and demons, for example. The hagiography of the period depicts religious figures of power, usually of noble background, responsible for miracles which effect change in the world.¹¹³

However, from the time of the Gregorian Reforms, a sense of the “humanity of God” becomes more evident in popular piety. This shift manifested itself in a rise in lyrical, emotional piety which focused especially on the *humanity of Christ*. The following century (twelfth) saw the feminisation of religious language and the re-emergence of feminine symbols for the divine,¹¹⁴ accompanied by another (inevitable) shift in focus: from redemption and atonement to creation and incarnation. Theological writing was marked by mysticism, devotion to female figures, and the use of female metaphors, while the number of female writers increased.¹¹⁵ In addition, the twelfth

¹¹¹ Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, p 316

¹¹² René Laurentin, *Mary’s Place in the Church* (1965), pp 75f and 148. Cited by Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment*, p 177f

¹¹³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Los Angeles, Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1982) p 16

¹¹⁴ Leech, *Experiencing God*, p 359

¹¹⁵ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p 136

century produced several prominent figures, notably as we will see, among the Cistercians, who expounded the notion of *Christ as mother*.

Hildegard of Bingen was the major female theological writer of the twelfth century. One of the interesting features of Hildegard, reflecting the shift mentioned above, is the sense of a cosmic picture in her spirituality - God, nature and humankind existing in mutual, nurturing relationship. A fascinating term coined by Hildegard is *viriditas* or "greening power".¹¹⁶ This has to do with bearing fruit, being well-watered, freshness, newness and so on. It is the opposite of drying up and withering. Hildegard calls Jesus "Greenness Incarnate", and in her opera *Ordo Virtutum* she says that "In the beginning all creatures were green and vital; they flourished amidst flowers. Later the green figure itself came down."¹¹⁷ Against this backdrop it is Hildegard's application of *viriditas* to Mary that is of particular interest. As the mother of Jesus, Mary is celebrated for being the *viridissima virga*, the greenest of the green branches, the most fruitful of us all. Mary is a branch "full of the greening power of springtime", and in one of her songs to Mary Hildegard says: "You glowing, most green, verdant sprout...you bring lush greenness once more" to the "shrivelled and wilted" of the world.¹¹⁸ Hildegard's insights, refreshing in their originality, are in line not only with the renewed emphasis on creation/incarnation of her own time, but also with such contemporary thinkers as Balthasar, for whom Mary's fruitfulness is of paramount importance. Of course, Hildegard also strikes a chord with those interested in creation spirituality and allied to it, eco-feminism.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ See *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, text by Hildegard and commentary by Matthew Fox (Santa Fé: Bear and Co, 1985) pp 32ff

¹¹⁷ Hildegard, *Lieder*, p 314. Translation by Tom Stratman

¹¹⁸ Gabrielle Ulhein, *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fé, 1982) pp 115 and 119. In Fox, pp 32ff.

¹¹⁹ For example, the controversial Dominican Matthew Fox (creation spirituality) and Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Judith Plant, among several others (eco-feminism)

The focus on creation and incarnation emerged in more direct ways as well, notably in the notion of divine maternity. Whilst the attribution of motherhood to God has never been a dominant trend in Christian theology or piety, neither its latent existence nor its permanence can be denied.¹²⁰ Despite conscious or unconscious patriarchal suppression, from time to time, writes Tavad, the motherhood theme re-appears in “lonely voices” of Christian tradition like that of Clement of Alexandria in the second century, and Anselm in the eleventh. Clement, for example, graphically describes the Father’s loving breasts and his milk, and then speaks of the Father who, in his love, became a Mother to us.¹²¹ Such people wrote in the context of a church that from as early as the fourth century (e.g. Augustine and John Chrysostom) and peaking with Aquinas in the high Middle Ages, was decidedly misogynist. Yet as we shall see, even some of those who spoke in the most desultory way of women, at times employed maternal imagery for Christ. One significant observation of Tavad is that the life-giving death of Jesus on the cross was not uncommonly compared to a mother’s birthing of her child.¹²²

¹²⁰ As a very old tradition carried over from pre-Israelite times, it was consciously introduced by some of the prophets into the religion of Israel – and as recently as 1978 the short-lived Pope John Paul I was to declare in respect of God’s unfailing love to us: “...God is Father; more still is he Mother.” (La documentation catholique, Vol 75, 60th year (24 September 1978) 17:836). In the Hebrew Bible we have God behaving towards the people like a mother towards her baby (Hosea 11:4; Is.49:15; 66:11-13). We also have God described as being like a “woman in labour” (Is.42:14). The divine Motherhood theme was continued in the apocryphal Wisdom literature where Wisdom is depicted in womanly God’s Word, and is the medium of creation and governance of the cosmos terms, as God’s companion, sharing his throne. She is identical with God’s word, and is the medium of creation and governance of the cosmos (Wisdom 9:1-3. See also Ecclesiasticus 24:24-26). The New Testament uses maternal imagery for the divine as well - for example in the image of Christ weeping over Jerusalem and, like a hen, longing to gather her chicks under her wings (Matt 23:37). The Prologue to John’s Gospel uses the maternal expression “begotten of God” (1:13), while in v 18 it is paradoxically the Father who is the Mother because the Son is located in the “bosom of the Father”. Tavad makes the interesting observation that the life-giving death of Jesus on the cross was not uncommonly compared to a mother’s birthing of her child - a theme that will be developed in due course. See Tavad, pp 52ff

¹²¹ Tavad, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, pp 52ff. See Walter Gardini, “The Feminine Face of God” in *Women in World Religions, Past and Present* (New York: Paragon House, 1987) pp 56f.

¹²² Tavad, *ibid.*, Citing Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, “A Christian speculation on the Man-woman relationship” in *Sexual Archetypes, East and West*, Bina Gupta (ed) (New York: Paragon house, 1987) pp 116-138.

From the twelfth century we find depictions of Christ as a woman nursing the soul at his breasts,¹²³ drying tears, giving birth to the soul in agony and travail, and so on. All of this was part of a growing tendency to “speak of the divine in homey images and to emphasise approachability.”¹²⁴ Increasingly analogies were taken from human relationships corresponding to a growing sense of God as loving and accessible, and to a more accepting attitude to natural things including the human body. The concern at this time was not primarily with the sacrifice needed as a bridge between ourselves (sin) and God (glory), but rather an identification of the fact that Christ is what we are.¹²⁵ This, of course, brings to mind Irenaeus and his idea of Christ recapitulating our human experience in a redemptive way. Maternal imagery opened the way for attention to the physicality of Jesus’ body in the spirituality, art and literature of the following three centuries, particularly in relation to his birth and death. And so we reach a period in history that brings together Christ and Mary, God and humankind, creation and redemption, in a most graphic and unprecedented way. The distinction between the divine motherhood and that of Mary became blurred. As far back as the Middle Ages Mary was believed to mediate between human souls and Christ. As we consider some of these images the question is how, and whether it is appropriate that, this medieval consciousness can be reclaimed and reworked in a contemporary Christology.

Bernard of Clairvaux provides us with more extensive and complex use of female imagery, especially as applied to men, than any other twelfth century

¹²³ For an excellent account of literary and visual depictions of *Maria lactans* see Bert Polman, “The Maternal Mary: Variazioni del Latte” in *Pledges of Jubilee: Essays on the Arts and Culture in Honour of Calvin G. Seerveld*, Lambert Zuidervaart and Henry Luttikhuisen (eds) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) pp 271ff

¹²⁴ Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p 129. In his study of the legend of the ninth century Pope Joan, Peter Sanford presents intriguing material on the cross-dressing among religious personalities during the Middle Ages, not least the eleventh and twelfth centuries. I suspect that this correlates with the issues being discussed here, namely maternal imagery for Christ, and the increase of affective spirituality. See Peter Sanford, *The She-Pope* (London: Arrow Books, 1998) Ch 6, pp 65ff

¹²⁵ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p 130



(above left)
 Jesus displays his wounds and Mary bares her breast to win the mercy of God towards sinners (Florentine, c 1402)



(above right)
 The Vision of St Bernard (Fillipino Lippi) Bernard receives three drops of milk from the Virgin's breast

(bottom left)
 Rosary propaganda: Apocalyptic Madonna surrounded by Five decades of beads (Woodcut, ? France, c 1490)



(bottom right)
 Polychrome statue of Christ, Mary, Anne (her mother) And Emeretia (or Esmeria, her grandmother) (The Urban Master from Hildesheim, Lower Saxony)



(centre)
 Madonna in a Rose Arbour (Stefan Lochner, d 1451)





(clockwise from top left)
Our Lady of Sorrows (reverse side of great crucifix, Westminster Cathedral, London)
Our Lady of Walsingham
African Madonna
The Virgin and Child (Dirk Bouts, 15th C)



figure. Bernard's main focus was on nurturing, especially suckling.¹²⁶ The Cistercians, who regarded Mary as the gateway through which salvation entered the world, used maternal imagery to discuss both theological and pastoral issues. Among them were William of Thierry, Gueric of Igny, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Adam of Perseigne, for whom images of the breast, pregnancy, the womb, and labour pains were among the common themes. Gueric's imagery is particularly striking. For him the womb was symbolic of fertility, security and union, rather than separation, suffering and sacrifice.¹²⁷

Breast milk for the medievals was believed to be processed blood.¹²⁸ Hence the human mother, like the pelican (also a symbol of Christ), feeds the child with her own blood.¹²⁹ Bynum notes that the connection between blood and milk in medieval texts was more than just a "parallelism of body fluids" so that "in medieval legends (e.g. St Bernard) and devotions (e.g. the sacred heart)... milk and blood are often interchangeable, as are Christ's breasts and the wound in his side."¹³⁰ The connection between milk and blood, with their respective life-giving/nurturing properties, is remarkably visible in late medieval art. In some portrayals Christ-as-Mother is seen to hold his wound in a manner similar to that in which a lactating mother holds her breast to enable her child to latch on to the nipple. An example is Quirizio of Murano's *The Saviour* (ca 1470). There are instances of Christ displaying his open wound and Mary her full breast, as together they plead on behalf of sinners before God the Father, as in *The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* (ca 1402), and *Man of sorrows and Mary Intercede with God the Father* (ca

¹²⁶ Bernard is perhaps best known for the legend which tells of the virgin rewarding him, her "Troubadour", with three drops of milk from her breast. This legend incident is depicted in the painting by Filippo Lippi, *The Vision of St Bernard*.

¹²⁷ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p 121

¹²⁸ This belief predates the Middle Ages by far. The notion is seen as early as Clement of Alexandria, for example, in a detailed account in "The Instructor". Here, among other things, Clement in order to use the nursing Christ as an image of the Eucharist, spoke of the explicit connection between breast milk and the blood supplied to the foetus.

See A. Cleveland Coxe (ed), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.II, pp 219ff.

¹²⁹ The female pelican was understood to bite into her own flesh to enable her chicks to drink her blood.

¹³⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp 132/3

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1450). Then also, notes Gavin d'Costa, in late medieval art the wound in Christ's side is transformed into both a "vagina" and a "womb", out of which are born the church.¹³¹

D'Costa draws attention to a striking and controversial contemporary piece of art which takes up this theme in a redemptive way. I cite it here to show how medieval imagery can be retrieved and reworked in the light of contemporary issues. Entitled *Bosnia Christa*, this 1993 mixed textile tapestry by Margaret Argyle was created in response to hearing of the rape and brutal denigration of women in Bosnia. The work depicts a Christa, portrayed as a naked woman on a grainy cross, against a deep red vaginally shaped background which has two lips or curtains on either side, framing and containing the Christa after the fashion of a mandala.¹³² Such symbolism, as I contend throughout this dissertation, is fundamental to a positive, life-affirming Christological model apposite to contemporary global concerns.

During the thirteenth century the *Mater Dolorosa* appeared - an influential monastic text linking Christ to his mother and used for meditation on the life of Christ from Mary's perspective. Another widely used European text of this period, the *Stabat Mater*, evoked Mary's pain at the foot of the cross. These are only two literary examples from this late medieval period highlighting the use of Mary's motherhood as a means for reflecting on Christ.

