

**SOME ASPECTS OF CHRISTOLOGY: A  
DIALOGICAL  
APPROACH FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE  
THEOLOGY OF OTTO WEBER**

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i.

**Although dogmatics certainly is subject to a given criterion which is beyond all questioning, it is equally subject to the process of dialogue and discussion with the *fathers and brethren*, a process which is also subordinate to the given criterion.**

**Otto Weber**

To:

Rev. Justine Mutai  
First Secretary General of the Synod of  
the Reformed Church of East Africa  
in affectionate remembrance

and to

my mother  
Esther Chebbolyuo  
for love immeasurable

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**Kongoi Kainyu ne leel mo chee bo tany**



University of Glasgow,  
April, 1991.

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## Summary

Otto Weber's dialogical Christology distinguishes itself in not only offering a framework that eliminates the problem of a one-sided emphasis on incarnational Christology over that of the Cross, the 'above' over that of the 'below' by correlating both, but also as one in which there is an exemplification of the Christological discourse in its character of a continuous dialogue and critical engagement with predecessors and contemporaries; in which the particular or contextual finds continuity and critique in the universal, the cultural in the biblical, and one in which the concern to do justice to the inner dynamic in the Christian witness do not conceal the variety of its representation. Recent Christological discussions and debates show the recognition of the problem and shortcomings of a one-sided approach and the stress on one aspect against others. But few attempts seem to have been made to address the subject in a way that this is overcome and what belongs to the very nature of Christological discourse is exemplified. Hence the concern to do so in this attempt.

In order to set Otto Weber's contribution in perspective, Chapter One examines the context and intention of his theology. This starts with a panorama of the theological trends in the German Protestantism of his upbringing; highlights on the theological crisis of the 1920s resulting from the experiences of the First World War and the emergence of dialectic theology; a process which culminated in Hitler's rise to power and the re-examination of the central question of the criterion of Christian witness and theology; the shift from the ontological question for theology to the relationship between revelation and history.

After a brief biographical sketch in Chapter two, there is an examination of Otto Weber's background anthropology in Chapter Three. An undertaking that shows his concern to align the Christian acknowledgement of God's Lordship in faith with the character of Christian conduct and experience. The over-riding thesis being that the person and event of Jesus Christ exemplifies what humanity really is before God.

In Chapter four is a preoccupation with Otto Weber's Christology. The immediate concern is an outline of his aim, method and structure of representation. This involves an analysis of 'above' and 'below' approaches to Christology, the former exemplifying classical Christology's concern to

speak of the reality of God's prior superiority and majesty. And yet the criticism that is directed to its exponents such as Karl Barth is whether adequate attention has been paid to the fact that God's majesty is encountered solely in his condescension. Contemporary formulations of Christology exemplify the dominance of the latter. First with the quest of the historical Jesus school and with Wolfhart Pannenberg's conception of Christology as an inquiry into what Jesus was, but also with Christologies of the Cross. But the criticism and adoption of the correlative approach by Weber is given by the fact that the event of Jesus Christ does not exemplify God as 'solely above' or 'solely below' but rather the God of man. Then there is the dialogical and discussive treatment of the Biblical witness to Jesus Christ, the examination of the whole question of Christ and history, and the Christology of the Church then and now. The basic thesis that emerges from these, and one which serves as a critique of traditional Christology right through to the contemporary period, is that what one encounters in Jesus Christ is not a central point in a system, a model of human possibilities as was the case during the enlightenment, or a source of a new self-understanding which dominated the nineteenth and twentieth century through existentialist philosophy, but the salvation event of Jesus Christ, God's act of confrontation with the human creature.

Chapter five, which serves as the beginning of the second part of the thesis, therefore, examines the Christianization of Africa; the experience of missionary Christianity and theology, the challenge of emancipation spirit and the resultant quest for African theology in the diversity of its representation.

In Chapter Six is an examination of the emergent perspectives in Africa's contemporary theology. This includes exposure to the challenge of indigenization and the question of appropriate methodology which unites both the witness and the theology of the Christian faith; and the treatment of the dominant themes that have come to characterise this particular perspective.

And it is within this context that the examination of that which is the centre of religious authority sets in perspective the treatment of the question of Christology in Chapter Seven. The insights gained from the two parts of the thesis are applied in a synthesized summary in Chapter Eight; the concluding reflection exemplifying the challenge of that greater dialogue; the confrontation and fellowship of God with us in Jesus the Christ. One where it can be said, 'It is no longer because of your words ....., we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the World' (John 4: 42 - RSV).

### Abbreviations

AACC	- All Africa Conference of Churches
AFER	- Africa Ecclesiastical Review
ATJ	- Africa Theological Journal
AWS	- African Writers Series
CD	- Church Dogmatics
JTSA	- Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
NSDAP	- Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Parte (National Socialist Party)
RSV	- Revised Standard Version
WSCF	-World Student Christian Fellowship
ZThK	- Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche ( Theological journal-Tübingen).

# **The Context and Intention of Otto Weber's Theology**

## INTRODUCTION

Where it may have been anathema to speak of Christian theology in a pluralistic sense, today's reality is quite the opposite. It is common-place to speak of theology in contextual, situational, confessional, and even in individual sense where the guiding thought is that of a given theologian or theologians. Where Africa is concerned, it is no longer an issue to ask whether there should be an African theology or Christology. The recognition of this as given has meant that the question is not whether there should be one, but whether one can speak of African theology or theologies? Confronted with situations as complex as this, the question that dominated my thinking as I set upon this research was to ask as to how one could still articulate the claims of the Christian faith and yet accept the above reality as given? What is it that is decisive for every theology if it is to remain Christian irrespective of the diversities of expression? Is it possible to speak of Jesus Christ in a particularistic way and still maintain that universal reality of his person and event? How was I to treat the decisive Christological question; who do you say that I am? This, and all other questions pointed me to the challenge that is inherent in Christian faith. For to speak of Jesus as the Christ is an act of response. It is an activity of acknowledgement and confession of his Person and work. The question I found confronting me is what I make of him in the reality of the above situation? What do I make of him even as I reckon with the particularity of my setting as an African Christian; from the particularity of my Christian experience, my community and Church, even as I reckon with the reality of his Universality and the historical heritage of the Christian witness?

As I set out to confront these questions, I was introduced by my

teachers in Glasgow to Otto Weber, whose theology did not only represent that perspective of the Reformed tradition that I shared and eager to understand, but also one whose Christology represent that attempt at articulating the significance of Jesus for those within and without the Church amidst not too dissimilar situations as the one stated above. I selected his thought because of this and especially for the kind of perspective that exemplified Christological discourse in the nature of its character of dialogue and discussion with the *fathers and the brethren*; but all done in subjectivity to that given criterion that is beyond all questioning. This is demonstrated in the way he displays throughout his work those internal dialogues and discussion within Christian tradition such as between medieval dogmatics and reformers, Luther and Calvin, Pietism and Rationalism, and even those between Barth and Bultmann among others; all done without losing sight of the person and event of Jesus Christ as the start-point and terminus of dogmatics.

Since our stated intention is an attempt whose Christological construction is to pay particular reference to the thought of Otto Weber, as well as the perspective of Africa's christian experience, it has been imperative to set out the background of the former as well as setting out similar backgrounds for the latter. In this exercise, attempts are made to show those factors that have given shape to the theological trends in the former's context (Weber's) as well as doing the same for the present theological trends in the continent of Africa. The question of appropriate methodology which unites both the witness and theology of the Christian faith is examined along with the dominant themes that characterise these

perspectives. And it is within this context that the decisive question of Christology is treated, the findings highlighted, and recommendations for contemporary orientation made.

It is hoped that the resultant insights from this attempt will in some way enrich the African and the world-wide church in her continuing task; which is not only that of knowing God the Redeemer, but experiencing transformation in her existence. For it is by doing so that the christian church has the freedom to live in and for the one it serves. And the endeavour to write from a particular perspective such as the African will be an expression of that particularity of every Christian response within that reality of the Universality of the Church.

## CHAPTER ONE

### OTTO WEBER'S THEOLOGICAL MILIEU

The most striking and dominant characteristic of Otto Weber's theological undertaking is his constant appraisal of the history of the Church. By doing so, he sets himself in dialogue with the past, critically highlighting and discussing the chief elements of theology as he identified them at the most important stages of their development. This did not only offer him the opportunity of discussing the essential content of theology, but the understanding of how the various contexts and particular emphasis at the various stages of the said development had shaped its content, emphasis and direction.

Weber did not only seek to show that dogmatics begins with critical respect of what has gone before in employing a dialogic methodology, but, as he said, 'this was to show that listening to the fathers and brethren, while doing so in bondage to the word of God, makes us free for contemporary questions.'<sup>1</sup>

Even so, his measure as a theologian cannot be evaluated in isolation from the context within which his theological formation took shape. Hence, the necessity of a brief outline of the setting, the main factors and theological questions which shaped the emphasis and methodology exemplified in his work.

a) His background

Otto Weber was born on June 4th, 1902, in Mühlheim-Köln to devout members of the Free Reformed Church congregation at Hessen. The setting was pietistic and conservative, best exemplified in the life of his mother, who has been documented by Katrin Mercker to have had more significant influence on his religious inclination than his father who was an engineer. Weber excelled himself as a keen and active member of the pupils bible study groups (Schülerbibelkreis) such that he was already involved in the leadership of it in his late teens.

Like many young people of his time, he set himself to study law at the University. But when the time came in 1921, he finally opted for theology at the University of Bonn. In the course of his second year (1922), as was the custom, he went to Tübingen where he studied for one semester under Karl Heine and Adolf Schleiermacher - both of conservative and pietistic persuasion in their theology, and are noted to have been of major influence on him - though he was no one's student *per se*.\*

He returned to Bonn in his second year where he did his second and final degree - specialising in reformed dogmatics and liturgics.<sup>2</sup> After a year's assistantship in the parish, he entered the teaching ministry of the church on his appointment as a tutor at the Reformed Theological college at Elberfeld in 1928 where he subsequently became Principal in 1930.

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\* Observation made by Professor J. Smendt- Department of Old Testament Studies- University of Göttingen. Interviewed on 21/7/1988.

With no documentation describing Weber's own account of his experience during the formative years of his University life, it does remain speculative to single out a particular trend of theology as having been influential on him, apart from the Conservative Evangelical persuasion which goes back to his early upbringing.

b) The Cross-Roads

It is imperative to note, however, that whichever trend attracted Weber's attention, the context in which he entered the teaching ministry of the Church was one of great challenges. It is the period referred to by Kenneth Latourette, as 'one of storm tossed protestantism in Germany.'<sup>3</sup> For the events of this particular period were not only of critical challenge to the witness of the Christian faith, but the orientation of its theological articulation.

Obviously, there were various factors and a whole complex of circumstances that were at play before and during this period. But the major event that served as a turning point even in setting in their proper perspectives the events of the late 1920s and early 1930s, particularly in Germany and Europe in general was the catastrophic experience of the first world war. The devastating effect on the socio-political and spiritual life of the people was immeasurable. Indeed, it did not only transform the political map of Europe, but the destruction which it wrought, unparalleled in previous human history in its scale, hurled a black question mark against the confidence in the onward and upward progress of the so-called Christian civilization which had so strongly characterised liberal theology, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In Alec Vidler's words,

‘The tragic experience of being caught up in the irrationality and meaninglessness of war made people wonder whether life could really be explained in the easy, optimistic and evolutionary way that had come to be generally accepted in the preceding period’<sup>5</sup>

Hence Alasdair Heron’s observation that this inevitably ‘forced the bitter question whether the advanced theological thought of the nineteenth century as a whole had not been far too unaware of the darker side of human nature, too optimistic about innate human capacity for good, too willing to take contemporary culture as its own high evaluation of itself, and over all too disposed to take God for granted, and to assume that he was somehow simply ‘given’ in what it regarded as the highest ethical, spiritual and religious values of mankind.’<sup>6</sup>

Inevitably, liberal theology in its various forms had little to say (if anything at all) in the face of these agonising questions especially as they were directed against the very foundation on which it had rooted itself as is exemplified in its general characteristic and trend since the eighteenth century.

As it has been well documented, the seventeenth and eighteenth century, commonly called the age of enlightenment saw the assertion of man’s autonomy as bearer of reason, through which he is capable of empirically controlling the world, explaining away all wonders and mysteries, and therefore asserting himself as central in the midst of reality.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, this meant a direct challenge to the authoritative claims of

Christian faith as the sole basis of interpreting reality and the very meaning and destiny of humanity. Illustrative of this is the challenge to the belief in the infallibility of scripture, the possibility of miracles and any inclinations of heteronomous necessity.<sup>8</sup>

Although there was an initial hesitation in responding to these challenges of the enlightenment, especially in Germany where Pietism was on the domain as a topical issue, the eighteenth century saw a new turning point. And what began initially as bridge building dialogue between theology and the new national movement was in no time a full blown activity in thorough going rationalism. This is especially reflected in both biblical and systematic scholarship of the said period.

In a brilliant study and summary of the thinking of the said period in biblical scholarship, especially the New Testament, Albert Schweitzer has demonstrated how rationalism and sceptical treatment of the subject was the norm.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the anthropological starting point by inclination had everything explained in a natural way befitting human logic. And so was Heinrich E.G. Paulus who had no place for miracles in the treatment of the Gospel accounts. On the contrary, he argued that the healing miracles as narrated could only be attributed to the Psychology and medicine known only to Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

A further approach which did even raise the questions of the authenticity and reliability of the synoptic and the fourth Gospel's accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus was David Friedrich Strauss, who argued that the source of

these materials was mythology.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Bruno Bauer even went further to assert that Jesus, as known today, was a creation of the gospel writers, clearly questioning the uniqueness and the very authoritative case of the Christian faith.<sup>12</sup>

However, it was in Immanuel Kant that rationalism was shaken to its foundations. For he did not only expose the concealed dogmatism of the rationalist system, but stated clearly that pure reason, by its very nature is limited to the objects of possible experience, and only leads itself to the area of entangling in antimonies once it crosses over this boundary.<sup>13</sup> This is especially true, as reason is restricted to experience and could not be said to provide any definitive and conclusive demonstration of what is beyond known reality. In Claude Welch's words,

'Theoretical knowledge, with its transcendental principles, is limited to phenomena, to objects as objects of experience. God, freedom, and immortality are not possible objects of our theoretical knowledge.'<sup>14</sup>

Hence, the negation of reason as leading to all truth. In fact, this marked a turning point in matters of religion as Kant re-asserted faith as the basis of approaching God.<sup>15</sup> Even though, the axiom or basis of theological articulation became his ethicism as he saw 'God in terms of the supreme good, the ultimate guarantee of the moral order in the universe'.<sup>16</sup> And Walter Kasper has argued that this should not be misunderstood as to suggest a subjectivistic ethic, but as an inter-subjective one as morality is linked to the reason shared by all free beings.<sup>17</sup> It has to be said, however, that there is certainly a continuity of the autonomistic spirit of the

enlightenment in the trend of his thought. Indeed his ethic or morality has its own autonomous justification in human freedom, and thus excludes any theonomous justification.<sup>18</sup> As Walter Kasper points out,

‘God does not serve as sanction for laws imposed from outside, but serves the perception that all duties arising from the free will are divine commandments .... our actions are not binding on us because they are God’s commandments, but we see them as God’s commandments because we find them inwardly binding.’<sup>19</sup>

It was Friedrich Schleiermacher whose radical continuity of Kant brought about the independence of religion (Christianity) over against reason as well as against the ethical. Heron summarises his concern that religion is more than this by stating,

‘It has to do rather with the infinite, universal wholeness of all things, of all-embracing totality, which may or may not be labelled ‘God’, but which includes and enfolds everything within itself.’<sup>20</sup>

It is with this concern that he re-asserted the grounding of theology in historic Christianity.

And yet in doing so, he set the subjective orientation of locating the said Christian faith and its theological articulation within the context of ‘feeling’ or immediate self-consciousness which for him is the innermost realm of human existence. As it has been noted, this entailed the awareness of utter dependence which is always given along with the feeling of relative freedom and dependence, vis-a-vis the world.<sup>21</sup> The ambiguity that surrounds this line of thought is even intensified in his analysis of doctrines which has led to the charge that there is no certainty as to whether what is said of God is in any sense true about him or only about our understanding of Him (God).<sup>22</sup>

In fact, his depiction of Jesus in terms of his unique divine self-consciousness in his Christology seemed to express the ideal of human idealism, associated with Friedrich Hegel and F. Schelling.<sup>23</sup>

It was in the period of bourgeois self-justification culminating in Albrecht Ritschl's re-assertion of Kant that the seeds of subjectivism and anthropological emphasis came to fruition. More so as he set to replace everything related to being with purely personal and ethical categories. And it is in his Christology that this line of thought is best exhibited, as he represents Jesus Christ in terms of value judgements, and therefore the 'moral ideal' for the believing community. In Alistair McGrath's words:

'Jesus was the historical realization of the full human spiritual and moral potential. The historical manifestation of the human religious ideal.'<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Ernst Troeltsch sealed this trend when he rejected any claims of finality in Christian faith. And this is demonstrated in his treatment of what was held in uniqueness, as authoritative and final for Christian faith, as no different from the universal religious phenomena in history.<sup>25</sup>

What emerges in this general trend is an exemplification of a theological form set to define the dominant self-understanding both in biblical and systematic scholarship. Indeed, the notable major accomplishment derived from the proponents of the nationalist thought in the context of dogmatics is their ability to face the historical criticism of the bible, and the relativism of the general understanding of the world. This is seen in their attempt to express dogmatically what they felt was possible in view of the known facts

and the existing world understanding as Weber observes.<sup>26</sup> But it is clear that the said dogmatism did not sell out the Christian discourse, but rather subjected itself to the spirit of the modern age. Hence, Robert Erickson's charge that what emerges out of liberal theology is a tendency in both biblical and systematic scholarship to strip away the inessential, supernatural trappings of Christian faith, which is said to be alien and having been acquired in a naive, pre-scientific age.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, the intended realisation of a purified core in Christian teaching only proved its inadequacy in its inability to hold both a negation of the authoritative base of the Christian proclamation and still be able to present it in a recognizable way.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the general characteristic of theological orientation as a whole is best illustrated by Richard Niebuhr's depiction of its equivalent in the American's liberal protestantism of his day. In his words:

‘The romantic conception of the Kingdom of God involved no discontinuities, no cries, no tragedies, or sacrifices, no loss of all things, no cross and resurrection.

In ethics it reconciled the interests of the individual with those of society by means of faith in natural identity of interests or in the benevolent, altruistic character of man.

In politics and economics it slurred over national and class divisions, seeing only the growth of unity and ignoring the increase of self-assertion and exploitation.

In religion it reconciled God and man by deifying the latter and humanizing the former .....

Christ the redeemer became Jesus the Teacher or spiritual genius in whom the religious capacities of mankind were fully developed ... evolution, growth, development, the culture of the religious life, the

nurture of the kindly sentiments, the extension of humanitarian ideals, and the progress of civilization took the place of the Christian revolution ....

A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgement through the ministration of a Christ without a Cross.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, the inevitable displacement of its standing in the face of the tragic experiences of the war and the subsequent pessimism which characterised the 1920s, nourished even more by the political and economic crisis of the Weimar republic.

It is in the midst of this state of despair that the rise of various movements claiming to be exponents of a 'positive Christianity' are to be understood.<sup>30</sup> And especially so in that they dominated the scene during the Church conflicts which characterised the proposed new plans of ecclesiastical alteration within the protestant church. One aspect that was held in unanimity was that the events marked a decisive end to theological trend of the nineteenth century. And it was only in seeing new ways that the Christian Church could be able to bear an effective witness of its calling.

A pioneering undertaking on the theological front was already under way amongst those theologians who came to be identified with dialectic theology. Taking the lead was Karl Barth who did not begin by attacking only the 'cultural protestantism' exhibited in Germany, but the fundamental disposition of theological and ecclesiastical thinking of the time.<sup>31</sup> Walter H. Horton has rightly stated that the ammunition for this undertaking had already been provided by Søren Kierkegaard, Rudolf Otto and Martin Buber.<sup>32</sup> Decisive was the realisation which Horton has expressed so

forcefully that:

'he found he could no longer do with honest conviction - explain God by identifying Him with any contemporary social movement or tendency, or with anything temporal or human. Hegel might do that, Utopian Socialists might do that, but Kierkegaard and current events had conspired to remove the scales from Barth's eyes ..... he learned to doubt whether the antitheses of human society were really leading on toward a glorious divine synthesis which would comprehend all tragic differences in some equitable and rational "both ... and" Human life. .... as he observed it, and as he found it magnificently analysed in Dostoevsky's novels, seemed to be an insoluble paradox, a question without an answer. Both the Christian Church and the Socialist Party seemed to be rushing to Perdition, rather than marching toward the Millenium. A God one could trust and hence reverence must be wholly beyond this. There must be as Kierkegaard said, 'an infinite qualitative difference' between the temporal and the eternal.'<sup>33</sup>

In fact, it is this particular realisation that set the framework of his famous *Römerbrief* (commentary on the Epistle to the Romans) of 1918, where he stressed unreservedly that 'God stands over and against man and everything human in an infinite qualitative distinction and is never identical with anything which we name, experience, conceive or worship as God.'<sup>34</sup> And thus, 'he remains God - the "Wholly other" even in our encounter with Him, where we as finite creatures of time and history are confronted by the one who is infinite and eternal.'<sup>35</sup> As Paul Tillich points out, here was a 're-statement of the paradoxical character of the absolute transcendence of God which we can never reach from our side, which we can never bring down to earth by our efforts or knowledge, which either comes to us or not.'<sup>36</sup>

It was not only this publication of his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, but also his Christian Dogmatics in Outline which came later that served to exemplify this as the thrust of his new approach, bringing the issues he saw as critical for theology from this perspective to the public debate.

~~Con~~firmation of this new stance came from Emil Brunner, Edward Thurneysen, Friedrich Gogarten (identified with dialectic theology) who reversed the Hegelian dialectic by affirming the 'absolute contrast between God and men - the interplay of the "no" and "yes" of the word to man and the fact that no human speaking about God could directly or immediately contain the truth about him.<sup>37</sup> The underlined summary is that these dialectic theologians took up afresh one of the prominent motifs in the thought of the reformers that the kind of religion that man works out for himself is in the end idolatory, for its real object is not the Living God, but man's own secret divinity'.<sup>38</sup> And since the thrust of the orientation of the nineteenth century theology was seen in this light, the logical consequence was, therefore, the inevitable negation of its standing.

It is worth noting, however, that the area of a common stance was on this recognition that theology could not continue along the direction of the nineteenth century and that the church should see only the Word of God which is the only basis of its freedom and obligation, as Weber has indicated.<sup>39</sup> But, as we shall elaborate when discussing the question of revelation and existential interpretation, the positive aspects that could be said to facilitate the desired new orientation for theology proved more divisive

than the negative aspects.

Even so, this decisive turning point had the thrust of its emphasis felt beyond the confines of those who were inclined to its orientation. For the standard bearers of orthodoxy, as conservative evangelicals were in Germany, this was more than an overdue awakening. And this was demonstrated by Otto Weber in a paper he gave to a movement of Calvinist students at Lunteren in the Netherlands in September, 1932.

Central to his analysis of the philosophy of life during the crisis period was that what was being experienced was the inevitable consequence of the enslaving spirit of modernism. And this is what he saw as inherent in the rationalist dogmatic tendencies of the enlightenment. Its underlying autonomistic tendency served to set man as lord of his life and destiny. And liberal theology's orientation served to perpetuate this tendency rather than meet its rightful task of a critical function in relation to the daily witness and preaching of the church. In this regard, he was decisive in his view of the general trend of the said period and of theology in particular by emphatically stating,

“The autonomistic (imperialistic) tendency of the nineteenth century was nothing but the other side of the basic humanistic will (Grundwille)<sup>40</sup>

The implications for theology were, therefore, enormous. And like Karl Barth, he argued that it is only when there is a recognition of the said enslavement that a return to its rightful task could be realised. This entailed the indispensable demand for the recognition of the “Godness of God”, and the reality of his word in Jesus Christ. Unlike the liberal theology's interpretation of Jesus in terms of the Spiritual Ideal, a heroic example or in

terms of value judgements as Richard Niebuhr highlighted in our earlier indication, there had to be a recognition that in Jesus Christ is the perennially contemporary event of the encounter of time with eternity, the intersection of finite by the infinite, by which everything human and creaturely is contradicted in its self-enclosedness and opened up to the reality of God.<sup>41</sup>

And if theology had to meet its constant challenge and demand for setting the stage and process through which the church, standing in her old truths, enters into apprehension of the new social and intellectual movement inherent in every new age, it had to do so only on the very basis that has been stated. For it to throw herself into the sanctification of each new social order, bring forth out of her treasures things new and old, and show again and again her power of witnessing under changed conditions to the catholic capacity of her faith and life, it could only do so from the very distinctive basis of its calling.

Hence, Otto Weber's corroboration of the dialectic theologian's stand that this was the enslaving shortcoming of liberal theology and cultural protestantism in general, and it was imperative to recognise the said bondage and recover the said insight which is demonstrative of the dynamism of the reformation faith and the New Testament in particular.

Having stated this, one notable point in Weber's treatment of nineteenth century theology is his acknowledgement of the contribution of historical critical scholarship, especially in its facilitation of Biblical criticism and theology in general. And this was generally the view held even by those who were standard bearers of orthodoxy as what was mainly unacceptable

was the tendency of aggressive and narrow rationalism.

However, it was the advent of the Third Reich that led Otto Weber (see also Emil Brunner and Friedrich Gogarten) to turn to ethical (especially social ethics) questions as the political trends brought about a situation of the gravest challenge for theology and the Protestant Church than ever before. And it is to this that we now turn.

c) Reckoning with National Socialism

As we have indicated, the rise of Nazism and its eventual assumption of power in 1933 brought about a situation that could be said to have led to a repeat of an ‘exilic experience’ for the protestant church in Germany. The crisis of the 1920s culminating in the failure of the democratic government and subsequent rise of the totalitarian state exemplified a situation of dejection and disillusionment that was no doubt reflected in daily life as much as it was within the Church itself. But the advent of the Third Reich brought about a scenario of optimism that was reflected in the enthusiastic response that some sections of the protestant church membership had towards the regime. Notable is the National Socialists’ attack against Godless Marxism, Materialism, decaying morals and what was seen as destructive authors; a move that was seen as leading to the rejuvenation of society. The awakened Conservatism within the Church actually saw these events as serving a Christian stance. Already, anything ‘liberal’ such as the right to advocate for individual rights was seen by many an enslaving trend which the country

had nearly died of. The exercise of authority, leadership and the emphasis of the whole embracing moral ideals as in traditional society was seen as the only way the country could stand united in confronting an hostile world.<sup>42</sup>

But as things turned out, there was more at stake than the simple endorsement of renewal and rejuvenation in national life. Within the Protestant Church were movements that saw these events brought about by National Socialism in terms of divine dispensation. And those within the movement of the German Christians are a classic example of this. And yet there were those who not only shared some of their ideals in their attempt to work out a theological grounding of social ethics as was the case with many theologians of Conservative persuasion, but even those identified with dialectic theology like Friedrich Gogarten found himself caught in the web as he reverted to the traditional Lutheran 'doctrine of the Orders of Creation'.<sup>43</sup>

However, it was during the ecclesiastical plans of alteration in 1933 that the grave reality of the situation the Church was facing became clear. For it was not only the Nazi regime's determination to influence the outcome of it that came to the open, but the racial and nationalistic concerns that were not only going to compromise but destroy the very witness of the Church itself.<sup>44</sup>

For theologians like Otto Weber, an exemplification of a clearcut stand was absent especially when faced with the challenges arising from the crisis. Infact, what he represented when addressing himself to the said plans of ecclesiastical alteration in April 1933, was an inclination that was reminiscent

of National Conservation. This is especially illustrated by his assertion that the new set up should be based on confession and a framework providing a re-assertion of order and commitment which was lacking in the age of individualism.<sup>45</sup> This approach was in line with the totalitarian and anti-democratic process already taking shape in the German Nation, was no doubt a statement in support of National Socialism.

At this time he joined the NSDAP and by May he had become a member of the German Christians. And this led to his promotion as the Minister of the Reformed Church in the Spiritual Ministry under the Reichbishopric of Müller, an undertaking that brought him to the centre stage of the dominating church politics vis-a vis the state.<sup>46</sup>

Obviously, there were genuine concerns of an ecumenical nature which were on the background of the said attempts at forging a united protestant church, but the political considerations that dominated the process overshadowed all that was envisaged. It was inevitable therefore that this led to the consequential explosive theological crisis of Summer 1933.

Indeed, the turbulent scene with which the churches found themselves posed serious theological questions that called for decisions on issues that were of far reaching consequence, not only for the time, but their future in its entirety. In Klaus Scholder's own words,

‘The only thing that seemed to matter was to stand one’s ground to some extent in the midst of this torrential flood, and to secure positions that might guarantee the survival of the Churches even in the Third Reich’.<sup>47</sup>

And the urgency of this was no where felt more acutely than in the task of theology. For that critical function which is inherent in its task in relation to the witness and preaching of the church was here tested to the full. The epistemological principles and the hermeneutic criterion upon which issues at stake were to be dealt with depended on whether those involved could see beyond the simple enticing utopia of National Socialism.

What emerges, however, is that there were those who were prepared to satisfy the particular trend rather than face the critical demand of facilitating the Churches' witness. For in no time, those within the German Christians started formulating what came to be known as a 'Political Theology'. One who came to establish himself as one of its leading exponents was Emmanuel Hirsch. In fact, he worked out a philosophy of Christian history in order to offer a rational justification of the adopted direction. And since he thought of the period in terms of divine dispensation, he took the political revolution as the decisive epistemological principle for theology. In other words, the political theme determined the theological stand and action of the Church.

