

PLURALISM AND CHRISTOLOGY IN A POSTMODERN AGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER HAIGHT

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*Prof. Roger Haight yazdığı *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Orbis Books, 1999) kitabıyla en üst derecedeki Katolik ödüle layık görülmüş bir teolog. Dr. Haight'ı öne çıkaran bir başka özellik, bu kitapta çoğulculuk, Hz.İsa'nın konumu, özellikle onun Tanrı'ya götüren tek yol olmadığı, ve insani yönü, vs. konulardaki görüşlerinden dolayı daha sonra heretik ilan edilerek, Vatikan tarafından görev yaptığı Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Cambridge, Massachusetts'deki görevinden uzaklaştırılmış olması ve soruşturmaya tabi tutulması. Dr. Haight, İsa'nın rolü ve tabiatının üzerine oturduğu St. Thomas kanalıyla kilise geleneğine hakim olan Yunan felsefesine ait kavramsal yapıyı Kristoloji'den ayırmaya çalışmakta. Böylece teslis, İsa'nın uluhiyeti ve kurtuluştaki İsa'nın rolü gibi yüzyıllardır kilisenin doktrinal zeminini oluşturan konular tartışılır hale gelmektedir. Öyle görünüyor ki, Latin Amerika ülkelerinde ortaya çıkan Liberation Theology'de İsa'nın ilahi tarafının yontulmasının kilisede yarattığı rahatsızlık, şimdi de pluralism kavramı etrafında yaşanmaktadır. Haight 'Christology from below' yaklaşımıyla, İsa'daki insani unsurları öne çıkarmakta, İsa'ya ilahi unsurlar atfetmesi ve tartışılan problemlerin kaynağı olması sebebiyle Yuhanna incilini anlatımları birbirine yakın olan sinoptik incillerden (Matta, Markos ve Luka) ayırarak özellikle eleştirmektedir.*

R. Haight'ın yaşadığı durumun hristiyan teologlar cephesinde, özellikle daha alt akademik düzeyde olanlar için endişe yarattığını söylemek mümkün. Zira, 1990 yılında çıkarılan Ex Corde Ecclesiae gereği yazdıklarını üstlerine onaylatma, yani mandatum alma durumundalar ve bu tür kontroller kilisenin akademik ayağını doğal olarak sorgulamaya açmaktadır. Bu tür soruşturmaya maruz kalıp, öğretimden uzaklaştırılanlar ve uzaklaşmalarına sebep olan çalışmaları ayrı bir araştırmayı gerektirdiği için burada örneklendirmeye gitmeyeceğim.

Bu mülakatı yaptığımızda Dr.Haight, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) tarafından kendisine yöneltilen soruları tamamlayıp Vatikan'a göndermiş ve

gelecek sonucu beklemekteydi. Sonucu kısa süre önce aldı. Dr. Haight yazdığı kitaptan dolayı ortaçağın meş'um kelimesini kullanacak olursak, aforoz edimişti. Şimdi Index Librorum Prohibitorum (Okunması Yasak Kitaplar) listesine bir kitap daha eklenmiş oldu.

Aşağıdaki söyleşide Roger Haight'la, dolaylı ya da doğrudan İslam'la ilintili soruların tartışmasını bulacaksınız.

ŞAD: *We are experiencing a postmodern situation. This is a shift not just from modern but also from traditional ways of conceiving and interpreting reality and the conditions in which reality is conceived. In this situation, with its inner forces which exclude any meta-theory, historical consciousness has become prevalent, and a sense of telos and meaning in history has been lost. Foundationalist approaches to truth, such as those based on autonomous rationality or sense experience, have yielded to notions and values of truth, which lead people to plural or multi-dimensional truths in many fields including religion. "Centers" of the world or "dom"-ended concepts like Christendom or Dâr al-Islâm as its counterpart have lost their traditional credibility. These radical changes in life, necessarily require some alterations in the method that has been applied throughout history within the religions both in their self-understanding and in their relations with other people and religions. What about this method?*

RH: I agree with the analysis which prompts the question of the need for a shift of method in theology. Before the period of extensive travel, instant communication, wide-spread migration, and international business dependencies, we existed in our cultures and religions like fish who could never see a dry world outside of ourselves. But with this new interdependence the human spirit has developed the ability to transcend the limits of our cultures and religions in such a way that we can begin to appreciate that others relate to their cultures and religions the way we relate to ours. This allows us to become confident that other cultures and religions possess truth and value that we do not, and that we can learn from them.

This may seem to be a simplistic analysis, but profound shifts of attitudes may accompany this now somewhat ordinary phenomenon of the appreciation of others who are different from ourselves. Here are three of them. First, the discovery that the differences between cultures and religions are real and not easily bridged. These differences live on deep roots of particular group identities that are tied to particular places and long historical traditions.

Second, because these group identities and the differences between them can be

explained by different particular contexts and historical traditions, they do not contradict each other and may even complement each other.

Third, therefore, a first reaction to other religions and cultures should not be competitive but other rather marked by curiosity, a desire to learn and understand the as precisely other. The distinctively human spirit can in some measure transcend the self and appreciate the other as such and thus communicate across these differences. For anyone who has had these experiences, the idea of cultural or religious absolutism seems somewhat quaint.

ŞAD: Postmodern situation in its emphasis on historicity and religious pluralism poses new questions and puts severe pressure on the traditional absolutistic claims. In your understanding is a new theocentrism something necessary, one which refrains from traditional totalizing metanarratives? Is pluralism an indispensable consequence of the necessity to interpret religious texts? How is it possible to decide whether a text admits a pluralism of different interpretations?