We cannot leave this period without mentioning Julian, whose exposition on Christ as Mother has been rated as one of the greatest reformulations in the history of theology.¹³³ Julian recalled her visions of Christ as Mother by describing a whole cycle of divine maternal activity involving the womb, birth,

¹³¹ D'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 49

¹³² *ibid*, pp 62f

¹³³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p 135. See also Brant Pelphrey, *Christ as Mother: Julian of Norwich*.

infancy, care, education, washing, and healing.¹³⁴ Julian has some remarkable insights emerging from her “showings”. We have noted her revelation concerning the Annunciation. A second lesson from this same “showing” carries the vision of Mary still further. It has to do with the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb. Julian calls it “God in a point”; God in an infinitely small point in space and time. In the Incarnation God had deliberately been reduced to such a “point” as the embryo in Mary’s womb. It is in this lesson that Julian had her well-known “hazelnut” experience. Something appeared in her hand “about the size of a hazelnut”, and she realised that this was in fact not simply a small ball, but the entire universe. From this vision Julian learned that God is not only “dreadful”, making and controlling all things, but also “homely”, intimately related to this tiny point in the universe.¹³⁵ It is not difficult to discern the relevance of Julian’s insights to the notion of a “Christology from within”. In a remarkable piece Julian shows her understanding of the way in which God wishes to be made known in the Incarnation, and this clearly impacts on Christology:

That is to say, our High God, the supreme Wisdom of all, in this lowly womb clothed Himself and enclosed Himself most willingly in our poor flesh, in order that He himself could do the service and the duty of motherhood in everything.¹³⁶

Not surprisingly, in time Christian imagination went on to take one step further - from the divine Mother to God as divine spouse - in the works of such great sixteenth century mystics as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.¹³⁷ John spoke of the heavenly beloved offering the human lover a

¹³⁴ See for example Julian of Norwich, *A Lesson of Love*, pp147-159

¹³⁵ Pelphrey on Julian, pp 109f

¹³⁶ Julian, *A Lesson of Love*, p 156

¹³⁷ See Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, pp 53ff

womanly breast to suck,¹³⁸ and goes on to use erotic imagery as well, to describe the soul's relationship to God. It is suggested that such female imagery can be carried over into the Christian doctrine of the trinity. The generation from the "Father" of the Word and the Spirit is most easily understood in terms of St Bonaventure's "fontalis plenitudo" (fontal fullness) - a concept that lends itself to femaleness, whether to overflowing milk-filled breasts or to the eternal mother's pregnancy and birthing.¹³⁹

The late medieval focus on maternal imagery, together with the link between Mary and Christ, was not surprisingly paralleled by attention to Christ's matrilineal heritage, and it is to this that we now turn. The period 1200-1550 saw a developing devotion to Anne, the mother of Mary,¹⁴⁰ and with it a symbolism which emphasised Jesus' matriarchal lineage in contrast to the (predominantly) male line of the Gospels. This trend co-incident with the increasing use of maternal imagery to describe both Christ and religious experience, perhaps indicating an awareness of the significance of Jesus' maternal line as a complement to the dominant male line. It is possible to trace this right back to the genealogies in the New Testament, however obliquely they may appear there. Here the symbol of the womb becomes important, coming to a point in Mary – born out of a succession of wombs and herself the womb out of which Christ and the church were born.¹⁴¹ We

¹³⁸ Kierean Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (eds), *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1973) p 518. Quoted by Tavard, p 54.

¹³⁹ Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p 55. This refers us back to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of Mary's continuing relationship with Christ.

¹⁴⁰ For example, during the mid- thirteenth century, Chartres Cathedral, dedicated to Mary, received the "head" of the matriarch Anne from a knight returning from the Fourth Crusade. Devotion to Anne during this late medieval period was anchored both in relics such as this as well as in pictorial representations emphasising Christ's matriarchal lineage in contrast to the male line overt in the Gospels. See Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, p 303

¹⁴¹ The genealogy of Matthew's gospel refers to four (unlikely) women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and (the unnamed) Bathsheba. This issue will be discussed further in Ch 6. For now it is important to note that these women can become symbolic of the succession of wombs out of which Jesus was eventually born. (The image brings to mind the picture of popular Russian "nesting dolls." I have in my possession a set of such dolls of which Mary holding the Christ-child is the largest, and out of her various saints of the church emerge. This is interesting considering the place of the *Theotokos* in Russian Orthodoxy.)

have seen that attention to the family of the Virgin Mary goes right back to the apocryphal Gospel of James.¹⁴²

By the end of the fifteenth century the Dominicans had assumed responsibility for promoting devotion to Mary, and it was they who introduced the rosary as a new ritual technique in order to promote the Ave Maria.¹⁴³ In this way, notes Chidester, by the following century the Holy Kinship of the Tree of Jesse was replaced by the Rose Tree of Mary.¹⁴⁴

The reason why the matrilineal theme is significant, and relevant to this dissertation, is that it represents an effort (conscious or otherwise) to do two

¹⁴² Here her parents are named as Anne and Joachim, and her maternal grandmother as Emerentia (or Esmeria). By the eighth century the Eastern Orthodox church was holding a feast to celebrate Mary's miraculous conception to the childless couple. After this tradition reached Europe in the eleventh century, there was increasing devotion to the "Mater Matris" (Mother of the Mother), St Anne. This devotion remained popular in Europe until the mid sixteenth century. Meanwhile the twelfth century had seen the beginnings of the concept of "holy kinship" in the teaching of Peter Lombard, as an attempt to account both for Mary's perpetual virginity and the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Jesus' siblings in this view were either children of the widower Joseph, or part of the extended family of Jesus – his cousins. This latter notion, which traced the extended divine family back to the matriarch Anne, was to take root and retain currency into the sixteenth century. It was only after the mid-sixteenth century devotion to Anne, as matriarch of the Marian lineage, gave way to a focus on the Holy family, bringing with it increasing status for Joseph. Teresa of Avila, who named her convent after him, described Joseph as the best saint because he was both stepfather to Jesus and supportive of Mary. It strikes me as interesting that despite his anti-Papist polemic, Calvin's writings reflect a similar interest in Joseph. Strauss, in his *Life of Jesus*, Ch 3. pp 119ff presents an intriguing account of the Holy Family. For an excellent account of the extended family of Mary see Chidester, pp 301-306.

¹⁴³ According to legend the origin of the rosary was actually with the founder of the Order, St Dominic of Guzman in 1214. In his efforts to convert the Albigensians and others, Dominic purportedly had a vision in which he was instructed by the Virgin Mary to evangelise using her "Psalter". His preaching in accordance with this injunction was accompanied by various supernatural phenomena, and so devotion to the Holy Rosary began to spread. See Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary* (Bay Shore, New York: Montfort Publications, 1954) pp 19ff

¹⁴⁴ Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, p 297. Lest we forget that many historico-theological developments frequently have a dark side, Chidester reminds us that the Rosary was actually used as a tool by the Inquisitors (1492), in their struggle to promote orthodoxy against heresy. Two strategies were employed which significantly altered the character of Christianity in Europe in the early modern era – the suppression of witches and the elevation of Mary. In 1486 Sprenger and Kramer published the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* in the context of Sprenger's new religious organisation "The Cofraternity of the Rosary" to promote and popularise devotion to Mary. The religio-political role of the Virgin Mary is also seen in the 1491 political alliance with in the Holy Roman Empire under the spiritual protection of the Immaculate Conception.

related things. First, it helps to retrieve the reality and value of female experience in the Incarnation. Second, it gives expression to a recurring theme, namely, incorporation of the feminine in a sense of the divine. Balthasar is indeed correct in laying emphasis on Mary's assent to being part of God's redemptive plan, because this symbolises the participation not only of one Galilean girl, but of womankind as a whole.

In the sixteenth century the Protestant Reformation in Europe¹⁴⁵ brought Mariology to a fork in the road. As the status of Mary declined in Protestantism it was paralleled by renewed fervour in Catholic devotion to her, beginning with the Counter-Reformation and continuing through the seventeenth century and beyond. The most important exponent of post-Tridentine Mariology was the Jesuit Francesca de Suarez (1548-1617). And it was the seventeenth century that saw, in addition to the general fervour of Marian piety, consideration of a co-redemptive role for the Virgin. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), possibly reacting in part to the Enlightenment, followed on the heels of de Montfort in propagating intensive devotion to Mary.

During the nineteenth century another such revival was associated with various Marian apparitions - a prominent feature of Catholic society during this period, and paralleling the process surrounding the declaration of Mary's Immaculate Conception in 1854. Examples are Rue du Bac (1830) and Lourdes (1858). The entire period from 1830 onwards in fact saw intense Mariological discussion which included the issue of Mary as co-redemptrix. This continued into the twentieth century, becoming associated with the desire for formal declaration of Mary's mediation and her role in redemption. Meanwhile the first half of the twentieth century was similarly characterised by an increasing number of Marian apparitions, together with the discussion

¹⁴⁵ For a useful overview of Protestant Mariology see Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, Chapter 7

which would reach a climax with Pius XII's 1950 declaration of the Assumption dogma.

Vatican II, as we have seen, took the bold step of including discussion of Mary in *Lumen Gentium*, the document on the church, rather than in a separate declaration devoted exclusively to her.¹⁴⁶ Before Vatican II we see Mary aligned with Christ, that is, a "Christo-typical" approach in which she stands alongside Christ facing the church. After Vatican II the church's understanding of Mary was modified to that of an "ecclesio-typical" approach. Under the influence, notes Gaventa, of dramatic changes in Catholic biblical scholarship, Mary now stands with the church and facing Christ.¹⁴⁷ We read that although she is the gift of divine grace and as such far surpasses any other creature, Mary is nevertheless a member of the human race, joining us in the need to be saved.¹⁴⁸ Els Maeckelberghe contends that this decision on the part of the Council, in conjunction with its announcement of a period of openness and experimentation, of renewal and dialogue, has helped in fostering ecumenical discussion on Marian themes.¹⁴⁹

The studies of both Gaventa and Maeckelberghe show that what constitutes official Catholic doctrine concerning Mary is certainly not indicative of uniformity in Catholic thought.¹⁵⁰ I would add that neither does the official stance define the bounds of much popular devotion. Maeckelberghe, in responding to the reflections of Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer, recognises the lack of practical unanimity in Catholic Mariology, indicating how this pair "unravel the myth of an unproblematic universal discourse about Mary", not denying the possibility of universal communicative discourse, but elaborating an approach that starts with contextual

¹⁴⁶ Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, pp 413ff and especially par 54, p 414

¹⁴⁷ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, p 13

¹⁴⁸ Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, p 414

¹⁴⁹ Els Maeckelberghe, *Desperately Seeking Mary: A Feminist Appropriation of a Traditional Religious Symbol* (Groningen: Pharos, 1992) pp 9-10

analysis.”¹⁵¹ By way of example I cite two very different situations within contemporary Catholicism. The first concerns the understanding of Mary as co-redemptrix.

Although the language may suggest otherwise, Catholic teaching has never placed Mary on an equal footing with Christ in a way that would compromise Christ’s role as Mediator between God and humankind. Her mediation is akin to that of the communion of saints, interceding with God on behalf of the faithful. Since Vatican II, however, there has in some Catholic quarters been renewed interest in Tridentine theology and with it a revival of intense Marian devotion. The illuminating 1997 article in *Newsweek* discussed how this revival is issuing in mounting pressure on the pope to declare Mary co-Redemptrix.¹⁵² Among those who have supported the proposal are notable figures such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Cardinal John O’Connor of New York, and Leonardo Boff. D’Costa also favours the declaration of Mary as co-redemptrix, but from a different perspective. Issuing from her ecclesio-typical position, d’Costa contends that Mary does indeed play a co-redemptive role alongside Christ – but in the same way as all people are called to do. She is therefore the model and forerunner of the church: “Mary should officially be declared ‘Co-redeemer’, for this serves to highlight how the entire church, both women and men, are called to be co-redeemers.”¹⁵³

The second example concerns the place of Mary in liberation theology. Leonardo Boff,¹⁵⁴ for instance, demonstrates the renewed appreciation of

¹⁵⁰ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, pp13f; Maeckelberghe, *Desperately Seeking Mary*, pp 13-39

¹⁵¹ Maeckelberghe, *Desperately Seeking Mary*, p 114

¹⁵² In the four years leading up to 1997 the Vatican received nearly four and a half million signatures from one hundred and fifty seven countries supporting the proposed doctrine. See Kenneth L. Woodward, “Hail, Mary” in *Newsweek*, 25 August 1997, p 39

¹⁵³ D’Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 13. This position is akin to that of Rahner. She is not to be understood as co-redemptrix “by the side of” Christ, but in a type of synergic “sharing” in redemption such as “a human being can and must do in the power of grace.” (*Theological Investigations, Vol 1*, pp 217f). See also later discussions on pp247 and 261.

¹⁵⁴ Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). Translated by Robert R. Barr and John W. Dierksmeier.

Mary in the Latin American context, particularly insofar as the Magnificat is interpreted as a manifesto of prophecy and liberation, making Mary a symbol of hope for oppressed people. Gaventa speaks in this connection of the Catholic "reinterpretation of the official doctrine in the service of people's needs,"¹⁵⁵ particularly in terms of its potential in symbolisation. Both liberation and feminist theologians emphasise the ecclesio-typical representation of Mary emerging from Vatican II, a position summed up by Gebara: "Mary, collective figure, symbol of the faithful people from whose womb emerges the New Creation, unfolds before human beings all their infinite horizons and their indescribable possibilities."¹⁵⁶

The past few years have seen a plethora of Marian publications, approaching Mary from many different angles and ranging from the traditional-conservative, to the radical feminist; from the devotional to the historical. One such publication is that of Tina Beattie in her critique of Marian symbolism, based on her interpretation of the work of French feminist Luce Irigaray. Both Irigaray and Beattie feature prominently in the recent publication of d'Costa, to which reference has already been made.¹⁵⁷ Another publication already referred to, and important for its ecumenical agenda, is the compilation of papers presented at various conferences of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, aptly entitled *Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*.¹⁵⁸ On this note, then, we turn to consider Mary in Protestantism.

Mary in Protestantism: suppressing the tradition

In terms of Protestant reflection on Mary, perhaps the most common feature is its lack! Yet within a wide diversity of viewpoints, it is clear that Protestant Mariological convention does have certain regular features. Because of my

¹⁵⁵ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, pp 13f

¹⁵⁶ I. Gebara and M. Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (New York: Orbis, 1989) p 174.