'The thrust of his thought was that it was the same one God who met us in the Gospel's call that also did the same in the stormy events of history.<sup>48</sup>. Of course, this was not without qualification. And Walter Horton has rightly pointed out that Hirsch 'did not mean to put the two calls on the same absolute plane'<sup>49</sup>. On the contrary he noted the distinction by stating that,

‘The Lord of Contemporary History is a ‘Verborgener Gott’ - a God that hideth himself, whereas in the Gospel we have the face of God revealed. The God of History imposes on us our present duty. The God of the Gospel opens up to us our eternal destiny.’<sup>50</sup>

Even so, the underlying arguments are those used in support of natural theology. For example, he stated that to locate the conception of revelation and grace in Jesus Christ with exclusivity is a christological narrowness which denies the reality of the stated wider aspect.<sup>51</sup> In other words, there was no doubt in his mind that events of history have their own revelatory quality - apart from that made plain in Jesus Christ. And his fanatical nationalism was demonstrated when he devotedly exhorted the protestant church to be on the lead in shaping the nation in terms of the Völkisch Ideology.<sup>52</sup>

Wilhelm Stapel was even more explicit in his exaltation of the Völkisch movement. In fact, he did not hesitate to equate the Nazi regime's stress on order, renewal of morals, and upholding of authority with the authoritative and autonomous status with the Old Testament status of the Torah for Israel.<sup>53</sup>

Friedrich Gogarten, who had parted ways with Karl Barth by stating that his theology had no adequate grounding for social ethics, especially showed similar inclinations as he treated the question of faith and history. As we indicated earlier, his recall of the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation served to illustrate this concern with history as still having the imprints of God’s will for us besides the corruption of sin after the fall.<sup>54</sup> As Walter Horton puts it,

'The basic social institutions (family, the economic order, the political order, etc.) are divinely ordained in their basic structure; and though they have been corrupted by sin, still bear the imprint of the 'Order of Creation', and must be respected as embodying God's will for their members.<sup>55</sup>

And so he understood this to be the foundation of Christian obedience to constituted authorities of which the Third Reich was. It is this stress on the state that underlined his support for National Socialism of which he had become a member, besides joining the German Christians. Like many in this movement, the political trend was the only agency through which the moral contempt of authority and ills related to the age of individualism was to be overcome. And this was the only way to bring about the desired healing for the spiritual and political life in society.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, his approach was in no doubt a boost to Emmanuel Hirsch's political theology.

Otto Weber recognised the distinctiveness of the gospel and, therefore, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In fact, he asserted that this was decisively central for Christian faith and was the foundation on which the Church stands on its confession. But he was prepared to say that there was a place for general revelation which has to be acknowledged as existing in God's creation and events of history. Even so, it was only after the Nazi revolution that he discriminated against the misinterpretation of this teaching as if to give distinctive revelatory quality to what appears in history and creaturely existence.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, his advocacy of order and authoritative leadership was not only underlining his Conservative and anti-democratic stand, but implicitly if not explicitly in support of the authoritarian political

order of the Third Reich.<sup>58</sup>

What may have been a guarded inclination to Völkisch ideology and religiosity by theologians and especially those in the membership of the German Christians came to the open in November 1933 through Reinhold Krause's speech at the Sports Arena in Berlin. As a member of the German Christians, he exalted the Aryan race and the ideology of the Third Reich demonstrating how many within the movement were prepared to replace anything that did not serve the Nazi regime. And so the concerns that had dominated the ecclesiastical plans of alteration within the protestant church were no longer confined to the realms of theology; but it was clear that the underlying drive was purely of an ideological nature geared to serve National Socialism.

In fact, here was an explicit demonstration of an idolatrous reality best illustrated by the adopted gods such as the trust in man, race, blood and Völkisch ideology.<sup>59</sup>

It was imperative then for anyone with the insight to recognise this reality and therefore, meet the challenge of the witness of the Christian faith or submit to the inevitable bondage of the period.

The mantle of prophecy was, however, for Karl Barth. For to him, the problem was with theology itself as alien forces including political trends had been entertained as forming the criterion of its articulation. And he singles out these alien forces as actually the real powers that deprive it of its

freedom.<sup>60</sup> In other words, whenever they are made an integral part of theological articulation, then it is inevitable that they will dictate its orientation.

Hence, his call for the recognition of the only one criterion for theology; namely the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In his words, 'It was the only basis through which the recognition of the Lordship of God is made - and so is the judgement of all our adopted gods such as trust in man, blood, race, and every given ideology.' Indeed, he underlines the vital responsibility of this distinction by saying,

'This responsibility will be demonstrated in the fact that it will interpret those other authorities by the criterion of revelation and not revelation by the criterion of those other authorities.'<sup>61</sup>

This was the thrust of his argument for the freedom of theology and indeed the thinking and action of the Church. For him, this was in reality the recognition of the Lordship of Christ over the Church and all her undertakings in whichever form. In other words, the recognition of the one criterion underlined that what is said, thought and done from this perspective takes precedence over any cultural, political, anthropological or metaphysical insights. And so it remained as a fundamental factor that was imperative for faith and the confessional stand of the church as far as he was concerned. Indeed this was the central point and framework on which the confessing church through his instrumental guidance responded to the crisis of the Third Reich.

Moreover, his rejection of natural revelation did not only underline his

conviction that even our preconceptions of divinity and humanity are shattered through God's self-revelation, which forces us to consider him as he wishes Himself to be known, rather than as we have preconceived him,<sup>62</sup> but could not conceive an attempt at looking at God as Lord of history in isolation or apart from his given revelation.<sup>63</sup> And his debate with Emil Brunner on this question serve as a fitting illustration.

Although we shall elaborate further on this as we discuss the question of revelation and existential interpretation, the basic contention is that it is from the position of revelation that a clear cut view of God's Lordship is exemplified. The basis of the argument is that when talking of revelation we are actually speaking about God's own self-disclosure. And since all that we can speak about him derives from that which is received, then as André Dumas says,

‘God's action is self-authenticating as it is that which God has already done of that which gives us the right to speak of Him.’<sup>64</sup>

For Barth, this is the basis which sets the Christian Church free to live in the obedience of faith. As it has been pointed out,

‘Barth develops a theology of liberation .... of the Christian Church from the prison of its social, cultural and intellectual matrix.’<sup>65</sup>

And especially so against the challenges of the Nazi regime. The theological direction deriving from this decisive framework served to demonstrate the unconditional primacy of theology, and remaining true to its function even in relation to politics.<sup>66</sup> An indispensable freedom which is

derived from the Word of God is only properly exercised when this recognition is made.

Ronald Thieman makes this point even more explicit in his response to George Lindbeck's Nature of Doctrine by stating that Barth was an intratextual theologian. In his words,

‘Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework ... which absorbs the world, rather than the world absorbing it. ... It supplies the Interpretative framework within which believers seek to live their lives and understand reality.’<sup>67</sup>

This underlines the basis on which his approach is to be understood. Moreover, the Barmen declaration which Barth was instrumental in its formulation, and which through his leadership, served to set the basis for the confessing church's opposition to Hitler and his Christian supporters, has at its core the understanding of the calling of the church in no other framework, but that of scripture. The first article which summarises all the six principles clearly illustrates that which is basic and decisive when it states:

‘Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.’<sup>68</sup>

Hence, Otto Weber's observation that this was in effect an act that was forcing the church to confess in a new and very concrete way the basis of its existence.<sup>69</sup> And this drew the framework within which theology and the Church undertakes its task.

However, Karl Barth's approach was not without its own shortcomings. Already Karl Heim and Paul Althaus questioned whether the narrow stance did not render the church's task in social responsibility inept.<sup>70</sup> The other major concern was the tendency in the thrust of Barth's emphasis to be too inward looking. And this was best illustrated by his treatment of the Jewish question. The Aryan Paragraph which many rejected had offered the opportunity for treating what was in fact the central question in the crisis of the Third Reich. In fact, it is Dietrich Bonhoeffer who points out this failure, even by those on the forefront in the opposition to Nazism to see this as a central question. And yet he argues that it was when one took seriously the entire theological, moral and humanitarian implications that the question arises that one could find it unavoidable to realise its centrality.<sup>71</sup> In other words, it was actually a pointer to the reality of what was to be understood as the essence of the Church. In his words,

‘The task of Christian preaching was nothing short of stating that here was the Church where Jew and German stand together under the Word of God: here is the proof whether a Church was still the Church or not.’<sup>72</sup>

This was no doubt the central critical question for theology. Indeed Karl Barth in a letter to Bethge concedes that his silence on the issue was no doubt an act of theological weakness on his part.<sup>73</sup>

In summary, it is clear that a return to Conservatism was in no way a corrective measure to the undue emphasis on human subjectivity in liberal theology. In fact, the reality of the situation demonstrated how easy it was to move from what was seen as a trend leading to idolatry to a full blown embrace of the same. And it was a stance such as that of Barth (besides the

shortcomings) which served to remind the Church of her true calling amidst the crisis.<sup>74</sup>

Even so, what served as decisive in bringing about a theological breakthrough was in itself the source of many questions that dominated theology thereafter. This is especially true for the whole question of revelation. For the above did raise the question of the relationship between Revelation and History and all that which relates to issues of human existence. Indeed, the debate between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann serves to demonstrate this concern. This is to say that even the unbalanced antithesis between the theology of the incarnation and that of the cross have at their root the treatment of this question. And it is to it that we now turn.

#### D. Revelation and the Question of Existential Interpretation

As we have already indicated, the collapse of nineteenth century liberal theology saw the re-assertion of revelation as the foundational framework for theology. This is especially true for many post-war theologians, who saw in revelation the only grounds for reconstructing theology anew. However, the interpretation of this assertion proved so diverse and complex that the undertaking can be said to have set the stage for the plurality of approaches that came to characterise twentieth century theology.

In spite of this diversity though, emergent dominant themes such as revelation and the knowledge of God, revelation and the question of human existence, and revelation and the meaning of history revolved around what

has been referred to as the ‘unceasing struggle on the double front of the objectivity of the Word of God directed toward God, and the existential reality of man’s language.’<sup>75</sup>

For Continental protestant theology (European continent) especially, it was Karl Barth on the one hand who took the lead in articulating the concerns of the former as his stress on the objectivity of the Christian faith meant that objective revelation was the decisive framework on which theology derives its orientation. This is to say that the very event of God’s self-disclosure in His word, Jesus Christ was the only basis and context in which our knowledge and speaking of God is derived. In this respect, objective revelation for him took precedence before any discussions on its subjective possibilities.<sup>76</sup> The stress here, as was acknowledged by Emil Brunner and even Rudolf Bultmann, though with a differing methodological framework, was that theology could not speak directly of God apart from his own self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. And this for Barth was in itself the point of departure as far as the subjective framework is concerned. For the direction was rooted in God's own initiative.

However, the decisive breakthrough came with his rediscovery of the “distance” existing between God and Man, well expressed in his theme of the “Otherness” of God which dominated his early works and was indeed the *Leitmotiv* of his crisis theology. At the root of this was the forceful revindication of objectivity for theological understanding which he found in Søren Kierkegaard’s axiom of ‘Infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity’ as it gave expression to what he understood of the scriptural

depiction of the relationship between God and us. This is what he expresses in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,

‘God stands over and against man and everything human in an infinite qualitative distinction and is never identical with anything we name, experience, conceive or worship as God’<sup>77</sup>

In fact, the recognition of this reality for Barth gave direction to the first task of theology, and for him, this was to begin with the recognition of the truth of God as God which entails the fact that he can only be known of himself. And the thrust of objective revelation was not a matter of expressing the objective reality of God in himself, but what he found well depicted in the dialectical methodology derived from Kierkegaard. For as alluded above, therein was the truth of God as God - beyond the finite realm and therefore distinct from man - and yet, having revealed himself within it.<sup>78</sup>

This, for Barth, was in itself a reversal of the subjective framework, as it begins with ‘the realization that makes it possible for us to know the One by whom we are already known.’<sup>79</sup> And this lay at the root of his polemic against any thought which takes its starting point in the certitudes and interests of the consciousness of the human subject as he found in rationalism - especially Descartes' proof of God from the Idea of God in Man, and in Schleiermacher and Ritschl.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, a similar approach is what led to his rejection of natural theology in the working of his theology. For as is best demonstrated in his famous “No” to Emil Brunner, the logical consequence of the need to work out a connection between the definite

revelation and the common concerns of natural theology such as the understanding of man as made in the Image of God, albeit fallen, the Universe as God's creation, the ordering of society through such institutions as the family and the state which were traditionally seen as divine, and the natural order as held through God's preserving providence irrespective of the fall, as Brunner argued, was for him nothing short of not only having two sources and norms for the Christian faith, but would simply mean that those things falling under it (natural theology) will have their own revelational quality.<sup>81</sup> This for Barth was no different from embracing once again the tendencies that had been found to enslave the nineteenth century liberalism.

Worth noting here, however, is that what was more significant in Barth's re-assertion of objective revelation is his realization of the imperative demand therein for a particular understanding of the theological task. For as Bromiley points out, the fact that he understood revelation to be tied to the category of the word meant that at issue was the larger conception of theology itself and its method in no other terms, but from the perspective of it being the 'theology of the Word of God.'<sup>82</sup> In fact, it is this particular conception which serves as a unifying point between his earlier stance which was very much dominated by his polemics against the question of human subjectivity and the latter approach which exemplified his concern for the concretization of the objective. Even so, the constant emphasis of God as the subject and man as the object remains. As David Ford points out, Karl Barth's treatment of the knowledge of God in his Church dogmatics serve to highlight this truth, for therein he defines God as the subject of the biblical history, and therefore the methodological clue to our theological task.<sup>83</sup> In

his own words,

‘God is the one whose being can be investigated only in the form of a continuous question as to his action.’<sup>84</sup>

This was not only expressive of his affirmation of the distinctiveness of the definite revelation in a consistent rejection of natural theology, but as David Ford further points out, it formed the basis of his conception of the freedom of God. For to him, God’s choice to restrict himself to the one definite revelation demonstrated the reality of his independence from anything else apart from that which he has done and does.<sup>85</sup>

However, one other aspect that was decisive for Barth was framework of faith which he understood as defining the very character of theology. As he demonstrated in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, the basic thrust was that the way of faith was in fact the reversal of the concerns of the enlightenment as far as the basis of faith’s rationality was concerned. And this stance was given impetus by the insight he drew from his study of Anselm where it became clear to him that the assertions of faith have their own internal coherence as the basis of understanding its truth is not from without but within its own premises.<sup>86</sup> As Eberhard Jüngel expresses, the decisive insight from Anselm bears this truth which goes to Augustine, that,

‘Intelligence comes about by reflection on the *credo* that has already been spoken and affirmed.’<sup>87</sup>

And so the question for the theologian is ‘to what extent is reality as the Christian believes it to be’?<sup>88</sup> In other words, the task is that of considering

the factuality of Christian truth alongside the demonstration of its inner necessity.<sup>89</sup> And so, at issue, therefore, is not 'the coherence of a freely-invented conceptual system, since the whole which thus obtains is a single witness to an event outside itself, an event which demands exactly this witness as its cognition.'<sup>90</sup>

This summary point which embraces his entire church dogmatics demonstrates the seriousness with which Barth took Anselm's contentment in relying upon the self-vindication of the object of theology, i.e., on God's free grace, and only the wish to prove it on its own terms. In fact, this, as has been pointed out, became the key which shaped his new theological method. For therein in Anselm's theological scheme was 'the subordination of the subjective to the objective, rationality (which has an original though not exclusive affinity with the subjective) to necessity (which has an original though not exclusive affinity with the objective).'<sup>91</sup>

In other words, here was the demonstration of the way of faith in its negation of the Cartesian practice of setting prior considerations such as to what or whether God can be! On the contrary, its starting point is one of acknowledgement or rather 'recognition (cf. his distinguishing of '*Erkenntnis*' - knowledge from '*Anerkennung*') of the reality of the revelation event exemplifying the fact that 'God presents us with Himself as an accomplished fact, as a reality which does not submit to the confirmation of our sense of possibility, but actually contradicts it.'<sup>92</sup> The way of faith was not, for him, irrationality, but was a faith seeking understanding operating dynamically within the given.

It has to be said though that the basic thrust well expressed above, of the reality of God's revelation and its implication for the theological task, was not to be understood as if it remains on a superficial level in terms of its concrete relation, as far as Barth was concerned. And an illustration of his thinking emerges quite clearly in a lecture he gave to Swiss Reformed Ministers in 1956, where he called for a change of approach from the early stance, whose emphasis on the 'Otherness of God' may have suggested an abstractionist conception of revelation. In the given paper he stated,

‘But did it not appear to escape us by quite a distance that the deity of the Living God (- and we certainly wanted to deal with him -) found its meaning and its power only in the context of His history and of His dialogue with *man* and thus in his *togetherness* with man? Indeed (- and this is the point back of which we cannot go -) It is a matter of God's sovereign togetherness with man, a togetherness grounded in Him and determined, delimited, and ordered through Him alone ..... Who God is and what He is in His deity. He proves and reveals not in a vacuum as a divine being - for - Himself, but precisely and authentically in the fact that He exists, speaks, and acts as the partner of man, though of course as superior partner ..... In this and only in this form was - and still is - our view of the deity of God to be set in opposition to that earlier theology.’<sup>93</sup>

Theology's witness to God's revelation then could not be otherwise than in relation to its concrete manifestation in the incarnation event. In fact, his rejection of *analogia entis* of Roman Catholic theology in preference of *Analogia fidei* centres on this conception of revelation. For to him, the former was in reality man's presumption of a given commonality between himself and God which falls under the “No” of his earlier theme of the “Otherness of God”. But the reality of the latter was in fact the realization of

the sheer miracle of God's "Yes" - that free and loving initiative and movement towards us displayed in the said event.<sup>94</sup> And so, he re-asserts the very character of faith which does not rest on itself nor on what can be seen as an extension of itself, but on what is quite other than itself.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the freedom of God in the said 'Yes' is re-affirmed as is best summarised in his discussion of analogy when he stated,

‘All kinds of things might be analogous of God, if God had not and did not make a very definite delimited use of his omnipotence in his revelations.’<sup>96</sup>

This is to say that Karl Barth's whole theology was therefore Christologically conditioned as he unfolded every aspect of the Christian faith in the light of Jesus Christ. And as it has been pointed out, this was not only true for the doctrine of God, but the very pressing concern with the question of human existence or indeed the interpretation of empirical history.

The basic thrust is in Barth's location of Christology in the context of God's lordship stretching from eternity to eternity. This meant that Jesus was not . . . only <sup>the</sup> ground and goal of creation, but indeed the only clue to anthropology. Consequently, our understanding of man is not derived from some generally reconstructed anthropological models or the embracing of some archetypal lineage of fallen Adam,. as Jesus Christ was the only prototype of humanity.<sup>97</sup> The same is true for our treatment of the question of revelation and the meaning of history. For the fact that he sets the history of Jesus Christ within the said context of God's lordship of God, from eternity to eternity, i.e., understanding of it as an event encompassing and

embracing the entire history of God and man is in itself a contradiction of the subjective conception common to Liberal theology. In other words, it cannot be understood as the progressive overcoming of evil and the gradual building of the Kingdom of God. But on the contrary, as James C. Livingston, states,

‘History (for Barth) like nature, is a veil hiding the purposes of God. Only in faith can man discern any meaning to history and that meaning lies not in history itself but beyond history, in revelation. History is the stage where the drama of the struggle between the temporal and the eternal is played out and where man faces the ever-present eschatological “crisis” of faith.’<sup>98</sup>

This is to say, therefore, that events in history cannot be understood in and of themselves, but from the context of the purposes of God, made plain in Jesus Christ.

By way of summary, then, we can say that although the initial stance was coloured more by his polemics against the preceding trend of theology, his latter trinitarian based approach bears the unfolding of the objective in a real historic event. The decisive continuity though remains in that the “Christ event” exemplifies the eternity of God in His triune being (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) breaking into time and history of human existence. This is what we find in his description of the incarnation event,

‘God becomes temporal without ceasing to be eternal. His call to man in Jesus Christ is a genuine, concrete, historical event in time.’<sup>99</sup>

And this underlines that, even though God remains distinct from the world as transcendent God, He affirms it, thereby exemplifying the reality of

the truth that in all His absoluteness, He is free love, entering into fellowship with His own, claiming man as His Partner and Friend. Hence, André Dumas' observation that this for Barth demonstrated that God's objective reality stands as much for his Otherness as for his Communicability.<sup>100</sup>

It has to be said though that what emerges from the foregoing is that the thrust of his Christology remains on a superficial contact with human history. It is in McGrath that this concern finds its true expression, as he says,

'Barth's concept of the divine freedom in revelation necessitates that the ensuing revelation merely recapitulates its eternal antecedents. The incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ merely declare what has already happened eternally. These events, so central to Christian theology as a whole (and two of which are unquestionably central to the New Testament *Kenymga*) are thus minimized in their significance, in that the emphasis is seen to have shifted from God's revelation in time to the eternal antecedent of that revelation.'<sup>101</sup>

The consequent result of the above is reflected in the treatment of the whole question of the relationship between theology and philosophy and between revelation and the secular history. For as Livingston points out, 'Barth and those who have followed his direction's conception of man's knowledge of God in terms of what can be called 'radical divine actualism bears the exemplification of man as passive receptor of God's revelation.'<sup>102</sup> It is questionable how such a notion can be upheld when concrete realization is advocated in the understanding of revelation as having been mediated to man by finite, human means. The same can be said of the concerns of hermeneutics, for whereas his invocation of the Spirit as sufficient explanation of how the event of the incarnation becomes a present

reality in the life of the Church, it has to be acknowledged that whereas this can be the case within a context of faith, there remains the wider concern of how to take seriously the role of the human thought in the task of discriminative judgement on issues before it.

The foregoing, therefore, demonstrates the validity of the criticism that what we have here is the shortcoming of a fully worked out system of understanding of the whole of reality where the man to whom all is directed is ignored or treated as passive recipient.<sup>103</sup>

It was Rudolf Bultmann, though, whose stress on the understanding of revelation in relation to human existence set out a contrasting position from that of Karl Barth. Born only two years apart, his background was in no way dissimilar, as he also was nurtured within the tradition of nineteenth century liberalism. In fact, there are striking similarities between the two in spite of their differences which actually became sharper in later years. Leading among these is their common rejection of the positivistic character of their Liberal heritage in the aftermath of the First World War as they teamed up in the new movement of dialectic theology.<sup>104</sup> Noticeable also is their common assertion of the distinctiveness of the Christian faith and its theological articulation in that its subject is God and not man - whose existence is only adequately addressed in relation to God. Hence, their joint affirmation of God's revelation event in Jesus Christ as the decisive and foundational framework from which our knowledge and speaking about God is derived. It is also worth mentioning that in the area of Christology, they both recognised that one could not be content with the question of Jesus

Christ according to the “flesh” (in his humanity) if one had to be true to the Christian proclamation, but the whole aspect of Jesus Christ as the God-man.<sup>105</sup>

However, it is in their differences that we have the parting of ways that came to characterise modern theology - the milieu of Otto Weber’s theological formation.

It has well been pointed out that what came to play a significant role in the contrasting position of Barth and Bultmann was already evident in the early years of their association. For whereas both appreciated the input of historical critical scholarship (Barth with reservation) there was already a growing uneasiness in Barth over Bultmann’s preoccupation with the clarification of the theological language and the philosophical categories underlying them. Of particular concern to the former was the latter’s readiness to embrace and apply the said philosophical categories as useful tools for theology.

The borderlines, however, became clear as Bultmann showed an increasing inclination toward the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger. For whereas Barth was shunning existentialist influence as reminiscent of the Liberal age, Bultmann’s contention was not only that philosophy generally had a given role in the working of theology, but as we stated above, he employed the ‘concepts of this particular existentialist philosophy arguing that they provided decisive insights for theology and especially the interpretation of the New Testament.’<sup>106</sup>

A noticeable exemplification of this orientation already emerged in 1925 with the publication of his essay entitled, ‘What does it mean to speak of God?’ For therein he demonstrates his understanding of the dominant theme of the ‘Otherness of God’ which was central to dialectic theology in a way that it did represent man’s being determined from beyond himself, which did really mean being determined by this encounter from beyond - which the revelation event exemplifies.<sup>107</sup>

This is to say that whereas here was the recognition of the reality of God as God distinct from man, and his religiousity or the created order in general, he rejected any talk of a ‘wholly other’ God which is construed in a metaphysical or speculative manner ..... ; i.e. signifying God’s removal from the world or locating him in some realm of being distant from the reality in which we move and have our being.<sup>108</sup> For to him, what we have in the revelation event is quite the contrary of such an inclination. For it exhibits our encounter with God precisely as that determination of our reality which we cannot escape. In fact, this was the root of his polemic against the kind of thinking dominant in Liberal theology where man’s thought and act was represented as if it constituted the determining centre of reality.<sup>109</sup>

The basic point for him then was that when one speaks of God’s transcendence in the reality of the event of Jesus Christ, it is not speaking of his remoteness in space, but of the fact that he is not at man’s disposal.<sup>110</sup> This understanding of the revelation event as spoken of in Christian faith is hereby well put by Schmithals:

'The Christian faith speaks of a revelation which it understands to mean God's act as an event which is not visible to the objectivizing thought of reason, an event which as revelation does not communicate doctrines, but concerns the existence of man and teaches him, or better, authorizes him, to understand himself as sustained by the transcendent power of God.'<sup>111</sup>

His understanding of the Christian proclamation as focused on man and the reality of his existence in relation to God was, therefore, the underlying reason of his shift to the emphasis of human existence. And it was clear to him that this line of thought which emanates from the revelation event was in reality not only speaking about man but was at the same time our speaking about God, and vice versa.<sup>112</sup> Giving expression to this stance, as it has been pointed out, was the theory of history and human existence which he drew from Wilhelm Herrmann's proto-existentialist theology and<sup>which was given</sup> perfection by his discussions with Martin Heidegger.<sup>113</sup>

Since the focus here was not on man *per se* but in relation to God, faith which the revelation event evokes became the primary point of emphasis rather than what is revealed. And although he was in agreement with Barth on the understanding of faith, his differing viewpoint emerges quite clearly as he employs Heidegger's categories to give expression to what he understood of it in contrast to unbelief. Illustrative of this is his embrace of the authentic and inauthentic concepts drawn from<sup>the</sup> existentialist philosophy of Heidegger. Here, he found the latter to give a vivid demonstration of the problem of the undue emphasis on human subjectivity in liberal theology as Heidegger's description of this was that 'it arises from man's absorption in

his concern with the world, in a way of being which is directed towards the world, dehumanized, and ultimately based upon misunderstanding and delusion.'<sup>114</sup>

Even so, the former depicted a state of man that was positive in asserting that it enables him to have free openness for the future, Bultmann understood this as insufficient and only serving to:

'bring home to us this awful reality of this fact by saying that for it, i.e., for philosophical analysis - each man's particular future can in the last resort be defined as "nothingness" and that it can understand freedom for the future solely as "the readiness for dread" (Angstbereitschaft), which man has to accept by an act of resolve.'<sup>115</sup>

Hence, his remark that if faith is simply this readiness for dread, it is still so in the face of the divine saving act. In other words, faith knows that God encounters us at the very point where the human prospect is nothingness and only at that point. In this respect, he follows Heidegger in the description of this structure of existence, which is not dissimilar from that of faith, for in both there is a recognition that to live from the future means to be open for whatever the future brings .... i.e. the recognition of life as not determined by a self-chosen aim, to which all man's energies and hopes are bent .....The faith .... that the future will bring him his true self, which he can never capture by his own self-appointed courses.<sup>116</sup>

But his prescription here differs from Heidegger in that for him, Christian faith rests on the knowledge that its freedom and true authenticity is a gift of grace from God and therefore is freed for such a future in that assurance and that alone.<sup>117</sup>

Since it is in the New Testament Kerygma that we have that one address of God to man, bearing the one depiction of the true nature of man and the reality of the one source of his authenticity, and the assurance of freedom derived of God in the said given authenticity, the dominant question which was central to his ‘New Testament and Mythology’ then was ‘how do we interpret the “event” the New Testament speaks about as one through which God has brought man’s Salvation?’<sup>118</sup>

It is clear then that the emphasis shifted the context of reflection to that of hermeneutics - which was an area that concerned him more than Karl Barth whose innovation of the Spirit as sufficient explanation set the limit. And as it has been observed, it is this concern and the different set of issues raised therein that sharpened his contrasting stance from Barth and Brunner .

Giving impetus to his approach was his preoccupation with historical critical scholarship, which had brought about the general understanding of New Testament scholarship, that one could not deal with the central message of a text without bearing in mind the influence of the point of view and style of the author. This was the recognition that the author was also immersed in the context and historical process of his time - leading to the description of the New Testament writing as clothed in mythical language which needed elimination in order to identify the essential matter of its message.<sup>119</sup>

For Bultmann, the task was not one of seeking to eliminate outmoded or false myths from the New Testament, but one of interpreting and understanding the self-understanding they express. For he understood the

real purpose of myth as not presenting an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he was. Furthermore, he saw myth as an expression of man's conviction that the origin and purpose of the world in which he lives are to be sought not within it but beyond it - that is, beyond the realm of known and tangible reality - and that this realm is perpetually dominated and menaced by those mysterious powers which are its source and limit. .... And so it is an expression of man's awareness that he is not Lord of his own being.<sup>120</sup> In this respect, what is at issue is not the mythical language or the imagery but the understanding of existence that the myth enshrines - questioning whether that representation is true.<sup>121</sup>

Demythologization as an hermeneutic tool for him, then, was to serve no other purpose, other than the interpretation of myth such that it was understated and made comprehensible in contemporary setting, and thus, enabling adequate evaluation of that which it conveys.

As far as Bultmann was concerned, such an undertaking was not a new invention of modern period, but a method he understood as present in the New Testament itself.