RH: In order to speak about pluralism without too much misunderstanding and confusion, one has to define the way the terms are being used. Here are some loose definitions of what I mean by pluralism. By "pluralism" I refer to differences of human responses in behavior and understanding within a common context or a field of unity. In other words, a situation in which all different groups are unconnected to each other is not pluralistic because the parties share no common space; it amounts to no more than an aggregate of sheer differences. Pluralism characterizes a single group or society where differences among the members prevail. Today the human race is becoming ever more pluralistic because more unified than at any other time.

Second, I understand a metanarrative to be one that encompasses all reality (as in a cosmic myth of creation or a big bang theory), or all of history (as in a universally applicable theory of creation, history, and end time). The narrative could be scientific or religious, but the point is that it includes all people and thus understands others by assigning them a place in it. Religions tend to have such metanarratives because they supply ultimate answers to ultimate questions about the whence and where to of human existence itself. The perceived problem of metanarratives is that they understand others not as they understand themselves but according to the story and tradition that is not their own and which does not correspond with their self-understanding.

I would distinguish between a theory of religions from a religious metanarrative, both of which try to include all religions. A good example of an all inclusive religious

metanarrative is Karl Rahner's Christian story of humanity that includes members of other religions as anonymous Christians. A good example of a theory of religions that is not a religious metanarrative is John Hick's philosophy of religions. Some people accuse Hick precisely of proposing a higher all encompassing religious metanarrative, but I believe his own insistence that his is a theory about religions and not a metareligion is quite coherent and cogent.

I will take up the questions of theocentrism and how texts yield to pluralistic interpretations in response to some of the questions which follow.

ŞAD: *Historicity, relativism and pluralism. Is there any direct relations among these three?*

RH: Historicity (or just being in history), relativism (or relativity, since relativism suggests that truth can never be found), and pluralism are all related to each other and each includes the other in its full sense. Historicity, the fact that we are individual entities in concrete, particular circumstance causes relativity, the condition in which all our knowledge and behavior is related to our situation and context. And relativity to the situation of all our views causes or results in pluralism.

ŞAD: *The concepts of dialogue and conversation. These always involve two mutually related parties: such as the dialogue of past and present; interpreter and text; the back and forth of conversation. How have you come to a position of embracing the dialogue or conversation between or among different theologians and even religions? What sort of consequences are you expecting from this horizontal dialogue?*

RH: The strategies of dialogue and conversation respond to a situation of pluralism: one human race, with multiple cultures and religions. Dialogue replaces monologue, where one party possesses a monopoly of truth and imposes it on others; conversation replaces debate where the assumption that there can be only one appreciation of the one truth that transcends our history. Both strategies rest on the premises of historicity, relativity, and pluralism. The danger of these strategies, however, is to cease being critical, asking questions, challenging the partners in the conversation in the face of evidence. Critical dialogue and critical conversation can be had when the conversation is not directed at the partners in the conversation but toward the subject matter. The ideal dialogue and conversation is when the partners together in mutuality address the subject matter that transcends them all.

There are multiple possible goals of dialogue and conversation: negotiation,

mutual understanding, cooperation in projects, agreement on a variety of levels, and many more. Such goals and expectations should be clarified in any given conversation.

ŞAD: In order to move logically on analyzing the issues we are going to speak about, I think, at first, I have to raise a question as regards theological and religious symbols and their individual and social functions. What kind of correlation is there between religious symbol and religious meaning and truth? Within the religious context symbols have past historical background but people have present-day context. How can the theologian correlate the historical meaning of a symbol and its present day context and does he have to? How are symbols to be interpreted? Granted that the meaning of symbols are changeable and corruptible, how will it be possible to objectify or stabilize them within a "context?" And can we talk about the negative and positive aspects of these symbols?

RH: In order to begin a discussion on religious symbolic language with some clarity, it may be good to lay down some definitions. By a symbol I mean some thing, whether it be an event, an object, a person, or an idea, or a literary passage which points to something else, other than itself, which it participates in and thus can help one to understand. There are many different kinds of symbol, but the basic idea is so common that we take it for granted. The fundamental structure of our communication with each other is symbolic, for words are symbols that reveal to others what is in our minds.

There are some areas where symbols appear to be absolutely necessary because the object which they refer to is only available to us through symbols. Take for example the subconscious: since it is sub-conscious, the only way humans can get at it is through symbols like spontaneous reactions, or dreams, or other behaviors that reveal it indirectly or symbolically. Take the example of God who is not present to our sense perception or immediate experience because God is precisely the one who transcends all finite experience: the only way to speak about God is through various manifestations of God in the world or history which are consequently symbols of God. In these cases it becomes clear that symbols mediate a symbolic knowledge with is not less than ordinary knowledge but more than ordinary knowledge.

When speaking of religious symbols and how they communicate religious truth, I would appeal to the language of a fifth century Syrian theologian called Dennis the Areopagite. One needs a theory of religious knowledge that acknowledges both the similarity between transcendent reality and our symbolic language drawn from this world and the difference between it and the reality of the transcendent one. Often people

appeal to analogous character of the meaning and truth of our language about God. But Dennis spoke in more dynamic terms of created symbols of this world leading our minds out of this finite context and into a superior transcendent sphere. This is called mystagogy, the ability of the religious symbol to attract and invite our minds creatively to imagine and engage the infinite reality they point to. In much of Christian thought, religious language is sacramental, another term for symbolic, because through the symbolic language God operates to push our minds out of our limited, created world and to draw them into the divine sphere. Any one who has had religious experiences knows that this language means.