¹⁵⁷ *Sexing the Trinity*

own Protestant location I am interested in both the diversity and the uniformity. My real interest, however, is in what role Mary can play in contemporary Protestant Christology, and especially in the retrieval of the humanity of Christ. I have come to question in this regard my own hitherto tacitly held beliefs, not least because Protestant avoidance of Mariology does little to explain the persistence, the popularity and the power of Mary in the lives of individuals and in the broader context of the church, and even beyond. We cannot ignore the fact that for many of the world's Christians Mary is and always has been integral to their faith in and experience of Christ.

Protestantism's three basic tenets, *solaus Christus*, *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, give shape to the common features in Protestant approaches to Mary and her position in the plan of redemption. Emphasis on biblical authority and consequent suspicion of extra-New Testament material concerning Mary is one such feature. Another is the Protestant centrality of Christ, which excludes any focus on Mary that does not include Christ, or that would seem in any way to displace Christ. In the third place, Protestants – in contrast to Catholics – frequently deny any individuated participation on Mary's part, considering her election to be entirely the result of divine grace.¹⁵⁹ All this accords with the essential concerns of the Reformation.

There is another cornerstone of Protestant theology, one which is seldom if ever referred to in connection with Mary – that of the priesthood of all believers. I consider this to be significant for Mariology. The Catholic position, endorsed by Vatican II, is of a divinely ordained hierarchical structure in the church, with a clear distinction between clergy and laity – or those in and out of Holy Orders.¹⁶⁰ Yet a few chapters later in the Vatican II documents, when believers are spoken of in the context of Mary, no such distinction is made.

¹⁵⁸ Edited by W. McLoughlin OSM and J. Pinnock (Leominster: Gracewing, 1997)

¹⁵⁹ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, pp 13-14

¹⁶⁰ Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, chapters 3 and 4

Quoting Augustine, the document states that “she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ...since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its Head”.¹⁶¹ Then again, in terms of grace, Mary is what we may become. She is, as we have seen in Balthasar, the first cell of the church. Is it valid to distinguish so sharply between church leadership and authority and the position of believers in relation to Christ? Protestantism's notion of the priesthood of all believers provides a resource for capturing the sense of Mary's ecclesio-typical position, and of the equality of all people before Christ.¹⁶²

Among the early Reformers, notably Zwingli and Luther, Mary had a far more prominent and traditional place than she has had in subsequent Protestant tradition. This is clearly a reflection of the Catholic background of both. As a renaissance humanist, Zwingli, whose approach to Mary was essentially pastoral, is caught between a traditional Catholic interpretation and the literal meaning of the Biblical text. Yet he embraced the traditional Marian doctrines, with the exception of the Assumption, on which he was silent.¹⁶³

Luther's Mariology must be understood against the backdrop of the heart of his theology: justification by grace alone. Although Luther preached on a number of feasts of the Virgin Mary, the essence of his Mariology is contained in his commentary on the Magnificat,¹⁶⁴ in which he distinguished between a doctrinal and devotional approach to Mary. The tone of the commentary, observes Tavard, was set in the dedicatory letter. Here the doctrinal note which is struck is characteristically Christological and

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, ch 8, p 414. Quoting St Augustine, *De S. Virginitate*, 6: PL 40, 399

¹⁶² These observations represent an “outsider” reading, which discerns a note of contradiction at this point in Catholic dogma. Clearly most Catholics themselves would interpret the situation differently.

¹⁶³ An interesting point about Zwingli is that, paradoxically, it was he who first drew attention to the heart of Mary. Based on the Lucan saying that when Jesus was a child Mary “pondered all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51), this anticipated later developments in the “Sacred Heart” Mariology of the Counter-Reformation. Tavard, p 107

¹⁶⁴ *Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and translated by A.T.W. Steinhäuser (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956) pp 297ff.

soteriological, while devotionally Luther does not hesitate to invoke Mary's intercession: "May the tender Mother of God herself procure for me the spirit of wisdom.." ¹⁶⁵ We will see in due course that this is a similar position to that identified by Anna Williams as the Anglican position, contemporary as well as historic.

Luther, like Zwingli, accepted the traditional doctrines, again with the exception of the Assumption. He did, however, reject the notion of Mary's perpetual virginity. For Luther it was important that Mary was an ordinary human being, blessed by God not because of her worthiness but because of God's grace. For Christ to enter fully into our human situation Mary's own humanity, akin to ours, is important. Luther's sermon of Christmas Day 1530 focuses in part on Mary. Yet, as always with Luther, here she is again understood Christologically and soteriologically and not in isolation. ¹⁶⁶ Luther uses an interesting expression, one to be taken up again and employed by Bonhoeffer (albeit not in connection with Mary). In a call to internalise (by the "second faith") the facts surrounding Christ's birth, Luther notes that Mary gave birth to her child "for me" (*pro me*) or for us (*pro nobis*). It is because of Mary, in other words, that the angel is able to say "to you is born..." ¹⁶⁷ What is interesting is that it is precisely this point that sums up the rationale behind the centrality of Mary in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox piety.

In comparison with Zwingli, his successor Bullinger, and Luther, the Mariology of Calvin was minimal. Yet, again because of his Catholic background, it is not surprising to find in him conformity at certain points with the Catholic position. Calvin offers some reflection on the Virgin and her place in relation to Christ and the church; he refers to Mary and the infancy narratives in some sermons; and – interestingly – he pays close attention to

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, p 298.

¹⁶⁶ "...we dare not put our faith in the mother but only in the fact that the child was born" (*Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 229)

the role of Joseph in relation to Mary and the child, retaining the traditional view that Joseph and Mary abstained from sexual intercourse after their marriage.¹⁶⁸ Calvin in fact speaks very tenderly of Mary, at times even echoing part of the Catholic position on her as the one who leads us to Christ:

This is the honour that God has given her, this is how we must look at her: not so as to stop at her or make her an idol. But that by her means we be led to our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is here also that she sends us¹⁶⁹

Another interesting feature in Calvin is that his doctrine of the church (*Ecclesia Mater*) follows the traditional analogy between the mother of Christ, the Christian soul, and the church:

...let us learn from the sole title of *mother* how useful, indeed necessary, is the knowledge of her, inasmuch as there is no entrance to permanent life unless we are received in the womb of this mother, and she begets us, she feeds us at her breasts, and finally she preserves and keeps us under her guidance and government....It is also to be noted that outside the womb of this Church one cannot expect the forgiveness of sins or any salvation¹⁷⁰

From these glimpses of the Reformers we see that within the Protestant tradition itself there are Mariological resources, however discreet, to be tapped for a Christological reconstruction which incorporates the role of

¹⁶⁷ *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, pp 228-31.

¹⁶⁸ See Tavad, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p 118, referring to Calvin's "Sermon on Matthew".

¹⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Revue réformée*, "Sermon on Luke", p 36. In Tavad, p 122

¹⁷⁰ *L'Institution chrétienne*, part 4., ch 1 (Geneva: Labor et fides, 1958) p 14. Cited by Tavad, p 125

Mary. Calvin's own writings involved for the most part, however, relentless polemic against Roman doctrine and devotional practices, and included the accusation of "excessively crass ignorance" for distorting the greetings of the angel and Elizabeth. His concern to counter Rome is implicit throughout, insisting that all Marian doctrines be compatible with justification by faith, and with no speculation beyond what is reported in the Scriptures.

Tavard, whilst acknowledging certain differences in detail, sums up continental Reformation Mariology as follows. First, Mariology was subordinated to Christology, rather than being understood as a part of it. Second, the Reformers condemned prayer to the Virgin Mary as mediator, because there is only one mediator, Christ. Third, the three Marian doctrines on which there was consensus among the Reformers were the *Theotokos*, the virginity of Mary (that is, the virgin conception of Christ; recall that Luther rejected her perpetual virginity), and her sinlessness. Yet after Calvin it was really a short step in Reformed theology to "treat Mariology by omission".¹⁷¹ The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 mentions Mary only once. Although she is referred to several times in the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, this is only explicitly in relation to her virginity. Even here it is not the Mariological significance of the virgin birth which is important; it was seen rather as a test for Biblical authority. Beyond this, and certainly by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both Protestant orthodoxy and the Pietistic movement, there was little attention to Mary. Subsequent Lutheranism and Calvinism were stamped both by the spirit of the Enlightenment and nineteenth century liberal theology, so that more recent Protestant theology and piety, as Tavard notes, has been even more negative towards Mariology than the historic confessions.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p 127

¹⁷² *ibid*, p 128

Studies on the religious situation in England during the period of the Protestant Reformation throw considerable light on Mary's position there, both in terms of the people's need for such a figure and of the historical roots of Mariology. The radical anti-Papist stand of Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century saw the outlawing of the cult of the Virgin Mary. The fact that this wave of Protestant iconoclasm co-incided with Elizabeth's proclamation of herself as the Virgin Queen, has led to the inevitable conclusion that this was a conscious effort by the Elizabethan court to woo the masses, with Elizabeth positing herself as a Protestant substitute for the Virgin Mary. Hackett goes on to cite a number of those who, with fairly convincing arguments, hold to this position.¹⁷³ The conclusions of these and other scholars are based on a number of factors, one of which, of particular interest to me, has to do with respective depictions of their lactation. Elizabeth is represented as a lactating mother, offering pure, nourishing milk to the people. Mary, on the other hand, produces "the idoll's poysoned mylke" (according to the anti-Papist Topcliffe), which is fatal if consumed by the people.¹⁷⁴

Hackett identifies various problems with what she considers rather too simplistic an assessment of the situation,¹⁷⁵ yet despite her reservations, she acknowledges the undeniable element of parallel/substitution in the situation. She contends, however, that "iconography of the Virgin Queen can be seen not merely as a continuation of the cult of the Virgin Mary, but as a perpetuation of a more ancient and enduring veneration of virginity grounded in superstitions about female sexuality and bodily pollution".¹⁷⁶ The fact remains, nevertheless, that the need which was fulfilled by Mary did not cease when her cult was outlawed.

¹⁷³ Among others, Dorothy Connell, Jean Wilson, Lisa Jardine, Stephen Greenblatt (Hackett, p 7).

¹⁷⁴ Quoted by Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p 7

¹⁷⁵ Among these is the fact that most evidence of an Elizabethan cult comes from only late in Elizabeth's reign. Another problem concerns the reality and complexity of the process of secular-sacred exchange: it was more a continual to-and-fro-ing rather than a one-way process of secular appropriation of sacred imagery (Hackett, p.24).

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*

We jump now to the twentieth century for it was then that the tentative beginnings of a Protestant “slight return to Mary”, mostly an expression of the spirit of ecumenism, began to occur. The Reformation position, as well as that of contemporary Protestant convention, according to Gaventa, is exemplified by Barth.¹⁷⁷ For Barth the issue at stake is God’s initiative and the centrality of revelation – not any human contribution or response. Furthermore, Barth suggested that the receptive nature of woman predisposes her to accept such initiative on God’s part, more so than a man.¹⁷⁸ The virgin conception of Christ is the symbol that God alone, without human co-operation, is the author of revelation. Mary’s participation is a passive one. It is here that Barth parted company with the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic positions by his resistance to the possibility of Mary having any independent significance – the capacity to co-operate with God, for example.¹⁷⁹ Pannenberg, who is critical of Barth’s position, is himself very cautious about Mariology. He concedes for Mary a symbolic role, particularly in relation to the relationship between God and the church, but firmly rejects any mediatorial role, which would do violence to the unique position of Christ.¹⁸⁰

Gaventa proceeds to identify three variations in contemporary Protestant thinking concerning Mary. First, she describes a “minimalist” position, adopted by Moltmann.¹⁸¹ With his concern to situate Christology within the framework of Jewish-Christian dialogue, Mary is considered briefly and within the context of “pneumatological christology.”¹⁸² Much of what would normally

¹⁷⁷ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, pp 16-17

¹⁷⁸ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 2, p 213. Barth’s position is underscored in an intensive exposition (mainly in footnotes) of his understanding of Mary as *Theotokos* in *Church Dogmatics* I, 2, pp 138-49.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp 176ff.

¹⁸⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) pp 141ff

¹⁸¹ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper, 1990)

¹⁸² Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p 73. Quoted by Gaventa, p 17

be attributed to Mary is transferred by Moltmann to the Spirit. Moltmann's typically Protestant position stresses both the pre-eminence of Scripture and the insistence that Mary's role exists because of Christ and not the reverse. This is an issue which I would guardedly contest, bearing in mind Mary's mediatorial role in Christ's humanity. For Gaventa the distinctiveness of Moltmann's position is his concern to preserve the roles Catholic tradition ascribes to Mary, but to transpose them on to the Spirit.¹⁸³ This is a significant parallel to the Orthodox Sophiological approach referred to earlier.

An alternative Protestant position is that of John Macquarrie,¹⁸⁴ who locates Mary as an extension of Christology but also as part of ecclesiology (in line with Vatican II). Macquarrie's position is "maximalist" because of his clear ecumenical agenda, shown in a willingness to "listen to the language of other traditions.... and reinterpret that language in ways congenial to one's own tradition."¹⁸⁵ Macquarrie is careful to pre-empt objections to the line he takes by acknowledging that for some, a section on Mariology might seem superfluous, introducing a needlessly controversial and divisive topic. He reassures readers of the sound Scriptural basis of his reflections, pointing out that whilst Mariology is not central, it does make a "definite contribution to understanding the church and its relation to Christ". Furthermore, ecumenical theology cannot afford to ignore it.¹⁸⁶

In his earlier work Macquarrie confines himself to three canonical themes relating to Mary - the Annunciation, the visitation and her station at the cross - but later he reflects on the classical Marian themes (the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, and Mary as co-Redemptrix) with greater

¹⁸³ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, p 18

¹⁸⁴ See Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, pp 392ff, par. 70. The position taken by Macquarrie here is expanded in his later publication, *Mary for All Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). A new edition by T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh (2001) has recently appeared. Macquarrie is a long-time Member of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although he is an Anglican, his contribution is more ecumenical than specifically Anglican.