In fact, James Livingston illustrates fittingly how Bultmann sees in Paul and John a clear exemplification of demythologization.<sup>122</sup> For whereas the two 'still expected the end of the world as a cosmic drama, the appearing of Christ on the clouds of heaven, the resurrection from the dead , and the final judgement, their grasping of the existential significance of the eschatological

imagery was such that 'in that existential reality of Jesus' resurrection, the said decisive event had already happened.'<sup>123</sup> This was in itself a proper justification of demythologization as a methodology. But at the same time, it served to underline his view that the givenness of mythical language in scripture and the validity of the interpretation process in such existential nature implied the admission of a move that presupposes some pre-understanding of the text - a point of sharp contrast with Barth and those of his inclination.<sup>124</sup>

This meant that the issue of hermeneutics was not whether one comes to the text with pre-conceived ideas, but what are the right presuppositions. Consequently, it affirmed what we already stated earlier on that the central concern in the entire enterprise was the identification of the real question in New Testament Kerygma; what is man? Unlike Barth's emphasis that the real question of the Bible is the self-revelation of God and not man, Bultmann, following Heidegger, saw the emphasis on the former stating, '...Man searches for God .... because he also searches for himself.'<sup>125</sup> And this underlined his subjective preference.

The whole Bultmannian thought is, therefore, a combination of Heidegger's analysis of the human being and the transcendental method derived from Immanuel Kant, where the recognition of the impossibility of speaking about God led to the de-objectifying of him (God) by beginning with humankind and his constitutive experiences before addressing oneself to transcendental questions.

This is true for his conception of revelation and the general view of history in the light of the New Testament. The former focuses on the possibilities in human existence making it possible, while the latter is best summed up in the adopted distinctions from Martin Kähler between '*Historie*' and '*Geschichte*'. For therein, as it has been observed, his understanding of the New Testament is well rendered in this statement:

'Rightly interpreted, the New Testament is not primarily 'Historie' - in terms of an objective, impersonal, factual account of past events. Rather it is concerned centrally with history in the sense of 'Geschichte', the meaning, significance, or intentionality of events for the persons who encounter them. In speaking of the incarnation, Christian faith presupposes certain objectively historical occurrences, but overwhelmingly it focuses attention on the person or existentially historical event in which the human individual is addressed by God and confronted with the demand to turn from unauthentic to authentic existence.'<sup>126</sup>

This depiction of Bultmann's line of thought as regards the question of the meaning of history is analysed even further by Robert Morgan as being the basis of his representation from his work which shows a lack of religious interest in the social, historical world - but on the personal, inner, existential history, which is said to be the locus of faith, genuine religion and the meaning of humanity.<sup>127</sup>

The logical result then is that here was a drawing of a distinction between history and Christian theology, between facts and meanings and indeed between God and what happens in the world and time.<sup>128</sup> And this is very well reflected in his Christology where he draws a distinction between the historical person of Jesus and the Preached Christ, to such an extent that the

significance focussed on the latter seemed to be divorced from the former. Hence the question that served to evaluate his entire orientation,

‘Does the adoption of existentialist presuppositions permit the New Testament to speak to us on its own terms or does it change the character of the biblical message by recasting it in a foreign mold?’<sup>129</sup>

This summarising point does not in any way imply that Bultmann is understood to have taken Heidegger’s existentialism wholesale, but his embrace of it as a prerequisite for the understanding of the gospel is in some way similar to nineteenth century liberalism he was striving to negate.

The question of his emphasis on human existence cannot escape the criticism that what we have in the thrust of his approach is nothing but an exposure to the risky business of describing nothing but that human approach to a kind of understanding and decision which is beyond our reach. Hence the charge that his Christology is in actual fact an exemplification of an anthropological foundation which he and his colleagues in dialectic theology had sought to correct. On this, Otto Weber's observation summarises the point when he says that what we have in Bultmann is a situation of one remaining a prisoner to a philosophical system which he had sought as a facility or aid to his theological undertaking.<sup>130</sup>

Having analysed these two positions, which are in many ways, expressive of the theological milieu in which Otto Weber had his formation, it is clear that the two basic concerns over-riding the two positions served to sharpen his dialogic vision. For he recognised in his methodology the thrust

of Barth's position irrespective of its shortcomings as an affirmation of the Sovereignty and Lordship of God in relation to his creation and to man in particular. And thus, his understanding of the revelation event was that it exemplified the reality of God and his freedom in relation to us, judging our closedness in the encounter and declaring his claims over us as God and Creator. And this is reflected in his embrace of Barth's understanding of our knowledge of God as a response to God's activity rather than a noetic reception of something.

Indeed, his understanding of theological activity is that of a faith seeking understanding, which in operating within the context of faith, exemplifies nothing short of a fellowship between the individual and his God.<sup>131</sup> And thus, he rejected any notion of speaking about God as though he were an object in the world.

But in stressing this insight, he recognised the dominant concern in Bultmann's position in spite of its subjective emphasis as stating the fact of the concreteness of the revelation event in its salvific reality. And this in itself was a rejection of the tendency in Barth to leave an impression of a passive relation of the "above" with the "below" - which is absent in the reality of Jesus Christ as the God-Man.

This is to say that his understanding of the revelation event was not as if it was a kind of an extra-dimensional component, but was an historical reality with a vertical as well as an horizontal dimension. And this is what emerges quite clearly in his methodology where he rejects both the objective and

subjective, opting for a correlation of both.

However, his treatment of the whole question of human existence was more akin to Barth's position as he saw in the God-man, Jesus Christ, the only exemplification of what has to be understood of human existence - being none other than man before God and his claims over him. This is the basis of his assertion, that it was when this is recognised that any anxiety about self-understanding is removed as the event of Jesus Christ offered the freedom for it. For he understood the talk of God in theology as entailing unavoidably our speaking about God's claims over us, which concern not our existence in itself, but always in relation to God and his claims over us.<sup>132</sup> This for him, was the only basis of breaking the egocentrism that had dominated liberal theology, and the re-statement of this truth which was central to the New Testament.

Indeed, this is what permeates his view on the question of hermeneutics. For whereas he acknowledges the inevitable presence of some pre-understanding in any approach to the text as stated by Bultmann, his dominant concern is the primacy of the biblical witness. And this is well expressed in the questions he raises in relation to Bultmann's position. For since he sees in Bultmann a movement toward confession rather than from it, he asks 'but can one move toward it without in fact coming from it? Can one describe the human understanding of the biblical writings on the basis of general hermeneutical categories, without already knowing that man will be drawn into a decision in regard to this witness, a decision which cannot be derived from general categories? And is not that decision-relatedness based

on what the biblical scriptures are testifying to?<sup>133</sup> In this respect, he sees the binding criterion of hermeneutics as being the bible itself as God's Word.

Consequently the whole question of the meaning of history in the light of the revelation event could not be treated distinctively. For like Barth, he did not view Christ's event as a calculable component of history or development, but as an event enacted in history in which God distinguishes his history from other history and qualifies it.<sup>134</sup> The basic thrust then is not one of giving meaning to history but realising in the event of Jesus Christ 'that we are not to understand God's will as a general governance of history toward a general good end, but as the powerful arrangement of all events toward the one event in the midst of history .... an event in which God takes mercy of man - the reality of his "being" for us.'<sup>135</sup> For in this act is the contradiction of the worldly, the evil, the dehumanization. In it is the "Child of the light" and "of day" amidst the encroaching night. (cf. Rom. 13:12, IThess. 5.5.)<sup>136</sup>

The thrust of Weber's dialogic approach then is anchored in his understanding of theology as never an end in itself, but one existing within the context of the whole Ministry of the Church to scrutinise, purify and reform its preaching and teaching - which it can only do as a 'faith seeking understanding enterprise'. This insight is a big challenge to all forms of theological undertaking in every generation, for the basic question remains as to how true it lives up to this task. The African scene in particular has to come to terms with this if it has to move beyond the simple reaction to Western theology.

But this leaves us with the question as to what was the underlying thrust of his Anthropology which permeated his approach? And it is to this that we now turn after a brief biographical sketch.

### Notes

1. Otto Weber in preface to Foundations of Dogmatics, Vol. 1, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 19812, p. vii.
  2. Otto Weber's Biography in Theologenzeitung, hrsg. Fachschaftsrat Theologie, Nikolausbergerweg 5b, GTZ, Göttingen, 1987, p. 74 f.
  3. Kenneth Latourette: Christianity in a Revolutionary Age Vol. 4. Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1970 edition p. 247 ff.
  4. Alasdair I.C. Heron: A Century of Protestant Theology, Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 69.
  5. Alec R. Vidler: The Church in an Age of Revolution, Vol. 5. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1926 repr. p. 212.
  6. Alasdair I.C. Heron, Op. cit. p. 69.
  7. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 128.
  8. Ibid.
  9. Albert Schweitzer: The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede, A & C. Black Ltd., London, 1956. p. 46
  10. Ibid, p. 52.
  11. Op. cit. p. 81-96.
  12. Op. cit. p. 156.
- See also F. Lichtenberger: History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1889.
13. Otto Weber: Foundations of Dogmatics, Vol. 1, op. cit. p. 134.
  14. Claude Welch: Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 1, Yale University Press, London, 1972, p. 45. These were not given in the concrete unity of intuition and subjected to empirical verification.

See p. 46.

15. Alasdair, I.C. Heron, Op. Cit. p. 18.

16. Op. cit.

cf. Also Claude Welch, op. cit. p. 46-7.

In his observation, there was the continuity of the typical rationalist conception of religion as a duality of beliefs and morality - and morality taking the central place such that it leads to theological utilitarianism.

17. Walter Kasper: Theology and Church, SCM Press, London, 1989, p. 41.

18. Ibid.

19. Op. cit.

20. Alasdair I.C. Heron, Op. cit. p. 24.

21. Claude Welch: Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 1, p. 77.

22. Alasdair I.C. Heron op. cit.. p. 31.

23. Otto Weber, Op. Cit. Vol. 1, p. 142.

See also, A. McGrath, The Making of Modern German Christology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 22.

24. Alister I. McGrath's Article in Reckoning With Karl Barth, edited by Nigel Biggin, Mowbray, London, 1988, p. 29.

Otto Weber observed that this was the final destruction of traditional Christology.

25. cf. Robert P. Erickson: Theologians under Hitler, Yale University Press, London, 1985, p. 12.

26. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 132.

27. Robert P. Erickson, op. cit., p. 13.

28. Op. cit.

A befitting illustration is the rationalist oriented theological framework's loss of its constituency amidst the negation of reason's absolute status. See also, James D. Smart: The Divided Mind of Modern Theology, The West minster Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p 96.

29. H. Richard Niebuhr: The Kingdom of God in America, Harper Torch Books, London, 1959 edition, p. 191-3. Indeed, it marked the end of bourgeois idealism and the disruption of the dominant idealistic tradition in philosophy along with its allied positive school.

30. cf. The German Christians, the confessing Church and the German Faith movement whose standing are expressed in Walter M. Horton's Contemporary Continental Theology, SCM Press, London, 1938, p. 94f.

31. cf. Kurt Aland: A History of Christianity, Vol. 2, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986, p. 432.

32. Walter H. Horton, op. cit., p. 90. f.

Note: the initial theology of "crisis" which did not only refer to the immediate concerns arising out of the crisis of Modern Civilization and Modern Theology, but the perpetual crisis in which man is always involved when he tries to solve his problem by his own powers (cf. Horton, p. 100).

33. Op. cit. p. 98.

34. Cf. A. McGrath: The Making of Modern German Christology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 95. : Commentary on the Epistle

35. Alasdair I.C. Heron, Op. Cit. p. 76f.

36. Paul Tillich: Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant

Theology, SCM Press, London, 1967, p. 24.

See also H. Martin Rumscheidt's Revelation and Theology - an Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923., Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 1972, p. 121.

37. cf. Alasdair Heron: A Century of Protestant Theology, Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 78.
38. Ibid, p. 79.
39. Otto Weber: Foundations of Dogmatics Vol. 1, William B. Eerdmans, Grandrapids, 1981, p. 157.
40. Otto Weber's 'Das Lebensgefühl unserer Zeit als Frage an die Kirche' in Theologenzeitung, (ed. Dieter W. Ahrens and Others, GTZ Göttingen, 1987, p. 79 - 81.
41. Alasdair I.C. Heron, op. cit. p. 79.  
cf. Also, Otto Weber: Foundations of Dogmatics, Vol. 1, p. 155.
42. cf. Walter H. Horton: Contemporary Continental Theology, SCM Press, London, 1938, p. 92.
43. cf. Friedrich Gorgarten in Einheit Von Evangelium und Volkstum? Hamburg, 1933, p. 7, as quoted by Scholder, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 423.  
See also Walter Horton: Contemporary Continental Theology, SCM Press, 1938, p. 108.
44. Walter Horton, ibid, p. 120. especially the quoted pamphlet of the German Faith Movement, by B. Lowew.
45. cf. the quotation of Otto Weber by Andreas Bartels in Theologenzeitung, op. cit. p. 85.  
It is worth taking note of the implicit anti-democratic inclinations expressed here.

- 46. cf. Andreas Bartels: Theologenzeitung, Göttingen, 1987, p. 86.
- 47. Klaus Scholder, The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1 SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 414 f.
- 48. cf. Walter H. Horton: Contemporary Continental Theology, SCM Press, London, 1938, p. 123.
- 49. Ibid, p. 124.
- 50. op. cit.

See also Klaus Scholder: The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 419.

- 51. cf. Klaus Scholder: The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 419.

See also Immanuel Hirsch's Deutsches Völkstum und Evangelischer Glaube, Hamburg, 1934, p. 34.

Notable are what he attributes as truly divine in contemporary history; horos - the reckoning with limits of intelligentsia was a demonstration of dependence on God. Logos - which was expressive of wider rationality or existential thinking which recognises responsible action in the face of mysterious destiny, nomos - (law) or the sense of right of the group to control the conduct of numbers and replacing what he saw as the irresponsibility of individualism [note the inbedded anti-democratic authoritarianism].

- 52. cf. James D. S. Smart: The Divided Mind of Modern Theology, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1967, p. 212. Notable is Hirsch's argument that it was the revelation of God in human conscience that became the validation of what the German conscience demanded of the German people.

53. Klaus Scholder: op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 421.
54. Walter H. Horton: Contemporary Continental Theology, SCM Press, 1938, London, p. 108.
55. Ibid, p. 108. f.

See also Nils Ehrenstrom: The Christian Faith and the Modern State, SCM Press, London, 1937, p. 98 ff.

56. Klaus Scholder: The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1, SCM Press, 1977, p. 423 f.

It is worth noting Karl Barth and Emil Brunner's observation that Gogarten's conception of orders actually implied a whole political and cultural programme which was decisively authoritarian. It has to be noted that although he modified his position after the Nazi revolution, the essential position still showed inclinations which still could be exploited along the same lines.

57. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 205.

It is worth taking note of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner's debate on natural theology here.

58. cf. Andreas Bartels: in Theologenzeitung, op. cit., 1987, p. 80.

59. Klaus Scholder: The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 433.

cf. also Alasdair I.C. Heron, op. cit. p. 86.

60. cf. Klaus Scholder, Ibid, p. 421.

61. op. cit. 432.

62. op. cit. 433.

See also Wolfhart Pannenberg: Revelation and History, Sheed and

Ward, London 1969, page 6. Especially the observation that there is no consistency in God revealing himself in other events, situations and persons, if already he has done it totally in Jesus Christ. Note the unique conception of revelation he distinguishes in Barth.

63. cf. A. McGrath: Reckoning with Karl Barth, ed. Nigel Biggin, Mowbray, London, 1988, p. 31-2. cf. also E. Hirsch's argument against Barth's position in Klaus Scholder: The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 419. Where he argued for the recognition of the will of God in history as well as in his word. note; Barth's thesis in his paper entitled "The first commandment" referred to in page 432 by Scholder.
64. André Dumas: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1971, p. 10.
65. cf. A. McGrath's article, 'Barth on Jesus Christ, theology and the church', in Reckoning with Karl Barth, Mowbray, London, 1988, p. 32.
66. cf. K. Scholder: The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 433.
67. cf. Ronald Thieman's article 'Response to George Lindbeck' in Theology Today Vol. XLIII, Princeton, 1987, p. 377.
68. cf. Barmen declaration in Article I in Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century, Edited by Arthur Cochrane, SCM Press, 1966, p. 334.
69. Otto Weber, op.cit Vol. 1, p. 161.
70. cf. Walter H. Horton: Contemporary Continental Theology, SCM Press, London, 1938, p. 127-40.

71. cf. André Dumas: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality. SCM Press, London, 1971, p. 55.
72. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, Vol. 1 (Ed. E.H. Robertson) Colins, London, 1965, p. 229. Note his assertion of the New Testament basis of the church.
73. cf. Jürgen Faugmeier and Hinrich Stoevesand (Editors) Karl Barth: Letters 1961-1968, T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1981, p. 250.
74. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 161.
75. cf. André Dumas: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, SCM, London, 107, p. 6.
76. cf. George Stroup's article on Revelation in Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks, Edited by P. Hodgson and R. King, SPCK, London, 1982, p. 104.
77. Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 330 cf..
78. J.C. Livingston, The Modern Christian Thought, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. 327.
79. cf. André Dumas, Ibid, p. 11.
80. Steven G. Smith: The Argument to the Other: Reason Beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas, Scholars Press, Chicago, California, 1983, p. 128.
81. cf. Otto Weber, op. cit.. Vol. 1, p. 205.
82. cf. G.H. Bromiley's article on Barth, in Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology, SCM Press, London, 19, p. 30.
83. David Ford: Barth and God's Story, Lang, Frankfurt 1981, p. 156.
84. Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics 11/1, T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1957,

- p. 61.
85. David Ford: Barth and God's Story, op. cit., p. 156. See also Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, Collins, London, p. 48 ff.
86. cf. Eberhard Jüngel: Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1986. p. 42.
87. Ibid. See also Karl Barth: Anselm; Fides Quarens Intellectum, SCM Press Ltd., London, 19 p. 27.
88. Ibid.
89. Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy, op. cit. p.42.
90. cf. Robert W. Jenson's article on 'Karl Barth' in The Modern Theologians: Vol 1, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 33.
- 91 cf. Steven G. Smith: The Arguments to the Other, Scholars Press, Chicago, 1983, p. 149.
92. Ibid.  
See cf als A.M. McGrath: The making of modern German Christology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, P.108.  
Also Paul D. Molnar's article 'The Function of the Imminent Trinity' in The Theology of Karl Barth: Implications for Today, Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 42, p. 369 f..
93. Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, Collins, London, 1961, p. 45. It is worth noting here the ongoing polemic against any dictating ground for theology - such as the demand in principle for serious treatment of culture and anthropology as he saw in Bultmann, Gogarten, Brunner and Tillich - Other than God.
94. Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics 11/1, T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1957, p.81 ff.

See also Paul D. Molnar's article Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 42, p. 372 - especially the stress on "miracle".

And Daniel D. William's article on 'The Concept of truth' in Karl Barth's Theology Religious Studies Vol. 6, ed. by H.D. Lewis, Cambridge, U.P., Cambridge, 1970, p. 139 f.

95. A.I.C. Heron: A Century of Protestant Theology, Lutterworth, Cambridge, 1980, p. 87.

See also Steven G. Smith, The Argument to the Other, Scholars Press, Chicago, p. 154 f.

96. Karl Barth, ibid, p. 232.

97. cf. Karl Barth, CD 111/2, p. 50

98. J.C. Livingston: Modern Christian Thought, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. 346.

99. cf. S. Paul Schilling: Contemporary Continental Theologians, SCM, London, 1966, p. 26-7.

100. André Dumas - Ibid, p. 10.

101. Alister C. McGrath, Ibid, p. 110

102. J.C. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought, p. 34.

See also André Dumas, p. 11.

N.B. Van Austin Harvey in The Historian and the Believer. SCM Press, London, 1967, p. 154. - argues that Barth's later attempts at unfolding the objective knowledge of God in real historical event was in itself a recognition of the above shortcoming.

103. cf. André Dumas, ibid, p. 11.

104. Walter Schmithal's An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann, SCM Press, London, 1967, p. 12.

105. cf. A. McGrath, *Ibid*, p. 110.
106. Rudolph Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 1. Ed. H. W. Bartsch, SPCK, London, 1964, p. 193.
107. Walter Schmithals: An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann, SCM Press, London, 1968, p. 33.
108. Roger A. Johnson: Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era Collins, London, 1987, p. 19.
109. *Ibid*, p. 19f.
110. Walter Schmithals: *ibid*, SCM, London, 1968, p. 34.
111. op. cit., p. 34f.
112. op.cit. p. 48.
113. cf. Robert Morgan's article: Rudolph F. Bultmann in The Modern Theologians, Vol. 1, ed. D. F. Ford, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 112.
114. A. McGrath, The Making of German Christology, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 136.
115. Rudolf Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 1, Ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, SPCK, London, 1964, p. 205 f.
116. cf. Walter Schmithals: *ibid*, p. 101  
See also McGrath, The Making of German Christology, op. cit., p. 134.
117. Rudolph Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, op. cit. p. 206.
118. Rudolph Bultmann in Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 1, op. cit. p. 14.
- 119 *Ibid*, p. 12.
120. op. cit. , p. 11.
121. op. cit.
122. James C. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought Macmillan, London,

- 1971, p. 375 ff.
123. Ibid, p. 376.
124. cf. Robert Morgan's article 'Rudolf Bultmann', in The Modern Theologians Vol.1 Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 122 f.
125. Rudolf Bultman, Jesus Christ and Mythology, Charles Scribner's New York, 1958, p. 53.
126. P. Schilling: Contemporary Continental Theologians, SCM Press, London, 1966, p. 82-3.
127. cf. Robert Morgan's article on 'Rudolf Bultmann' in The Modern Theologians, Vol. 1, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 118..
128. Alasdair Heron, A Century of Protestant Theology, Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 111,
129. S.P. Schilling: Contemporary Continental Theologians SCM Press, 1966, p. 95.
130. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 345.
131. Ibid, p. 195-9.
132. op. cit., p. 312
133. op cit p 313.
134. op. cit.
135. op.cit. p. 522.
136. op.cit. p. 525.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ON OTTO WEBER

As already indicated in Chapter One, Otto Weber was born on 4th June 1902 - being the eldest son in a family of six at Mühlheim in Köln. His upbringing was that of a strict Christian family as his parents were devout members of the Free Reformed Congregation at Hessen. The distinctive characteristic of this setting was Pietistic and Conservative. Indeed, by the age of 17/18, he was already a member of the pupils Bible study group (Schülerbibelkreis) through which he first exemplifies his pedagogic gifts as his leadership was soon acknowledged in the group.

Although his initial interest was in law, after passing his highers in February 1921, Otto Weber decided to undertake theology which he began in October 1921 at the University of Bonn. One semester of his second year studies was spent at Tübingen University, where he studied under Karl Heine and Adolf Schlatter, who as already indicated, did impress him with their Conservative and Pietistic orientation.

He returned to Bonn University in 1923 where he passed his first degree in 1925. As was the practice, he undertook parish assistantship as a curate at a Congregation at Herchen, where he worked especially among the sick, as well as teaching Religion and French at a 'Pädagoge' (High School) where he demonstrated his enthusiasm in teaching. In 1927 he passed his second and final degree, specializing in reformed dogmatics and liturgics.<sup>1</sup>

His formal teaching career began in 1928 when he was appointed Tutor at the Reformed Theological College at Elberfeld, where he taught courses in Greek, Hebrew, Old Testament and Christian doctrine, focusing especially on Calvin. It was not long before his administrative skills were acknowledged, leading to his appointment as the Principal of the said College in 1930. From the testimony of Professor Smendt at Göttingen University, these were the great years of Otto Weber, as he undertook his work with enthusiasm, exemplifying a character of a man with great potential in the teaching ministry and as a theologian.

It has to be said though, that this marked the beginning of a period of great challenges in his life, as events in the political life of the German nation were soon to bring about wide ranging implications for the Church and its relation to the state. For the years of decay and dejection which were associated with the Weimar Republic came to naught in the ensuing rise of National Socialism, leading to the Third Reich's assumption of power in 1933. For the Church, the rejuvenation of national life through such attacks against Godless Marxism, materialism and decaying moral standards by National Socialists was in itself an opening for revival and spiritual reawakening. Hence the enthusiastic support that this brought, especially among those of Conservative persuasion within the Church. And as we indicated in Chapter one, the events were seen by many, especially within the said orientation, as serving a Christian stance. And Otto Weber was no exception. In fact, by 1933 he had become a member of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) and also the National Socialist Teachers Association (the "NS-Lehrerbund"). By May of the same year, he had joined the German Christians who came to establish themselves as the leading exponents of Nazi Ideology within the Church.<sup>2</sup>

The ecumenical attempts aimed at the Creation of a National Church, led to a tripartite ministry in Berlin, with representation from the Lutheran, the Reformed and other Evangelical Churches under the auspices of Reich's bishop Ludwig Müller. For Otto Weber, the Church was so rigid, and was in need of spiritual rejuvenation and a new sense of authoritative direction amidst the rising challenges. And although he initially debated the suitability of joining the said tripartite ministry,<sup>3</sup> he accepted the invitation to represent the Reformed Church, having the conviction that here was the possibility of a positive contribution to the concerns facing the Church then.

In fact, it was while he undertook this responsibility that he was promoted from the Reichsbishopric of Ludwig Müller to be the Minister of the Reformed Church in the Spiritual Ministry (Geistlichen Ministerium) of the German Protestant Church (DEK) in September, 1933.

However, this new responsibility did not last long, as the German Christians' theological inclination toward the Nazi regime proved a trying one, culminating in the extremist speech by Reinhold Krause in November at the Berlin Sports Arena, where he exhibited a clear-cut inclination to the Nazi cause, with his theme of 'The Popular Mission of Luther'.<sup>4</sup> In fact it was after this speech that Weber quit the membership of the German Christian's, and also resigned his position at the Spiritual Ministry, and only accepting to stay on as a reformed representative after persuasion from Bishop Müller. But even this came to an end, when he finally resigned in December 22nd after the Christian Youth Associations were made part of the Hitler Youth.

And it was only with reluctance that he accepted the request from Müller to take over the role of the Commissarial Administrator for the Reformed Church in the Spiritual Ministry of 4th January, 1934.<sup>5</sup>

A sigh of relief\*, however, came in June 26th when he (Otto Weber) was appointed to the Chair of Reformed Theology as Professor at the University of Göttingen, where he succeeded Karl Barth who by now had moved to the University of Bonn - and whose position even then had become untenable due to the political pressure of the Nazi regime.<sup>6</sup>. Indeed his life was from now on settled into the Göttingen community where he married in the summer of the same year and only had outings especially during his vocations, and especially to his Rheinland home. And it was during this time that he became a member of the National Socialists Lecturers' Association.

In October 1936 he teamed up with Friedrich Gogarten in becoming members of the Theological Chamber of the 'Reichskirchenausschusses' whose concern was the integration of ethical (social ethics especially) concerns in theology.<sup>7</sup>

Otto Weber wrote his doctoral thesis in 1938 on the Biblical Knowledge of the Old Testament, under the supervision of Emmanuel Hirsch and Martin Gehardt, which he passed on 7th June, of that year after an oral examination on Calvin under Friedrich Gogarten and Emmanuel Hirsch.

\*Expression from Mrs Weber - interviewed on 12/7/88

From 1939 to 1945, Otto Weber was the Dean of the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Göttingen except for a short time in which he served as chaplain in the army during the war in a post he took over from Emmanuel Hirsch with the backing not only by those aligned to the Government of the day, but also by the Confessing Church. 1940 to 45 also saw him in the membership of the spiritual 'Vertauensrat' of the German Evangelical Church.

1950-51 and also 1957-58, saw him once again serving as Dean of Divinity Faculty in the University of Göttingen, where he subsequently was appointed as Chancellor of the University in 1958/59. In 1960 he was awarded honorary doctorate of divinity by the University of Edinburgh, especially in recognition of his contribution as a Reformed theologian.

From 1962-66 he undertook the chairmanship of the Foundation Committee, overseeing the founding of the University of Bremen, where he served as First Chancellor on the appointment of the Senate from 1964 to 1966. At this time he also was Vice Chairman of the Board of Curators of the 'Stiftung Volkswagenwerk'.

He died of heart attack in 1966 while on holiday in Switzerland.

Notes

1. cf. His biographical outline by Katrin Mercker in Theologenzeitung, hrsg Fachschaftsrat Theologie Nikolausbergerweg, GTZ, Göttingen, 1987, p. 74 f.
2. Ibid, p. 74f..
3. From an Interview with Mrs. Weber, on 12/7/1988, at Göttingen.
4. cf. Eberhard Busch's account in his book on Karl Barth: His life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, SCM Press, London, 1975, p. 232.
5. cf. Andreas Bartels, in Theologenzeitung, op. cit. p. 75.  
See also, Klaus Scholder: The Churches in the Third Reich, Vol. 2, SCM Press, London, 1988, p. 64.
6. cf. E. Busch. Karl Barth, SCM, London, 1975, p. 255-62.
7. Andreas Bartels, op cit.
8. cf. Robert Erickson: Theologians Under Hitler, Yale University Press, London, 1985, p. 197.
9. Ibid.  
See also, Katrin Mercker: Theologenzeitung, op. cit. p. 76.

## CHAPTER THREE

### OTTO WEBER'S BACKGROUND ANTHROPOLOGY: THE PERMEATING FACTOR IN HIS APPROACH

It is clear from Chapter One that what emerged out of the new direction of theology as a dominant theme in relation to the above question was that man is who he is before God. This assertion in the light of the theological task meant that here was a reassertion of the reformation dictum that the knowledge of God and that of ourselves are inseparable.<sup>1</sup>

For Otto Weber, this thesis formed the basis on which the subject of anthropology had to be dealt with in theology. And there were two-fold purposes for such a recognition; first was a corrective measure against an over-reaction from the egocentrism of the nineteenth century liberalism. For it was clear to him that the logical result of a narrow over-reaction would be the formulation of a theology that had to do only with God and not with man,

- with the creator and not the creature
- with eternity and not with time
- and with the 'absolute' which has no bearing on the relative.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, it will be a sheer misrepresentation of the God witnessed to in scripture as God who has to do with humanity.