How are we as theologians to interpret religious symbols? The method of correlation that is alluded to in the question is a generalized formula that does not solve all problems, but captures a common structure for theological interpretation. It can be understood in three steps or as having three logical components. The first is that an interpretation should be faithful to the original meanings of symbols. This means that one should do historical study to find out what symbols meant when they were first posited. The second follows from the recognition that the original meaning may be quite different from what would be meaningful today. For example, some laws of the past are out of date; some conceptions of the world are archaic; some views of human nature are rejected today. Given this recognition, this second step asks the question of the experience that gave rise to the past text or symbol. What was the important conviction or value that was given expression with the symbol, whether or not the symbol itself may be meaningful today? This step presupposes that one can in some measure, although not completely, distinguish between a more generalized experience and the precise language or symbols that are used to express it. In a third step, then, one asks what symbols in our own time might be employed to approximate for a present-day culture what was expressed in the past through a symbol that is no longer meaningful. This is called a method of correlation because it brings into conjunction, or brings together, or correlates the meanings of the symbols of tradition and the context of today, and in that correlation constructs a meaning that is faithful to the past experience within the symbols of tradition and the world view of the present context.

Relative to the ability to have a permanent meaning to symbols, or whether their changeability is a negative or a positive quality, I think one has to think dialectically, where dialectic means seeing two sides of this question at the same time and affirming them both. Symbols are both stable and changeable; and this is both a good thing with some possible negative side effects. Let's take both the New Testament and the Qur'an

as symbolic texts because they are religious texts: they draw the readers' minds into transcendent world of revelation. All Christians and all Muslims take these texts respectively as central to their religious imagination and knowledge. They are thus common, stable landmarks for their adherents. But they are interpreted differently by different groups, in different periods, and times, relative to different problems. They combine both stability and changeability, and this is their strength. It is only their weakness when the changeability falsifies the original or authentic meaning of the texts relative to the present. Given our historical condition, I do not see how it is possible to live without that risk.

ŞAD: With regard to the relation of symbolic language to pluralism. What are the clues that give warrant to or justify such a pluralism of interpretations? Are these reasons intrinsic to the symbolic level itself involving pluralism in every context, or does it depend upon the interpreter? If these are symbols, let's begin with symbol and accordingly religious language which lead you to this point.

RH: The last two areas of discussion are related: pluralism and the symbolic structure of religious language. I believe that the nature of religious language, stemming from the fact that its subject matter is strictly transcendent reality (or finite reality in the light of that transcendence), must be symbolic, not "merely" or "only" symbolic, but symbolic in the strong sense that only symbols can introduce us into the sphere of revelation and God. Literal and univocal language about this world tells us about transcendent reality only if it ceases to be considered literal and univocal and functions symbolically in the sense of Dennis the Areopagite.

The interpreter is certainly involved in the pluralism, because we are speaking precisely of a pluralism of different interpretations of the same text, gospel, body of sacred scripture, or doctrine. No text has a pure meaning apart from an interpreter, because meaning does not lie in the marks on a page, but in the minds of authors and interpreters. It is true that texts and symbols do not yield whatever interpretation one may wish; one cannot interpret a text or symbol apart from what the symbol proposes, or offers, or challenges us to think. But that objective meaning does not live apart from the interpreter. Thus in the end pluralism is generated both by the symbol, because it is a symbol of transcendent reality that is not available apart from the symbol to compare with the interpretation, and by the interpreter, who receives meaning and by appropriating it projects it on to reality.

ŞAD: You refer to low Second or Last Adam christology and relatively high

Wisdom christology. Can you explain them and how they function? Which concepts are to be reinterpreted so that they can redefine the relations with other religions? Second Adam christology contains a paradox. When compared to Adam, a human being, Jesus Christ is also transposed into a human being. How can you handle this paradox, first? And secondly, does the logic of a christology from below as you put it amount to a paradigm shift in christology? Does it entail a substantially new method of christology that finds its basis in new premises and assumptions so that some conclusions reached in a former way of thinking are drawn up into a distinctively new synthesis?

RH: I want to begin again with some basic definitions so that the premises of the discussion are clear. First of all, I understand christology generally to be the study of the nature and person of Jesus Christ. This can be quite broad for there is christology in the New Testament, all through the history of the church, and innumerable works in contemporary christology. Sometimes one hears the expression “the christological problem.” This refers to the precise issue of the simultaneous relation of Jesus to other human beings and to God. What does it mean to speak of a “God-man” or an “incarnation of God?” But christology is also broader than that central question.

Another common distinction regards the method of christology when it is very broadly defined as “from above” or “from below.” The best way to explain this distinction is in terms of the imaginative framework within which one is thinking, the general assumptions regarding the picture of God-world relationship with which one is operating when one tells the story of Jesus Christ. The one story, from above, begins by imagining God, and Jesus or the Word of God preexisting in the sphere of God, and he comes “down” or into the world as Jesus of Nazareth, and then at the end of his life through resurrection and exaltation, he returns to the Godhead. The other way of imagining the story begins with a certain person in Israel in the first century, Jesus of Nazareth, who preached, was crucified, and then was recognized as resurrected and exalted with God. These people who so recognized him were drawn together in a new faith focused in him and after many years of reflection gradually interpreted him to be the Christ, or messiah, and then that he was the incarnation of the Word of God who was himself truly God so that Jesus Christ is a divine person. Note again that these are methods of thinking that are different according to the points of departure and initial suppositions.