¹⁸⁵ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, p 18

ecumenical significance.¹⁸⁷ Macquarrie does this in such a way that they can be accepted and even appreciated by Protestants. His treatment of these themes is an attempt to show that their real value lies in their theological and symbolic significance rather than their mythological meaning.¹⁸⁸ Whilst I concur with Macquarrie in this useful symbolic approach to the Marian doctrines, it concerns me that the historic person, Mary the mother of Jesus and mediator of his humanity, receives so little recognition.

Although she has little in common with Macquarrie, being both a radical feminist and post-Christian, aspects of Mary Daly's Mariology are relevant here. There are clearly problems with using Daly, the most significant being that she has severed Mariology from Christology, positing Mary as a substitute for Christ. Mary symbolises hope (for women) whilst Christ is merely a stumbling block. Daly's value to this discussion is therefore limited. Nevertheless, her symbolic interpretation of the Marian dogmas, like Macquarrie's, has the potential to inform our understanding of the Incarnation and Mary's place in it.

Daly distinguishes the symbol of Mary from the mother of Jesus, the former being for her a two-edged sword,¹⁸⁹ according Mary a sometimes God-like status yet portraying her as the model of male-defined womanhood: meek, submissive, dependent. Daly's concern is clearly with the symbolic rather than the historic Mary, with three main Catholic Mariological doctrines holding liberating possibilities when interpreted symbolically. For example, Mary's virginity can be a symbol of female autonomy; the Immaculate Conception can symbolise the power and influence of the Mother-Goddess,

¹⁸⁶ Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, pp 392f

¹⁸⁷ See Macquarrie, *Mary for all Christians*

¹⁸⁸ The Immaculate Conception, for example, can symbolise the "original righteousness" in which we are created and never quite obliterated by "original sin". Macquarrie therefore understands The Immaculate Conception to refer therefore, not to a biological event, but to "the absolute origination of a person." Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p 398; *Mary for All Christians*, p 62.

¹⁸⁹ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p 83

Spong's analysis shares some common ground with that of Marina Warner in her renowned 1976 study of the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary.²⁰² Because of its penetrating and multi-faceted examination of the subject, Warner's work warrants mention here. Having dealt in successive chapters and from an exceptionally broad base with the history of Mary as Virgin, Queen, Bride, Mother, and Intercessor, Warner's conclusion includes the following two points. On the one hand – as anticipated in her Prologue – Warner (echoed in Spong) contends that in “the very celebration of the perfect human woman, both humanity and women were subtly denigrated.”²⁰³ On the other hand, the power of the Virgin is destined to cease: “...the Virgin's legend will endure in its splendour and lyricism, but it will be emptied of moral significance, and thus lose its present real powers to heal and to harm.”²⁰⁴

This is not all that Warner says, but for our purposes these points are pertinent. Maeckelberghe, in her assessment of Warner, suggests that the importance of the study lies in demonstrating how the history of Mary has been ruled by images. Such images, multitudinous in number, “correspond to the society in which they functioned”, and point to the complexity of developing discourse about Mary.²⁰⁵ This is particularly significant when, as Warner showed, the belief easily persists that Mary as she is now understood existed from all eternity. In this view the doctrinal data have “been made explicit through a slow and conscientious process of drawing from revelation”²⁰⁶ – with either total disregard for or blindness to the contextual

²⁰² Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983). This citing of Warner is not to suggest that hers was the only significant feminist Mariological study of recent decades. Important work, at times appearing as journal articles and chapters in books rather than as full studies, has been done by scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Johnson, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Carol Ochs, Ivone Gebara, Maria Bingemer, and Maria Cassel

²⁰³ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p xxi

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, p 339

²⁰⁵ Maeckelberghe, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, p 36

²⁰⁶ Pope Paul VI, 1974, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, Apostolic Exhortation (Marialis Cultus), February 2, 1974, Section 36, p 26. Cited by Warner, p 334

dynamics of Mariology. This is an important observation, and one with which I concur.

Let us briefly take up the conclusions of both Warner and Maeckelberghe, setting them in the context of the motherhood theme (disussed by Warner over three chapters). Essentially, for Warner, emphasis on Mary as mother has in various ways led to the debasement of women. Mary's submissive "let it be"; the biological determination implicit in her breastfeeding (*Maria Lactans*); the contrast between Eve's pain in childbearing as a consequence of sin and Mary's virtuous virgin-motherhood – combine to strip Mary of her true humanity and her intrinsic value as a person. Warner, commenting on the frequent poor treatment of women at the hands of men in precisely those areas of the world where the Virgin is venerated most, has suggested that "Machismo, ironically enough, is the sweet and gentle Virgin's other face."²⁰⁷ The call then, is to eschew Marian piety precisely on the grounds of its negative consequences for women. Despite Williams' insistence that such conclusions are unwarranted, reflecting faulty understandings of Mary (refer to earlier discussion),²⁰⁸ I agree that in a context that has historically, and largely without exception, been both androcentric and misogynist, Mary has in various ways been used against women. The incorporation of Mary in a Christological reconstruction would need therefore to affirm women as human beings. It is my contention that a linking of Christ with his mother in such a paradigm, facilitating the use of maternal imagery for the Incarnation, is one way to provide such affirmation.

I would ask the following question. Given the fact that images of Mary issue from the context in which they function, is it not possible that Mary's motherhood could receive an alternative interpretation? This would be one that lends itself to incorporation into a Christology sensitive, for example, to a

²⁰⁷ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, see especially pp 192-205

²⁰⁸ See Williams, "The Language of Reality", p 5

post-colonial context - such as the one in which I live and seek to do theology. Why must Mary's motherhood be associated with meekness, submission, sweetness, the notion of the "weaker sex", humility/humiliation, and so on? Is there not something redeemable in the motherhood themes, according value to the things that women can do and which are indispensable for human life and well-being?²⁰⁹

Let us pause to consider these issues further. A Christology from "within", in which motherhood is a core image, can have profound relevance in the African context. Since motherhood is an integral (perhaps the most basic) part of the reality of most women's lives on this continent, the fact that Christ emerged from the body of a woman accords dignity to this state. Mary's designation as *Theotokos*, bearing in mind the full meaning of the title, can then be understood as a recapitulation of motherhood. We noted in the Introduction²¹⁰ that motherhood and childhood in the South African context assume particular poignancy, with much need of redemption. Mary's role in the Incarnation, situating motherhood in the ambit of redemption, can help in mediating a Christ relevant to situations where motherhood has been forcibly violated.

For Warner the one Marian motherhood theme which constitutes an exception to the debasement of women is that of the *mater dolorosa*, bringing Mary close to people who suffer, and stressing the fact that tears are part of the universal language of cleansing and rebirth.²¹¹ This, particularly in contexts of historical hardship, is significant, and is something with which

²⁰⁹ I pose this question in full awareness of the valid feminist position which, in its call for equality between women and men, addresses itself to the issue of creating opportunities for women to exercise their talents and to experience fulfilment outside of the domestic sphere. I contend, however, that since women will always be those who give birth and provide the primary nurture for children, it is important to recognise the value intrinsic to these roles.

²¹⁰ p 20

²¹¹ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p 223

many women identify.²¹² Yet what Warner doesn't seem to connect is the notion of suffering in motherhood with the extraordinary physical and emotional endurance required by every experience of motherhood. Are there not possibilities for using these images, together with that of woman's regularly shed blood – historically associated with the curse on Eve – in a redemptive way?

Recovering Mary/Mariology?

Having reflected on these various Protestant Mariological perspectives, we move on to note three hopeful signs identified by Tavard, which have led to a higher degree of appreciation of Mary in contemporary Protestantism. The first is the ecumenical movement, with its ensuing encounter with the Mariology of Orthodoxy and to some extent Catholicism. The second is the liturgical movement with its focus on sacramental symbols and devotional language, leading to an enhancement of the image of Mary. The third is a return to sources, both biblical and patristic, resulting in a higher appreciation for Mary and her relation to the redemptive work of Christ.²¹³

The French theologian Gérard Siegwalt,²¹⁴ provides an example of contemporary Protestant attention to Mary. Siegwalt's position contains echoes of other Protestant approaches we have considered, namely Barth and Macquarrie. Although for Siegwalt Mary must always be seen in subordination to Christ, the various portrayals of her in the New Testament have made her the model of the church – a model who evokes the church's "feminitude"²¹⁵ (not femininity, the human state related to sexuality). Feminitude, expressed precisely and typically in Mary, describes a

²¹² One exceptional example is symbolised in the icon, "Mothers of the Disappeared" by Robert Lenz.

²¹³ Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p 138

²¹⁴ Gérard Siegwalt, *Dogmatique pour la catholicité évangélique, Système mystagogique de la foi chrétienne* (Geneva: Labor et fides, 1991) 2:1:337-81. Cited by Tavard, p 128ff

²¹⁵ cf Jung

fundamental disposition of openness to the plans of God. Understanding Mary in this way means that the traditional Marian dogmas – even the most recent – can have spiritual meaning in relation to Christ and the church, providing a link between Christology and ecclesiology. These dogmas, however, whilst sometimes useful, are not essential to the gospel and neither are they absolute – making this a position akin to that held by Luther. The exception here is the acknowledgement of Mary as *Theotokos*, essential because of the connection between this and the message of salvation through Christ alone. The other dogmas may have useful symbolic rather than literal meaning – a position not dissimilar to that adopted by Macquarrie.

Perhaps the most striking example of Protestantism's "slight return to Mary"²¹⁶ in the contemporary church is the Taizé community in France, founded in 1940 by the Swiss Reformer Roger Schutz for Jewish refugees, and then converted into a cross-denominational Protestant/Catholic place of prayer and religious life. It is this community that provided the context of Max Thurian's "catholicising reflection about Mary", published as *Mary, Mother of all Christians*.²¹⁷

The existence of an Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which has had several important conferences in recent decades, bears testimony to the ecumenical concerns of theologians of various traditions, and to the ecumenical significance of Mary. Out of the 1995 conference Catholics and Methodists issued a landmark joint statement on Mary.²¹⁸ Because Methodism is my own tradition, I am particularly interested in this statement – as I am with the earlier reflections of Geoffrey Wainwright on the Catholic-Methodist Mariological relationship.²¹⁹ Wainwright begins by explaining the

²¹⁶ Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p 130

²¹⁷ New York: Herder and Herder, 1964

²¹⁸ McLoughlin and Pinnock, *Mary is for Everyone*, pp171ff

²¹⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment*, Ch 10. This chapter, entitled "Mary and Methodism" is a modified form of a lecture given at the 1975 conference of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary

historic “link” between Methodism and Catholicism, noting the contention that original Methodism marked a reaction within the evolution of Protestantism. Wesley’s doctrine of justification by faith was, according to the Belgian Franciscan writer Maximin Piette, closer to the Council of Trent than it was to Luther. And Wesley’s “unswerving Arminianism” places him in direct opposition to “Genevan predestination”.²²⁰ In view of such suggestions Wainwright asks if there perhaps exists in Methodism the potential to give Mary more of her due than is usual in Protestantism.

With this in mind Wainwright proceeds to identify six doctrinal emphases within Methodism,²²¹ looking to them for a possible link with Catholicism with regard to the position of Mary. Wainwright’s treatment of the first of these, “active receptivity”, is an indication of what he attempts to do. Methodism holds that all people, when they hear the gospel, have the capacity freely to accept it. Such optimism in Methodism is an “optimism of grace” – not that of (Pelagian) freedom in humankind’s fallen state. Mary’s response to the angel, “Be it unto me according to your word” (Luke 1) is for Wainwright the nearest Catholic correspondence to this Methodist doctrine. For Schillebeeckx Mary’s assent was “the first case of explicit and free consent to the specifically Christian plan of redemption..... Redemption always demands co-operation with, free consent to, and full acceptance of, the gift of the God-man, who, by his very calling, is the Redeemer.”²²² Having identified this correspondence, Wainwright goes on to warn of the danger of confusing the terms “co-operation” and “co-redemption”, as if something could be added by Mary to the saving work of Christ. There should, contends Wainwright, “be no maximising of the Irenaeus idea that ‘by her obedience Mary became the

²²⁰ Maximin Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (1937). Cited by Wainwright, p 169

²²¹ 1. Faith as active receptivity, 2. Entire sanctification (scriptural holiness, perfect love), 3. Assurance, 4. The universal offer of the gospel, 5. The social implications of the gospel, 6. The communion of saints

²²² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (1964), pp 91 and 93. Cited by Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment*, p 171

cause of salvation...”²²³ The problem for Methodism becomes even more acute “when we move from the *Hail Mary* to the *Stabat Mater*,” understood by Catholics to express the deep *theological* significance of Mary standing at the foot of the cross sharing in the suffering of Christ. Schillebeeckx, for instance, can speak of “the sacrifice of the Cross, accomplished by Christ himself and co-accomplished in a maternal manner by Mary.”²²⁴ Whilst accepting, with Catholicism, the free response of Mary to the gracious initiative on God’s part, Methodists reject all notions suggestive of a co-redemptive role for Mary, and for this reason stop the language of “co-operation” short of the language of “co-redemption.”²²⁵

Having identified other points of both convergence and divergence between Methodists and Catholics, Wainwright finally suggests three areas offering potential for future collaboration.²²⁶ First, there could be a shared study of Scripture, beginning with the birth narratives, moving on to other references to Mary, and finally to those ambiguous passages given Mariological interpretation by Catholics. This could be done employing the notion of Mary as *Theotokos* as an area of common ground. Second, Mary as the “active model” (Schillebeeckx) of the church could be a mutual inspiration insofar as her humble status as handmaid of the Lord and servant of humanity contrasts with a triumphalist church. Third, common prayer could be a means towards better understanding and the discovery of shared ground. Methodism boasts the surprising publication in 1971 by one of its ministers, Neville Ward, of a book of prayer centring on the rosary.²²⁷ This Christocentric work could well, according to Wainwright, lead to greater doctrinal understanding through the joint exploration of prayer.