Secondly, it served to underline the whole embracing realisation that man is a theme of theology because God is the theme of theology.<sup>3</sup>

But inasmuch as this has been stated, it is imperative that we spell out what is understood of man when it is spoken of as above.

Now, the starting point for Otto Weber is the recognition that the first and the last word of the Bible is not man - inasmuch as God of the Bible is not dependent on or is correlative to man. But to state that the issue in the Bible and in ~~the~~<sup>he does want</sup> message of the church is really man, <sup>and</sup> thus <sup>to</sup> negate any theological tendency that envisages a kind of platonic or agnostic notion of God's relation to man which has no concrete bearing, as is expressed in the Incarnation.

It is obvious that whenever concerns of anthropology arise, there is the dominant thought that man has always and everywhere been the object of his own reflection.<sup>4</sup> And this is well demonstrated in various disciplines, be it philosophy, science or art. The same is true in the formulation of various world views, where the central point is actually a working out of a pattern that exemplifies man's projection of himself upon the world.<sup>5</sup>

However, the thrust of theological anthropology is that what we have in the Christian proclamation and indeed 'the message of Jesus Christ is not additional insights about God, the world, and not even additional insight about man himself or a modification of man's self-understanding,'<sup>6</sup> but a

complete 'new foundation of his existence, the conversion of the whole direction of his existence.'<sup>7</sup> This clearly indicates that here is an invitation to a completely new view of man. For what is emphasized here is simply that 'man does not "exist" as a "being" in and of itself 'apart from his relationship to God.'<sup>8</sup> As Otto Weber states,

'This knowledge is not the result of an analysis of man, of his existence or his self-understanding. Rather, it is the other side of the message that God is the Creator, the Lord of this man. However, this message is not, in turn, just the communication of a doctrinal proposition - it is the proclamation by God himself in his dealing with man'<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the basis of our speaking of man as he who he is before God is because of the fact that God is God - for - the-creature. Indeed this for Weber is the qualifying factor of the linkage of the knowledge of God and that of ourselves in Christian theology.<sup>10</sup>

Even so, he recognises the dangers existing in every anthropological undertaking that aims at working out what can be said to be the universally applicable representation of man even with the Christian qualification. For it is obvious, as Weber points out, that the idea of humanity one comes out with, is in fact merely the expression of the self-understanding of a specific man breaking into a concrete situation, be it the man of the late classical period or of the European Enlightenment or the twentieth century. In this regard, he argues in the light of the above that the only possible way is that of perceiving "the" man from the perspective of <sup>the</sup> opposite who is contrasted to every man.<sup>12</sup>

This, for Weber is not found anywhere else other than in what is expressed in Christian faith as the scriptural depiction of man. For therein is the distinction which does not derive its universal picture of man from any qualities which are inherent in all men, or because of the universality of sin, but from the Old Testament message that the God of Israel is the Creator of ‘the’ man, and therein, He is the God who turns to all men in the anticipated age of salvation.<sup>13</sup>

Examples demonstrating this universalistic depiction of man are in the Yahwist Account of Creation in Genesis, where Israel's God is the creator of all men without any restrictions. The connection of faith in the creator and universalism is made most clearly in Deutero-Isaiah, even though it is already present in other prophetic books such as Amos. Indeed, the basic thrust of the New Testament is an exemplification of the Old Testament depictions as the father of Jesus Christ is none other than the God of Israel.<sup>14</sup> And thus, Weber sees the continuity being in the fact that,

‘God's relationship to and attitude toward ‘the’ man does not become a self-evident generality in the new covenant; but is now revealed in its exclusiveness and concentration, for it is identical with God's activity in the one man Jesus Christ, toward whom Israel's history has been proceeding and in whom it ends as the history of Israel according to the flesh’.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, it is in the light of this that the primary concern when dealing with a theme such as the ‘Adam-Christ’ is not so much with the analogy, but only with the fact that we are dealing here with the idea that humanity is qualified not just by whatever characteristics it bears, but by the total

constitution which God has set in him.<sup>16</sup> And so to speak of humanity before God is to re-state, therefore, that which is exemplified in Christ's event. For therein, the unity of mankind is rooted in the Unity of God as the Living, Triune Unity, in which God discloses himself to man.<sup>17</sup>

But this stance has not been pursued by Weber at the expense of not addressing himself adequately to the dominant question of human self-understanding in relation to theological anthropology. On the contrary, he begins with the recognition that one cannot envisage a conception of an understanding of humanity that does not take the question of human self-understanding seriously without ending with some gnostic view which essentially suggest man's creaturely sphere to be alien to God.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, he takes note of the fact that what is spoken of is not a kind of a 'complementary' picture where the revelation event seems to affirm what is already there. For the constant assertion of the Christian message is that what takes place in Jesus Christ is a 'total redefinition of the man who receives it.'<sup>19</sup> In other words, 'God's revelation in Jesus Christ (as the basis of theological anthropology) bears the ultimate questioning of man and simultaneously his only truly positive affirmation.'<sup>20</sup>

And this for him sets the basis on which the question had to be dealt with. Hence, his embrace of the New Testament concept of *Metanoia* (repentance, conversion) as the adequate medium in exemplifying the connection between the transformation of existence and that of our self-understanding. For he reckons in the concept something more than a change

of ‘mind’ or ‘opinion’, especially when its old testament rooting in the concept of *shub* (to turn back, to turn around) refers not to the thinking, meditating, or reflecting, but to the direction and constitution of existence.<sup>21</sup> And this for Weber was a clear indication that Christian anthropology essentially rests upon something other than a mere alteration of our understanding of our being and to that extent also represents something essentially different from the unfolding of such a process.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed this was at the root of his polemic against Emil Brunner's notion of “Continuity” between unbelieving or untransformed man and the transformed. For to him, the only basis of continuity, if any, is that which is understood in the light of “Christ-event” which in reality exemplifies a ~~more~~ decisively changed concept of continuity than that which is thought of by Brunner.<sup>23</sup> This is to say that even when a pneumatological basis is sought, the basic thrust of what emerges is demonstrative of what is understood of the person of Jesus Christ as God-man. The dynamic operation of the Spirit does not eliminate nor negate the given human factor, but enlists it for service in its reality. This is to say that the Christian message is not received in a kind of super-human status, but in the reality of human speech and activity which is true of every creaturely reality. And according to Weber,

‘It becomes the reality which overcomes and transforms him (man) only in the incomprehensible and incalculable work of the Spirit of God. And where this happens, the self-understanding of man is not eliminated but penetrated, turned around, brought into a new direction and under a new Lordship.’<sup>24</sup>

But the question remains as to what relationship there is between what is

formulated as theological anthropology and the Christian experience!

What is clear from the above is that Weber sees in the acknowledgement of a specific theological anthropology a negation of any notion suggesting its basis being found in the natural man. But having said this, it is clear that the question of Christian experience remains to be addressed. The problem as pointed out is not new, nor are the attempts to give it a significant role. Weber indeed points out that this goes to Calvin who did ascribe a significant role to "experience". But as is well known, it was in Schleiermacher that an integrated system was formulated with his stress on the 'self-consciousness'.<sup>25</sup> And as far as Weber is concerned, the dominant polemic against human experience being thought of as forming any basis for theological articulation does not erase the fact that there is the 'experience' of being a Christian! As he puts it, 'It does not mean that an 'it' in us believes, nor the Holy Spirit in us believes, but faith is designated in the New Testament as the faith of this or that person.'<sup>26</sup>

The distinction that has to be drawn in Weber's view, however, is that when we talk of the Christian view of man, it is not the analysis of the 'Christian' person, nor is theological anthropology to be dependent upon Christian experience as its source and foundation.<sup>27</sup> Decisive in the said stance is the view that what makes Christian experience is not within itself. For he understands what is at the heart of faith as the faithfulness of God

which is, therefore, responded to rather than the other way around. And this no doubt expresses the reformed assertion of *sola gratia*. But what is more important for Weber is that we do not believe on the basis of our experience, but in spite of it. Hence, his recall of Luther's dictum, 'Our experience provides "opposition" to our faith'.<sup>28</sup> And it is in the light of this that he states:

'this opposition, which certainly exists in Christian experience, can only be understood on the basis of the word addressed to us, as the opposition of our existence before God.'

Furthermore, the reality of "being in Christ" as stated in the New Testament (Gal. 2.20) does not imply an account to a religious experience emergent out of the event, but the accent as far as Weber is concerned is upon the One who gives himself to the believer.<sup>30</sup> We see a similar point being made by Newlands, when he states:

'....you cannot define the reality of the human person without taking into account the reality of God. The hope of man lies in the evidence that the openness we need is offered to us by and as the openness of the love of God.'

In summary, therefore, it is clear for Weber that since the borderline character of Christian experience is in the reality of faith, this experience cannot be an independent object of reflection, and thus, is unattainable as the foundation for a theological anthropology. And it is on this basis that he follows Barth's stance in contrast to that of Bultmann or Paul Tillich.<sup>32</sup> For as he states, "the reality which is the essence of the derived reality of faith as our faith is not transcendent or beyond in the metaphysical sense, but in the

strictest sense it is ‘outside’ of ourself, that is, not derived from us, nor in us, but solely in the triune God himself, who is, however, our God.”<sup>33</sup>.

Unlike Barth, whose emphasis minimises any role of man, Weber’s concern is to establish the primary starting point of reflection in God’s event and from this reality restate the dynamic expression that is best exemplified in the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Having said this, there is no doubt that he sees the initial task of any theological anthropology as reckoning with the reality of man’s creatureliness in relation to God. Secondly, there is the imperative factor of human sinfulness which in biblical language is exemplified by the constant state of alienation and conflict with the Creator. And it is on this basis that he revisits Barth’s Christologically based anthropology where man as a creature is not spoken of in an isolated way, but also as one who is a sinner. This is to say, ‘in Jesus Christ our creatureliness is revealed in such a way, that at the same time our sin is revealed through him as truly sin’.<sup>34</sup>

Now, Weber understands this in two ways: first is the sense that in Jesus Christ our sin appears before God as what has been absolutely, powerfully, and effectively negated; and the second sense is that in Jesus Christ our sin is first recognized as what it is for us. And these two senses for him make up the core of the ‘theology of the cross’ in the light of which it becomes clear that only in ‘looking to the man Jesus’ can we fully appear as what we are before God, and thus in truth: creature and sinner, not in ambivalent polarity, but in a unity which we cannot intellectually dissolve

but which God solves in this man Jesus'.<sup>35</sup> And this becomes even more plain in his treatment of Christology which is the focus of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Otto Weber. Foundations of Dogmatics, Vol. 1, op. cit. p. 529. See also, T.F. Torrance, Calvin's Doctrine of Man, Lutterworth Press, London, 1949, p. 13.
2. Otto Weber, ibid.
3. op. cit., p. 530.
4. op. cit. p. 531. See also Karl Jaspers: Man in Modern Age, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1933, p. 144-162.
5. op. cit. p. 532.
6. op. cit.
7. op. cit.
8. op. cit.
9. op. cit. p. 533.
10. op. cit.
11. op. cit., p. 535.
12. op. cit.
13. op. cit.

See also H.W. Robinson: The Christian Doctrine of Man, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1958, p. 467.

14. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 535.
15. op. cit., p. 536.
16. op. cit.

See also Karl Barth's article Christ and Adam - Man and Humanity in Romans 5, in Scottish Journal of Theology - Occasional Papers No. 5. Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1986.

17. Otto Weber, op. cit. p.535.

18. Otto Weber, op. cit. p. 538.

cf an interesting affirmation on this point though from a different perspective in Rudolf Bultmann: Faith and Existence, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1960, p. 93.

19. Otto Weber, op. cit. p. 539.

20. op. cit.

21. op. cit. p. 541.

22. op. cit.

23. op. cit. p. 542.

See Emil Brunner: Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology, Lutterworth Press, London, 1947, repr. p. 135 ff.

The only basis in which one could speak of continuity for Weber is if it is meant the concealed continuousness of the preparatory, guiding work of the spirit of God (cf. Augustinian Prevenient grace).

24. Otto Weber, op. cit. p. 544.

25. op. cit., Vol.1, p. 545.

See also, H.D. McDonald: The Christian View of Man, Marshall Morgan & Scott, London, 1981, p. 102.

26. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1., p. 546.

27. op. cit.

28. op. cit. p. 547.

cf. also H.W. Robinson: The Christian Doctrine of Man, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1958, p. 217 ff.

29. Otto Weber, op. cit.

30. op. cit. p. 549.

See also David Jenkins: The Glory of Man, SCM, London, 1967, p. 112.

31. G. Newlands: Theology of the Love of God, Collins, London, 1980, p. 133.

32. cf. H.D. McDonald, The Christian View of Man, Marshall Morgan & Scott, London, 1981, p. 121 ff.

33. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 549.

34. op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 558.

35. op. cit.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FOCUS ON CHRISTOLOGY

Any treatment of the subject of Christology cannot escape addressing itself to the fact that what is at issue is the teaching about Jesus which lies at the heart of the proclamation of the Christian faith and theology. The sense in which this centrality is understood is, therefore paramount, as it has bearing on the articulation of those issues which arise there ~~from~~ and which have always shaped the discussion of Christology itself. There is also the question of methodology and the basic concerns of the subject as dealt with in Otto Weber's theological milieu and the wider context of Protestant theology in the post-second World War Period and their implications for contemporary approaches to Christology.

Besides the variety of ways in which Jesus Christ is understood in His centrality to the proclamation of the Christian faith and theology, Otto Weber highlights two that have always emerged as dominant in the development of Christian theology. These are: The depiction of Jesus Christ as the fundamental 'idea' to Christianity and indeed the very 'principle' through which Christian faith defines its utterance, - and the depiction of Jesus Christ as the One who has brought about the 'turning-point' in man's relationship to God or in the religious self-understanding of man.<sup>1</sup> The former, according to Otto Weber, finds its basic root in the view that only the 'spiritual' has the character of valid authority. It is clear to him that this kind of thinking is not new as it was already propounded by the exponents of docetism in the early Church.

In fact the emphasis on unconditional prior positioning of the spiritual element over the historical by the spiritualists during the Reformation was in itself a revisit to this docetic type of thought even though their stand fell short of denying the historicity of Jesus Christ. The same is true for the well-known dictum of G.E.Lessing that, ‘Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason’.<sup>2</sup> For besides the basic polemic directed against any reliance on historical conveyance of ‘truths of history’ from generation to generation (that is, directed against ‘historical criticisms’ - viewing of this as source of that which could be said to be valid), the essence of this statement advocates nothing other than the proposition that the spiritual alone is valid.<sup>3</sup> And this is what becomes even more explicit in J.G. Fichte when he states that the ‘metaphysical only, and not the historical can give blessedness; the latter can only give us understanding.’<sup>4</sup> F.W. Schelling exemplifies the same along the lines of what was the initial proposition of the so-called speculative Christology. For his concept of the ‘incarnation of God’, interpreted as the ‘incarnation of eternity’ - a process culminating in Christ’s assumption of a visible human form (appearance as the opposite concept to idea) and being its beginning also because of this reason, - is in no way different with the understanding of the Christ-idea as the code, disguise, expression, or manifestation of the unity of the absolute, which is realizing itself in history, with the relative - i.e. the world and the human race.<sup>5</sup> Another demonstration is what was already exemplified in Immanuel Kant’s equation of the ‘Son of God’ with the ‘Ideal of humanity well pleasing to God.’<sup>6</sup> And so is Friedrich Hegel as Weber points out in this statement, ‘But the history of Christ is a history for the spiritual community because it is absolutely adequate to the idea’, while the basic thought to be acknowledged in ‘God’s ambassador’ who has

preceded us is ‘only the effort of Spirit to reach the determination implied in the implicit unity of the divine and human.’<sup>7</sup>

The inevitable consequence of this kind of thinking is what we find in David Friedrich Strauss’ speculative Christology exemplified in his ‘Life of Jesus’ where he devalues completely the historical and the personal in Jesus Christ. And the same can be said of those who chose a middle way. For the essence of their approach bears the said inclination.

Weber acknowledges the datedness of speculative Christology and docetic thinking in contemporary theology. But his concern is directed against what he sees in this contemporary period as the re-emergence of similar inclinations if not a kind of thinking which lead to it. A notable example is what he sees as the dominant factor in historical critical research and aligned dogmatics’ shifting of the ‘historicity’ of Jesus into the center. For the fact that some of its leading exponents such as Wilhelm Herrmann has his understanding of history dominated by the idea of morality, and Martin Kähler’s concept of ‘the suprahistorical’ being insecure from dissolving into an idea, raises the question as to whether the basis of their understanding the historicity of Jesus is not that of an idea.<sup>78</sup> Indeed this is what becomes critical when one directs this against trends in contemporary theology where radical historical scepticism is linked with theological personalism, itself influenced by existential philosophy. For according to Weber, what flourishes out of such a soil is a ‘Christocentricity’ which in reality is nothing more than this Personalism in disguise.<sup>9</sup> Hence his assertion that the logical end of such an approach as it relates to Jesus Christ, is that one is not dealing with a person but rather with the idea of a person, or with the original form of our own being as person, or even our own

historicity.<sup>10</sup> And this for him is to deny the genuine ‘confrontation’ for us in Jesus Christ - either binding or loosing as we would instead be cast back on ourselves.

By way of summary then, the understanding of the centrality of Jesus Christ in terms of that which is spiritual and, therefore valid, leads to the ‘Christ-Idea’ concept which is in itself a misrepresentation of the Christ-event. For as we have illustrated, it does not only lead to the denial of the historical and the Personal in Jesus, but ultimately leads to a mere act of self-confirmation and simultaneously man's self-exaltation. More so as the spiritual element called Christ is understood as corresponding to our own being Spirit or to our possession of spirit and thus, an act of self-confirmation or exaltation which shuts itself completely from the one whose encounter and confrontation brings about decision and liberation. Without this reality, the very task and understanding of the centrality of Jesus Christ which Christology endeavours to exemplify is misrepresented. Hence, Weber's assertion that the centrality of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Christian faith and theology is never that of an idea.<sup>11</sup>

The alternative possibility speaking of Jesus as the Center would be by the latter concept of the ‘Turning-Point’ as it is a proposition which places us on the foundation of history. In fact Otto Weber points to the various Biblical texts which speak of Jesus Christ in a way that what is meant concerns history in a practically exclusive sense. For example, John 3:17 when it speaks of the Son ‘being sent into the world’ or Gal. 4:4 whose term ‘fullness of time’ means that the Son confronts us temporally.<sup>12</sup> And, therefore, there is no doubt in the synoptic gospels, John and Paul or the

entire New Testament tradition that our encounter with Jesus Christ is in the reality of temporality and earthliness, i.e. within the realm of history and time - a factor neglected or marginalised by the proponents of a Christ-idea. What this concept also means, however, is that in Jesus Christ, a "time" reaches its conclusion, a "time" is consummated and a "time" is inaugurated.<sup>13</sup> And this raises the question of the adequacy of the term even though it is not ambiguous.

For as Weber points out, the term cannot be said to refer to the course of events of "World history" in an empirical sense without clarification. And this is simply because what has taken place in Church history and even the so-called 'Christendom' cannot be said to have been directly influenced by Jesus Christ in an empirical sense. What is sustainable is the point that the effects of the event - 'Jesus of Nazareth' have left their traces in the face of world history - even though they are not comprehensive as other cultures' history have scarcely been affected or influenced by them.<sup>14</sup> The viable view then would be with the understanding of the turning-point in terms of the work of Jesus Christ rather than in terms of his historical influence. In Weber's words,

It is not in terms of world history, but ..... 'the history of salvation', the history of God's dealing with man, which is not to be understood as a kind of special history within, next to, or even superior to "World history". It is to be understood as the relationship of 'World history' to God - who imparts to that history its validity.<sup>15</sup>

Taking the concept as it is though, the biblical depiction does not in anyway point to something happening in the event of Jesus Christ which was not oriented towards it, but as an involvement of him who has all along been involved - God himself, the begotten Son. And it is this that Weber sees

finding expression in this concept when understood eschatologically, 'solely as a "then" which was once and for all, which neither arises out of the historically recognizable given nor proves itself to be the turning point in the sum of recognizable effects'.<sup>16</sup> Hence, his concluding remark that as a term, 'turning point' cannot be said to be in itself an adequate description of the sense in which Jesus Christ is the center of the proclamation of the Christian faith and its theological articulation.

What emerges out of this analysis of these two concepts, however, has to be taken into account as it affects the very understanding of the task of Christology. For besides its false representation of the centrality of Jesus, the 'Christ-Idea' as articulated in the former concept is in itself an attempt to state an understanding of Jesus Christ as the one in whom the absolutely valid, that which "unconditionally concerns us" encounters us. Although the latter concept of the 'turning point' has its strengths in bringing to the fore the issue of the uniqueness, unrepeatability, historicity, temporality, personality and capacity for decision of the "biblical christ-event", it remains insufficient without our speaking simultaneously of the validity of the Christ event.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it is only when this is dealt with in this light that it can be argued in a general sense, that it is expressing the task of Christology - which as Weber states, is to

'give an account of what is meant when the Biblical witness and following it the Church speak of Jesus Christ's history at a specific time, and of his uniqueness, and do so in the sense that this history and uniqueness as such have the special validity which establishes faith, even though they can only be recognised in faith'.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, it states explicitly what is comprehended by our speaking of Jesus Christ as the Lord, the Son of God.

In fact, it is in the light of the understanding of this task that Christology has always been dealt with in the context of the doctrine of trinity, as the event of Jesus Christ, as an exemplification of the Trivine God acting upon us and being for us. In other words, the focus on this particular activity of Christ's event and thereby on the one in whom God encounters us as our God is never dealt with in an exclusive sense, but in recognition of the said context. And it is with this that we turn to the question of methodology.

It is clear from the above that to speak of Jesus Christ is to speak of His work as we cannot speak of the Person of Jesus Christ in and of itself, just as there is no comprehension of his work apart from his person. However, the immediate concern is not so much the justification of the above proposition for even when distinctive treatments of the above is undertaken, there is the imperative relation which brings about meaning to both. But the imperative question as to which order is the appropriate one to follow when articulating what in every Christology is said of Jesus Christ in 'two-fold' yet one (of the concept of the 'God-man') is a valid one.

Indeed what has come to be known as the 'great divide' in contemporary Christology between 'Christology from above' and 'Christology from below' is in itself a demonstration of the problem this question raises.

It is therefore imperative that we address ourselves to these approaches in our attempt to work out what can be a viable methodology for Christology.

a) Christology from above

As Weber indicates, ancient Christology's presupposition of the eternal deity of the Son meant that beginning from above was a given factor which came before speaking about the incarnation and humanity of Jesus. In this regard, the approach was very much in line with the relationship between the problem of the Trinity and that of Christology, as the former concerned itself with the essential issue as to whether, in Jesus Christ, God himself, 'God once more', and the eternal Son or a being which was divine but not deity were present. And the answers given till the fourth and fifth centuries including those European modifications under the influence of Augustine by implication affirmed both in structure and method the said precedence of the deity of Jesus before speaking of his humanity. The same is true with classical Christology - even though its major question since the fourth century was that of 'how one should conceive of the eternal son taking on "the form of man or humanity itself" and uniting himself with it.'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Weber notes this basic structure permeating the medieval period through to the reformation even if the emphasis in Martin Luther is the theology of the Cross and so with John Calvin even as he rejected Luther's Idea of ambiguity.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, the maintenance of 'Christ's' emptying of himself, as the starting point set the framework from above to below. And there is no doubt as Weber observes, that this approach in classical Christology has that corresponding characteristic of the New Testament witness. The same can be said in relation to the definition of the Biblical relationship between God as the Creator and man as the Creature.

Both in terms of revelation which is understood in terms of God's initiative in his self-disclosure to man, and even in the reality of man's

sinfulness which clearly shows man as the problem and not God, the initiative of salvation is from God, i.e. from above to below.

The question that Weber raises is whether this sequence in itself is a prescription for the approach to the subject. For he finds in this given structure that even if the direction is from above to below, the reverse side that has to be addressed is the fact that ‘God himself cannot be known in any other way except in what does happen here below.’<sup>20</sup> Hence, his remark, ‘We recognize his being (God’s) in and of itself in his being for us, i.e., Jesus Christ’.<sup>21</sup> In this way, he sees in the direction of classical Christology a pattern that is in itself the source of its criticism. For unless one wants to remain with abstract propositions, there has to be a recognition that theological discussion is only possible at the event of revelation just as that which concerns the eternal Son is only possible in the context of his incarnation.<sup>22</sup> Whereas Weber recognizes classical Christology’s endeavour to speak the reality of God’s prior superiority and divine majesty, he maintains that the Biblical witness which is the basis of theological articulation shows that speaking of this is in reality ‘speaking of the superiority which is directed toward us, that is, of free grace, and of the glory which is disclosed to us, which is the free act, and of the communicable attributes of the One who has related Himself to the creature, that is, of God, in Christ’.<sup>23</sup> Hence his questioning of the ‘above’ Christology as to whether its proponents paid adequate attention to the fact that ‘God’s majesty is encountered by us solely in his Condescension.’<sup>24</sup> What Weber does not say, however, is that the recognition of this fact does not render the proposition invalid. On the contrary, the ‘above’ starting point is affirmed in God who takes the initiative in encountering us in the below.

b) Christology from Below

It is clear from the heading that what we have here is the reversal of the above. Although this approach has come to characterise most contemporary Christological formulations, Otto Weber traces its origin to the fundamental transformation of man's self-understanding brought about by the enlightenment under the influence of older spiritualism. And the primary point of departure came with the alteration of what was the basic problem in classical Christology - namely man in his relationship to God. In Webers' words, "For classical Christology, God was not really the problem, but it was man in his relationship to God. This was reversed for the man of the enlightenment. Man is now not the problem at all, but God is in every way! His existence must first be proven, and the only acceptable way to do that was in terms of what reason can directly assert or what can be deduced as the unquestionable object of reasonable knowledge".<sup>25</sup> It is debatable as to how this shift altered the formulation of Christology. But the dominant characteristic emanating from the emphasis on the 'below' - on what McGrath calls 'an essentially rational cosmos in which man, as a rational being, works toward his own moral perfection through conforming himself to the rational moral structures of the cosmos'<sup>26</sup> - is that the significance of Jesus was not more than that of the first among equals' as he was acknowledged to be more advanced than the rest of mankind.

Although modern Christology did affirm this approach from 'below', it is Weber's contention that this is not to be viewed as a direct continuation of the enlightenment. Obviously there is a common rejection of classical Christology. But the emphasis on history is more a distinctive feature which Weber rightly states as more sharply directed against speculative Christology and its understanding of the above in terms of an 'Idea' than as a critique of the 'above' emphasis in classical Christology. Indeed, the emphasis on

history of Jesus of Nazareth understood as no different from any other was in itself a rejection of the Idealism of Speculative Christology which devalued this historicity of Jesus as we already demonstrated in David Strauss.

In terms of Christology, however, what emerges out of this emphasis on the historicity of Jesus Christ is the understanding of the assertions being made about him in terms of the Moral Ideal as in Albrecht Ritschl (such that his treatment of Jesus was in no different from the ordinary except by asserting that he was in an exceptional way that which can be said of an historical personality), or as in Wilhelm Herrmann following Schleiermacher whose acknowledgement of Jesus as the one who completely belongs to God - and therefore discloses that which is of God (his being, love and forgiveness). But even this distinction which is derived from the assertion that in Jesus Christ is the self revelation of God, the basic interpretation of what this means is in terms of what can be understood as the 'power of good' such that Christian piety can only arise in the field of man's moral experience.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Weber's observation that what we have here is an exemplification of the legacy of Immanuel Kant.

The Question of the historical Jesus school in its new form, had their methodological framework set within this 'below' approach as they preoccupied themselves with the man Jesus Christ as he could be understood through historical critical analysis of the New Testament witness. And this inclination is what is found also in Wolfhart Pannenberg whose approach in contemporary Protestant theology revolves around the conception of Christology as an inquiry into what Jesus was<sup>28</sup> - as he says in his own words that

'the task of Christology is to establish the true understanding of Jesus' significance from history, which can be described comprehensively by saying that in this man God is revealed.'<sup>29</sup>

The immediate question that arises here though is how one can arrive at such a true understanding of Jesus Christ that is not subject to the presupposed system of historical reconstruction already worked out and which is no doubt indebted to its philosophical foundation? In fact, this is the same point that has been raised by McGrath in his criticism of Pannenberg's theological programme which to him seems to suggest a distinction between the knowledge of the history of Jesus of Nazareth which can be treated as prior and independent from faith.<sup>30</sup> For him, this is a questionable proposition which does not seem to take into account the nature of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. In his view,

'It has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the New Testament sources present historical facts as they are perceived by faith - faith operating in the perception of historical fact in the Kerygma'.<sup>31</sup>

The reality of an irreversible intermingling of faith and history in the New Testament source itself, therefore, shows how questionable it is to suggest a possible isolation of these two inseparable factors. What is encountered therein on the contrary is both an historical account as well as an assertion of his significance which implies that to speak of the 'Christ-event' is to speak of God in relation to man and man in relation to God; a factor which suggests more a correlative relation of the 'above' to the 'below' and vice versa than the one way approach of the 'below' to the above, as advanced by Pannenberg in contemporary Christology.