Finally, another common distinction is between a high and a low christology. This is not a characterization of the method of approach, but an appraisal of the content of one’s interpretation of Jesus Christ. A high christology is on that tends to think of Jesus

as God (but not without also affirming his humanity), and a low christology is one that tends to think of Jesus as a human being (but not without affirming his divinity). It should be noted that method and content are not the same: one can have a method that begins from below, but ends by affirming a high christology. This is the way christology actually developed; it began with Jesus and developed through the centuries of reflection to arrive at the classic doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon. It may be possible to begin from above and generate a low christology, but that does not usually happen.

With these distinctions, I can address the questions of Wisdom christology and Second Adam christology. Both are types of christology that are found in the New Testament. Wisdom christology, at least in some of its manifestations in the New Testament, could be described as a christology from above. Second Adam christology could be conceived as christology from below.

Wisdom christology uses the idea of God's wisdom as a way of understanding how God was present and active in Jesus and thus his divinity. God's wisdom is mirrored in the working of the world: in nature, in human beings, in the workings of society. God's wisdom is personified as a lady companion of God before the world began who assists God in the creation of the world according to God's intelligence and design or, as embodying or being God's Wisdom, entering into the world. This Wisdom of God was also at work in Jesus: Jesus spoke and acted in the power of God's wisdom. Jesus was divine because he incarnated God's personified Wisdom from above who came down and dwelt in him.

Second Adam christology uses the analogy or parallel of Adam's relation to the human race to understand what God was doing in Jesus of Nazareth. As Adam was the former source and origin of the human race, but who failed by his disobedience and led humanity into sin and death, so Jesus is the second and new Adam or head of the human race who, by his obedience will lead the new tribe of his followers through death to resurrection. Jesus was God's chosen one, or God's Son, who as the new archetypal human being pioneers human beings to salvation from God.

In this case, not only is Wisdom christology from above but it tends to be a high christology emphasizing the divinity of the incarnate Wisdom, whereas Second Adam christology tends to be a low christology because it begins with the premise of Jesus being a second Adam who was a human being. But Second Adam christology does not exclude a high christology.

Can one hold both of these christologies? Yes, as long as one does not reduce the

whole truth of Jesus Christ to either of them. A general rule is that christologies in the New Testament are plural but they are not competitive. One should hold all of them, allowing some to say things that others do not. Here pluralism is not meant to confuse, as if one had to chose among them, but to develop a fuller and richer understanding of Jesus Christ. The ultimate reason justifying pluralism is the symbolic structure of all religious language: no religious language can exhaust its subject matter; a pluralism of symbols enhances our knowledge of God.

Going back to the question of the comparison between the methods of christology from above and from below, I believe that it is accurate to say that there is a major difference of paradigms distinguishing these two methods in christology. A christology from above serves many good and sound purposes in the Christian faith community, and will continue to do so. But as a method it is not adequate to the task of addressing a postmodern culture which does not share the presuppositions and premises upon which a method from above is based. These are different methodological worlds that shift the general imaginative framework for understanding. The two christologies just alluded to show this.

ŞAD: You approach New Testament christology as a hermeneutical theologian. This means that a double concern guides the reflection. The first relates to the historical meaning of the text as a witness to the experience of the Christian community during the first formative and normative century. The second question relates to the bearing of this christology on the Christian community today. What about the idea of a pluralistic document also being normative?

RH: This question expresses well the method of correlation, which is a hermeneutical method or method of interpretation, that was discussed earlier under symbolic language. The method of correlation describes in the broadest way possible the structure of how the theologian operates and how many interpret the symbolic language of christology. We have also seen that there is a pluralism of christologies in the New Testament, and I indicated that these are not competitive, so that one should not be used against another, but along with another to make appeals to different problems and situations today.

But there is another aspect of the pluralism of New Testament christologies that is most significant for today. On the premise that the whole New Testament is normative for the Christian community, and from the fact that the New Testament contains a pluralism of christologies, one can affirm that the New Testament prescribes that the

Christian community today be open to a pluralism of different christologies as the New Testament communities were when they formed the early church. We will talk about whether there are criteria for judging among a pluralism of contemporary christologies below.

ŞAD: You say there are different christologies which are impossible to reduce one into another, sometimes may contradict each other (Jesus Symbol of God, 181) And the development of these christologies did not come about directly from Jesus' teaching and sayings; rather the reason for this difference was that they were developed in different communities and contexts. Two questions come up then: 1. Are these christologies historical? If so, to pursue a metaphorical language is not necessary, because historicity requires a literal interpretation not metaphorical. 2. Considering the community and context of our day, what kind of christology is necessary concerning the pluralism?

RH: The premises of the questions are correct, namely, that there are different christologies in the New Testament that are irreducible to each other, and that the reasons for these differences are the differences in the communities and contexts in which they were developed. On this basis one can often discover with analysis that such different christologies that seem to be contradictory are not really so, because they are generated out of different sets of supposition and language.

The first question requires sorting out the senses in which historical, literal, and metaphorical are used. I sense that the meaning of "historical" as it is used in this question means "referring to Jesus the way he really was," or "to the real Jesus of history." Accepting that meaning and working with it, I take it that all christological interpretation and titles should be referred back to the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth. When one says "Jesus the Christ," the predicate "Christ" refers to Jesus of Nazareth, now risen, but still not other than Jesus of Nazareth. But all religious titles of Jesus are interpretations of the deeper and not overtly accessible relationship that also constitutes his historical existence. In other words, they refer to Jesus, but as interpretations of the transcendent character of his existence; they are not available to historical observation and or merely historical reconstruction. Once one enters the realm of religious interpretation, the only way of describing that aspect of an historical being is through symbolic language. Metaphor is an example of symbolic language. In sum, one's religious interpretation of Jesus is both historical and theological, and as theological it is symbolic or metaphorical. And as theological and symbolic, interpretation is historical in the sense that it refers to the historical figure Jesus as he really was, but not in the sense that empirical method as historical research could

establish such a theological interpretation.