²²³ AH III.xvii.4, and quoted in Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, p 416. Cited by Wainwright, p 172

²²⁴ Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment*, p 172, quoting Schillebeeckx, p 163

²²⁵ Wainwright, p 173

²²⁶ *ibid*, pp 185-7

²²⁷ *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy*

This lengthy chapter has explored the place of Mary through history as she has been understood in various Christian traditions and across a spectrum of theological (and ideological) positions within them. The discussion has included the weaving together of various strands - for example, the biblical and patristic origins of Mariology; the feminist critique of Mariology, both positive and negative; and the imagery giving expression to Mariological issues, some of which are able to enrich our understanding of Christology. As we have proceeded and seen a number of significant Mariological themes appear, I have emphasised that the agenda of this dissertation is Christology and not Mariology. The key issue, therefore, is to bring our discussion of Mary to the point where it clearly informs Christology, and in particular reinforces the notion of a Christology "from within". The following poem is helpful in suggesting the connections that take us forward:

Before Jesus
was his mother.

Before supper
in the upper room
breakfast in the barn.

Before the Passover Feast,
a feeding trough,
And here, the altar
of Earth, fair linens
of hay and seed.

Before his cry,
her cry.
Before his sweat
of blood,

her bleeding and tears.
Before his offering, hers.

Before the breaking
of bread and death,
the breaking of her
body in birth.

Before the offering
of the cup,
the offering of her breast.
Before his blood,
her blood.
And by her body and blood
alone, his body and blood
and whole human being.

The wise ones knelt
to hear the woman's word
in wonder.
Holding up her sacred child,
her God in the form of a babe,
she said, "Receive and let
your hearts be healed
and your lives be filled
with love, for
this is my body,
this is my blood."²²⁸

²²⁸ From "Life Prayers", edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon (San Francisco: Harper, 1996) p 169. By Alla Renee Bozarth.

On the basis both of this chapter and the discussion which preceded it, I go forward with two assumptions. The first is that it is problematic to discuss Jesus in isolation from Mary. The second is that both the doctrine of recapitulation and the Chalcedonian Definition bring the notion of Mary as *Theotokos* to the fore. Mary is the mediator of Christ's humanity. In the person of Mary, therefore, we have the meeting place between the human and the divine, issuing in the God-human, Jesus. With this clearly in mind, let us move on to explore further the meaning of, and motivation for, a Christology "from within".

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PART 3

CHAPTER 6

CHRISTOLOGY FROM WITHIN

The organ which is unique to the female becomes a metaphor to express the compassion and the love of God. The God in whom we live and move and have our being is a God of womb-like love – a God who will hold us close, and who, in love, will withdraw, will contract her womb and give birth to us¹

All theological discourse is a combination of rigorous historical-critical reflection and imaginative construction. In this thesis I have sought to engage both, and as we come to an end a brief reminder of the enquiry is in order. My efforts to recover the significance of Christ's humanity began with an historical-critical enquiry. We explored the debates surrounding the search for the historical Jesus; we considered the circumstances and debates leading up to Chalcedon; we engaged in dialogue with Irenaeus, Balthasar and others; and eventually arrived at a consideration of Mary's position. In each of these areas elements of constructive Christological value were identified.

The debate surrounding the search for the historical Jesus clarified at least three issues. First, to speak of the historical Jesus is not simply to speak of the humanity of Christ. The former is the product of rational enquiry, whilst the latter is essentially, though not only, an article of faith. Second, it is not possible to separate the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith. It is the historical Jesus whom we worship as the Christ – the one who was conceived and born, who lived and died, as an historical person. This is what the Incarnation is about. Hence the humanity of Christ is not just an article of faith, it is historically embedded. Thirdly, one of the striking omissions from the search for the historical Jesus was a sense of sociality – as if the historical Jesus could be a person in isolation, and specifically in

isolation from his mother. The omission of Mary reinforced, in fact, the post-Enlightenment Protestant rejection of Mary's significance.

Chalcedon clarified the bounds within which Christological discourse can occur. In reflecting on the Council and the events leading up to it, certain things became evident. Rahner reminded us that Chalcedon presented a formula meaningful in the language of the time, but that there is an ongoing need to re-express the same truths in categories which reflect contemporary experience.² Interestingly, many of the issues facing the Fathers persist in various forms today, notably docetism. Describing Mary as *Theotokos* was intended to reinforce the notion of Christ's true humanity, an issue which continues to require emphasis. Above all else Chalcedon captured the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery "that must remain as mystery,"³ so that it should be approached doxologically and not just dogmatically. This is a theme that recurred throughout the enquiry in respect of Christ's humanity.

Going behind Chalcedon to Irenaeus and his doctrine of recapitulation demanded that we consider carefully what is meant by the claim that Christ assumed our full humanity. For Irenaeus the "true humanity" of Christ meant that he recapitulated every part of human experience from birth to the eschaton. Balthasar took Irenaeian thought further, by insisting that recapitulation in Christ began in the womb, and also by applying to Christ Irenaeus' notion of growth through conflict. In critical dialogue with Robinson, Magdalen and others we explored further the meaning of true humanity, and discovered that particularity was one essential element. It was primarily Bonhoeffer who honed our awareness of the social dimensions of human being. Balthasar's particular value for this enquiry lies in his attention to Mary, and the prominence he gives her as mediator of Christ's humanity.

¹ Thurston, *Because of Her Testimony*, p 24

² Refer to Ch 2, discussion of Rahner's essay, "Chalcedon, End or Beginning?". Horvath, in his comparison of Nicaea and Chalcedon, makes the same point as Rahner. Chalcedon added nothing new to the Christological position of Nicaea, but "explains its meaning for new questions" (*Jesus Christ as Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, p 28)

³ Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p 18. See Ch 2, p 81.

The picture emerging from our enquiry thus far was that the role of Mary is vital in affirming the humanity of Christ. In order to discern *how* she should be used, we then sifted through a considerable amount of Mariological material, dismissing what is patently divisive and that which belongs in the area of “Marian excesses”, and identifying elements which can be constructively used in a Christological reconstruction. But what difference does Mary make? And how can we give expression to her role in such a way that it informs us about the humanity of Christ? I suggest that the incorporation of Mary in a Christology “from within” does what the classical Christological statements regarding the *Theotokos* intended to do. They confirmed the humanity of Christ against docetic trends – as evident now as they ever were – so that salvation is truly possible. Paradoxically they preserved this truth in doxological form – designed to be accepted in praise rather than understood by rational enquiry, the element of mystery setting limits to the potential of rational discourse.

Our consideration of Mary’s position in church history yielded some crucial insights. First, she is an ambiguous figure. Second, without exception – and this includes even the most radical Marian positions – she is never to be understood apart from her relation to Christ. Third, whilst Mary’s designation as *Theotokos* is officially the one point of agreement in the main church traditions, there is a less obvious and yet equally strong strand of common tradition – doxological acknowledgement of Mary’s role in the Incarnation. This last point is significant. We see it in Irenaeus, in the deeply respectful manner in which he speaks of Mary as the one who gave to Christ his experience of humanity. We have seen how the Chalcedonian formula is a statement of what *is* rather than an explanation of *how* it is possible, evoking praise and a sense of mystery. We saw it pre-eminently in Balthasar, and finally, either overtly or covertly, Mary is praised in each of the church traditions – be it in piety, liturgy or hymnody.⁴

In view of contemporary knowledge and challenges, we move forward with the tradition but beyond it, exploring the possibilities contained in the notion of Mary as *Theotokos*. In doing so we keep in mind that Mary both

informs our understanding of Christ's humanity, and in herself remains integral to the mystery of the Incarnation. Let us now identify some of the resources available to us in Mary's motherhood in order, literally, to flesh out the meaning of Christ as fully human.

Elements for a constructive Christology

In setting forth the elements for a constructive Christology "from within", I am assuming acceptance of the substance of Chalcedonian Christology. This, for Bonhoeffer, constituted "critical" Christology, establishing the bounds of positive Christological discourse. Within those bounds I have identified elements that have been neglected or even omitted in doing Christology and which, in the light of what I have argued, need to be included.

In the Introduction I cited Miller-McLemore's comment that few women use the resources available to them from motherhood as a central theme for theological reflection.⁵ I remarked then on my intuitive sense that a contemporary Christology could and should exploit such resources. The significance of my own motherhood, which interacted with other dimensions of my hermeneutic (a response to feminism; being a nurse; living as a person of faith in the South African context), confirmed the need for this. From the epistemological location of motherhood I am able to provide a perspective on the Incarnation and specifically the humanity of Christ not available to Irenaeus, the Chalcedonian Fathers, Balthasar and most other dialogue partners in our study. The lens of motherhood has honed my sensitivity to issues that need to be recovered for our understanding of the Incarnation, giving substance to Christ's humanity.

At the level of his divinity we believe that Christ was pre-existent as the Logos. On the level of his humanity we can, with no less assurance, speak of Christ's pre-history in the womb. We turn now to consider Christ's

⁴ To this point we shall return shortly.

⁵ Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, p 133.

humanity from this latter perspective, which we do by focusing on the genealogies, the first of several elements in my proposal for a Christology in which the humanity of Christ is retrieved in the light of the role of Mary.

1. *Genealogies*

The genealogies function to situate Jesus in the context of salvation history, emphasising the teleological dimension of the Incarnation. On another reading the genealogies can suggest that Christ emerged *from within* the history of Israel, giving historic rootedness to the Incarnation, showing that to be human is to exist in time. But there is also a symbol within a symbol here, highlighted by the image of Christ's matriarchal lineage. The succession of wombs out of which Jesus was born signifies Christ's link, through the womb, with all humanity. The womb can also symbolise the regenerating cycles of life – the life-death-new life pattern - drawing attention to the organic rootedness of Christ's humanity, and providing complementarity to the teleological process of salvation history. *Within* the forward thrust of history this other process has always carried on.

Previous Christological approaches have tended, from varying perspectives and with differing hermeneutics, to focus intently on the notion of salvation history. This certainly is part of what recapitulation is about. Christ does not merely cover the ground again by entering creation, but also renews it and takes it forward towards the eschaton.⁶ But are there reasons other than theological ones for this overwhelming emphasis on the historical nature of biblical faith? Is there not a connection between the assumed maleness of God and this historical orientation? I suggest that both are at least in part the result of Old Testament efforts to stamp out the stubbornly persisting fertility cults of the goddess.⁷ In doing so, something was lost – or at least suppressed – and that is a sense of the

⁶ Adrio König's study on eschatology captures the significance of this, as Christ reaches the eschaton *for us, in us and with us*. See *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989)

⁷ For a fascinating excursus into humankind's possible religious past, see David Leeming and Jake Page, *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

regenerative cycles of life. What is missing is the life-death-rebirth motif, which represents, as does the womb in the context of the genealogies, a tradition within a tradition in scripture. For the Westerner this may seem insignificant, but the same does not apply to everyone. In Africa, for example, life is traditionally understood in terms of its natural cycles rather than a perpetual forward thrust. Women, too, because our lives are to a great extent determined by nature's cycles, have a sensitivity to their significance. Paul Coelho, through one of his characters, sums it up:

"Men lived through movement, while we remained close to the womb of the Mother. This allowed us to see that seeds are turned into plants, and we told this to the men. We first made the bread, and we fed our people. We shaped the first cup so that we could drink. And we came to understand the cycle of creation, because our bodies repeat the rhythm of the moon."⁸

The genealogies in Matthew and Luke refer overtly to the male line of Jesus, in which his genealogy is paradoxically traced through Joseph, respectively along the kingly (Matthew) and priestly (Luke) lines. Both unambiguously represent male, Jewish salvation-historical tradition, into which Jesus was born. As such these genealogies, within the context of Judaism, signify power – the dominator, the victor. But Matthew's genealogy, as we saw in Chapter 5, is interspersed with the enigmatic inclusion of four surprising women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and (the unnamed) Bathsheba. Whilst there is no consensus as to the significance of these particular women in Matthew's genealogy, a common conclusion is that in some way each one challenges the respectability of the male dominant line. Each is in some way a threat to the status quo, and each is herself in some way threatened.⁹ There is a sense, therefore, in which these women represent anti-tradition – the line of the weak, the victim, the

⁸ Paulo Coelho, *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* (London:Thorsons, English translation 1997), p 15

⁹ See Gaventa, *Mary, Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, pp 32ff; Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, pp 59ff; Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, pp 20ff.

oppressed, in some cases the sinner - and it is in continuity with them that Mary appears as the fifth woman to be mentioned by Matthew. Jesus himself is born out of wedlock; he grew up only to be crucified outside the city... Matthew's genealogy therefore signifies two levels of anti-tradition - the succession of wombs through which the seed of Jesus passed before it emerged as the "Word made flesh" in Jesus of Nazareth, and the fact that Jesus' birth occurred in irregular circumstances.