This is to say that any attempt that seeks to express the said event in terms of an exemplification of Christ's true solidarity with humanity cannot be said to be a viable proposition when it pursues a stance that sacrifices one aspect of his Person. Indeed this criticism has been raised even more explicitly by Colin Gunton against Karl Rahner's below approach and especially in his advocacy of a 'degree Christology' which aims at overcoming the traditional Christology's apparent insistence on the miraculous otherness of Jesus at the expense of his humanity.<sup>32</sup> In fact, John Robinson's embrace of this expression of the 'below' approach is a fitting example of a revisit to the propositions we encountered in the modern period especially in Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Herrmann. For his statement that,

‘If one had to choose, I should side with those who opt for a 'degree Christology' - however enormous the degree. For to speak of Jesus as different in kind from all other men is to threaten, if not to destroy, his true solidarity with other men;’<sup>33</sup>

actually defines the significance of Jesus in terms of his possession of human qualities - except in a large and unique degree - which is close to depicting him as the moral and religious Ideal.<sup>34</sup> And this, for Weber, cannot be said to be expressive of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ.

A general overview of both the 'above' and the 'below' methodologies then show the insufficiency of either approach in expressing what can be said to do justice to the reality of the Christ-event. For as Weber points out, reckoning with the New Testament Witness to this event shows that,

‘Christology cannot begin solely from ‘above’ because God is not ‘solely above’ but rather in Christ the God of man; Christology is not solely from ‘below’ because what is ‘below’ is only that by virtue of God’s act, and in relationship to this ‘below’ faith does not perform an apotheosis.’<sup>35</sup>

This meant that the only way that was capable of doing justice to this reality derived from the Biblical witness was a correlative methodological approach which upheld the correlation of the ‘above’ and the ‘below’, God and Man, time and eternity and indeed immanence and transcendence which takes place in the God-man Jesus Christ.

Inasmuch as the reality of the Biblical witness was a dictate in working out the question of the epistemological approach to Christology in Weber, the treatment of the actual question of Christology was no exception. In fact, his preoccupation with Christology has been formulated throughout the history of the Church and within theology as a scholarly discipline begins with an overview of the content of Biblical witness itself as the ultimate source and foundation of any articulation on the subject. And it is in examining this that we can set his contribution in perspective. But before doing this, it is worth taking note of what he understands of the character of the New Testament tradition.

It is clear to Weber that whenever one is dealing with the New Testament, it is imperative to bear in mind that the character of its tradition is already of Christological significance. For what we encounter therein is a testimony of people who believe in Jesus and their confession of him as Lord goes beyond the confines of their circle as they claim the same for those without and indeed for the World. Furthermore, it is a testimony rooted within a community of faith which has come to understand itself as the eschatological Community of Salvation, which means that it does not see itself in terms of the subjective conditions of its members, but in terms of the eschaton which has broken through in its Lord. Their testimony is therefore dependent on

**Jesus Christ, inasmuch as their very existence as a Community is.**

What is even more significant is that their portrait of Jesus goes beyond a biographical account in that there is virtually no interest in the development of his personality. Instead what we encounter therein is an exhibition of who Jesus Christ is in terms of his work.<sup>36</sup> Emerging out of the witness of this tradition is therefore an assertion that is the very decisive problem in Christology itself, i.e.,

‘How are we to interpret the fact that the divine decision which Jesus Christ, according to the testimony of the community, brings and takes concrete form in this one who is totally man, man before God, and not just man in and of himself but man for mankind?’<sup>37</sup>

In other words, ‘We are confronted with the early church’s assertion of Jesus as ‘true God and true Man’<sup>38</sup> - which can be repeated and interpreted when the witness of the New Testament is discussed in terms of its content according to Otto Weber.

### **THE BIBLICAL WITNESS TO JESUS**

Scholarship always entails discussion. And there is no exception when dealing with the content of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. Hence Weber’s setting up of such statements in their most important groupings even though he recognizes that they are totally integrated into each other.

What emerges from his summarized overview is as follows: first is the fact that what we immediately encounter in the New Testament is an exemplification of the genuineness and unlimited reality of the humanity of Jesus. Indeed the Gospel writers were part of the community of men and

women whose understanding of Jesus, the teacher and prophet from Nazareth as a man, did not constitute a problem, nor was there any theological significance that he was so as John Knox observes.<sup>39</sup> Hence their depiction of him as any other man who could be hungry, thirsty, be in need of sleep, be angry, suffer homelessness and indeed have friends and enemies.<sup>40</sup> The summary point is that these traits in the portrait of Jesus which he shares with everyman are given factors of Jesus' humanity which needed no explanation or qualification.

The only distinctive point that is of particular significance as Weber observer, is to reckon with those elements of the tradition which portray Jesus as the man before God. For even if most of the statements briefly alluded to above could be said of a god who appears in metamorphosis as a man, the New Testament emphasis is on those statements that assert Jesus as a man before God. This is to say that there is something more or      which goes beyond the physical and psychic qualities of human beings. It means rather to be the being before God who is ordained to be God's opposite in relationship, and whose existence takes place "under the law", that is, in obedience given or refused.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed he illustrates this fact by pinpointing the twofold rendering of Jesus as 'born under the law'. The first being that placing of Jesus in the realm which is ruled by the law as expressed in the Old Testament. Hence the binding law of uncleanness and the sacrifice of purification on his mother at birth (cf. Luke 2:22 ff), His subjection to circumcision and customary pilgrimage (Luke 2:9, 41ff), keeping the legal obligations such as those of taxation for the temple, sending the healed to the chief priest and such like acts of a man of faith within the Judaistic tradition (cf Mt. 17:24 ff). However, the second has

Jesus' own express confession of this law's validity for himself (Matth. 5: 17 ff; Mk 10: 19, 12:28 ff) such that there was no doubt of his understanding of the 'law and the prophets' as the only expression of the will of God.<sup>43</sup> The significance of this affirmation, however, is not in terms of the distorted form it comes to be held. Instead the Gospel writers demonstrate his 'obedient yes to the law as a struggle against the law which man had autonomously made to himself, in which the good will of God was made into man's security in relationship to God.'<sup>44</sup> His was, therefore, a 'transformation of the law that had been made into a codex of norms, the observation of which is thought by the pious person to be a protective wall he can use against God, into a "radical attack by God upon man in his selfhood .... ..that of his self-security".<sup>45</sup>

The depiction of his life as a man of prayer, <sup>of his</sup> struggles of obedience in the face of temptation and trying moments, his act of humility - giving God the glory in all things, was understood in no other way than as the conduct of a man before his Creator. In fact, the characterization of his reality in the New Testament is such that Weber finds no similarity with the conduct of a 'god' appearing in a disguised form as a man.

Reckoning with the fact that the Gospels were written from the perspective of the Cross, and none of them depicting an understanding of the Passion as a heterogenous catastrophe, but all seeing the life of Jesus before the Cross and His life leading to it, and that both the proclamation and the behaviour of Jesus, not to speak of his own prophecies of his suffering, correspond to that unconditionally, the life of Jesus, then, is shown here as not that of a mere human existence.<sup>46</sup> As we said already, in relation to the Biblical concept of man, it is clear, as Weber observes, that the life of Jesus

is understood as that which was ordained for human existence.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the phrase ‘man from above’ is a crown of that obedience that distinguishes man from the ordinary reference to our experience or anthropology, but in terms of God who is at work in him. Hence Bultmann’s definition of this New Testament understanding of Jesus’ human existence as God’s act<sup>48</sup> (cf. the Prologue of John and Ph. 2:6). Indeed this is what underlies John Knox’s viewing of the earliest Christology as adoptionist.<sup>49</sup>

When it comes to the New Testament name of Jesus as the Christ, it is inevitable that there is the immediate linkage with the Messianic concept that is rooted in the Old Testament . . . thereby denoting Jesus’ messianic claim. However, Weber indicates quite clearly that the content of the New Testament witness has no express depiction of the term understood in that sense. On the contrary, we find the Gospel writers being very careful in stating whether Jesus called himself the Messiah (the Christ) before his Passion. For example, there is every indication that Jesus did not make his Messiahship (defined in the narrow sense) into the theme of his proclamation

He

- ‘responds to the messianic “testimony of the faithless” - of the demonic by commanding them to be silent (Mk1:24; 3:11; 5:7)
- to the messianic confession of Peter .. by commanding him to be silent! (Mk8:276)
- responds to the high priest’s question about the messiah affirmatively
- but with reference to the coming son of man (Mk14:61f)
- answers the messianic query of the Samaritan woman (Jn4:25f) with the typical Johannine “I am he” ’50

Even when these cited passages are said to be the creation of the early church, the issue remains. For Weber points out that this was the Community that believed in Jesus, that passed on the rich sayings, the accounts of mighty deeds by Jesus before the Cross that clearly made the

messianic claim of Jesus literary known and reflected. How the same tradition can speak of Jesus as avoiding the term “Christ” or Messiah, even amongst the disciples is therefore a puzzling question. One view which Weber affirms is that ‘the Community understood the acts and words of Jesus before the Cross and Resurrection solely in the light of the Cross and Resurrection’.<sup>51</sup>

There is also Julius Schniewind's view that it was Jesus' intention.<sup>52</sup> The uniting point in both, however, is that from the light of the Cross and the Resurrection, Jesus was in fact already the Christ concealed in the opposite form - a reality which Weber says still exists even apart from faith.<sup>53</sup>

The issue then is not one of Jesus' messianic consciousness, or the community's claim which is attributed only to their experience, but the distinctive factor that 'he who was crucified' (Acts 2: 36) has been made by God both Lord and Christ, and has been 'designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead (Rom: 1:4)'.<sup>54</sup> In other words, there is a complete transformation of the understanding of the concept of messiahship in Jesus. For the above entails that the Gospel's description of Jesus' way to the Cross was one of obedience, such that,

‘The Cross signifies not only the concealment of the majesty of Jesus from our knowing, but also the final confirmation and realization of the fact that the messiahship of Jesus is not to be understood in terms of majesty at all (e.g., in the political sense), but as obedience and humility, in complete contradiction to all the expectations of that time and to every human desire.’<sup>55</sup>

In this respect, the understanding of Jesus' humanity even in being called the Christ was not different.

Linked with the above is the indication in the New Testament witness that the term ‘Christ’ used both as title and name of Jesus has the particularity that belongs to the special history of God’s dealing with Israel and which is defined in his covenant promise in the Old Testament. And therefore we do not have a depiction of Jesus in terms of the “Universal” history of ‘man as such’ or of abstractly conceived humanity, but one that exemplifies this particularity, which is a great puzzle and offense in the history of humanity.<sup>56</sup> When it comes to the question of his humanity then, there is no doubt that he belonged to a particular nation, culture and tradition. And in relation to his function, he is the Christ of all men because of the particularity of God’s promise rooted in the covenant with Israel.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, it is in the light of this that his coming is understood in terms of the Jewish expectation of God’s promise of Salvation (cf. Gal. 3: 15, ff). And as we already stated, the distinction that came to be made was in the understanding of Jewish popular thought. In other words, Christ as the expected one did not act of himself but as the one mandated, elected, and empowered by God.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, it was already evident in Jewish eschatology that Salvation was Universal! - leading to the establishment of the sole Lordship of God. But the point of divergence is that he is not the one Israel expects in their distorted conception of the Messiah’s role. In this regard, fulfilment of God’s salvific promise in the coming of Christ is in itself a crisis to the Jewish expectation, as is evident in their rejection and crucifixion of him.

The title of the ‘Son of Man’ - or the ‘Coming One’ is found predominantly in the Gospels (including John) where it is used as a messianic title unlike “Christ” which appears here in a concealed form, yet

dominant outside the Gospels. It is not disputed that as a title, it does not have a messianic reference in the Old Testament, except in the formal sense that is given in Daniel 7: 13 f. - where it refers to the context of the people of Salvation.<sup>59</sup> The givenness of its usage in the Gospels according to Weber, therefore, suggests that the title must have been known as the mysterious description of the One who was to come - indicating a development of its conception from that already stated in the Old Testament, as is illustrated in the so-called similitudes of Ethiopic Enoch.<sup>60</sup> In fact there have been suggestions as to whether what we have here are assertions that exemplify some of these legacies: especially the Idea of the "Primordial man - Redeemer". But the Gospel rendering shows a contradiction of this possibility in that the conception here is that of the Son of Man who possesses both majesty and humility, i.e. what he 'possesses as claim and commission is NOT separable from what he is for all men by virtue of his claim.'<sup>61</sup>

Indeed this is what is always alluded to in the rendering of this term as expressive of the fact that Jesus is the 'true man'. The Gospel accounts therefore did not only speak of Jesus' usage in terms of what he was to be in an eschatological sense, but what he already is! And the same is true in Paul, where Christ is the New Man, in whom everything has been made new.

What is central to the New Testament witness, however, is the depiction of Jesus as the crucified one. And therefore the reference to his messiahship gains a unique dimension in that he is the one who suffers and is rejected. Indeed, Weber points to Albert Schweitzer's thesis that the 'messianic problem' is essentially connected to the 'problem of suffering'.<sup>62</sup> Notable is also the suggestion that the question of a 'Messianic Secret' emphasized

by W. Wrede, as it particularly appears in Mark, is unlikely to have been a theological thesis of the Evangelist, but rather was related to Jesus' renunciation of power and his acceptance of suffering.<sup>63</sup> There is no doubt in the New Testament that this is the scandal and offence which was brought about by the contradiction of the claim of Messiahship and the way of suffering. For as Weber states,

‘A messiah’ certified unambiguously by mighty signs would not have been rejected by the Judaism of that day.’<sup>64</sup>

But as he indicates, Jesus' claim to Messiahship was no doubt associated with his willingness to suffer.<sup>65</sup> Hence the subsequent equation of his standing to that of the suffering servant of God in Deutero-Isaiah.

Amidst the contradiction and offense that the way of the Cross brought in the witness of the Community, there is a clear-cut depiction of it as in ‘accordance with the scriptures’ (cf. I Cor: 15:3, or Lk 22:37 in context of Passion).

This is to say that in this event was the realization of the salvific promise rather than a thought of executing a designed programme. In this respect, the embrace of the ‘Suffering Servant’ concept was very much in accordance with the imbedded thought of the ascertainment of the faithfulness of God beyond the folly of suffering and the Cross.<sup>66</sup> Indeed this finds its culmination in the understanding of the Cross as the one sacrifice and atonement ‘for all’ in the light of the resurrection. And it is notable that this does not alter the Christian Community's proclamation of it in its historical reality that it was the way of the criminal, outcast and the rejected! Yet this

way of humiliation has become the unrepeatable event of God's salvation for all.<sup>67</sup> Hence the Easter message that the crucified has been raised for our justification.

The question of the resurrection raises a completely new dimension to what we have been stating to this stage. For there is the alteration of the historical, natural dimension as there is a breakthrough of the extraordinary, that which goes beyond the existential history ending in death. The immediate question that arises is the sense in which resurrection can be spoken of as 'historical'.

With the New Testament contents being the basic guide here, Weber makes the following observation that therein is a significant distinctiveness of the Easter narratives from that of Pre-Easter tradition. For whereas the latter exemplify a certain convergence of material - at least in the Synoptics, the former depicts a divergence that is best illustrated by the different versions of where and when Easter appearances took place. Noticeable is the absence of any development of a notion as to how Easter experiences took place.

Furthermore, there is the absence of any lead back to the appearances of the Risen One in the Easter Materials. For whereas the Cross is set up within secular history the Easter events are hidden to the world such that what is given is the confrontation of the risen with the witnesses. In this regard, the resurrection lies beyond the 'historical'! <sup>68</sup>

Apart from the New Testament, Weber reckoned with the fact that the concept of the historical had often been understood in such a way that it excluded Jesus being raised from the dead.<sup>69</sup> Now although this appears to

suggest an inclination towards denying the reality of the resurrection of the Risen Lord, the contrary is the case since this is not what is at issue. In fact statements such as those of R. Bultmann, W. Künneth and even Karl Barth in their variant approaches propound the thesis that in ‘history’ as we receive it, there is no place for the resurrection, and that it can be seen here only as something “incomprehensible”, as a “vertical” which meets a “horizontal”.<sup>70</sup>

In fact, Bultmann as Weber indicates, goes a step further in distinguishing between the ontic and the existential - leading to his conclusion that resurrection when interpreted “historically” must necessarily then appear as a miraculous proof which makes the cross as a stumbling block unreal.<sup>71</sup>

For Weber, the question he directs to the above is whether the concept of the historical in the way it has been approached has not been in alignment with a modern view of history which asserts ‘God has and establishes no history, and history is without God’.<sup>72</sup> It is clear to him that the Risen Lord does not fit into our concept of the ‘historical’ which refers to once-and-for-all events in the past - which is really the past history of death. For the New Testament witness refers to the Living One, who is not sought among the dead. Weber’s view is that if in the appearance of the Risen Lord an aspect of the historical becomes visible, it makes it impossible to understand history any more as the permanent event of dying and passing.<sup>73</sup>

He acknowledges that the New Testament, and above all, its oldest report in I Cor. 15, apparently deals with an event which as such is past, for ‘some’ of the witnesses have gone to sleep(!), but in the One who has

disclosed himself. Here, this event is divorced from its consignment to the past (cf. 1Cor 15:53).<sup>74</sup> In this regard, he finds the decisive point being the fact that the New Testament does not appear as a source for dead history (for the development and passing on of what is destined to die) but a testimony to life (I Tim. 1:1 ff). In fact, this for him is the only sense in which resurrection can be understood as ‘historical’. For whereas it touches upon the sphere of the history of death, and in a most important way - as we have his encounter with witnesses (mortal men) who in turn witnessed to other mortal men whose proclamation on the level of the historical brings about a community of faith whose essence is not rested in the history of death, its historicity is of another kind.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the assertion is that the secular world appears as the recipient, the hearer of the message or testimony, but not the witness in an empirical sense. This is the same view asserted by William Lane Craig in his criticism of James Keller in his article on ‘Doubts about the Resurrection.’<sup>76</sup>

Related to the above is the New Testament proclamation of Jesus after the Easter experiences as ‘The Raised Lord’ - leading to the common phrase of ‘The Crucified and Risen Lord’ which is not expressly found as such therein. This clearly indicates a similar line of thought to that which we encountered when discussing the understanding of the Cross after Easter. And the basic reason as Weber indicates is that the New Testament understands both the Cross and Resurrection as God’s acts upon Jesus. In fact, the reference to an activist notion of Jesus’ rising as in the synoptic prophecies (cf. Mk 8:31; 9:9, f., 10: 34, Lk 18:33), or reports (Lk 24:6, Mk 16:8) and even the Pauline confessional formula (cf. Thess. 4: 14) that ‘Jesus died and rose again’ does not alter this fact. For the New Testament does indicate a divine power inherent in Jesus ‘by virtue of which he would

have broken through the barrier of death on his own<sup>77</sup> to use Weber's words, but as a qualification of the understanding that his death was not merely something he suffered, but an act of his obedience.<sup>78</sup> In this regard the Lordship is derived from the Father who calls him to life. For Weber then, the basic thrust is that whenever the risen Lord manifests himself, God is being manifested and not a divine being immortal in and of itself.<sup>79</sup>

Before discussing the question of the designation of Lordship to Jesus at the event of the resurrection, there is in Weber a treatment of the question of witnesses to the resurrection and the contingency of the Easter event itself. For the former, Weber observes that whereas there are no witnesses to the actual Easter event, the New Testament contents - especially in Paul (cf. I Cor. 15:3 ff) speak of witnesses to the event as the ultimate court of appeal in relation to the certainty of the event. And he finds the legitimacy of this in no other way (cf. the proposition of legitimacy of their witness by 'objective' event whose witness they have become by chance) except by virtue of the one they testify about. In other words, the preoccupation of their witness is with the one they testify about and not about themselves.<sup>80</sup> Hence Weber's remark,

‘The witnesses point away from themselves, beyond themselves, toward the mystery of the resurrection which they never describe, toward the mystery of the Risen Lord himself which has come near to them in the appearances.’<sup>81</sup>

For the latter (contingency of the event) Weber finds the underlying thrust as stating the contingency of the resurrection as an event in itself and from scriptural evidence. In other words, its insusceptibility to

objectification only leaves room for any experience of it in the encounter as deriving from the one who is acting in the event. In fact, even their faith and subsequent witness to the event is vested in the one encountered in the event. And thus, we have an illustration of its contingency in terms of its external reality.

The New Testament witness to the risen one as Christ, the Lord (Acts 2:36) does not only speak of the resurrection from the dead as the enthronement of the Son of God (as already in Rom 1:3), as that Son (Rom 1:4) but that in that event (the sitting at the right hand of the Father) the One who had humiliated himself as a profound act of his will is now exalted beyond measure.<sup>82</sup>

The title of '*Kyrios*' - Lord, is a designation of Majesty from God which is now declared openly unlike the reference with hesitation to pre-Easter Jesus in the light of the said event. But it does not only rest at this point of exaltation for Jesus Christ in his genuine and unlimited humanity. Instead, this assertion that the risen one is *Kyrios* as a climax of the New Testament witness is in fact an encounter with the second factor of the genuine and unlimited reality of the divinity of Jesus. For what is indicated in the title surpasses the Messiah titles we already dealt with. And unlike the Son of Man title, especially, *Kyrios* refers from the work to the worker, and from time to eternity<sup>83</sup> as Weber observed.

Obviously, this raises the question of source - which has been the subject of debate as we find in the variant propositions set out by Wilhelm Bousset, Rudolf Bultmann and Oscar Cullman.<sup>84</sup> Weber's view in concurrence with Cullmann is that it goes back to the oldest and earliest Christian community

whose embrace of the title that was equivalent to the unuttered name of Yahweh can only be understood on the basis of the fact of the resurrection (cf. Acts 2:36, and the same sense without the term in Rom 1:4) as it brought about an integration of the unconditional lordship claimed even by the pre-Easter Jesus into faith in the risen one.<sup>85</sup>

Since the fact of its presence is primary, it is imperative to examine its rendering in Pauline writings which form the primary representation of the title. It is evident as Weber shows that *Kyrios* appears in Paul within the context of worship. Indeed, the witnessing Christian community has its identity centered on their calling upon the name of Jesus Christ as their Lord (cf. I. Cor: 1:2, Rom: 10: 12 ff, II Tim. 2:22). It is the focus of prayer together with the Father as we find in Paul himself (cf. IThess. 3: 11, II Thess. 3: 16). And therefore even if he was brought up within the Rabbinic tradition, his speaking of Jesus Christ as *Kyrios* in the same breath with God without seeing any blasphemy of the Father in this invocation could only be understood as expressive of his view that in Jesus Christ was the self-expression of the Father. In other words, God the Father was revealed in his Lordship, as Cullmann asserts.<sup>86</sup>

In fact, the reality of his exaltation demonstrated his Lordship in terms of his work rather than his being. But this was not only directed to the past, but present and to all time, as is illustrated in the address of the title as also meaning the Master and Present Lord of the community calling upon his name. Furthermore, this in itself is a negation of all other lordships as all are placed under his judgement. Hence, the depiction of him as the Lord of the World. The significant factor though is that pointed out by Oscar Cullmann that ‘the honour and dignity of the Son, even as the King of the World, is

in his submission and his obedience.<sup>87</sup>

The New Testament Witness, however, brings us to a point of departure in its ascription to Jesus of the title of ‘the Son of God’ without evading the reality of the Cross in its majestic rendering as the *Kyrios* time.<sup>88</sup>

This is not to say that a new concept was adopted. On the contrary, Weber points out that it was already given in the Old Testament. Notable is its application to Israel in relation to Yahweh as the chosen people (cf. Ex 4: 22 ff, Hos. 2:1; 11:1, Ps 73:15). There was also its application to the King by oriental analogy as in II Sam. 7: 14, Ps. 2: 7 and Ps. 110. The point though is that it is a theocratic title in both cases as the former points to the basis of their historical position, whereas the latter points to the divine legitimization of the ruler.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, he points to the fact that there is no evidence in the Old Testament, for a direct application of the “Son of God” title to the Messiah and therefore it was not adopted in the New Testament as a consequence of Jesus' messianic calling.<sup>90</sup>

The same is true for the parallels in Greek and Hellenistic ascription whose embrace as a possible source of influence is negated by the fact that its representation has no notion of such important factors as the Cross which is central to the said witness. Hence, Weber's assertion that what we have in the New Testament is the taking of a new road that can only be said to demand our contentment with the fact that the Gospels render Jesus' witness about himself and beyond that is not susceptible to explanation.<sup>91</sup>

Another notable observation is that unlike the *Kyrios* title, the Son of God title in the New Testament witness in the first place is not only directed to the presence of Jesus but also to his legitimation. And secondly, it does not merge with the statements about the Father, but expresses rather Jesus' distinctiveness from the Father and even his subordination to the Father.<sup>92</sup> What is more significant though is that the New Testament testimony goes beyond this depiction which has been understood at times in ~~an~~ adoptionist sense. For it also employs this title in reference to Jesus' pre-existent origin as in John 1. This is to say that 'the one in whom God is with man is not One who has come out of time but out of God's eternity'.<sup>93</sup> And this underlines the dominant tension of what has been depicted earlier on as the obedient servant of God with reference to God's eternity in such a way that he is spoken of in terms of eternal election and eternal glory. Indeed this is the context in which we encounter the subsequent exemplification of Jesus Christ in terms of his Deity - when he is spoken of not just as Son of God, but 'God' - if not in terms of ascribing God's work to him.<sup>94</sup> And for Weber it only points to the New Testament Church's doctrine of the Trinity which had no independent ontology for Jesus Christ.

In summary then, the foregoing offers what to Otto Weber is a possible structure of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ which exemplifies that conception of him as both human and divine in such unlimited and genuine way.

## CHRIST AND HISTORY

But such an assertion is problematic in itself. For what we have here is the giving of that which belongs to time and eternity in togetherness! And the question is whether and in what sense this can be said to represent historic testimony?

In Weber's observation, the problem is focused even more sharply when we turn to those elements of the New Testament witness so far untouched such as the concept of the 'logos' in Johannine writings and the 'Virgin Birth' in the synoptic gospels.

Moreover, the New Testament community as we encounter<sup>14</sup> in their confession of the Apostle's creed expresses this double-sided Christological statement that makes it imperative to state whether we can speak here of 'history' and if so, in what sense.<sup>95</sup> For there is no indication therein that there is any distinction between what is historical (cf. 'suffered, under Pontius Pilate ....') and the 'unhistorical', Kerygmatic or the incoordinable (cf. 'conceived by the Holy Spirit .....') in such a way that they can be said to have independent functions. In fact the basic depiction is that of their inter-connection in a peculiar way!<sup>96</sup> It has to be stated, therefore, whether what we are confronted with here falls within the common framework of speaking about history or that framework itself is the one that requires critical investigation.

For if the common depiction of history is not what is entailed in the New Testament even if it is eminently historical in its design as is the Old Testament in its own way, then our understanding of history points to a completely different direction from what we encounter here.

The common view of history is that which derives its orientation from the tendency that took the centre stage during the enlightenment stressing the importance of time as a reaction against the ‘other wordliness’ of earlier eras.<sup>97</sup> The tendency that finds its culmination in the orientation of liberal theology in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it asserted that ‘Modern scientific world-view provided the only reliable account of how things really are such that the Bible could only be understood in terms of that account.’<sup>98</sup> In other words, theologians who embraced this approach unqualifiedly assumed that ‘existential history’ or ‘factual history’ connotes the whole of what is proven to have actually happened in the past.<sup>99</sup>

But as Weber himself points out, this in itself is questionable as that very basis itself had been shown to be relative and therefore untenable as a foundation of what which was represented in absolute terms. Indeed Friedrich Nietzsche from whom he quotes summarises the point when he asserted,

‘recent theology seems to have entered quite innocently into partnership with history’ and that ‘it scarcely sees even now that it has bound itself unwittingly to the Voltairean *ecrasez*’.<sup>100</sup>

And the same is true of Franz Overbeck’s point that ‘history is an abyss into which Christianity has been thrown against its will’.<sup>101</sup>

Besides, there is the additional point that Weber finds in Karl Barth’s pursuance of Overbeck’s criticism of a ‘Christianity’ which views itself historically. For central to his (Barth’s) argument is that ‘if history’ is the whole of all that can be proven to have happened, then it certainly is not a criterion for God’s self-disclosure to man.<sup>102</sup> This is the same point that found affirmation also in Rudolf Bultmann.

It is clear, therefore, that this dominant philosophy of history which was embraced by theological historicism is the one that had been questioned as we find in Gogarten, and that was being negated by Ernst Fuchs' assertion that Christ is the end of history. In other words, what is at issue as Weber points out, is the rejection of the concept of history that is articulated to the extent of asserting that history as the foundation of faith.<sup>102</sup>

For it was clear in theological Historicism that its preoccupation with the historical Jesus was such that he as an ‘historical person’ was set as the foundation and standard for contemporary faith in Christ. And so in terms of the Creed, what we referred to as the ‘co-ordinable’ elements in the Christological statement were regarded as assured or as what modern research would demonstrate as assured.

In this regard, faith had its basis on these ‘coordinable’ elements and could only make use of the ‘incoordinable’ elements as possible tools of interpretation. This is to say that with or without the help of these ‘incoordinable’ elements, faith was dependent on the categories of the philosophy of history.<sup>104</sup> And so even Albert Schweitzer and Martin Kähler who rejected this orientation of theological historicism in their own way still maintained its basic impulses as Weber observes. The same is true for liberal theology till the 1920s for the dominant conviction therein was ‘that the eternal’, the valid, can only be found on the foundation and in the foundation of the historically perceptible.

The turning point that came with dialectic theology in the 1920s, however, saw a general departure from historicism culminating in the subsequent influence of existential philosophy. Even<sup>so</sup> it set the stage for

renewed quest into who Jesus of Nazareth was - such that the same impulses could be seen emerging though from a different direction. This is especially true with Rudolf Bultmann, whose view 'that the historical life of Jesus is sufficient in a way' exemplifies the legacy of historicism although the basic criterion was that of existential philosophy.<sup>105</sup>

The significant point of departure though arose with the new way of relating eschatology and history to each other - along with the redefinition of history and human existence that we find in Martin Heidegger. For it meant that eschatology conditioned and determined the life and history of Jesus.<sup>106</sup> Hence the speaking of his life and ministry as a turning point. In fact it is this particular point that raised anew the question of Christ in 'time'.