The second question I think leads us into the realm of globalization and interreligious communication which is the next area of discussion.

ŞAD: Jesus' divinity and Jesus' mediating position both have a fundamental importance in your method, and I think this is what seems to threaten the traditional dogma. How does your interpretation of Jesus and of theology of trinity differ from others so that it can pave way for a fruitful dialogue and conversation with other religions? How can you overcome the traditional self-understanding of Christians that has dominated Christian consciousness since classical times? Certainly the divine or human sides of Jesus come into play here.

RH: The question posed here is most important because it operates as a kind of turning point or point of conversion in Christian theological thinking. It may have analogies in the Muslim world of thought. I want to use the issue of religious pluralism as a bridge to the further questions about Jesus' divinity and the theology of trinity. The two points I want to make here have to do with fundamental attitudes that lie behind one's theological reasoning.

The first point regards the need to address the question of the relationship of the religions to each other. One can pursue Christian theology, or theology in any other religion, completely within the confines of the thought world defined by that religion. Here one seeks clarity about one's own self-understanding on the basis of resources provided by the scriptures and other revelatory sources that seem to define the religious identity. With implicit blinders, one blocks out consideration of the rest of the world from one's strictly or purely Christian reflection. One can also pursue Christian theology by examining the same sources but within a framework of the community's being in relationship with the world and the whole history of its interconnections with nature (science), the course of human affairs (history), and politics (relationships with other social entities like nations and religions).

I am not alone in the conviction that Christian theology, and the theologies of the other world religions, can no longer consider that a theology that is turned in on itself is adequate to the task of self-understanding. The phenomenon of globalization has shown clearly the degree to which corporate entities, such as religions, achieve self-constitution and self-definition through interaction with the world outside them in a way analogous to the individual in society. Of course, in accepting this principle, one must be aware of the risk of compromising corporate identity through conversation with the other, as those

who use the term “syncretism” negatively always remind us. But such caution does not undermine the sheer fact that all religions develop and change in the course of their dialogue with history across time and cultures. Today one cannot escape the question of defining a plausible relationship of one’s own religion with others and still generate a credible theology.

The second point has to do with the priority of the relationship of Christianity to other religions to the question of the meaning of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Let me begin by recalling the structure of the method that I have suggested governs all theology whether explicitly or implicitly (i.e., unconsciously): that is, a correlation between on the one hand a faithful interpretation of the sources of revelation and on the other hand intelligent life in a contemporary world: these define the generating field of theological assertion. The second arm of this pincer includes a world of various vital world religions with traditions that provide their faithful across national boundaries and cultures with ultimate, self-constituting meaning. That is the situation in which all theology of all those religions is actually unfolding. Responding to that situation in an intelligible and credible way is an apriori condition for the possibility of an adequate theology today.

I will put this last point in another way so that its force may appear. Christology is theological interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. The narrow christological problem of Jesus’ divinity, of the meaning of incarnation, and trinitarian theology are areas of ongoing theological interpretation. One can chart the history of these interpretations over the centuries. They are the subject matter for continual interpretation; past doctrines provide the subject matter that is to be interpreted as relevant to ever new situations. Therefore, one does not merely interpret the situation on the basis of ready-made doctrine; one also interprets the doctrine so that it may be meaningful and relevant for the present situation. One must consider the relevance of religious pluralism for christology before interpreting a meaning of traditional religious doctrines.

To put the point in hermeneutical terms: all theology is interpretation. Interpretation always occurs within a framework of the questions addressed to the past. Religious pluralism today provides the single most important challenge to the self-understanding of all the religions as we enter more deeply into an interdependent world. Therefore, an evaluation of religious pluralism is not the conclusion of the interpretation of Jesus divinity, incarnation, and the trinity. It forms the context for interpreting those doctrines in a mutual correlation of past meaning and present possibility. Today’s situation of religious pluralism is prior to constructive christology because plausibility in that situation enters into understanding intrinsically as the condition of intelligibility.

intrinsically

ŞAD: What is the real relationship between God and Jesus Christ? There are many theories, but I am looking for yours. The Qur'an claims that Jesus Christ did not claim to be God or the Son of God? In recent decades there is almost a consensus that traditional orthodoxy of Jesus Christ's being God or Son of God must yield to a new conception? What is your approach?

RH: I respond to these questions in two long and intricate chapters of Jesus Symbol of God. A short answer will not be able to capture the many nuances that I introduce into this rather delicate question. So my answer here has to be a mere indication of the trajectories that I would follow in a more complete answer to these questions. Once again I have to begin with a definition of a couple of premises that are most important in defining a framework for this discussion.

First, in these matters which are so central to Christian faith it is quite crucial that one know the difference between faith and belief. Faith, as I understand it, refers to an existential commitment of the "whole person," that is, the affective or emotional, the conscious and intelligent, and the voluntary dimension of commitment, to a transcendent reality that is always inadequately defined by sets of belief. This distinction means that a fundamental faith commitment can remain the "same," that is not substantially changed, while at the same time undergoing rather significant changes in the beliefs that define the object of faith. A good example of this is the developmental process of an individual's faith through the life cycle. Beliefs can change while faith remains constant.