Each of the genealogical traditions comes together in Mary (the kingly Davidic, the priestly, and the female lines). As symbol of the line of wombs out of which Jesus appeared, Mary ensures that women are accorded a central role in the Incarnation. In view of the persistent denigration of women through history, recapitulation cannot be complete without this dimension. Equally Mary symbolises the "womb" that ensures Christ's continued presence in the world. Here, of course, we are referring to the church and facing the issue, in the context of recapitulation, of the ongoing presence and activity of Christ after his resurrection and ascension.

In her symbolic identification with the church, Mary becomes the "womb" that generates Christ's continuing presence as he "exists as community", or in human relationships. We saw that Balthasar expressed this in terms of Mary being the "first cell" of the church. For d'Costa "Jesus' story cannot be told out of its relationship to a series of stories and lives that interpenetrate each other and are formed precisely through these complex relations of love and forgiveness, sin and violence that together form the creation that groans for a redemption that has already been attained." As we have seen, d'Costa goes on to suggest that this redeeming love is seen pre-eminently in Mary and then in those who, with her, will be "co-redeemers" with Christ (that is, the church).¹⁰

A woman's womb is associated, first through menstruation and then in birth, by the shedding of blood. And so we allow the imagery to move our

¹⁰ D'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 60. See comments on p 218 and later discussion on the notion of co-redeemers, p 261.

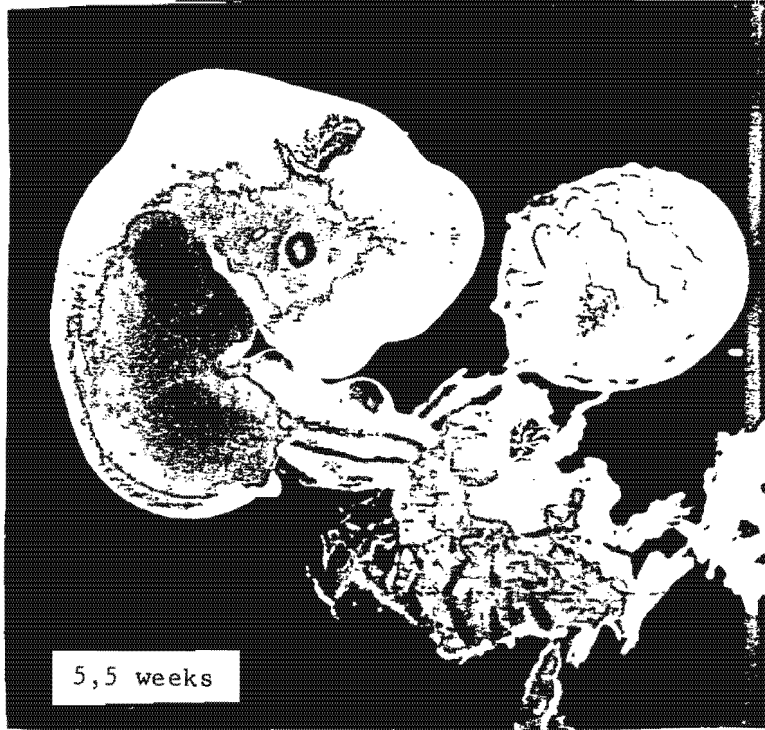
focus from Jesus' pre-history as contained in the genealogies, to his birth into the world.

2. *In birthing blood is shed*

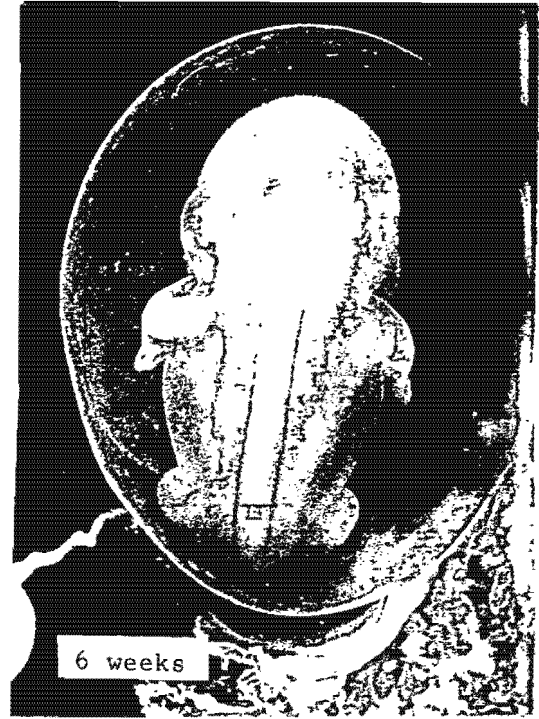
According to both the Old and New Testaments, shed blood has redemptive significance. We ask ourselves again the questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation. Why does the blood shed by women never have redemptive significance in the bible? Why should the blood shed by Christ (a man) on the cross not be paralleled in Christian imagery by the blood of Mary (a woman) shed at Christ's birth?

Consider the kenosis passage of Phillipians 2. After describing the process of Christ's self-emptying, the pivotal moment comes in verses 8 and 9 where "he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross... And *therefore* God exalted him..." Thurston draws a striking parallel between Christ's emptying and the process of giving birth. Giving birth is a literal giving of oneself. For Thurston, giving birth "fulfills the paradox of mystery: the more one gives oneself over to the event the more strength one receives and the easier it becomes."¹¹ The letting go of self ("dying" to self?) becomes the possibility of a new beginning. Anyone who has given natural birth knows about that low point in the process – the point of utter despair ("My God, why have you forsaken me?") which is also the point of no return. This is the very moment that makes the birth inevitable – a child *will* be born out of this pain ("It is finished"). We have seen how Paul was able to grasp the power of birthing imagery in the Romans 8 passage (vss 18-23). And we have seen that as far back as Clement in the second and third centuries, and then among medieval mystics, the life-giving death of Jesus on the cross was not uncommonly likened to a woman giving birth, and the blood shed by him to breast milk.¹² In view of all this we need to consider the possibility of this twin symbol for Christianity: the man (Christ) dying on a cross and the woman (Mary) giving birth.

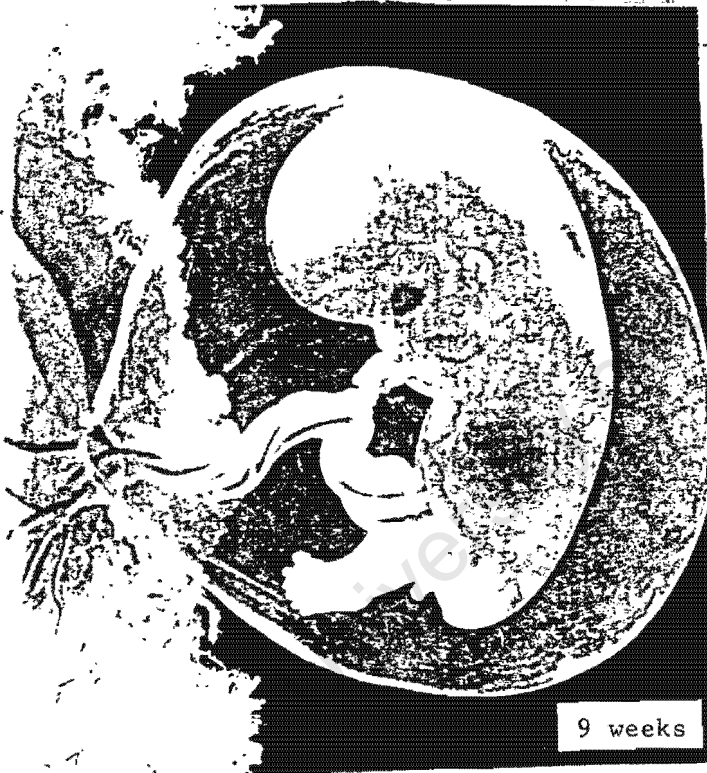
¹¹ Thurston, *Because of Her Testimony*, p 28



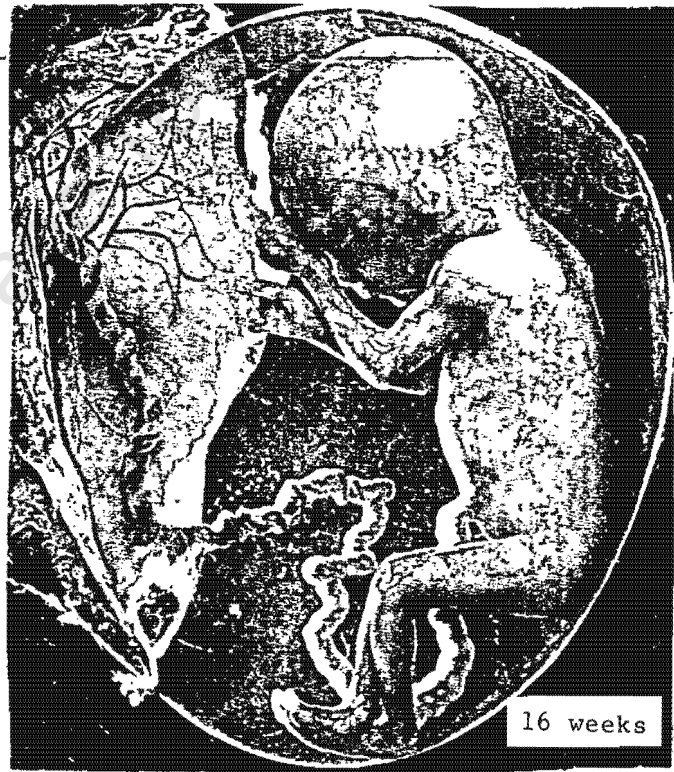
5,5 weeks



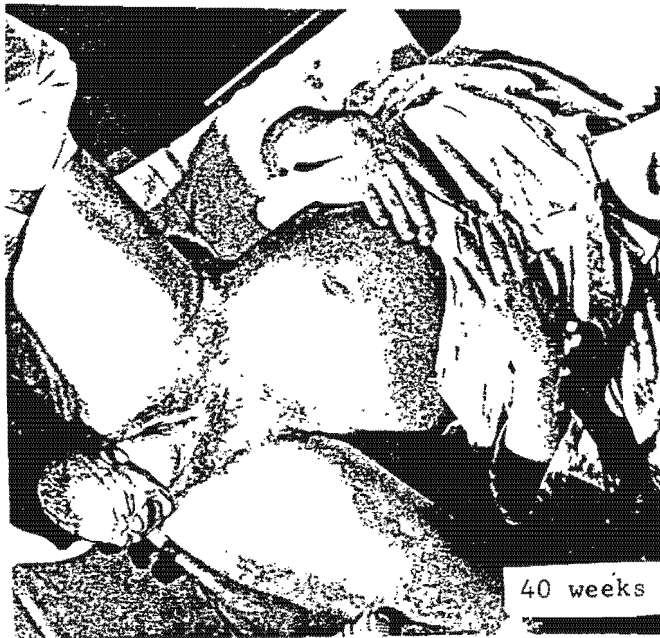
6 weeks



9 weeks



16 weeks



40 weeks



a child is born...

To incorporate the image of the blood shed by the woman (Mary) at (Christ's) birth in a Christological paradigm is significant for another reason. Consider the following, for example - the cleanliness taboos of biblical times, which meant that women spent a high proportion of their lives ritually unclean; the vast number of women who have died during childbirth; the discomfort and indignity associated with menstruation; and the violation of women and girls through sexual abuse. Women's shed blood has frequently been associated with physical pain, social exclusion, and emotional loneliness and scarring, and it is too often the vehicle of an aborted foetus¹³ – how does redemption fit in here? Indeed, there is much to redeem in the experience of women's shed blood. The image of the woman giving birth helps to provide a framework which makes it possible to view these issues within the ambit of redemption in Christ. In this sense it is Christ-through-Mary who recapitulates and redeems the experience of women.

There are considerable doxological resources available in the Christian tradition, both in the scriptures and in church tradition, which enable us to develop a Christology "from within" incorporating both images. And this raises the question as to why such resources have not been drawn on more often for mainstream theological reflection.¹⁴ Let us consider one such resource - Christian hymnody, where we have theology in doxological form. Hymns are imaginative constructs, poetry and music as the vehicle of theology, often reflecting theological insights more profoundly than is possible in a theological textbook.¹⁵ In the Preface to the 1780 of the Methodist Hymn Book, John Wesley was to say that "when

¹² Tavad, p 52. Refer to the discussion in Ch 5, and especially to Clement of Alexandria's treatment of this theme.

¹³ The South African context, with its widespread poverty and associated social problems, has evoked from me a reluctant (and qualified) condoning of abortion on demand. I also stand in no judgement of those who for other particular reasons opt for abortion. Whilst abortion may sometimes, for these and other reasons (e.g. rape, genetic abnormality, German Measles, the endangered life of the woman), be the lesser of two evils, I contend that essentially it is wrong to terminate the life of an unborn child, and that these situations stand in need of redemption.