Otto Weber identifies two ways of speaking about history when confronting the witness of the New Testament. The first is what he refers to as 'History that is oriented towards death'. This is centred on the thesis that 'history' is the dimension of reality which is chiefly characterized by being in the past - i.e., in the sense of the irrevocable and unrepeatable.<sup>107</sup>

In other words, even if history is understood as a present experience, as the realm of our decision and implementation of our "destiny", time is still seen as unrepeatable and irrevocable - subject to the fact that it is past and gone.<sup>108</sup> And it is this 'Pastness' apart from our customary time that makes it so.

What has to be noted here is that since this condition of "Pastness" becomes especially concrete in the measurable Pastness of an event, it is

treated as an “it” which can be researched in an objective sense as is the case with nature. And Weber observes that this is indeed the basic reason why there was a methodologically close association of it with the process of nature. For one can observe in both instances causal relationships and base judgements on them - even though in varying ways and with varying degrees of certainty.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, there is an introduction of a degree of relativity into the procedure as causal systems can be used such that whatever can be causally related or even explained can never be “absolute”. And so is the characteristic we find in historicism and theological historicism even if the applied criterion of the philosophy of history tries to conceal it.<sup>110</sup>

Having said this, the basic issue is that this orientation of history to the Past, the unrestorable, irrevocable and unrepeatable is what he finds summarised in Heidegger's ‘Being - toward - Death’. When Otto Weber says 'the between which relates to birth and death already lies in the Being of Dasein'<sup>110</sup>, he is talking of history in the reality of temporality as experienced apart from or in the absence of God. In fact, what is experienced in natural reality illustrated the point being made here in that the events that characterise it are birth, adult life, and eventual death, that is, becoming and passing away.

However, the second is the history that is oriented towards life. And what is basic in this line of thought is even if the reality of temporality exemplifies history in the light of the above, the same offers human experience the basis of continuity that looks towards the present and what can be called life. In fact, Weber observes from historical research that history is not ‘dead’ in every sense of the word, as it processes memories that live on.

Moreover there is the significant factor of tradition where the present is determined by the past in a way that the past in its influence is relived in the present. Hence the viewing of the ‘history of death’ as one of “life”.<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, there is that decisive distinction in theology where unlike the sceptical viewing of life with its orientation towards death, there is the optimism vested in the presence of God in history. The question, however, is what this entails in terms of our understanding of history. In other words, what does it mean to speak of God's self-disclosure in history?

The first thing that has to be reckoned with is the scandalously unique feature of the Christian faith that does not regard God as the Meaning of History, even though it lives out of God's self-disclosure in history. Indeed faith does not interpret history as it derives its life from the ‘last things’, from the ‘Eschaton’, such that history is truly and conclusively an event destined for death.<sup>113</sup> But this is not to say that there is a superior light that appears above history in the platonic sense. For faith is dependent on an event within history in terms of its establishment and its life. The very words of Jesus, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life -’, as Weber says, refer to an event which takes place in human existence through the encounter with the Revealer.<sup>114</sup> And so is ‘The Word became flesh’, as it asserts that God's revelation and self-manifestation took place in the midst of the death-ridden reality of man.<sup>115</sup>

In this regard history in the reality of its temporality has no reference to God even though it is the obvious place of his revelation. In fact, it is this particular point<sup>which</sup> serves Otto Weber's polemic against the embrace of philosophy in theology. For as he says, faith does not need it nor preoccupy

itself with the meaning of history as it does not owe its existence to it.

One other point that he observes from the fact of revelation taking place in simple history is that it negates any attempt to embrace any ideally or existentially worked out historical scheme for the understanding of history in theology.

This means for Weber that revelation contradicts every kind of interpretation of history that attempts to set aside categories of human possibilities as the basis for the understanding and the recognition of the revelation of God in history. Hence his assertion,

'We do not have any presuppositions at our disposal which would enable us to gain objective knowledge of the Presence of God in history ..... for the special nature of God's presence in history is not demonstrated for faith in remarkable occurrences, although there are those, but in the self-proclamation of Jesus.'<sup>116</sup>

And the same is true for this self-proclamation of Jesus about himself. For to suggest this is to place it within our sphere of influence. In fact for Weber this applies to the self-proclamation of the historical Jesus, the self-manifestation of the risen one, and the proclamation of the community which follows. In other words, there is every indication from the New Testament witness that the above have no connection to some kind of an already present and active understanding - even though as a man he falls within the realm of subjectivity (subject to our interpretation).

Earlier on, we stated that an historical phenomenon is not only oriented towards the past, but also to the present. This, for Weber, serves to

Underline an appeal that comes out of history. For therein we noted that the viewing of that Past as the foundation of our existence in the Present was the basic motivating factor for historical research, and the concern with the historically certified results. In other words, the role of <sup>the</sup> said results becomes crucial for our Present existence itself. And this is what Weber recognizes when he says, 'Its intent then is to provide itself retrospective legitimacy and to fill itself with "meaning" such that history becomes the domain out of which existence derives its legitimation'.<sup>117</sup> And so, the securing of facts - serves as a self-securing of existence. Hence the appeal inherent within it.

Set in the same framework, however, Jesus' self-proclamation is not depicted in the New Testament as a conveyance of assured results or as facts historically certified, but as a confronting appeal which negates our temporality with the 'Yes' of life as it is God's appeal. In fact we have a radical departure from what we find in Existential Philosophy where the 'demand is to cast oneself forward, throw aside the old and stepping out of one's impersonal identity as 'One'<sup>118</sup> and the future into which one is to cast himself is a dark future which one is to accept in a blank risk.<sup>119</sup>

For Jesus' self-proclamation, which does place us at the end of history as the supposed epitome of our retroactive securities because it is 'eschatological', does open up to us the offer of faith, of the new existence, of the reality of God disclosed to us.<sup>120</sup> In this regard, history is not only important for God's self-disclosure, but the latter is also for the former. For as Weber echoes Berkhof 'By virtue of faith in the Christ who has come and in the future consummation in the Kingdom of God we see events in time not as the arbitrary movement of free powers or the forced effects of inner necessity, but as the realm of the redemptive Government of God.'<sup>121</sup>

Even so, we have to state what we understand of ‘Eschatological history’ in relation to history as we find in the witness of the New Testament. Already we stated that history of death or calculable history is one that can be mastered to a certain degree - leading to its becoming a component of our world view. At issue here is the point that the calculability of history encloses within itself the calculability of man - which is the end of humanity. In this regard, history of death would not be just the testimony to the inevitability of death, but would be, in ultimate perfection, the death of man as man<sup>12</sup>. This is to say that this entails<sup>that</sup> the calculability of man, as the inevitability of death - is in ultimate perfection the death of man. In other words, what we have is not the testimony of the inevitability of history of death, but of man as man.

But ‘Eschatological history’ by contrast is a message appealing to us in the event of proclamation that the Old is Past (cf. II Cor. 5: 17), as Weber observes. In other words, what we encounter in the Old and the New Testament is not a pointer to the course of events being determined not by past and calculable events, i.e. those belonging to the history of death, but the incalculable activity of God.<sup>123</sup> And Weber illustrates this from the apodictic law and the prophetic words crossing the calculable events in the Old Testament, the very existence of Israel which is not explicable in terms of what is calculable, and indeed Jesus' self-proclamation in the New Testament.<sup>124</sup> The basic insight then is not the setting aside or the despatching of ‘old’ to historical past, but an encounter with the establishment of a new reality which is not derived or deduced from what was already there.

'Eschatological history' then is not a deducible ultimate, but rather the breaking in of the origin into the realm of the deducible such that what we have is not the restoration of the original, but the establishment of New Creation.

Weber observes that within the limits of historical knowledge;

- '- we can derive the past from what is past
- the mortal from what is mortal
- and the present can be said with a certain degree of caution where it is going.

But the origin and goal which are held closely related in Biblical thought cannot be conceived within this history of death'.<sup>125</sup>

This is to say that 'Eschatological history' is, therefore, under the aspect of the origin and goal - which in itself is the ending of the history of death as it is not derived from it even if it emerges therefrom. And its emergence in confrontation is a demonstration that the Creator is not against his creation, but against its often craven surrender to death as the dominant element of history. Hence the soteriological orientation of the Christ event. For Jesus' taking upon himself the reality of temporality is in effect the confrontation of that which is of the creator, with the perversity of man, whose sinfulness is in actual fact a subjugation to the fate of death. In fact, the New Testament witness declares nothing other than this fact in its unified representation of the origin and goal of Jesus Christ. For as Weber says, 'What is more important than the Creed is the salvation-event. As the 'victim' (in reality of the history of death) Jesus is also "Victor" in that he reveals his glory in his solidarity with mankind which is surrendered to the No of God and thus to

the anguish of the conscience - in that he submits to the power of the No which stretches beyond anything which can be experienced.'<sup>126</sup>

In fact, it is from the context of this dialogue with the Biblical witness and the insights derived thereof that he appraises the Christological developments throughout the history of the Church and which forms the framework of his criticism and reformulation - which we now turn to.

### **CHRISTOLOGY OF THE CHURCH THEN AND NOW**

It is clear to Otto Weber that the New Testament witness to Christ does not lead to the historically isolated figure of the Jesus of long ago, but to the 'Christ of faith', who nevertheless cannot be separated from his temporality and historicity. For as he says, 'the titles which the New Testament ascribe to him refer to the history just as they refer to the faith'<sup>127</sup>

The same is true for the question of history which had to be thought anew in terms of Christology. For it was now characterized by the inextricable interweaving of what we referred to as 'eschatological history' and that 'history bearing the stigma of death'.

This, however, leads us to an inevitable state of tension where in asserting that the historical Jesus is the One believed in, we cannot turn to 'factual history' in an attempt to establish how he is that, nor can we turn to dogmatics in an attempt to state plainly who he is outside of faith!

Hence, Weber's observation that this explains why Christian thought has always been tempted to understand Jesus as an ideal being. Indeed this is

what we find already in the early church when gnostic spiritualistic movements first thought of Jesus in terms of the gnostic Redeemer, the bringer of light - who could not be flesh. A view that found its full expression in what came to be known as Docetism.<sup>128</sup>

For therein is the simplest solution to the Christological problem as it depicts Christ as God's intervention 'from above to below' - 'here and now', apart from history with its fatal banalities. Moreover, it is an approach that eliminates the said tension in that paradoxes and contradictory statements fade, God is absolutely God while man is set aside! and so is the problem of history, of temporality, and of mortality which become non issues as they all belonged to the world of flesh which was inferior in Hellenistic thinking. The primary concern with the 'spiritual' world of reality meant that man's preoccupation had to be the gaining of knowledge which enables him to be released from the said world of flesh, that opportunity of grasping the depths of his being or of his destiny beyond the world not known until now. Jesus being that given symbol to point the way as a dimensionless point, such that the salvation event is no longer an event in <sup>a</sup>n empirical sense.<sup>129</sup>

However, this kind of thinking had no place in the early Church as it asserted its understanding of Jesus Christ as one that had come 'in the flesh' such that the Salvation event could not be a mere appearance, but one that had taken place within this specific history and time (cf. I Jn. 4:2). In fact, it is not only this, but the 'encounter' emphasis expresses the understanding that in this event, God himself has really encountered us in the reality of our worldliness and temporality. Even though the docetic tendency has persisted throughout the history of the Church - either in the above form, or <sup>in</sup> that Christ

understood as a man but deified as was common among monophysites, or in the representation of him as the Principle or epitome of the Unity of God and man which we encountered in speculative Christology.<sup>130</sup>

In contrast, the Ebionites whose background is traced exclusively to Jewish Christianity depicted Jesus in terms of his humanity and especially his Jewishness such that his divinity is secondary (cf. an exemplification of the central problem facing Christians within this background whose concern was how to reconcile their faith with the strict monotheism of Israel).

In fact some were of the view that the said divine nature was a unique dignity or the Christ who descended upon Jesus of Nazareth at his Baptism. A notion also found amongst some Hellenistic theologians such as Paul of Samosata (3rd cent.), (c.250-c. 336 A.D)<sup>131</sup> The basic thrust was that there was that maintenance of that important distinction between the earthly and the heavenly, the Creator and the Created as even the elevated or deified Jesus Christ of logos-Christology was represented in a way that he remained as one who was in some way inferior to God.<sup>132</sup> Hence its rejection as heresy.

Indeed there is merit in the view that the Church's Christology developed to a great extent in its struggle with the above heretical positions. As it was in its counteracting stance that it sought to maintain the human-historical view of the salvation event, and insisted that in Christ we are not just encountering a divine something which consists of the extension and surpassing of the human, but God himself.<sup>133</sup> However, it was this basic assertion that set the stage for the debate that dominated the Church till Chalcedon in the fifth century. For the question that arose was how to conceive of the Unity of

God and man in Jesus of Nazareth? How should God remain God and man truly man?

Weber's dialogue begins with Apollinarius of Laodicea (c. 310-390 A.D.) who, he argues, even if his position quickly found disfavour within the Church should be credited with posing the Christological problem anew. For he confronted the whole question of how to speak of a true incarnation of the 'Logos' even if he ended up with what was more akin to Arianism!

The first response that we encounter is that of the 'Antiochenes' whose opposition to Apollinarius led to their argumentation for a genuine human nature in Jesus inasmuch as they upheld the view of a genuine incarnation of the 'logos'. Unlike Apollinarius who advanced a kind of melting together of the human and the divine by stating that 'two conceptually perfect entities' (*duoteleia*) could be 'one' while preserving their being; the Antiochenes as Weber points out, advanced the view that the Unity of God and man should not be understood as fusion but rather as *synapheia* (connection).<sup>134</sup> And it was this view which actually laid the foundation for the formulation of the doctrine of the two natures which was first worked out within this Antiochene cycle.

The immediate problem, however, was how to articulate the said connection between God and man in Jesus of Nazareth. For whereas speaking of the two natures posed no problem, their representation of the said *synapheia* or 'connection' was so ambiguous that they were accused of teaching 'two natures' in regard to Jesus Christ. There was also the problem arising from their ethicist orientation which as Weber observes led to a

conception of Jesus in terms of the “Perfect” man whose attainment of the ‘logos’ seems to emerge as a kind of an act of crowning his moral achievement - and God’s saving activity being seen as a response to human effort.

However, the second opposing response to Apollinarius was that of Alexandria with Cyril (c. 375-444 A.D.) as the leading theologian in the fifth century. His acceptance of the formulation of the two natures in Jesus Christ as set out by the Antiochenes and the acceptance of the human soul in Christ was a clear negation of the Apollinarian stance which argued for a mixture of the two natures, Even though his concern to state that the two ‘natures’ have their ‘bearer’ solely in the ‘logos’ was an invitation to his opponents that his was an Apollinarian situation. For it was no different from Apollinarius’ view that, ‘there is only one’ physis in Christ because in him there is only ‘one’ all-animating source of life and movement, the logos,<sup>135</sup> a charge which he found hard to extract himself from. In fact, one can detect a docetic tendency in the implied view from the above that the humanity of Jesus had no inherent essentiality.<sup>136</sup> As for Frances Young, Cyril’s primary concern seemed to be aimed at defending the coherence of the Nicene creed by insisting that it was improper to ascribe some of the credal statements to the logos and others to ‘his man’; all its statements were made of the one divine subject who existed in a pre-incarnate and an incarnate state yet without change.<sup>137</sup> The consequence of this kind of approach for soteriology according to Weber though, is that instead of speaking about the salvation men experience in their encounter with God in Christ, a complete shift to a tangible change of being in the cultic sense seem to be implied. And the end result is that the manifest and tangible deity of the man Jesus

establishes the equally manifest deification of man, who is thereby dehistoricized.<sup>138</sup>

It was in the Chalcedonean definition of A.D. 451, however, that the Christological debate reached its decisive stage. For besides the historical consequence of Rome emerging victorious in forcing Constantinople - its arch-rival into the role of an equal and doing away with Alexandria's dominant position, it was here that the Christology which had been developing in the West was asserted.<sup>139</sup>

Basic to the disagreement among Greek theologians as Weber observes was how to reconcile the question of the immutability of God with the notion that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. Furthermore, it was inconceivable to think of man - including Jesus as being one with God without losing his 'mode of being'.<sup>140</sup>

But Leo's representation of the western position set the framework of what was to emerge out of Chalcedon when he stated, 'For, just as God is not changed by his compassion, so man is not destroyed by his dignity .... God's mercy and man's exaltation cannot be ontologically united, but there is no falsehood in this unity, as long as there are alternately the lowness of man and the exaltedness of the Divinity.'<sup>141</sup> Hence, the abrogation of Antiochene and the Alexandrian 'solutions' in a way that both were not only contrasted against each other, but a greater and difficult paradox was asserted in the well-known formulation:

'..... indeed born of the Father before the ages according to divine nature, but in the last days the same born of the virgin Mary, Mother of God, according to human nature; for us and for our deliverance, one and the same Christ, only begotten Son, our Lord, acknowledged in two natures, without mingling, without change, indivisibly, undividedly.....'<sup>142</sup>

An assertion that did not only stress the unity of the person of Jesus Christ but the reality of his two natures.<sup>143</sup>

Of particular significance to Weber in this formulation is that its paradoxical statement achieved what the opposing groups and ‘solutions’ could not accomplish. And that is to recognise what we already stated earlier on that we cannot express ‘eschatological history’ with the categories of the ‘history of death’<sup>144</sup>. But since the former needs to be expressed and all our terms are inadequate, paradox remains the only relevant form of expression we have. Not because a unique language is being sought, but because ‘whoever speaks of him in human words is entering into the realm of ‘rational’ speech in an attempt to express that which belongs to the realm of the incalculable and the irrational’!<sup>145</sup> For Weber, the Chalcedonian paradox serves to remind us of the inadequacy of our language - which belongs to the calculable-to describe the incalculable. Hence his assertion that ‘its terms (of the incalculable) are not the means for grasping but rather for making known that we have been grasped. It is not then a form of mystery, but a testimony to the overpowering experience which has come upon us.<sup>146</sup> Without being apologetic for the Chalcedonian fathers’ paradoxical statement, Weber sees in the definition an exemplification of our state of awe as creatures when we encounter that which is of the creator - that which is of God.

Indeed concepts such as *prosopon* one person, or *hypostasis* entity were compromise terms to express the reality of the two natures in one person in a way that even if they seem to serve the main points required by faith, were subject to a variety of interpretation.<sup>147</sup> The assertion therein though, is that in Christ was no separate human *hypostasis* entity,

but that which belongs to all humanity. As we already stated above, the Chalcedonian definition asserted that which was the truth about both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ, even though it did not envisage to say how the natures function - except in what they cannot do (cf. the negations of without mingling, without change, indivisible and undivided). For Weber, however, this point exemplifies its strength and weakness. For whereas it is a valid statement of the mystery, it is no protection from reading between the lines an attempt to restore the contradiction that is inherent in the reality of God and man in the unity manifested in Christ. Its soteriological consequence, however, is of such significance in that the saving activity of God is affirmed as having taken place within the reality of our temporality.

The middle ages can be said to be the period when Chalcedonian ideas were further refined in a variety of ways, the East pursuing the distinct line of orthodox theologians inasmuch as the West had this idea transmitted through the theology of Augustine. At issue as Weber observes were two questions, i.e. How the 'hypostatic union' (*unio hypostatica*) - common term in the west - (or 'hypostasis' in the East), the unity, in the person had to be understood; and how the common participation in the 'properties' (*idiomata, proprietates or Idiotetai* - which Chalcedon spoke of meaning peculiarities) should be formulated<sup>148</sup>—concerns which directed the discussion to a static and unhistorical doctrine of being.

As regards the first question, the basic thrust of the discussion had its framework set by Leontius of Byzantium who stated that the human nature in Christ does not have its own *hypostasis*; it is *anhypostasis*(without *hypostasis*, i.e. its independent being). Instead, it is '*physis anhypostatos*' meaning that the human nature finds being or *hypostasis* in the *hypostasis*

*of the logos.*<sup>149</sup> And so the distinguishing features of the particular man who Jesus was are then attributed to the divine by hypostasis as well as the essential qualities of the species (mankind) to which he belongs.<sup>150</sup> The breakthrough of this suggestion according to Weber is that it affirms the point that God remains God in the concrete union with human nature - as there is no thought of a merging of two equally important partners.<sup>151</sup>

The danger though is that it leads to God's Son being conceived of 'in and of himself', apart from the man Jesus. Hence his criticism that the inclination seems to be part of that way of thinking which tries to establish the special features of the person of Jesus Christ on the basis of general categories of being.<sup>152</sup> The same is true for the latter question. For once the assumption of a particular conception of union is set - as in 'personal or hypostatic union', then each of the 'natures' communicated its 'properties' to the other. Indeed, its general acceptance as part of Christology right through the reformation for Weber demonstrates the inseparable connection of the former and the latter question.

In summary then, it is clear to Weber that in spite of the shortcomings, the middle ages' important input is in its attempt to maintain the concrete historicity of Jesus within the limits of the period - even though it remained with the problem of how to explain the 'Incarnate Christ' and the 'Present Christ' as one and the same person.<sup>153</sup>

The Reformation Christology as Weber observes does not offer any novelties in terms of terminology. Basic background that he reckons with is the influence from both scholastic formulations and mystic inward experience

of Christ. Even so, they did not form its essential base as its point of departure was justification, faith, the proclaimed Christ.<sup>154</sup> This indeed was in itself a turning around from the medieval period in that its concern was not with ‘above’ or the nature of Christ, per se, but ‘below’ - that reality of inseparability between Christ and his work, or as Weber puts it, ‘our receiving, our being given, and being claimed.’<sup>155</sup> Indeed, George Wehrung expresses this point quite clearly when he says, ‘the nature of Christ was related to his work once and for all. And since this work took place within history, then Christ in his own person must always be acknowledged in association with his work, which is the divine work of Salvation within history.’<sup>156</sup> And it is this that sets the basis for Christology.

It has been pointed out that the Reformers preoccupied themselves with the articulation of traditional Christology rather than embarking on new developments. And this is evident in the works of Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. However, the Communion controversy did provide the impulses to develop a Christology out of the Reformation theme of the proclaimed Christ. For it was the ‘Present Christ’ that was the issue in the Communion disputes as Weber points out. Ours is not to rehearse the whole debate except to say in summary form that in Luther, Weber identifies his preoccupation with the gift of the divine presence - especially in the Eucharist. The logical result being that his immediate concern was with God whom he encounters, or as Marc Lienhard puts it, ‘is carried and presented by this unique high priest, who is Christ.’<sup>157</sup> This does not mean that the particular question of this ‘mediator’ taking centre stage was in doubt. But the framework in which he treated the Christological question derived from the question of God.

We already stated that his understanding of the object of Christology was that it dealt with the benefits of Christ and not with his person and natures, apart from the benefits. The basic thrust of his Christological articulation was, therefore, characterized by his doctrine of *ubiquity* - the presence of the body of Christ everywhere.<sup>158</sup> The problem though is that in due course, the ‘doctrine of the two natures’ was rendered questionable as the ‘human nature’ of Christ participated abstractly in the divine ‘nature’ as far as its properties were concerned. Hence the criticism that this tended toward monophysitism as Weber observes. But Luther’s attempt to overcome this problem is illustrated in his embrace of the Patristic theory of *communicatio idiomatum* (communion or exchange of divine and human attributes).<sup>159</sup>

As for Ulrich Zwingli, the traditional stance was given except in his distinctive assertion that to speak of the ‘Proclaimed Christ’ is to speak of the Ascended One, whose human nature was no longer in that tangible reality of an historical figure. Hence his argument that the historical Christ is a theme of ‘recollection’ or ‘remembrance’ for us (*recordatio*) as it was impossible for him to conceive a bodily presence of the once historical figure Jesus Christ. Hence Weber’s observation that in Zwingli is a Christology in which the unity of the historical with the present Christ is not given in every regard as Christ’s presence with us is in that spiritual encounter of faith.<sup>160</sup>

John Calvin’s stress on divine transcendence meant that when it came to Christology, he was concerned to state ‘that the Son of God was ‘completely’ but not ‘wholly’ present in the historical Christ - just as he is “completely” but not ‘wholly’ with us.’ Calvin thus opposes any quantification of the Salvation-event which sets aside the person as Weber points out. The summarising assertion being that: whereas ‘the Son of God

is completely with us, he is simultaneously outside of the humanity which he has assumed. He becomes a servant, but remains the Lord. He becomes spatial and temporal yet remaining supreme over space and time.<sup>161</sup> an assertion which returns him to the traditional representation of Christ in terms of paradox already exemplified in the Chalcedonian definition. And so the ‘Mediator’ as the pivot theme of his Christology can best be understood in the context of the above. His occasional exposition on the famous *extra Calvinisticum* did not invite any deviation from the boundaries of tradition as Weber points out. Even so, it has to be said that it is on this that a charge of the ‘Nestorianism’ of Reformed Christology has been made in that it appears that there is a notion of a Logos existing entirely outside the human nature.<sup>162</sup>

The dynamic input of the Reformation Christology according to Weber is well exemplified in the constant incorporation of Pneumatology into it (Christology). Hence the dynamism of Martin Luther's concept of incarnation which negated any static representation of the event. The same is true for John Calvin in his speaking of the *communicatio idiomatum* inasmuch as what is exemplified in Zwingli's ‘Our Christ’ - especially in the dynamic rendering of the Living Lord. And therefore one can speak of a re-echoing of the New Testament depiction - especially as can be found in Paul (cf. Rom. 1:3 f, II Cor. 3:17). Indeed, it is Weber's view that pneumatology does provide more than adequate reason to regard Christology ‘dynamically’ in that the presence of Christ is not a post-existence, but a truly effectual existence for us and to the World. For Christology does not deal with an ontologically deducible something, but Jesus Christ - the Living Lord.<sup>163</sup> This is a factor that is of particular significance for the Reformation's Soteriology.

However, one other aspect exemplifying the dynamism of the Reformation Christology is in the discussion of the ‘State of Christ’ (*status Christi*) which led to the whole question of Kenoticism as Weber points out. As he said, at issue was the ‘Present Christ’ in his identity with the historical Christ, together with the differentiation of the two'.<sup>164</sup> What is of particular significance is that it served to modify the Christological structure influenced by the metaphysics of being as it exposed the insufficiency of ontological formulations in describing the mystery of Christ.

Within Lutheran theology, the doctrine of the ‘states’ was integrated into the already established system of the ‘communion of the Properties’ whose consequences were as follows; first, that it brought to focus the question as to who is the ‘subject’ of the process of self-emptying (*Kenosis*) that is the theme of Philippians 2: 6 ff. For Lutheran theologians, it was not the logos as that was of God who is immutable, and therefore, cannot be said to be self-emptying.<sup>165</sup> To speak of the ‘God-man’ also was no solution as its human nature was enhypostatized in the logos.<sup>166</sup> The remedy was to state that it was the human ‘nature’ understood to have participated in the majestic attributes of God - but renounced them in the act of humility (thought to be expressed in Ph. 2: 5-7) in order to assume therein the ‘state of exaltation’.<sup>167</sup>

But even to assert that was not decisive (cf. problems arising from I Cor. 8:6 and II Cor. 8:9). Second, the view advanced by Martin Chemnitz who was the ultimate source of the ‘doctrine of the states’ was to think of an ‘intermittent *kenosis*’ where the general thought would be that the Incarnate one did always possess the predicates of majesty - but customarily held them

'concealed' at this time of humiliation. The problem though was that one could no longer speak in truth of Kenosis but *krypsis* or concealment.. The basic point that Weber reckons to have emerged from the above, especially in Lutheran orthodoxy is that besides the system of the 'two states' the assumption of the human nature by the pre-existent one was such an exaltation of human nature. Indeed, it meant that humiliation and exaltation were not to be misunderstood as events belonging to the 'history of death' - but within the framework of 'eschatological history' - but more in line with what was recently proposed by Karl Barth: that is to say, that 'self-humiliation was a reality - but not in the sense of an intermezzo. On the contrary, it was as an act of God's gracious and active self-manifestation in the sense of his unshakeable faithfulness, but not in that static sense of his 'immutability'. For Weber, this means that 'in the exaltation of Jesus man experiences the Yes which rejects him in his sluggish and obtuse self-centredness but exalts him in Jesus Christ.<sup>168</sup> Apart from this is the view advanced in New Kenoticism where Jesus Christ in his 'state of humiliation' is said to have not possessed the divine attributes - such that Wolfgang F. Gess could talk of 'logos' as having 'deglorified itself'.<sup>169</sup> This meant that a process of 'development' in Jesus Christ had to be advanced in order to make sense of his obedience as a free selective act.

Indeed as Weber shows, Gess' assertion is that the work of Christ as an act of obedience cannot be understood without a change of the logos.<sup>170</sup> But as he reckons with Paul Althaus' criticism of this proposition, the whole argument is unsustainable in that it leads to the division of the 'diety'. The same can be said in the contemporary period where the remedy in the search to maintain a kenotic Christology is to advance a thought of 'a Kenotic Love' as constitutive of the very being of God, as we find in Lucien F.

Richard.<sup>171</sup> The basic thrust here is that Jesus Christ is God for us, answering God's self-emptying in his own self-emptying, as his self-understanding and his freedom are realized in history.<sup>172</sup>

The question for Weber though is how to speak of that without envisaging that framework of 'Eschatological history' if we are not to return again to the unsatisfactory propositions revolving around ontology as the source of articulating this point?.

In a kind of midway reflection, Otto Weber identifies two major characteristics of the development of traditional Christology till the Reformation. First is that tendency to work out a definite doctrine - which once formulated acts as the criterion for the rejection of other views as heretical or part of an isolated group of thought within the church as is exemplified by the post-Chalcedonean disputes.