Second, Paul Ricoeur uses a distinction between "first naivete" and "second naivete." Roughly, one might describe the first as the imaginative framework used by people when they are first introduced to primary religious language, that is, the common or ordinary religious language used in a religion's narratives of belief and devotion. One who is socialized into this language accepts it "at face value" without too much critical probing of its meaning. Sometimes I characterize this level of religious language as "comic book" religion because it is nurtured by common sense images and scenarios that are frequently anthropomorphic. Second naivete refers to religious belief that has undergone critical examination and analysis and reconstituted on another level of sophistication and nuance. What is important about second naivete is that it is still naivete, that is, a system of belief that expresses a faith commitment to transcendent reality that cannot be reduced to or contained by historical or rational explanation. Note that this distinction may but does not have to correspond with "non-theological" and

“theological,” because some theology is uncritical or unquestioning and never escapes first naivete.

On these premises, responses to the questions fall into place. First, many exegetes would today confirm the historical view that Jesus did not claim his own divinity. This is a complex question because we are dealing with a period in history where polytheism was prevalent, as was henotheism, that is, the belief in one supreme God in a supernatural world of many gods. Thus the meaning of the term God is not as straightforward as it may seem to us today. In Judaism, the name for God was Yahweh, and there is no evidence that Jesus claimed to be Yahweh. This question is complicated, but as a bottom line many exegetes today would agree that Jesus never claimed that he was God in the sense that we mean God today. I will say something about the title Son of God further on. But one should be clear about the fact that Jesus did not have to claim a special divine relationship to God for his followers to claim that divinity within him.

Relative to the question of whether or not we need a new orthodox conception of the divinity of Jesus, my approach flows from the distinctions that help to clarify the issue. Very often the perception of a need of and the call for a new conception of Jesus’ divinity that changes the standard or traditional language flows out of a first naivete, a use of images, concepts, and theological language as if it were straightforward, descriptive, or empirical language rather than the deep, symbolic language it is. This is a perpetual problem: theologians write within the canons of an academic discipline, and their language is interpreted as comic book talk. This is simply misinterpretation. My view, then, is that orthodox faith must remain constant, but it has to be expressed in terms, including statements of belief, that are relevant to a present-day situation.

ŞAD: Concerning the realism of Son of God. From an Islamic point of view the term Son of God invites many doctrinal difficulties. There is no uniform depiction of Jesus being Son of God, so it is hard to rationalize it in a single meaning. Especially the gospel of John offers some discrepancies with others, especially with that of Mark, a soteriology in which christology is more clearly tied to the idea that Jesus was a human being led by the Spirit of God. With the comparison of the Son of God as the king of nation in Jewish tradition and considering the doctrinal problems it creates, can one interpret sonship in a way that overcome these difficulties? Must it be an ontological or epistemological interpretation? It seems that the Holy Qur’an does not object to an epistemological relation with God, calling him the Logos (kalima) in the Qur’an, but it objects to his being called the Son of God in a way that implies an ontological reference. How does one solve this problem? And can such a christology be appropriated and

stimulate a realistic life within Christian community and its relation to others? Can religious language understood as symbolic and metaphorical help us here?

RH: I agree with the analysis that the image of “Son of God” has a variety of different meanings in the New Testament. And one has to sort out the context of each usage to assess the manner in which Jesus is envisaged as “son.” I think it is safe to say that generally these usages are all using phrases and images from a tradition in order to put into words a special relationship that Jesus had with God because God chose or appointed him.

Let me try to explain how I would view the distinction between an epistemological and an ontological interpretation of Jesus’ sonship. If the distinction means that, while we might understand Jesus as God’s son or use that kind of language, it was not really the case (ontologically, in his “being”) that Jesus was God’s son, then I would not use the distinction. The reason is that this separation puts too much stress and paradox into our language when we explicitly understand that what we say does not correspond with reality. Better to define what we mean by our language and maintain that it has reference to reality, that it has ontological density. The question, then, is hermeneutical: how does one interpret the meaning of sonship today that is faithful to the meanings found in the New Testament and makes realistic (ontological) sense today when affirmed of Jesus.

The answer to this question addresses the central and narrowly defined christological problem concerning the status of Jesus Christ in relation to God and other human beings which requires a discussion of the divinity of Jesus. If you like, we can put the question of sonship in the context of Jesus’ divinity. But, it is clear that the response to such a question can only be symbolic, for there is no other way to speak of the transcendent God. But symbolic language about God is also ontological language about God, for it tries to put into concepts and words the way revelation and our religious experience tell us God and Jesus in relation to God really are. In the language of epistemology this position is sometimes called “symbolic realism,” that is, symbols introduce the mind into being and the way things really are.

ŞAD: Then let’s come to the divinity of Jesus. Christianity is the only religion with the claim that it has a founder who was the incarnation of God. That means Christianity is God’s own religion and so has superiority over all others. Will not this self-understanding disturb other religions? And this conviction, whether taken for granted or claimed, has been a claim throughout the church history. As a consequence

of this claim it has been accepted that there will be no salvation outside the church. Of course, this doctrine is not accepted by all Christians or all Christian churches. But how are we to interpret incarnation, salvation, and related terms and at the same time protect the claims of other religions to have encountered the all-embracing face of God? If incarnation is metaphorically understood, how will it affect other basic doctrines such as trinity, etc. As it seems that trinity was developed to protect the literal incarnation doctrine.