¹⁴ Among the notable exceptions is the work of Geoffrey Wainwright, to whom reference has already been made and whose reflections are useful for the current discussion.

¹⁵ Recall the comments in Ch 5, p 195 on the doxological nature of Eastern Orthodox Mariology, as well as Williams' observations about Anglican Mariology, p 230.

Poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.”¹⁶

It is this hymn book, many of whose hymns were written by Charles Wesley,¹⁷ with which I am most familiar. These hymns are loved – memorised, quoted and invoked - by Methodists and other Christians, and their insights constitute the foundations of many people’s theology. The scriptural basis of most of these hymns¹⁸ underscores their value as theological source material, not least in respect of the imagery I am trying to recover for a Christology “from within”. We have referred several times in this study to the significance for this paradigm of the emptying of Christ – kenosis. Wainwright explains the use of poetry to articulate this astonishing movement which describes the opposite of what one might expect - not us growing into the image of God, but God becoming one of us – by noting that it evoked rapturous praise from believers.¹⁹ Among the profound insights contained in the lines that follow are the central place of Mary in the Incarnation as mediator of Christ’s humanity, bolstering the idea (foundational to this thesis) of Christ as the Source of life emerging from *within* it to become a *part* of it.

Lo! He abhors not the Virgin’s womb.
Word of the Father
Now in flesh appearing...

(No 118, ? Frederick Oakley)

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus our Immanuel...

¹⁶ Cited by Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) p 202.

¹⁷ Charles Wesley lived from 1707-88, his brother John from 1702-92.

¹⁸ Bernard Lord Manning noted that only five books in the Bible are missing from the scripture index of the 1780 version of the hymn book. He described this version as “a modern book of Psalms,” and the hymns of Wesley as Methodism’s “greatest contribution to the common heritage of Christendom.” *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954) p 13)

¹⁹ Wainwright, *Doxology*, p 206

(No. 117, Charles Wesley)

The incarnate Deity,
Our God contracted to a span
Incomprehensibly made man

(No 142, Charles Wesley)

The Anglo-Catholic hymn, "Crown him with many crowns"²⁰, contains a stanza that brings together the two images in a Marian interpretation of the Mystic Rose in Isaiah 11. This stanza is omitted from the Methodist Hymn Book, an indication perhaps of Protestant suppression of Marian elements in faith. Here, using typical Marian imagery, the writers convey something (which Balthasar would later echo): Christ who is "root" and "stem" (i.e. source) becomes "fruit", just as Mary who grows from the "root" and "stem", gives birth to the same as "fruit" of her womb - as "Being's source begins to be, And God Himself is born"²¹...

Crown him the Virgin's Son
the God incarnate born,
whose arm those crimson trophies won
which now his brow adorn;
Fruit of the Mystic Rose,
as of that Rose the Stem;
the Root whence mercy ever flows,
the Babe of Bethlehem

(Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring)

Jesus' birth of Mary is a particular event. But his birth of a woman is an *experience such as is common to all people*. To recall Thurston's reminder: "whilst we are not all mothers...we are all born from the womb of mothers. We have all shared the experience of birth..."²² Christ's birth, therefore, is an integral and climactic moment of recapitulation, pointing to

²⁰ No. 147, *Hymns Ancient and Modern New Standard* (1983)

²¹ Charles Wesley, *Methodist Hymn Book*, No 134,

²² Thurston, *Because of Her Testimony*, p 23

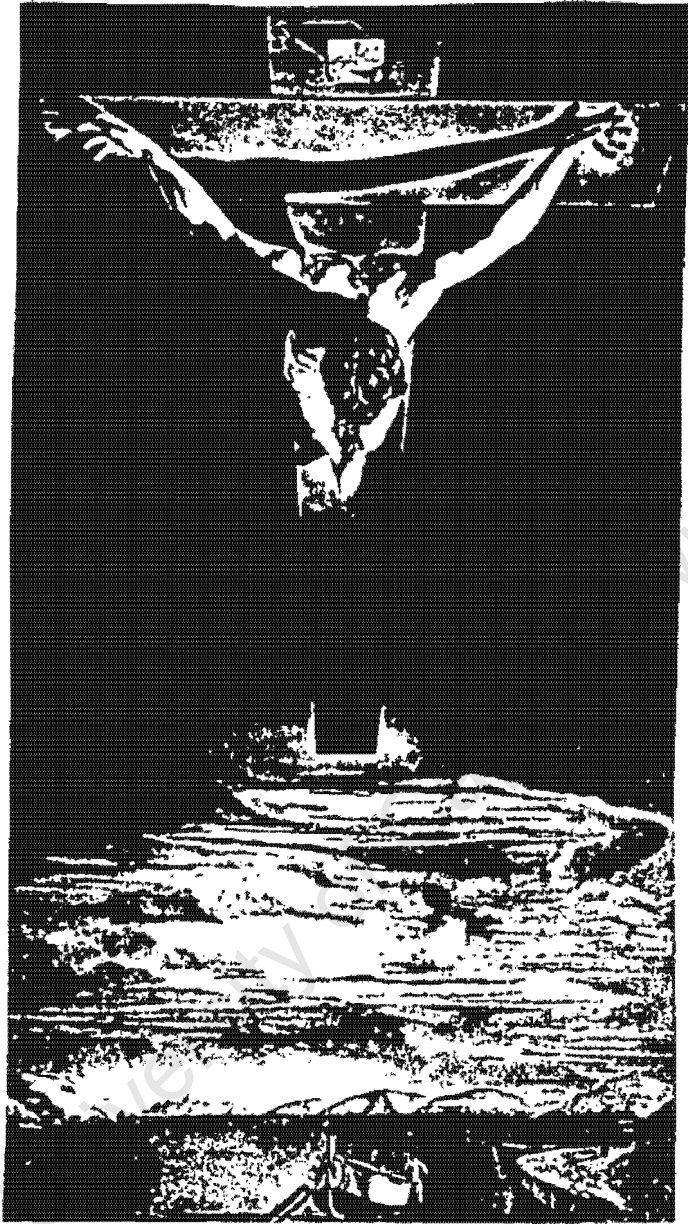
Thurston's further insight that the "biological facts concerning the way in which human life is mediated through the bodies of women have profound implications for our understanding of personhood."²³ We noted in the Introduction that this truth might also have profound implications for our understanding of the Incarnation. For as Thurston contends, with every birth "an ethic of the rights of the individual alters in favour of the ethic of relationship."²⁴ Thurston observes that *to be is to be in relationship*. The child in the womb shows us this. We begin our lives within another. And this is the first grace, the first wisdom that women must name.²⁵

These observations underscore the fact that in order to assume human existence Christ was contingent on Mary. He could not recapitulate human experience alone, and therefore, *in this sense*, neither could he redeem us alone. At various junctures in this dissertation we have encountered a linking of Mary with the Spirit and, allied to this, the suggestion that the Incarnation bears witness to the Trinitarian nature of God. It is Christ as the human-in-relationship who is Redeemer.

I have seen reproductions of Salvador Dali's painting "The Crucifixion" many times, noting and appreciating its obviously unusual perspective, but attaching little significance to it. I recently had occasion to view the picture again, and was grasped by it - transfixed. What I saw was not the form of a man nailed to a cross, but a woman's reproductive organs set against the backdrop of a cross. The form of Christ in Dali's painting, because of its aspect (looking down from above), strongly resembles the shape of the female uterus and Fallopian tubes - even to the "fingers" at the end of the tubes, spread over the ovaries. The head of Christ is portrayed by Dali as a dark, somewhat elongated shape set in the middle of the body - again, the position of the body of the uterus in a woman's reproductive system. The muscular form of Christ's neck, shoulders, torso and legs encircle the head - just as the muscular uterine wall encircles the womb. The arms of Christ stretch out above on either side of the body, and the fingers are splayed against the cross - just as the tubes extend upwards and

²³*ibid*, p15

²⁴*ibid*, p 36



The Crucifixion (Salvador Dali, Glasgow Art Gallery)

University of Cape Town

outwards in both directions from the top of the uterus, terminating in the “fingers” described above. Christ’s feet come together to form a point, and beneath this the lower vertical section of the cross extends down to the earth. In a woman’s body the womb narrows towards the cervix, below which is the vagina which leads, literally, to the world outside. As I gazed at Dali’s painting, the woman’s form did not replace Christ, but was somehow superimposed on him. This experience brought again to mind the observation that the cross is present in the womb. It is this image that encapsulates the notion of a Christology “from within.”

A woman’s reproductive system ultimately has a single purpose – to give material existence to another being. Mary’s task, begun with her assent and then Jesus’ conception, and continuing throughout her life, came to a point in the moment she gave birth. Here, in tangible form, was God Incarnate. Jesus’ birth meant embodiment, and it is to this that we now turn our attention.

3. *Embodiment*

The Catholic feminist, Tina Beattie, makes the significant observation that through the “fall” Adam was alienated from his own body – as was Eve from hers.²⁶ We read in Genesis 3:7 that after eating the fruit the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened “and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” That this revelation was related directly to sin is confirmed by God’s interrogative question to the pair: “Who told you that you were naked?” (v 11). This is profoundly significant when considered against the backdrop of a Christianity which was to dichotomise body and soul, denigrating the body, and thus perpetuating the alienation between humankind and the rest of the physical order – with far-reaching consequences.

²⁵ *ibid*, p 33

²⁶ See d’Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, pp 57ff

In an informative study Emily Martin provides an intriguing account of how language betrays tacit attitudes and relationships.²⁷ From interviews with a range of women, Martin concludes that the language women use to describe their body functions indicates a sense of the self as being separate from the body. In the terms we have been using, the body is “other” to the self,²⁸ echoing the alienation of Adam and Eve from their bodies after disobeying God. As far as women go, this detachment of the self from the body receives reinforcement in the taboos surrounding women’s shed blood, and particularly in the social problems and prejudices associated with menstruation, to which we have referred.

The message of the Incarnation is a different one. It not only gives value to the body, affirming (against Hellenism) corporeality, but shows also how it is the *embodied Christ* who comes to redeem us. Jesus was *his body* whilst on earth – or, to use Balthasar’s expression, “true man is soul in body and grace in both.”²⁹ In other words, the “eschatologically whole” person is not the “disembodied post-mortem soul but the risen flesh.”³⁰ McFague insists that the central claim of the gospel is not only that the word became flesh, but the particular shape that flesh took in the actual person of Jesus.³¹ Too often the message of the Incarnation (the gospel) has been different to the message of Christianity:

What does Christian faith, and especially the story of Jesus have to offer in terms of a distinctive perspective on embodiment?... Christianity is *par excellence* the religion of the Incarnation, and, in one sense, is about nothing but embodiment, as is evident in its major doctrines....In another sense..Christianity has denied, subjugated, and at times despised the body, especially

²⁷ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) pp 76ff. Martin bases her reflections on a study by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, entitled *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

²⁸ Examples of such “body talk” are: “Your body sends you signals”; “Menstruation, labour, birthing, etc are....things that happen to you”; “Your body needs to be controlled by your self” (Martin, p 77)

²⁹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol II, p 64

³⁰ Nichols on Balthasar, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, p 70

The body's unity with the self is also affirmed by Mary's assent. It was not only her body that mediated Christ's humanity, as if she were merely a vessel. Mary assented with her whole self to be the mother of the Messianic Saviour. She was engaged in mediating the Incarnation physically, emotionally, and with her will – that is, as a whole person.³³

The unity of Mary's self with her body is made plain by Augustine. Of Mary he would say "*fide concepit*" ("she conceived by faith") and "*Non concubuit et concepit, sed credidit et concepit*" ("She did not lie with a man and conceive, rather she believed and conceived").³⁴ Leo the Great expresses something similar: "*prius concepit mente quam corpore*" ("she conceived in her heart before she conceived in her body").³⁵ The image of a woman conceiving and giving birth is a powerful one in bringing the body into alignment with the self, both in terms of Mary as representative of women, and of Christ representing all humankind.

Embodiment is never a solitary thing. It implies relationality, initially between mother and child, and Christologically speaking, between Mary and Jesus. The "Word made flesh" then is only truly human when considered in relationship – to people, to history, to culture, to the natural world.³⁶

4. Relationality

To speak of genealogies is to speak of relationality – the connectedness of past, present and future in what Moltmann would call the "community in

³¹ McFague, *The Body of God*, p 167

³² *ibid*, p 164

³³ The observations which follow provide an alternative perspective on the conception of Christ.