The second is the recognition of the presence of a diversified Christology that has its origin in the New Testament witness itself. The former for Weber serves to show that traditional Christology bears the impulses for criticism within itself, whereas the latter is a basic reminder that Jesus Christ cannot be understood as central point of a system of thought or the development of an idea. And it is a point he reinforces by saying:

'The biblical witness to Christ as a human process and as the document of such a process was even stronger than all the 'better' knowledge of those who came later. And the Person of Christ is stronger than the witness as he works through the witness. In fact he makes that witness effective.'<sup>173</sup>

A point that is valid for our articulation even today when we recognise

from this *dialogue* that the Church's Christology cannot evade the witness of the New Testament - which also stands under the dominant personal power of Jesus Christ - who is superior to it.<sup>174</sup> His *dialogue* with the post-Reformation period - especially the nineteenth and the twentieth century does not escape this critical underlying point.

Notable are his observations on the developments of Christology since the Enlightenment where even the attempt to offer an apologetic representation of the old traditional view of Christology ended up being a self-demolishing process. For as he says, 'the historical Jesus as they construed him was transformed into the peak of all human possibilities; he became the epitome of all virtue, the beloved friend of all men because he loved all, the model of morals'.<sup>175</sup> Contrary to what tradition had always asserted here, Christ was not the ONE in whom God reaches out to us and takes our part, but rather he is the highest perfection of a religion in which man reaches out to God and gets God in his grasp,<sup>176</sup> as we pointed out in Chapter One. Indeed this is what he finds even in the big change that took place in both Schleiermacher and Kant (cf. the Rediscovery of the Church) as far as theology was concerned. For whereas these two brought about the rediscovery of the church and consequently the new formation of Christology, what we find in Kant is an exemplification of Jesus Christ in terms of the moral ideal. Schleiermacher's stand is not far from this in that he integrates christology into the sphere of religious consciousness and morality.<sup>177</sup>

However, twentieth century approaches have recognised again the unpredictable and incalculable aspect of Jesus Christ as we already demonstrated with the reassertion of revelation as central for theology in

Chapter One. But this does not mean that traditional Christological thought has escaped criticism. For the contrary is the case.

Weber's concern though is whether these criticisms are as a result of a compelling structure of thought, which makes it alien to the matter on hand, or is derived from the matter itself.<sup>178</sup> This is especially the basis of his criticism of the thought structures of 'Personal being' which he finds in Friedrich Gogarten. Indeed, he acknowledges that the thought forms of existentialist philosophy - which offers terms like 'person', 'responsibility', 'historicity', and 'existence' may possess a greater degree of appropriateness for the expression of the 'mystery of Christ' because they are derived from the encounter with it via Kierkegaard. But his concern though is with the short cut that is evidently taken in approaches of this kind when the developed Christology is that pursued from insight into the personal being of Jesus to a universally conceived personality of man.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, where the latter is made dominant as he observes, the outcome is a 'personalistic, existentialist or activist total view of the reality around us, a new world view' - such that the person of Jesus is incorporated into that worked out system to the extent that the world view itself deprives him of his relation to the world.<sup>180</sup>

For Weber, this is not a criticism that can be directed against those Christological formulations that have embraced existentialist philosophy as the framework of reflection, but against every undertaking that tends to operate from a worked out system. Hence his criticism of Friedrich Gogarten's tendency to operate from a system of 'pure personality'.<sup>181</sup> In fact, it is the basis in which he criticises Barth's approach which he sees as

not free from a worked out system even if he reckons with his attempt to conceive Christology in terms of the whole wealth of New Testament statements.<sup>182</sup>

In a Summary reformulation, Weber reckons that the constant attempt at connecting every Christological assertion to history (- which has been very much evident in this dialogue) only serves to remind us that what is at issue is not a 'Wonderful being' - but a man in the sense of our history in whom God has encountered us. The question of the 'how' has been a dominant one, which has been attempted in a variety of ways, but what he sees as central is that even when we talk of 'Eschatological history', there is no inclination that can attempt to underestimate the 'historicity' of Christ's event and be true to the New Testament witness.

Indeed, this is the point he reinforces in his reflection on the 'Christology of exaltation'. For as demonstrated already in the overview of traditional Christology, the basic thrust of the Antiochenes was an attempt to look for a perfect humanity of the 'logos' in the heights - a tendency that was negated by the fact that in Jesus himself we encounter one who places himself at the depths of our existence<sup>183</sup>

The Alexandrians on the other hand confront us with a Christ of the heights - surrounded by the glory of the resurrection and the exaltation - integrated into a transcendent ontology. Of course this Christ humbles himself, but does so only in an episode - while retaining the properties as later Lutheran doctrine of the states broadly assumed. But the real outcome is that we have a Christ who is an actor rather than one who really becomes man.

The rejection of traditional Christology for Weber, therefore, is not because of the static ontology it contains, but because it does not permit Jesus of Nazareth the lowness which he did assume according to the New Testament witness. For even if we talk of the exalted Christ, we cannot do so in isolation from the pre-Easter Christ. Theology of glory has to be reconciled with the theology of the Cross if the New Testament witness is to be taken on its own terms.

Furthermore, there is that recognition which has come to light in ‘Christology of Paradox’ that there is no indwelling aptitude for God in man that we know of, except our reception of the Word that God in Jesus Christ has accepted humanity and espoused the cause of man. This may be said to be what is implied in Barth’s Christology. But as Weber points out, its ‘above’ emphasis is such that the ‘below’ is strictly incorporated into the ‘above’ to such an extent that history or earthly events have easily become the mere documentation of what is above or precedes it.<sup>184</sup>

At issue in the ‘Christology of Paradox’ of which Weber rightly reminds us is that in Jesus Christ, God becomes what he is not. He becomes a creature. But not what we may call a neutral creature, but, rather, a creature under the curse. He ‘submits’ himself, he delivers himself to the contradiction of man against him.<sup>185</sup> Hence his mediatorial role which is more of confrontation than appeasement. For the paradox has its causes in us rather than in God’s action upon us or only because God has become involved with us.<sup>186</sup>

It is clear therefore that Christ’s event can be recognized and understood by us as the Salvation-event. We may undertake an historical approach with

the intended objective of recapturing that which can be said to be the authentic depiction of the historical Jesus, but that will not tell us that in him God is at work! As Weber states, ‘Even the historian who believes in Jesus is unable as a historian to establish anything other than a human life which was unusual in every regard and the unusual acceptance of this human life in the sphere of men's faith. But it remains history of death - where the great saying applies: ‘the living cannot be sought among the dead’. A point of criticism which he directs against Wolfhard Pannenberg's approach<sup>187</sup> - which has been taken up recently also by Colin Gunton.<sup>188</sup>

We can actually say that what emerges again and again in Otto Weber as an underlying critic of traditional Christology right through to the contemporary period, is his constant rejection of a central point in a system, a model of human possibilities as was the case during the Enlightenment, or as a source of a new self-understanding which dominated the nineteenth inasmuch as it did the twentieth century through existentialist philosophy. For to him, we encounter in the salvation event Jesus being the person through whom God has acted and acts in confrontation and fellowship with the human creature. Indeed, it is this that is basic to the thesis he advances as decisive for Christology, i.e. that in Christology - the issue is not the change of our consciousness (cf. Schleiermacher), but the transformation of the realm of Lordship and thus the very structure of life. In this regard, Jesus Christ is never the object of our knowledge but the giver of new life, <sup>which is</sup> not just the knowledge of God - the Redeemer, but is simultaneously the experience of a turning around in our existence. Hence, his assertion of the unity of Christology with Soteriology.<sup>189</sup>

This dialogic vision exhibited in this revisiting of the classical Christian teaching in all the diversity of its representation does not lose sight of the said basic thread. In fact, it is one that leads to the constant maintenance of method and content as inseparable in the theological task.

The challenge from Weber is in this approach which attempts to do justice to the New Testament witness and the Christian experience exhibited in the Church's Christology by returning to the whole pervading question of Jesus 'Who do you say that I am?' (cf. Mt. 16: 13; Mk 8: 29; Lk 9: 20 RSV).

Today in Africa, the Church faces many divergent traditions and theological strands similar to those exemplified in the context of Otto Weber: There are of course their peculiarities and concerns dictated by the distinctiveness of the African context just as it is with Weber's European context of his day. There is even the added dimension to theological activity (in literary form) in Africa in that one speaks of its stage as that of 'flowering' after the disseminating activity of missionary Christianity and the rising into being of the African Church. A clear historical understanding of the heritage that has laid the foundation of the present trends is imperative if an effective evaluation and worthwhile contribution is to be made to its ongoing growth. This is especially true for theology as it is for Christology when we reckon that what emerges therefrom is not only to serve this particular context, but is part of the ongoing quest of the Church universal.

The zeal and determination has already been demonstrated in the pioneering work of her first generation of theologians and all who have in one way or another contributed to this effort. And the primary task of working out the African Church's expression of the said event has been

made. Even though it remains true that theology as a facilitating process of this endeavour has to face the challenge with an ongoing sense of responsibility.

This is not only imperative in its response to the diverse challenges of the christian church whose representation is of such a variety as the continent itself, but also in reckoning with the imperative challenge of entering into useful dialogue with the church worldwide. And this is especially true for christology where there are a variety of approaches.

The dialogic vision exhibited in Weber shows that variety can and has served to enrich the Christological discourse. What has to be borne in mind though is the one essential point of orientation; and that is the Christ-event through which God encounters us and confronts us as the Lord and the Christ. How this is done is the challenge and the preoccupation of the African Christian perspective, to which we now turn.

Notes

1. Otto Weber: Foundations of Dogmatics, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 3.
2. Gotthold E. Lessing ‘On the proof of the Spirit and Power in Lessing’s Theological Writings, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1956, p. 53.
3. Otto Weber, op. cit., p. 4.
4. J.G. Fichte: The Way towards the Blessed Life or The Doctrine of Religion, Chapman, London, 1849, p. 107.
5. Otto Weber, op. cit.
6. I. Kant: Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, Harper, New York, p.54.
7. F. Hegel: Lectures on Philosophy of Religion, III., K. Paul, French, Trubner & Co., London, 1895, p. 113.
8. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 5.  
See also F. Gogarten in Theologie und Geschichte, ZthK, 1953, p. 380.
9. Otto Weber,op. cit. p. 6.
10. op cit.
11. op. cit.
12. op. cit. Especially the quotation from Friedrich Gogarten in Theologie und Geschichte, ZthK, 1953, p. 334.
13. cf. Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics 1/2 T.& T Clark, Edinburgh, 1957, p. 45 ff, 437 ff.
14. Otto Weber, op. cit., p. 7.
15. Op. cit.
16. Op. cit. p. 8.

17. Op. cit. p. 8

See given examples in Rom. 6:10, I Pet. 3:18, Heb. 7: 27, 9: 12, 26-28, 10: 12,14.

18. Op. cit.

See also W. Pannenberg's view which appears to the historicity of Jesus yet derives significance in the fact that God is revealed in him. Jesus - God and Man, SCM, London, 1968, p. 30.

19. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 14.

20. See the affirmation of this in A. Ritschl: The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, Scribners, New York, 1966, p. 394. Also, W. Niesel: The Theology of Calvin, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1956, p. 194 ff.

21. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 6, 21.

22. op. cit.

23. op. cit. p. 22. See also Vol. 1, pp. 496 f.

24. op. cit. p. 16.

25. Op. cit. See also Lesslie Newbigin's Foolishness to the Greeks: the Gospel and Western Culture, WCC, Geneva, 1986, especially p. 33 f. on this point of the transformation of man's self-understanding.

26. A.E. McGrath: The Making of Modern German Christology Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. .11.

27. cf. Wilhelm Herrmann: The Communion of the Christian with God, Williams and Norgate, London, 1895, p. 77, 295 ff.

28. Colin Gunton: Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1983, p. 24.

29. W. Pannenberg: Jesus: God and Man, SCM Press, London, 1968, p. 30.
30. A.E. McGrath: The Making of Modern German Christology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 177.
31. Ibid.
32. Colin Gunton: Yesterday and Today, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1983, p. 15.  
See Karl Rahner: Foundations of Christian Faith, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1976. p. 295-310.
33. John A. T. Robinson: The Human Face of God, SCM Press, London, 1973, p. 209.
34. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 25.
35. Op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 26.  
See also Colin Gunton, op. cit. p. 53.
36. Op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 44 ff.  
See also Martin Kähler: The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Christ Philadelphia, 1964, p.
37. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 48.  
See also A. Grillmeier's Christ in Christian Tradition, Mowbrays, London, 1975, p. 3. quotation of M. Kähler.
38. Otto Weber, op. cit.
39. John Knox: The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 5.
40. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 50.

- 41. op. cit.
- 42. op. cit.
- 43. op. cit. p. 51.
- 44. op. cit.
- 45. op. cit.

Note his view of this struggle with law both in word and deed as being  
the obedience that led him to the Cross

- 46. op. cit. p. 53.
- 47. op. cit.
- 48. Rudolf Bultmann: Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, SCM  
Press, London, 1965, ed. p. 304.

- 49. J. Knox: The Humanity and Divinity of Christ, Cambridge University  
Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 8.

- 50. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 54 f.
- 51. op. cit., p. 55.

See especially his quotation from W. Bousset's Das Messiasgeheimnis  
in the Evangelien, in Criticism of W. Wrede: The Messianic Secret,  
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971, p. 354.

- 52. cf. Julius Schniewind: Das Evangelium nach Matheus., Vandenhoeck  
and Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1949.

- 53. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vo.2, p.55

- 54. op. cit. p. 56.

- 55. op. cit.

See also, Oscar Cullmann: The Christology of the New Testament,  
SCM Press Ltd. London, 1959, p. 133.

- 56. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p.56.

- 57. op. cit. p .57.

58. op. cit. p. 58.

See also W. Pannenberg's interesting debate with Weber on this point in its wider context: Jesus: God and Man, SCM Press, London, 1968, p. 251, f.

59. cf. J.D.G. Dunn: Christology in the Making, SCM, London, 1980, p. 95.

60. Ibid, p. 81.

See Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 60.

61. op. cit. p. 61.

See also O. Cullmann: The Christology of the New Testament, SCM Press, London, 1959, p. 133.

62. Albert Schweitzer: The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion; Macmillan, New York, 1950, p 222f.

63. W. Wrede: The Messianic Secret, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971, p. 84 ff.

64. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol. 2, p. 63.

65. op. cit., p. 64.

66. op.cit. p. 65.

See also Martin Hengel: The Cross of the Son of God, SCM Press, London, 1981, p. 180.

67. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 67.

68. op.cit. p. 68.

See also the sentence from R. Bultmann, 'All that historical criticism can establish is the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the Resurrection'. - Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 1, S.P.C.K., London, 1953, p. 42.

69. Ibid, cf. The examples from R. Bultmann, ibid, p. 42., where he states, 'The historical problem is scarcely relevant to Christian belief in the

Resurrection'.

Also, W. Künne from different direction, 'Untenability of the thesis of the historicality of the Resurrection of Jesus' in his Theology of Resurrection, Concordia, St. Louis, 1965, p. 29 ff.

And from Karl Barth in Epistle to the Romans, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1933, p. 38 is the following, 'Within history, Jesus as the Christ, (i.e. Risen Lord!) can be understood only as problem or myth.'

70. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 69. See also K. Barth, C.D. IV /2, p. 118 ff.

71. Rudolf Bultmann: Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 1 SPCK, London, 1964, p. 39 f.

72. Otto Weber, op. cit.p.69

73. op. cit.

74. op. cit.

75. op. cit. p. 70.

76. William L. Craig, 'On Doubts about the Resurrection' in Modern Theology. Vol. 6, No. 1, October, 1989, Edited by K. Surin, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p.73.

See also K. Bornhauser: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, C.L.S. Press, Bangalore, 1958, p. 173 ff. in his arguments for empirical verificationof the Easter accounts.

77. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 71.

78. Ibid . p.71.

79. op. cit. p.71.

See also Gerald O'Collins The Easter Jesus 2nd ed. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1980, p. 50-51. Though from a different direction.

- cf. A. Robertson & A. Plummer: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, T. & T. Clark, 1967, p. 343.
80. Otto Weber, Op.cit, Vol.2, p. 73.
81. cf. W. Bousset: Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginning of Christianity To Irenaeus, Abingdon Press, 1970, p. 129f.  
 R. Bultmann: Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, p. 124 f.  
 O. Cullmann: The Christology of the New Testament, p. 203 ff.
82. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 76.  
 See also, W. Kasper: The God of Jesus Christ, Crossroad, New York, 1984, p. 174.
83. Oscar Cullmann: The Christology of the New Testament, p. 235.
84. Ibid, p. 220 ff. and 234 ff.
85. cf. Martin Hengel: The Son of God, SCM Press, London, 1976, p. 88.
86. Ibid, p. 22.
87. cf. Oscar Cullman, op. cit. p. 279.
88. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 79.
89. op. cit.  
 See also, I. Howard Marshall, Jesus, The Saviour, SPCK, London, 1990, p. 146.
90. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 80.
91. op. cit. p. 81.
92. op. cit. p. 82.
93. op. cit. p. 83.
94. cf. Colin Gunton: Yesterday and Today, op. cit. p. 81.
95. Leslie Newbigin: Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western

Culture, WCC, Geneva, 1986, p. 45.

96. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 83.
97. Friedrich Nietzsche: Thoughts out of Season, Part II, edited by Oscar Levy, T.N. Foulis, Edinburgh, 1909, p. 58.
98. cf. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 83.
99. op. cit.
100. op. cit.
101. op. cit.
102. op. cit.p.84

See similar stance advanced by Peter Carnley in Article The Poverty of Historical Scepticism in Christ, Faith and History, edited by S.W. Sykes and J.P. Clayton, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, p. 168 ff.

103. cf. R. Bultmann: The Problem of Eschatology, in History and Eschatology (The Gifford Lectures 1955), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1957, p. 38 ff.
104. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 88.
105. op. cit. p. 89.
106. op. cit.
107. op. cit.

Note his observation that the same aspect of history is what we find permeating the orientation of historical critical study of the Bible.

108. Martin Heidegger: Being and Time Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, reprint, p. 426.
109. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 91.
110. op. cit. p. 93.

111. Rudolf Bultmann: The Gospel of John, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1971, p. 695.

112. Ibid.

113. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 93.

114. op. cit. p. 96.

115. op. cit.

See also J.M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus, SCM Press, London, 1959, p. 43.

116. op. cit. p. 96.

117. op. cit.

118. op. cit.

See Also Rudolf Bultmann's Christian Faith and History in God, History and Historians, ed. C.T. McIntyre, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977, p. 109.

119. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 98.

120. op.cit.

121. op. cit.

122. op. cit.

123. op. cit. p. 104.

See also H. Berkhof: Christ, The Meaning of History, SCM Press, 1962, p. 187.

124. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 105.

125. op. cit.

126. op. cit. p. 107

See also G. Newlands' article on 'Christology' in A New Dictionary of Christian Theology edited by Alan Richardson and John Bowden. SCM London, 1983, p. 102.

127. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 105. See also p. 3 f.

128. op. cit. p. 108.

See also H.M. Gwatkin: Early Church History to A.D. 313, Macmillan & Co., London, 1927, p. 9 ff. for a variety of representation on Ebionites.

129. cf. G. Newland's article on 'Christology', op. cit. p. 103.

130. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol.2, p. 109.

131. op. cit. p. 111.

Note: Representatives of the Antiochene position:-

- Diodore of Tarsus (c. 390)
- Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428)
- Theodore of Cyrrhus (C 393-458) and
- John Chrysostom (c. 347 - 407)

For an extended discussion on Apollinarianism, cf. Aloys Grillmeier: Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 1, Mowbrays, London, 19, p. 329 ff.

132. cf. A. Grillmeier, op.cit. Vol. 1 p. 474.

133. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 113.

See also J.A. Dorner: History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ, Second division, Vol. 1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1951, p. 67.

134. cf. Frances Young's article in 'Alexandrian Theology' in A New Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. A. Richardson and J. Bowden, SCM, London, 1983, p. 10.

135. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol.2, p. 114.

136. op. cit. p. 115.

137. op. cit.
138. op. cit. Quotation from H. Denzinger's The Sources of Catholic Dogma, translated by R.J. Deferrari, 39th Edition, Herder, St. Louis, 1957, p. 59.
139. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2.
140. R.V.C. Sellers: The Council of Chalcedon; A Historical and Doctrinal Survey, SPCK, London, 1953, p. 211.
141. Otto Weber, opcit, Vol. 2. p.98.
142. Otto Weber, op. cit. p. 116.
143. op. cit.
144. cf. G. Newlands article, op.cit. p. 104.
145. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 119.
146. cf. Paul Tillich: A History of Christian Thought, SCM, London. 1968, p. 88.
147. cf. G. Newlands' article, op. cit. p. 104.
148. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 122.
149. op. cit.
150. op. cit. p. 127.
151. op. cit.
152. op. cit.
153. cf. His article on 'Christology' in Twentieth Century Theology in the Making Vol. 2, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, The Fontana Library, Collins, London, 1970, p. 123.
154. cf. Marc Lienhard: Luther; Witness to Jesus Christ. Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1982, p. 137.
155. cf. Georg Webhung's article on 'Christology' in Twentieth Century

Theology in the Making, Vol. 2, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, The Fontana Library, Collins, London, 1970, p. 125.

156. cf. G. Newlands article, op.cit.

See also, Luther's Works: Church and Ministry, Vol. 4, edited by Eric W. Gritsch, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1966, p. 100.

157. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 130.

See also an interesting contrast between Luther and Zwingli in Paul Tillich: A History of Christian Thought, edited by Carl E. Braaten, SCM, London, 1968, p. 256 ff.

158. op. cit. p. 132.

See also John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1953, p. 449 - especially under section 14 and 15, i.e. 'Ascension' and 'seated at the right hand of the Father'.

159. cf. Georg Wehrung's article, op.cit. p. 126.

See E. David Willis: Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1966, p. 63 ff. for an extended discussion.

160. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 136.

161. op. cit. p. 135.

162. op. cit. p. 138. As he refers to E.F.K. Müller's discussion on 'Jesus Christ, Threefold Office Of' in The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. VI, edited by S.M. Jackson, 1970 edition, Baker Bookhouse, Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 175 f. (where Müller maintains that the question of the 'immutability of God is significant in this question').

163. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p.138. Note. Weber's reference to Johann

Gerhard's view that 'God-man' is not the subject in Loci Communes Theologica IV, 1, 592, thesis 1 - whereas David Hollaz designed human nature as the 'subject' as he shows.

164. op. cit.

165. op. cit. p. 140.

cf. Also Karl Barth: CD IV/1 and 2 which gives these general lines of approach as Weber cites.

166. cf. W.F. Gess: Christ, Person und Werk Nach Christi Selbstzeugnis und den Zeugnissen der Apostel, Vol. III, Bahnmaier, Basel, 1870-87, p. 344 ff. cited by Weber opcit, vol 2. p. 41.

167. Ibid, p. 327 ff.

168. cf. Lucian J. Richard: A Kenotic Christology; in the Humanity of Jesus the Christ, the Compassion of our God, University Press of America, Washington, D.C. 1982.

169. cf. G. Newlands' review of the above book in The Expository Times, edited by C.S. Rodd, Vol. 94, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, October 82 - Sept. 1983, p. 90.

170. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 145.

171. op. cit.

172. op. cit. p. 146.

173. op. cit.

174. cf. Immanuel Kant: Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1938, p. 115 ff.

175. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 147.

176. op. cit. p. 148.

177. op. cit.

178. cf. Friedrich Gogarten as Weber cites from Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, Tübingen, 1953, p. 436.

179. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 149 f.

180. op. cit. p. 154.

181. op. cit. p. 160

See also, G.C. Berkouwer: The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1956, where he directs the same criticism justifiably against Barth in the light of the above.

182. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p.160.

See also Karl Barth: CD IV/1, p. 185.

183. op. cit.

184. op. cit. p. 161.

He notes that Pannenberg in his analysis of 'Redemptive Event and History in Basic Questions in Theology', SCM Press, London, 1970, does proceed cautiously in asserting history as foundation. Weber's contention is that it is only when it is acknowledged that that foundation - 'historical Christ' is not subject to rational insight.

185. cf. Colin Gunton: Yesterday and Today, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1983, p. 61 ff.

186. Otto Weber, op. cit., Vol.2, p. 163 f.

## **Towards an African Perspective**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF AFRICA AND THE RESULTANT QUEST FOR AFRICAN THEOLOGY

The Christianization of Africa has been a process of both indigenous and missionary activity. The current concerns, dominant themes, and problems preoccupying the Church in Africa along with the methodological approaches employed in her theological articulation have been shaped in one way or another by this two dimensional scenery of its heritage. In fact, we need not emphasise that to talk of the Church in Africa is to recall a history that goes to the first century when Mark the Evangelist is said to have established the Church in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> It is to revisit that tradition of the early church fathers in North Africa where the immense contribution of Tertullian, Augustine, Cyprian and Donatus shaped the development of the early Latin theology, and indeed provided the foundation of what we now know as modern Western theology.<sup>2</sup> The same is true for Athanasius, Origen and Cyril all of Alexandria whose thoughts did not only form the basis of Eastern Greek theology, but had influence also in the West.<sup>3</sup>

John Parratt has rightly observed that while it is true to say that North Africa was properly part of the Mediterranean world rather than Black Africa before the appearance of Islam, it is also the case that by the middle of the 6th century, the Christian faith had penetrated southward as far as Ethiopia<sup>4</sup>. Mbiti has argued that we have in the Ethiopian Church the bridging of the first Christian Africa with the new whose history is very much coloured by missionary Christianity and colonialism. For it is the only country belonging to the first Christian Africa that withstood Islamic expansionism in terms of history and geography.<sup>5</sup>

However, modern Christian Africa derives its distinctiveness from the fact that it is largely the child of European evangelization (and sometimes colonization) and the Americas.<sup>6</sup> The pioneers were the Portuguese Catholics who made initial attempts at evangelizing Africa in the 15th century, a missionary activity that founded no lasting Church except for one convert who seems to have seen Christianity in African terms.<sup>4</sup> This was Kimba Vita, a young Congolese girl of royal birth, who soon after baptism began to claim prophetic gifts. She identifies Jesus and the Apostles with the black race, saw Christ's role as liberator from poverty and oppression, and looked forward to a black millennium on Earth. In about 1706 Kimba was burnt at the stake, but her ideas have re-emerged in more recent teachings of some of the Independent churches.<sup>8</sup>

The full-blown missionary activity though was in the nineteenth century. In fact this was the time that saw the beginnings of the great thrust of Protestant missions into Africa - with the given impetus originating from the Evangelical Awakenings of the time.<sup>9</sup> And although one would reckon with the accreditation of this missionary expansion of the churches to the breath of the Holy Spirit reaching tornado-pitch, it is a fact of history that the structures arising therefrom were to a large extent the effect of colonial power in Africa, as Jean-Marc Ela observes.<sup>10</sup> Indeed he points out the fact that the missions sometimes had need of the military, economic and diplomatic support of Colonial Europe such that what one encounters is an expansion of the Western Church within that constituted aspect of the world-wide expansion of the 'West' exhibited in this activity.<sup>11</sup> And as if to affirm this point, the planted African Church and even the orientation of its theology remained patterned along the models of Europe such that Adrian Hastings would characterise missionary Christianity as that of adopting 'the faith is

Europe' approach.<sup>12</sup> This is a factor that has been understood to explain, among other things, why there was little attempt at indigenization - except for the celebrated efforts of Bishop Samuel Adjayi Crowther and James Johnson in West Africa. Hence Mbiti's assertion that 'Christian Africa is largely living on borrowed or inherited Christianity'.<sup>13</sup>

The emancipation spirit that swept across Africa in the nineteen-fifties and -sixties brought this factor of a dependent Church into the theological agenda. In fact, this is the time that 'missionary Christianity' found itself not only faced with the charge of being an instrument in the colonial process, but as representing a theology that was basically wrapped up in the thought forms and cultures of Western Europe.<sup>14</sup> The calls for indigenization of Christianity, the emergence of independent churches, and indeed the call for an 'African' theology served to demonstrate the dissatisfaction amongst some African Christians toward 'missionary Christianity' in terms of its theology, church structures, patterns of ministry and even its liturgy or the ways of worship.<sup>15</sup> This is a reaction that underlined the serious shortcomings that African theologians realised in missionary Christianity. And one that set off a real attempt at rethinking the Christian faith in African terms and doing theology in an African context as is demonstrated by the preoccupation of the African Church in the last thirty years.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the immediate shortcomings of the unfortunate unholy alliance between the political, economic and cultural hegemony of the West on the one hand and the missionary enterprise on the other,<sup>17</sup> there was the tendency of 'missionary Christianity' to devalue traditional African culture and especially to dismiss traditional religion as heathen or pagan, such that there was no room for the appreciation of possible aspects of continuities between Christianity and African culture and religion.<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, several reasons can be given for this approach which in a way dominated missionary Christianity. However, there are clear indications from an overview of missionary activity, that a lot had to do with the backgrounds of pioneer Western missionaries. For many of them came from theological backgrounds where aspects of discontinuity between Christianity and every culture were stressed to the exclusion of continuity with local cultures. Conversion to Christianity was thus interpreted in terms of a radical breaking away from the past and being set in a new pattern of life, even if one continued to live close to one's cultural and social situation. In other words, the general orientation was that of an uprooting process rather than a transforming one. Hence the consequential unacknowledgement of the two-dimensional process of continuity and discontinuity evident in conversion, and this explains the subsequent condemnation of everything African as pagan and mere superstition - such that no dialectic relationship was envisaged.<sup>19</sup> Indeed there was a recognition by these missionaries that African traditional religion was an integral part of being an African, being a member of a given tribe or ethnic community and this explains the reasons of its not being missionary, for that would imply conferring a tribal status to an alien to the tribe, which was unheard of (one had to be born into it!); a pervading reality that could not be reduced to a narrow definition as it was the way of life. But this realization of the omnipresent nature of traditional religion did not stop them from demanding a total break away from this cultural heritage from new converts.<sup>20</sup> Many of them had come to destroy the 'Citadel of Satan' and construct a new one of God in its place. With their presumption that there was no God outside Christianity, but the devil's realm, traditional religion was no doubt a Satanic faith.<sup>21</sup> Samuel G Kibicho argues that it is these assumptions and the prejudices which these missionaries brought with them against the African people and their religions

that is at display here. For to them, Africans were ‘Savages, primitive, the lower races’ etc and their religions were primitive religions, pagan and animistic - creating a serious missionary dilemma (for how appropriate was it to use the language and symbols of a people who did not worship the true God, and how were they to ‘exorcise’ the languages inbred with ‘Satanic’ conceptions for them to be a proper channel for expressing the new and only true religion and thereby enabling the African to be freed from the claws of evil?) which was to become a fundamental cause of the constant struggle between African religions and Christianity.<sup>23</sup> Kibicho further points to the nineteenth century evolutionary view of human races and of their religions as advanced by Darwin and whose popular appeal then was not only outside Christian thinking in the West. As he states pointedly, ‘Africans and their religions were regarded as being at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder, while people of European origin were at the top’. Therefore colonisation was interpreted (and still is - especially white domination by the upholders of apartheid in South Africa) as a divine mission to help advance these savage races in the scale of humanity, or to civilise them. In this divine mission (the ‘White man’s burden’), colonialism and Western Christianity saw themselves as united.<sup>24</sup> Missionaries found themselves adopting one or both theories of how religion came about; how did man ever come to believe in the existence of any God, high or low? The two main theories as to the origin of religion are both based on the assumption that monotheism is the truth of the matter. (The Western world assumes this - and many African theologians assume it too, but it is necessary to realise that this assumption is made).<sup>25</sup>