RH: This is so large and fulsome a question that it cannot be answered in a short space, and the attempt to do so will inevitably defeat itself by the amount of ambiguity it will necessarily contain. So I will limit my answer here to a number of principles that have a direct bearing upon the answer, and which can help clear away many of the obstacles that wrongly block the way to an adequate resolution to the problem. Many of these principles are obvious to Christian theologians, but they are not always marshaled into the following unified set of seven presuppositions.

The basis of christological doctrine is the experience of salvation in Jesus. This is the common experience that underlies all the different christologies found in the New Testament. Encountering salvation from God in the ministry and person of Jesus is the basis of all the doctrines about him, and the point of the doctrines is to preserve and put into language the grounds for that experience. The doctrines developed in the course of the early history of the Christian community leading to the landmark, classic doctrines of Nicaea (325: the Logos who was incarnate in Jesus was no less than God) and Chalcedon (451: the single person of Jesus has both a human and a divine nature). It took a long time for the experience of Christians to reach those doctrinal formulas. But doctrinal interpretation did not stop in the fifth century. Other doctrines have developed and so has the understanding of these two. Doctrines will be valid and orthodox in the measure that they express and protect the Christian experience of salvation from God mediated by Jesus.

The classical doctrine about Jesus is that he is both human and divine. The relevance of this statement at this point can be indicated by saying that the doctrine is not that Jesus is God or that he is divine. It is that he is both human and divine. One cannot say either that Jesus is “simply a human being,” because he is both human and divine, and Christians relate to him the way they relate to no other human being as the bringer of God’s salvation.

The most fundamental or central Christian doctrine, therefore, is dialectical, or a

tension between two things that cannot be resolved. Both must be affirmed at the same time. The relevance for Christians is quite important. If one says simply that Jesus is God, one removes Jesus from the common run of human beings and in so separating him removes the whole point of christological doctrine, namely, that God has visited us human beings in Jesus. And if one goes in the other direction and says that Jesus is no more or less than any other human being, then one also subtracts the very basis of Christian faith, namely, the experience and conviction that God's salvation comes to Christians and potentially everyone through Jesus in a normative way.

The idea that Jesus is symbol of God is meant to capture this dialectical tension. Jesus as a figure in history was and is a concrete symbol (as distinct from an idea or conceptual or literary symbol). As such he embodies that which he symbolizes, namely God, for if he did not he could not have mediated God's presence and salvation. And he also points away from himself in his humanity to that which is completely other than himself, namely, the transcendent God. To say Jesus is symbol of God is like saying he is sacrament of God: a finite person who, in his finitude makes present and active something other than itself, namely, God's presence, power, and grace.

Jesus' being symbol of God is not a competitive statement. I will state this principle simply and directly with the knowledge that it is for many such a large statement that it cannot be absorbed all at once with the simple telling. Christians make their statements about what God has done in Jesus Christ on the basis of an encounter of salvation from God in the person of Jesus. These statements do not in their first instance announce what God can and has done in other religious mediations, and it would be quite presumptuous to lay down absolutely what God cannot do in other times and places. This does not limit the relevance of Jesus for all humankind; it must be said that if what is encountered in Jesus is true on this fundamental level of what it means to be human, then it must be true for humanity as such. But this in no way forbids that God could do something equally fundamental and relevant for all of humankind in other historical mediations of God's presence and providence relative to humanity. The fact that Jesus has been and continues to be interpreted in a competitive way offends the logic of the content of Jesus' own revelation when it is viewed in the new situation in which we live today. That revelation discloses God as pure love for all human beings. The idea that God would not be equally present to others through historical mediations does not make sense within the context of Jesus' message.

Symbol and metaphor are not opposed to realism. This thesis has already been discussed but I bring it back here to show its relevance precisely in the question of Jesus

divinity. Jesus' divinity can only be critically grasped through symbol and metaphor and analogy; to construe it in any other way is to do so in a childish naive way, and not in a theological way that respects God's transcendence and mystery. It is through the dynamics of analogical perception, and creative metaphorical reasoning, and symbolic mystagogy or being drawn by symbols into transcendence that religious language, which applies realistically to its object, is meaningful.

The language of incarnation must be understood in the context and on the premise of the doctrine of creation. Much of the discussion of incarnation seems to unfold against the background of the unrecognized and tacit assumption that God is absent from creation. The doctrine of creation as it has evolved in Christianity has come to mean the ongoing activity of God creating out of nothing. Creation was not an event that happened once for all in a past time, in the beginning, so that God withdrew and left created reality on its own. Rather God's creating is God's holding in being at every given moment the whole of the reality that is non-God. Creation out of nothing means in the words of Edward Schillebeeckx that there is nothing between God and what God creates, so that the loving, personal creator God is ever present, in an inconceivably intimate way, to that which God creates. Whatever incarnation means it is not to be understood as God visiting a place from which God would be otherwise absent.

"Spirit" and "Logos" are realistic symbols that give expression to God's intensive, active presence to created reality. There are a number of symbols used in Jewish literature that are picked up in the New Testament to indicate God's presence and action in creation in a more than ordinary way. Two of them, "Spirit" and "Logos," roughly meaning respectively the dynamically active power of God (Spirit) and God's word or effective intelligence (Logos), are especially important for christology. The symbol of God's wisdom is also important, and it is sometimes assimilated with either Spirit or Word. These words, terms, symbols, and metaphors were used in the Old Testament to refer to ways in which God's presence and power were experienced to be operative in history: God acts as Spirit or as Word or as Wisdom, and God's "Glory" is manifest in the world. Sometimes these symbols pointing to God's presence were personified or spoken of as independent agents, but their intention was to give expression to God's presence, power, and action in the world.