³⁴ Augustine, *Sermo* (Denis) XXV, 7 (PL, 46, 937) and *Sermo* CCXXXIII, 3, 4 (PL 38, 1114). Cited by Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church*, p 171

³⁵ Leo the Great, *Sermo I in Nativitate*, 1 (PL 54, 191). Cited by Wainwright, p 171

³⁶ Mark Kline Taylor, in his quest for a Christ of "reconciliatory emancipation", makes the interesting suggestion of *Christus Mater* as a metaphor "intentionally crossing wires that are not usually crossed in Western traditions and philosophies". Among the other possibilities contained in this term are the fact that it implicates "Christ's salvific praxis not

generations".³⁷ The story of salvation, contends d'Costa, requires that a larger story be told, one which relates Jesus most primarily to his mother, Mary, and then also (in Irenaean style) to another man and woman, Adam and Eve. D'Costa suggests that "the chain of events is incomplete, and only comes to completion in the eschaton. Here genealogies run wild, and embrace all creation."³⁸ Here we find an echo, or perhaps more accurately, a variation, of Robinson's insistence, noted earlier, that to be truly human Jesus must have been "linked through his biological tissue" both to the origins of life on earth and behind this to the inorganic processes "reaching back to the stardust."³⁹ Robinson hereby draws attention to the fact of Christ's recapitulation, and therefore redemption, not only of human experience, but of *all* life. In terms of a Christology "from within" it is not incidental that in the womb the development of the foetus is in fact a "fast-forwarded" microcosm of each evolutionary stage of life, extending right back to the most elemental forms. Thus the relationality represented by Christ is an all-embracing one, and Christology is traced deeper and deeper within. The fact that Christ in the Incarnation assumed creaturely existence in so radical a way, accords dignity to every aspect of creation – an issue foundational to a Christology able to evoke response to situations of ecological and human violation.

We remain with the notion of relationality, bringing together issues which have emerged in the course of this dissertation. Among the reasons for postulating the idea of a Christology "from within", to which the conceiving, carrying, birthing, and nurturing processes are integral, is that from the very beginning we comprehend Christ not in isolation but in relation.⁴⁰ This is vital both for his true humanity and his true divinity. To be God incarnate Christ would necessarily have had to reflect the communal character of the triune God. Indeed, "relationship is central to self-constitution – the trinity shows that the two are indivisible."⁴¹ For d'Costa,

only in "maternal" ... functions, but also in the "material" needs of humanity and nature" (*Remembering Esperanza*, Ch 6, pp 194ff).

³⁷ Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future*, p 11

³⁸ D'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 48

³⁹ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, p 54

⁴⁰ See Carter Heyward's *The Redemption of God* for a thoroughgoing and controversial relational Christology.

⁴¹ D'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 53

relations of perichoretic reciprocity and love generate the creativity that bears analogical resemblance to God's creativity and God's love – which in fact we, as embodied persons, represent. It is for this reason that “loving, redeeming, mediated object relations are an essential precondition for love to flourish.”⁴²

Clifford Green, reflecting on Bonhoeffer's concept of sociality, underscores this point by referring to the analogy between humankind and God as an *analogia relationis*.⁴³ On the basis of this one might go so far as to question whether it is in fact possible for one person to be redeemed if every person is not redeemed, and for humankind to be redeemed if the whole creation is not redeemed as well.⁴⁴ Such considerations bring to mind Barth's understanding of election (and of course Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation): we (that is, the entire creation) are *all* elected in Christ and so redeemed in him.⁴⁵

McFague calls contemporary theologians, if they are to be part of the solution to contemporary problems, to deconstruct and reconstruct the traditional symbols of the faith.⁴⁶ This involves a redefinition of power, grounded in a move to an “ethic towards others”, and marked by the transition from competing rights to responsibility and care.⁴⁷ McFague's call relates to Bonhoeffer's thoughts on sociality. To underscore the points made in Chapter 4 in this connection I would add the following. For Bonhoeffer human existence is fundamentally relational. This is the meaning of the Incarnation: God with us and God for us, epitomising the essence of personhood, the I-You relation of persons who are independent, willing subjects existing in relation to others.⁴⁸ “The

⁴² *ibid*, p 56

⁴³ Green in John W. de Gruchy, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p 117

⁴⁴ D'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 56. This is the suggestion made by d'Costa in his reaction to Irigaray's potentially dualistic understanding of the separate redemption of men and women.

⁴⁵ For Barth's doctrine of election see for example *Church Dogmatics* II, 2, para 32 and IV, 2, para 64, pp 31ff.

⁴⁶ McFague, *Models of God*, p 21

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p 12

⁴⁸ See Clifford Green, “Human Sociality and Christian Community” in John W. de Gruchy (Ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp 114f

individual,” writes Bonhoeffer, “exists only in relation to an ‘other’...for the individual to exist, ‘others’ must necessarily be there.”⁴⁹ For Bonhoeffer, relating with the “other” implies ethical encounter as we transcend the boundary of the self to reach out to the other. Herein lies the essence of personhood. Bonhoeffer thus provides substance to McFague’s call for the qualities of personal relationship – mutuality, respect, care, responsibility – to be reflected in our religious imagery.⁵⁰ My concern has been to interpret Christ’s humanity in terms of such an understanding of what it means to be human.

What became unambiguously clear in the course of this study is that relationality (sociality) lies at the heart of the Incarnation and therefore of redemption. Marcus Borg offers some insights in the regard – which we cannot afford to ignore - based on the term “Son of God” as applied to Jesus.⁵¹ Borg describes a shift in meaning of the title from being a *relational* to a *biological/ontological* metaphor. In Jewish tradition at the time of Jesus it denoted a relationship of intimacy with God, but that through the New Testament, climaxing with the conception stories of Matthew and Luke, and then the notion of his pre-existence in John, the term gradually changed meaning. My present concern is not to undermine the ontological relationship, but to retrieve the relational. Just as Christ’s humanity and divinity are brought together in the person of Jesus, so it is possible to speak of him both as Son of God “in essence” but also Son of God “by relationship.”⁵² My contention throughout has been that in dominant Christological models Christ’s divinity has historically been stressed at the expense of his humanity, and that the pendulum now needs to swing in the opposite direction to redress this imbalance without compromising his divinity.

A tangible symbol of such relationality is the mother-child relationship between Mary and Jesus. But this relationship is more than a symbol. If he was truly human as the creeds assert, then it is also the *actual* relationship

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, p 51

⁵⁰ McFague, *Models of God*, p 19

⁵¹ Marcus Borg, *Jesus at 2000*, pp 13f

⁵² Refer to discussion in Chapter 2 for Heyward’s approach.

between Christ and his mother that had significance for the person he was to become. It was this that mediated both the particularity and the sociality which constitute the essence of true humanity.⁵³ It was Mary, as we have seen, who gave Jesus his first experience of relationality, his first encounter with the “other”. We have seen that Mary has been absent from most Protestant Christological discourse, notably from the central debate of the Quests for the historical Jesus. Yet it has been my contention throughout this study that only a paradigm which takes into account the pivotal role of Mary, and this *in a particular way*,⁵⁴ can avoid the Christological distortions which have been paralleled by a distorted self-understanding of the church and her mission in the world.

Discourse on relationality obviously includes the reality of difference. Beattie is helpful in this regard in grounding the problem of difference in the creation and fall accounts of Genesis. Based on the story from Genesis 3:11 onwards, we have seen Adam and Eve experiencing difference not as the diverse goodness of creation but as otherness and alienation marked by guilt and blame. We see Adam alienated from others (Eve), from the rest of creation, and from his own body.⁵⁵ From this observation I would like to extract two points. In the first place, Christ’s recapitulation of the human experience, setting right what went wrong in Adam, must necessarily include the redemption of the notion and experience of difference. Secondly, it should also include a reconciliation between ourselves and our corporeality. A Christology “from within”, focusing as intently on Jesus’ birth to life as on his death and then resurrection to new life, helps to articulate these dimensions of the Incarnation.

To sum up – we have established that the significance of the Incarnation for our redemption includes Christ’s birth of a woman; it means to be embodied; it means to live in relation. These are three different aspects of

⁵³ Recall Bonhoeffer’s observation that “God does not desire a history of individual human beings, but the history of the human community. Nor does God want a history which absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of human beings” (*Sanctorum Communio*, p 52)

⁵⁴ Avoiding, for example, the “Marian excesses” sometimes evident in Marian devotion

⁵⁵ See d’Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 57ff

recapitulation. We have noted Irenaeus' insistence, strongly supported by Bonhoeffer, that Christ both recapitulates the whole of human experience and is recapitulator until the consummation. One of the implications of this is that in some way it is the *incarnate Christ* who remains present in the world, redeeming us. It is, moreover, *Christ-in-relation* who is our redeemer.

Christ's continued presence in the world is essentially part of the mystery of the Incarnation. As such it belongs in the area of Christian confession, and cannot be conclusively and rationally explained. One feature of the mystery, expressed by Bonhoeffer, is the dialectic between the particular and the universal: Christ was "within concrete time" but is "for all times."⁵⁶

There are many ways of approaching the theme of Christ's continued presence - his ability to go on recapitulating our experience and thereby redeeming it – and many metaphors and concepts are employed, both in the scriptures and in extra-biblical reflection. For example, Bonhoeffer has developed the biblical theme of vicariousness.⁵⁷ Another is advocacy, which includes the idea of trust. We do, after all, have a "high priest" able to be "touched by the feeling of our infirmities" because he shared our common human experience, triumphing over evil in it.

However, the agenda of this concluding chapter is to hone our thoughts on a Christology "from within", exploring particularly ways in which Mary can further our understanding and experience of Christ. We have repeatedly noted, notably with the assistance of Balthasar, how Mary becomes the symbol of Christ-in-relation, and how, issuing from this, she symbolises Christ's on-going relationship with humankind through the community that is the church. In Balthasar's words, "the community which binds God to man in her when he becomes a Child of man, is the foundation of a community which binds us all together as children of God, a community we call God's Church."⁵⁸ Mary's relationship with Christ is the prototype, the forerunner of all his relating with humankind. And so the presence of the

⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, p 155

⁵⁷ *ibid*, e.g. pp 155ff, 293ff, 303ff

incarnate Christ, now symbolised in the eucharist, continues in the world today.

There is a paradox here. Christians are unanimous in their belief in Christ as sole redeemer, and yet equally, we participate in redemption – because the divine *modus operandi* is such that Christ redeems *in a particular way* i.e. through his Body on earth. This accords with the Protestant emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. This is another sense of a Christology “from within” –Christ working from within the community, rather than as an incursion from without.

D'Costa, in dialogue with Irigaray, contends in this respect that the Incarnation is partial “insomuch as Christ’s body, the Church, lives between the Cross and the final resurrection, between now and the parousia.”⁵⁹ Citing John 16:7, Irigaray’s feminist reading suggests that Jesus himself saw the Incarnation as partial, ushering in the age of the Spirit and the Bride, opening the way for female divine representation. For d’Costa one fruitful way to facilitate female representation of Christ is through a retrieval of the idea of Mary as co-redeemer. However, in contrast to Boff who contends for the equality of Mary and Christ, d’Costa, as we have seen, aligns Mary with the church in the sense that all of us, both women and men, are co-redeemers with Christ in the church.⁶⁰ In this way, existing as community, Christ is present to people today – and this happens through concrete relationship. Bonhoeffer provides an added perspective in this connection, taking us back to the point from which we set out to explore Christ’s humanity - Irenaeus and his parallels. In linking Adam and Christ, contends Bonhoeffer, “it is ‘Adam’, a collective person, who can only be superseded by the collective person ‘Christ existing as church-community’.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, p 21

⁵⁹ d’Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, p 49

⁶⁰ *ibid*, pp 48f. This understanding of co-redemptiveness can be described as minimalist. The position of Boff and others who contend for Mary’s equal status with Christ in redemption is a maximalist one.

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, p 121

Concluding methodological postscript

All *theological* discourse is, in the end, an attempt to articulate our understanding of God, and specifically of God-in-relation-to-us, in categories and images that are meaningful to human experience. All *responsible* theological discourse employs categories and images appropriate for the context in which theology is being done. This requires, in the first place, that we acknowledge the indirection of our speech about God – its metaphorical nature – and hence its provisional character.⁶² It means secondly that speech about God requires constant reassessment. It demands enquiry as to the appropriateness of the images we use, the relevance of the issues being evoked and addressed by those images, the possibility of reworking familiar images to retrieve their significance, and the discovery of new images for the present-future.

Using these points as a theoretical framework, our enquiry has unfolded in setting out to rework and restate Christological themes. I have sought ways to articulate, in language and images and with emphases appropriate for the current time and yet in continuity with orthodox tradition, the meaning of the Incarnation of Christ. McFague has asked “in what metaphors and models should we conceive of God as Thou who is related to the world in a unified and interdependent way?”⁶³ For the Christian this means asking the question about images in which we conceive of Christ in the Incarnation.

The observations that have been made in the course of our discussion, arising out of critical reflection on the sources, have provided the building blocks for an imaginative Christological reconstruction – the main contribution of this study. I have tried to construct an alternative reading of what it means that Jesus Christ is fully human. Theological enquiry does not end. It involves a continual return to the sources and continual

⁶² See Berkhof's useful discussion in *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), “The Symbolic Language of Revelation”, pp 65-71.

attempts to construct imaginatively meaningful models for our time. There is no last word on the humanity of Christ, but this attempt to approach Christology from the perspective of motherhood enables us to develop a fresh paradigm, Christology "from within", that can contribute to the ongoing quest.

We began this study with a search for an understanding of the humanity of Christ. We end with Mary as a focal point in this understanding, signifying a shift from previous attempts to interpret Christ's humanity without her. When I started the research and began to seek for the historical Jesus, I had no idea where the search would lead. Mary was nowhere on my Protestant horizon. Yet the more I considered the search for the historical Jesus, the more I realised that failure to take Mary seriously was a major problem. The more I considered the history of the doctrine of Jesus' humanity, the more critical the role of Mary came to be. All along I intuitively knew that however much Christology must be done from "above", "below", and "behind", it had also to be done from "within", and I knew as well why this is so important for a critical retrieval of the humanity of Christ.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p 19

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