Among the many christologies of the New Testament what may be called "Spirit christology" and "Logos christology" are the most important. Of the two, Spirit christology is far more predominant than Logos christology. But especially due to the graphic presentation of a Logos christology in the poem introducing John's gospel,

Logos christology captured the Christian imagination and so overshadowed Spirit christology as to displace it. Since both symbols, Spirit and Logos, function in the same way to express how God is present and operative in Jesus in an extraordinary way that allows one to affirm that he is both human and divine, and since a pluralism of christologies is normatively recommended by the New Testament itself, either one of these christologies may be used to draw out theologically the meaning of the doctrine that Jesus is both human and divine. Both will have slightly different contours or configurations, because the symbols have different metaphorical bases and open up different facets of God's incarnation in Jesus. But neither can be allowed to negate the other nor undermine the normative doctrine of Chalcedon that Jesus is both human and divine.

It should be stated forthrightly that among the distinctive virtualities of each of these symbols for christology, a Spirit christology is more open to religious pluralism in the world. For it is traditionally said that the Spirit of God blows where it will and so may be active in other religions the way it was active in Jesus. A Logos christology tends to, but does not necessarily demand, a presence of God to Jesus in a way that is superior to all other religious mediations.

Trinity is not a name of God and does not signify tritheism but is a doctrine about God that flows realistically from the Christian story of God. The doctrine of the trinity finally fell into place in the year 381 after years of slow, public discussion and debate. A critical theology of the trinity will attend to the fact that as a doctrine it is derived from christology and is not prior to it, that it developed as a theological understanding of God in the light of the Christian experience of salvation in Jesus, and that the language of God working salvation in Jesus through God's action is expressed both by "Logos" and by "Spirit." The doctrine of the trinity can never be understood in a way that compromises the Christian monotheistic belief that God is single and one, no matter how the inner life of God may be differentiated.

One can best understand the doctrine of the trinity (as distinct from saying understand the inner life of God) by recognizing how it came to be as a doctrine. In a broad, rough terms one can say that trinity encapsulates the Christian story of how God has worked in the world for human salvation in creation, in Jesus, and in the formation of the Christian community. The story of the economy of salvation in Christian terms unfolds within the pattern of God as creator, God as savior through Jesus of Nazareth, and God as accompanying Spirit as mediated in the Christian community called church. This is indeed a metanarrative. But it must be told today more humbly in a way that

admits that other metanarratives also illumine ultimate reality.

To conclude this section, at this point it should be clear that a method from below engenders a new synthesis of the traditional dimensions of Christian self-understanding. In a christology from below one cannot begin the discussion with the trinity and ask the significance for other religions of the second person of the trinity becoming incarnate in Jesus. All of the terms of such a proposition have to be examined critically in order to determine where they came from, how they developed, the experience that informed them, and how they can be appropriated today as elements of a Christian language that can be employed more realistically.

řAD: The Catholic Church also accepts a particular kind of pluralism which declares everybody who is saved as anonymous Christian? So, if the Gospels propagate pluralism, and Vatican is also pro-pluralism, what is the source of the difficulty that the Vatican has with your position? What is the distinguishing characteristics of the pluralism you defend from that of the Church and so deserves investigation?

RH: Yes, the Catholic Church at Vatican II officially taught that there is salvation outside the church, when the church is understood to be the community of Christians in history. It teaches therefore that God's saving grace or influence is effective in the whole of history, and thus that there is a pluralism of different ways to salvation available in history.

But the teaching of anonymous Christians means that all of those who are saved, including those who are not within the Christian fold, are saved through Christ. Following the theology of Karl Rahner and others after him, all grace is constituted, made available, or caused through the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. This is a christocentric view of the universe and of all salvation in it. The result is a clear affirmation of the absoluteness and hence the superiority of Christianity to all other religions. In Rahner's thought all other religions do not have an autonomous theological warrant for their existence, but because they possess their saving power through Jesus Christ, they also have an inner orientation towards an acceptance of Jesus Christ as the source of the salvation of all human beings. It should be noted that Rahner formulated this position around fifty years ago.

By contrast, quite a distinct conception would say that the power of salvation comes from God, creator of heaven and earth, and has always been available in the world because God as savior has never been absent from the world. That salvation is not caused by Jesus Christ but is revealed in Jesus Christ. But whenever and wherever Jesus

reveals God's saving power to this individual or that group, he at the same time causes their salvation in the sense of making it consciously operative. But other salvation figures can make God's power unto salvation operative in individuals and groups independently of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christian community. This view preserves the revealing and saving function of Jesus Christ and with that his status, and at the same time opens the way for recognizing that God can be operative in a saving way in other religious symbols, mediations, and communities, and share an equal or analogous status.

There is quite a bit of difference between these two positions, and it is often difficult for someone who has been brought up in the first imaginative framework of christocentrism to shift to the second imaginative framework of theocentrism, which would have to be adjusted philosophically even further to an even more inclusive language of centeredness to include religions which do not conceptualize ultimate reality in terms of a personal God. But as our situation of religious pluralism becomes more routine and normal, so that people can begin to realize that religions are not in the first place competitive, I think that this second view of Jesus Christ will become more prevalent in the Christian church.

ŞAD: I do believe that your explanations will clarify some vague points which cause many discrepancies existing both in the Church and in its relations with other religions. And I also want to hope that in the end this investigation will clear you, as the perspective you are putting forth is one members of religions need much. Thank you for sparing time for interview and for writing answers to my written questions.