As has been observed, the one theory is that which holds the view that monotheism is the culmination and peak of a long evolutionary process from

an original animism or animating up through polytheism and the like, to a final monotheism. The process includes fetishism, ancestor worship, totemism and so forth. This theory involves the assumption that man's first reaction to the outside world was a single animistic reaction whereby he personified the nearby objects of the natural world and those processes of nature which immediately affected him. These personifications are the low-gods; that is, the gods of fertility, of the rivers and the springs, of the rains, of the fields, of the trees - and all gods of the earth, near to earth or distinct from it as is the case with the thought of the great gods of the sky who are high, remote, unapproachable and unapproaching. Man needed these low-gods, and their goodwill and active aid was a prime necessity for survival. This is said to be the origin of worship, born out of the need to placate the low-gods on whom humans depend for their life itself. It is further maintained that out of this primitive animist religion emerged ultimately the idea of one God over all, until in the course of time man abandoned his crude animistic notions and arrived at the idea of and the belief in the one and only God.<sup>26</sup>

The second theory is 'that religion started as a pure, orginal monotheism, that it became corrupted, the one into many, but that there was a revival of monotheism in Judaism, itself the cradle, if not altogether the nursery, of both Christianity and Islam'.<sup>27</sup> It follows from this, therefore that the creation stories of Genesis are tacitly assumed as right and that when it is said in Chapter One that 'God saw that it was good' the word 'good' means 'morally good'. How earth and seas and sun and moon and stars can be morally good is hard to understand, just as it is difficult to see what the phrase 'a fallen world' means. The word 'good' means nothing except by reference to a predetermined standard. To this many have added the uncritical use of the word 'good' in the first chapter of Genesis, together

with the uncritical attitude of the Old Testament by which chapters one, two and four are combined to give a picture of the Age of Innocence, giving us an un fallen man in an un fallen world. Is there really any such basis in the truth of the stories to be found in the whole world over, of a primitive state of blessedness?<sup>28</sup>

When we turn to African religions, the evidence therein points to the fact that animistic religion existed with a clear notion of a supreme being or God<sup>29</sup>; these religions involve much more than a belief in animistic spirits. Animism is only one aspect of these religions, and therefore to say that animistic ideas concerning nearby objects and the nearby processes of nature existed in primitive times or exist today without any notion or trace whatever of a supreme-God, is an assumption based on a preconceived theory and a consequent failure to ask all the questions. Certainly one finds the supreme-God with his intermediaries, the low-gods, everywhere. Often this supreme-God is far away, so remote that he is altogether shadowy. Indeed the common practice is that he is not worshipped for he is too remote and it is the nearby gods who must be conciliated, and the supreme-God is hardly found in tribal customs and rituals - for how can such a supreme-God be found in these things?<sup>30</sup>

What comes into light, therefore is that the failure to ask the right questions or to look for such a God in things that cannot contain him resulted in the early missionaries missing him altogether; for they were looking for a cult of this God, a God who is far away, far above the lowering rain-clouds, remote from day-to-day affairs, and in any case unchangeable. Equally the belief in an original, pure monotheism is built on a preconceived theory.

A lot of evidence can be deduced which supports the view that the African seems to have had a double animistic reaction to his environment. On the one hand was his personification of the nearer objects and the process of nature on which his life depends from day to day - a pointer to the polytheistic-gods on whom the animistic theory above is based. On the other hand, he also personified the totality of things, especially as embraced and covered by the all-embracing sky, and he supposed that there existed a supreme-God, away on the topmost mountain above the clouds looking down upon the flat earth. In this regard, the supreme-God, way up in the sky, is as much a product of animistic thinking as the low-gods are. The necessity of services, priests and worship of the low-god made their existence plain and obvious to missionaries, especially if they were primarily interested in ceremonies and rituals. This double animistic reaction of man to his environment or outside world still belongs to our modern world as well as to any other; although today it tends to be more 'sophisticated', based on entirely different premises and using different categories, categories that are vast in number in the interpretation of the data gathered through the senses - this is the difference but in the way in which we think in comparison to our ancestors - for at the heart of animistic thinking is man's attitude and tendency to interpret the outside world in terms of purely human ways and human institutions and turning this interpretation into a dogmatic affirmation about the ultimate or the totality of things. We need not stress that there is no special language which can be used in speaking about God. For the only possible language is that which is used about man. But this does not stop us from being on the guard against imagining that God is a superman or an immensely larger kind of man. For even where language, say for example mathematical symbols and formulae, was capable of ensuring an escape from anthropomorphism, the depicting of God in the likeness of man, or more

crudely, from making God in man's image - would still be no insurance against a picture of God devised in accordance with a particular form of human thinking. And this is very much like what may be called letting in anthropomorphism by the back door.<sup>31</sup> A notable point is made by J K Mozley when he says, 'The real question is this: Is there anything which is true about man which is also true about God? Obviously, if God exists, the fact of his existence is common to him and to man. But if nothing more than that can be said, the existence of God will make hardly any difference to man here and now; it will not give light to his mind, or strength to his will. Above all, it will not give him the least direction as to what his attitude to God should be or whether it matters if he puts all thought of God quite away from him. God is of importance in man's life only if and when it becomes possible to say something more about him than that he exists. But that 'something more' must be of such a nature that it is within the ordinary man's power to understand, unless the knowledge of God is reserved for some class of man, in which case once again, it will cease to be of any concern to the vast majority of men ... Whatever is said about God must have meaning which men will recognise because they have been familiar with the same kind of language in their experience. Nor does there appear to be any good reason at the very start to justify the view that something which is true when said about man will necessarily not be true when said about God?<sup>32</sup>

At issue therefore is that missionaries should have been sensitive to the permanent recurrence of 'animistic' reaction in all ages and should have been less eager to adopt either of the two theories as to the origin of religion. As it has been pointed out 'it is regrettable that John Robinson's *Honest to God*, and *Exploration into God*,<sup>33</sup> came a century too late to warn the early missionaries of the need for sensitivity in dealing with Africa's double

animistic reactions, for this same reaction was present and real in missionary-Christianity, and although his book did crack the surface, enabling some to reflect the shadowy, otiose ‘supreme God’, a God who was as much of a product of man’s animistic thinking as were the ‘earth-bound-gods’, the permanence of this double animistic attitude in all ages has helped to preserve this ‘God’ that never was. And although Jesus of Nazareth is the emphatic denial of the existence of such a God, modern theology is being constantly terrorised and betrayed by its retention of such a God. The African experience should remind us of some aspects of continuity and discontinuity in Christianity vis-a-vis other religions. While therefore, noting that there are aspects of discontinuity between the Gospel and African life, practice and culture, we must not neglect the aspects of continuity’.<sup>34</sup> Even so, there is need to avoid giving the impression, after almost a century of Christian influence, that what the Africans regarded as the supreme-God can readily be called or renamed without any radical reconstruction and re-definition of the various beliefs and practices, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>

In other words, it is an adherence to the warning to guard against ‘positivistic’ views about languages, cultures and religions. And the tendency is to ignore the historicity of such languages, cultures and religions and the practical life that resulted from such conceptualizations and belief. For if we do this, we shall be falling into the error of what goes for much ‘orthodox’ Christian theology, a theology that tends to identify ‘God the Father’ with a synthesis of the supreme-God of natural religion and the Absolute of the Philosophers. This so-called Christian ‘Supreme-God’ is strictly moral, but he remains remote, terrible, ranging from the ‘exalted-Jesus’ to priests. Hence the insufficiency of saying that because people

believe in a ‘supreme-God’ who is one, this must be ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’. Indeed there is every truth in the statement that the problem that faces modern theology today is that of stating what sort of a supreme-God we are talking about; or what kind of monotheism one is talking about. For the evidence of the New Testament, the moral Christian experience and church tradition will not be adequately represented if this one only God is understood to be one and all alone, who communicated with man through intermediaries. This evidence has cut through all the medley of intermediaries, establishing a pure monotheism that acknowledges God who himself can and does communicate with man. One theme of the Christian gospel is indeed ‘God is one, but man is not alone and nevermore need be so’. Being aware that all our ideas and images of God always have anthropomorphic suggestions, the Christian gospel declares that everyone can walk and talk with God, for God is immediately near. In fact it does underline the assertion that every Christian theologises, and thus, at issue is not whether there can be a contextual reflection. This is so because the New Testament, the moral Christian experience, and Christian tradition give a fuller and richer teaching about God's nature, purposes and activities. Belief in God has been deepened and widened through the fact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit within the Christian church, the fellowship of those who believe that Jesus Christ is ‘the Lord’ and that God raised him from the dead; the events surrounding Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have a direct bearing upon the knowledge of God and have been the chief influence and factors which have led to the building up of Christian theology. We cannot therefore formulate our thoughts in such a way that there seems to be distinction in the development of our thoughts on the person and work of Christ, for example, from that of the doctrine of the triune God. All the works of the divine are undivided and

mission follows expression. Those who wish to discard the trinitarian understanding of God seem almost to suggest that belief in the trinity was and is a simple matter. This doctrine is difficult because we are brought, however, reluctantly, to face the attempt to hold together two apparently different worlds; whether one looks at it in its Eastern, Athanasian and hypostatic way or in the Western, Augustinian and economic one, there still is the leap from the eternal to the temporal. Indeed it was evident as we discussed revelation in Chapter One that the question of how God can give himself to the world (of incarnation), which is a disclosure implying an alienation from himself, is a challenge that faces every theologian in the attempt to understand this disclosure and to find a way of stating it, a way that shall show the unity of theory and practice, paying full attention to the historicity of this disclosure or self-giving. And therefore, our ideas of the oneness of God, his supremacy, his impassibility, his transcendence have to be seen and re-thought in light of the Trinitarian understanding. For the unity of God is seen as its stake in the Passion of Jesus Christ and God's transcendence is shown to be related to the world, a relatedness which speaks of the divine humility, humility seen in the son, the word made flesh; and the world is therefore shown to be the stage of the divine drama of redemption. As for human thought, it is not autonomous, unshaken by the concrete material around it, and if we succeed in the 'naming' of God, many Christians in Africa today opt for 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', the <sup>which</sup> name might help us to appeal to the material and to the concretely real. But the problem of man is not just the 'name' of God, but rather the prior problem of man's experience and knowledge of God who has known man. How are we to characterise how we are known by him? And surely our knowledge, however real it may be, is only partial, ambiguous and tentative if such knowledge is not knowing as we are known.<sup>36</sup>

It is worth revisiting the timely warning therefore, that all African theologians should avoid over-reacting but take seriously the words of H.W. Turner, who studied African independent churches with thoroughness and sympathy when he says that he is not convinced that the ‘Limitations of a culture-bound white Western theology are best corrected by the development of other cultural theologies, black, brown or yellow’.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the shortcomings of missionary Christianity cannot be corrected by a tendency to perpetuate similar inclinations even if it serves at a particular time a contextual concern. When it comes to Christology therefore, the urgent task is not one of mediation between African traditional religion and Christianity. On the contrary, what emerges as the immediate task is the concern to characterise Africa's experience of how God has known the African in pre-Christian days and now through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit which has been given to the African. This is where a dialogic insight exemplifies its input in that aspects of distinctives<sup>*nec*</sup> or discontinuity are not compromised in as much as continuities are to be made plain. Otto Weber's characterization of Christian experience (when we talk of encounter with God as encounter) as transformation serves to illustrate the point being made here.<sup>38</sup>

Rightly stated, ‘the Africans, like other people, see Jesus, who is the exegesis of God, through first century eyes, and that means often we do not understand their terms and outlook, their culture is not ours, and the picture they give us is full of ambiguities and we are constantly being forced to ask in humility whether the ‘clouded’ parts or the ‘faded’ areas are part of the original painting or not. And this first century picture constantly refuses to be transferred on to a new canvas however modern<sup>*and*</sup> appropriate it may be - it always ends up a poor imitation hardly resembling that of the first century,

the traditions associated with it, and people's knowledge of it then and today.

This first century picture on the somewhat tattered and worn-out canvas demands great sensitivity and careful handling; and whatever picture we care to superimpose on the old one (like in Chinese pottery where new diagrams are superimposed on to the old ones), due to the shifts in experience, methods and categories of thought, this does not mean that the old one is completely obliterated, having no relevance and significance for us. This means that since we are dealing with a historical picture, and the discipline is certainly historical, we cannot finally dispose of any part of the canvas'.<sup>39</sup> This is a point reinforced by Robert Morgan when writing on the study of the debate about New Testament theology by stating,

a chess player has a definite aim, and the strategy behind his moving pieces around the board is dictated by that. Similarly, in interpreting the whole tradition to reach a cogent position a theologian must so marshal the evidence of the tradition that an opponent has to admit the superiority of his position.<sup>40</sup>

Not that Morgan equates the theological game with chess in every way. For all the rules of the game are not decided in advance in theology. But where he draws the resemblance between the two is in the use of tradition to provide strategies. For Morgan, the tradition provides the pieces for the game rather than the rules. Hence his view that the formulation of a theological position requires reflection upon the tradition.<sup>41</sup> A view we also find asserted by Weber when he says

Dogmatics neither starts anew at a given point in time, nor does it commence with the destruction of what has gone before in history, it begins with critical respect for what has gone before.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, it is a view that reckons with the fact that all the pieces of tradition come back on to the board after every game of theological interpretation. The intention here is not that which seeks to destroy or through theological criticism try to mutilate that tradition by annihilating what is thought to be unacceptable.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, it operates with the recognition that other peoples' patterns have a role to play in the formulation of our patterns, in the communication of our understanding of the ways things are - and may even mould our entire patterns! Even though in the end the attempt to discover is ours, the patterns made on the voyage are an account of our travels for the assistance of other travellers. The lesson therein is that it is only when that account is made clearly and responsibly that it can begin to illuminate, or even perhaps point towards, the infinitely complex reality of God, who is the object of our journey and the path of our travelling.<sup>44</sup>

Now this raises an important point relating to the very nature of the Christian Gospel. For whereas the contextual imperative demands an exemplification of an expression of faith emerging out of a peoples' encounter with God in their time and place, it is that which they encounter which dictates their expression. And the same is true for Christology. For the concern for relevance has tended to lead to that practice where 'our' portrait of Jesus is painted on the old canvas. That idealised picture of ourselves or our ideals such that our reference to the first century witness (New Testament Church) is in fact a process that exemplifies our reflections of twentieth century African faces. Sentamu's call is therefore timely when he says that 'African theology must resist the temptation of portraying Jesus, as many have done today, as a paradigm for the self-reliant, self-sufficient and entirely ego-directed - seeing Jesus as a model for the self-made man; which in fact is the figure of a self-portrait of bourgeois-capitalist secular man in his attempt to take Jesus away from his orientation and reject it as

unintelligible to people today; or to portray Jesus as the oppressed, the under-privileged, the exploited, the powerless, who need to struggle with sinful-structures, principalities and powers, overcoming them by ‘obedience’ to the causes of justice and ushering in liberation, which in fact is a utopia belief in progress’.<sup>45</sup>

MacKinnon rightly states ‘Christianity faces man with the paradox that certain events which could be otherwise are of ultimate, transcendent import; and this without losing their character as contingent events. The propositions *crucifixus est sub Pontio Pilato; passus et sepultus est*, are contingent propositions; their subject matter moreover is altogether innocent of miraculous undertones. Yet this judicial murder, its pain and its end, form the substance of confession’.<sup>46</sup> Obviously, this needs further elaboration which will come later. But for now, the invitation that seems to emerge from the above, is for us to recognise the Christian Gospel as a principle of life whose centre is the person of Jesus Christ, who although welcome and is easily adaptable, is at home in no culture.<sup>47</sup>

Reckoning with this fact then, how are we to characterise the subsequent emergence of African theology, taking into account the missionary past already outlined and the state of the church in Africa today? Following Kwesi Dickson, it is important to state from the very beginning that we recognise the fact that wherever the church has come into being, theologies of greater or lesser sophistication exist as every Christian theologises.<sup>48</sup> And thus, at issue is not a question of going into the old debate of trying to justify the existence of an ‘African theology’. On the contrary, our concern here is more to do with how best to understand and characterise that which the term denotes in terms of its national, confessional, methodological or conceptual framework.

We need not stress that ours is not a pioneering undertaking in that various attempts have already been made. In fact, it is in the light of this fact that is necessary to clarify what is meant by our usage of the term ‘African’ in that there are varying depictions of what is implied by its usage in the said attempts. For example, some African theologians hold the view that African theology, strictly defined, is the systematic presentation of the religious beliefs, ideas and practices of African Traditional Religions such that it is distinguished from African Christian theology.<sup>49</sup> Our position, however, is aligned with those who see this as a pedantic distinction since both must be concerned with the truth. Resorting to the Latin phraseology of *Theologia Africana* could be more of a romantic expression intended to serve as a linkage to the Latin Fathers of North Africa whose contribution to what is now known as Western theology was undoubtedly immense, even though Upkong has attempted to see its merits in terms of being a common title for both French and English-speaking Africa.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it is worth stating that there is legitimacy in the usage of all these designations as is demonstrated by some African theologians who use them interchangeably. The primary concern is to recognise that at issue is an attempt to articulate that particular expression of the African people as they respond to the reality of their encounter with Christ's event; that self-disclosure and self-giving of God proclaimed in the Christian Gospel. This is an expression that is not done in isolation but within the heritage of its past such that there is a reckoning with that reality of continuity and discontinuity with the pre-Christian religious expressions as our christological quest would hope to exemplify.

In as much as the term ‘African theology’ is a whole-embracing one, we have to state that the continent confronts us with such a diversity and variety that is in itself a depiction of its geography, size, the complexity of her

peoples' cultures, languages and religions. Indeed, there are homogeneities such as similarities of rituals, practices and ideas amongst African peoples - especially in what has come to be known as sub-Saharan Africa. But these similarities do not overshadow the fact that there are also remarkable divergencies.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the call to be on guard against sweeping generalisations, whether it is in reference to the cultures of the African people, their religious perspectives, and even their economic and social institutions. And the need to reckon with the reality of the plurality of theological persuasions which we encounter therein.<sup>52</sup>

The South African situation confronts us with a particular dimension in the definition of African theology. For the continued oppression of Africans by whites through the racially discriminating legislation of apartheid architectured in its origin by Dutch Reformed Church theologians, has always led to the identification of African theology with *Black Theology*. The question as to who should participate in the quest for this theology therefore, becomes one of primary importance even though it may sound superfluous in the ordinary sense of treating the subject. As Basil Moore has shown, the point of departure emerges when we reckon that what we are dealing with here is a quest of 'a theology of the oppressed, by the oppressed, for the liberation of the oppressed'.<sup>53</sup> A wider perspective is raised by Justin Upkong who does not see the basic concern as one that aims at exclusivity. On the contrary he argues that the cutting-edge critical response of Black theology has always arisen from the basic concern to re-discover in the Gospel that liberating theology of both the oppressed and the oppressor.<sup>54</sup> This is a view that has found eloquent expression in Alan Boesak when he says, 'Black theology ... comes from a situation of oppression and suffering of a people who believe in God and who ask what the Gospel of Jesus Christ has to say about the situation, is also a theology

of liberation ... *that which leads to* a spiritual and a political exodus out of the situation of oppression toward one of liberation, - out of inhumanity, darkness and hatred toward a situation in which we, both whites and blacks, can regain our common humanity and enjoy a meaningful life that has been destroyed'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, this is the insight which has found qualification in De Gruchy whose articulation of black theology is with the understanding that it is the Christian faith that determines how to relate to the sociopolitical situation, not the situation which determines the faith.<sup>56</sup> The tendency to assert *colour* as the criterion of participation in its articulation by some of the exponents of black theology has, however, entertained shortcomings similar to those which it sought to overcome.

In pursuance of our already stated understanding of African theology as that response to the Gospel, that quest whose aim is to arrive at a distinctive meditation upon faith in Christ that does justice to the life-circumstances of the African Christian,<sup>57</sup> our usage of the term 'African' in our christological quest is not therefore different. Indeed we share the view of those whose definition of African theology in terms of the above render its usage as a summative and interpretative term for the various prayers, sermons, songs, poems, writings, beliefs, etc., through which the African Christians have and continue to express their experience of God's Salvific Act in the Event of Jesus Christ. And we need not stress that this befits that conception of the nature of theology as 'a risky, albeit exhilarating business of reflecting on the experiences of a particular Christian community in relation to what God has done, is doing and will do - the ultimate reference point *being* the man Jesus';<sup>58</sup> a conception that begins with the recognition that theology is of necessity particularistic, existential and provisional in that the universal faith of Christianity is always exhibited in local manifestations; a reality that

always makes it imperative for every theologian to be sensitive and responsible to his own local community in as much as he reckons with the fact that the totality of its (community's) cultural manifestations do not supercede the greatness and richness of the Christian Gospel. The question here then is not one of exclusivity, but the realisation of the fact that the very diversity of the Christian Church begets plurality of theologies in that we do not all apprehend or respond to the transcendent in exactly the same way, nor can we be expected to express our experiences in the same way. Contrary to a possible viewing of this state of affairs in the negative, Tutu reminds us that here is a reason for rejoicing because it makes mandatory our need for one another because our partial theologies will of necessity require to be corrected by other more or less partial theologies. It reinforces the motive of interdependence which is the inalienable characteristic of the body of Christ. It is after all the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is eternal; man's response is always time-bound and his theology even more so. The former is what ultimately gives Christianity its universality. Of course theology will have universal elements because there are certain constants such as the recalcitrance of human nature and the thrust for self-transcendence.<sup>59</sup>

It has to be said though that what has come forth in the calls for the enhancement of a local expression - best expressed in the term indigenization - has at times tended to be too backward looking, if not at times giving the impression that what is sought is a kind of a mixture of African traditional beliefs and the Christian Gospel.<sup>60</sup> Tendencies of these kind, however, arise when one does not reckon with the fact that culture is not a static thing but is always dynamic. And a theology that arises out of what we referred to as that distinctive meditation upon faith cannot be blind to the scandal of the Gospel, but at all times will take into account its declaration of judgement

upon every culture in all its ungodly inclinations. Serious reflections on one's context is no excuse for cheap and hollow theology. And therefore African theologians have to take seriously J.C. Thomas' reminder when he says,

...Africanizing Christianity can only be done ... if both traditional religion and the doctrine of the Christian churches are examined carefully and systematically and areas of agreement and conflict are carefully defined and demarcated. It is a tragedy that in just these areas African theologians are producing works which are superficial and unscholarly.<sup>61</sup>

One area that we already pointed out as a major shortcoming of missionary theology was the general negation of African belief and religious heritage to such an extent that some could share Emil Ludwig's questions as to 'how an untutored African could conceive of God? For deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing',<sup>62</sup> and thus be engaged in that avowed duty of not only 'civilizing' the African, but drumming the idea of God into his mind - thought of as a *tabula rasa* - or at least filled with demonic ideas - which can only be exorcised by an exercise as the one stated. This is a fundamental error that would continue to be made even when people like Robertson Smith had long ago stated that,

No positive religion that has moved man has been able to start with a *tabula rasa* to express itself as if religion was beginning for the first time; in form if not in substance, the new system must be in contact all along the line with the old ideas and practices which it finds in possession. A new scheme of faith can find a hearing only by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist in its audience, and it cannot reach these without taking account of the traditional forms in which religious feeling is embodied and without speaking a language which men accustomed to these forms can understand.<sup>63</sup>

But it is not enough to highlight these shortcomings and then not learn from them. For example it has been well documented that by negating Africa's

religious heritage, missionary Christianity could not draw such enhancing insights as that of corporate life in African society which did not only stress the communal bond as source of identity, but the inseparability of the sacred and the profane.<sup>64</sup> In other words, to speak of God is to speak of one who does not affect only one aspect of an individual's life, but his total way of living as an individual, as a family member, and his public life in society. When one turns to today's African Church and its inclinations, there seems to be a repeat of the above in that it seems to be advocating disengagement from the hectic business of life and that split of private and public life which has been a typical characteristic of Western society.<sup>65</sup> In fact it has been argued that this could be the root cause of its inability to speak meaningfully in the face of a plethora of contemporary problems which assail Modern Africa. A theology that seeks to undertake a holistic approach, that seeks to undertake to articulate that quest of faith engaged in the challenge of the Gospel or its witness and which seeks to yield that power which enables us to be driven back to Scripture and its witness in the Church's witness in history, and into the world of our time as we hope to in this undertaking, cannot afford such short sightedness.

One insight that seems helpful to me from Weber's dialogic approach is that which begins by identifying its primary task as raising those fundamental and formal questions with respect to the nature, content and method of doing theology. For by doing so, there is opportunity to identify the dominant directions of the common articulated positions of theology, their concerns and their approach in articulating them. As diverse a church as that of Africa today and the variety of its theologies can only be addressed adequately if we bear the above in mind. In fact, I take the view that this seems to be a helpful way worth attempting in our quest for christology. For it is by doing so that

we can address those formal questions regarding our fundamental stances and presuppositions.

It has rightly been observed that easy rejection of Western theology by African theologians has meant that even concerns of methodology have been dismissed as pro-Western,<sup>66</sup> and yet it is only by addressing them that we can recognise those things that give shape to our thought forms.

It is important to bear in mind the inseparability of methodological questions and the content of theology. Some African theologians in their enthusiasm for contextualising theology have tended to forget this important factor such that what emerges from their articulation is an easy equation and identification of theology with strategies for specific Christian action.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the challenging demands of Africa's economic, social and political problems confront the theologian with questions demanding immediate existential decision and direction. But the responsible theological task that is undertaken with the understanding of the role of theology as the compass of the Church cannot shy away from paying sufficient attention to the what and how of its task.<sup>68</sup> And a rigorous wrestling with the challenges of the word of Scripture and the existential situation of the Church in Africa can generate illuminating insights if this is seriously taken into account.

Acknowledging that all theologies and all pre-articulated religious experiences are in any particular situation shaped by the controlling images and the linguistic and conceptual categories inherited by the theologian in the cultural setting, I feel obliged to reflect on the emerging orientations and perspectives in the articulation of theology in Africa today before addressing the question of religious authority which sets in perspective our christological formulation within this context.

Notes

1. cf John S. Mbiti, Bible and Theology in African Christianity, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1986, p. 1
2. cf E.W. Fasholé-Luke's Article 'The Quest for African Christian theologies' in Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 29, Ed. T.F. Torrance, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1976, p.161
3. John Parratt, African Christian Theology, SPCK, London, 1987, p. 1
4. Ibid
5. J.S. Mbiti, Bible and Theology in African Christianity, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1986, p.6
6. Ibid, p.7
7. J. Parratt, African Christian Theology, SPCK, London, 1987, p.1
8. Ibid  
See also C.P. Groves, The Planting of Christianity in Africa, Vol 1, Lutterworth Press, London, 1948, p.128
9. G.H. Muzorewa, Origins and Development of African Theology, Orbis Books, New York, 1985, Page 23.
10. Jean-Marc Ela, The African Cry, Orbis Books, New York, 1986, p.22
11. Ibid. See The Emergent Gospel, Edited by Torres and Fabella, p266  
See also William H Grave's article, *Mission and Radical Obedience* in International Review of Missions, Vol LIV, No.215, Edited by Lessie Newbigin, London, 1965, p.3288 - where he points to the same problem highlighted above.
12. Adrian Hastings in his article *On African Theology* in Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol.37, Edinburgh, 1984, p.363
13. J.S. Mbiti, op cit, p.7
14. Ibid

15. cf E.W. Fasholé-Luke, 'The Quest for African Christian theologies' in Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 29, Ed. T.F. Torrance, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1976, p.159.
16. John Parrat, op cit, p.3.
17. Desmond Tutu in his article Whither African Theology in Christianity in Independent Africa, edited by E.D.W. Fasholé-Luke and others, Rex Collins, London, 1978, p.364
18. E.D.W. Fasholé-Luke, op cit, p.160
19. J M. Sentamu, Some Aspects of Soteriology with Particular Reference to the Thought of J.K. Mozley, from an African Perspective, PhD thesis, presented to Cambridge University, 1980 p.98.  
See also well documented examples of missionary attitudes toward African culture with special regard to aspects of discontinuity in J.M. Waliggo's thesis , The Catholic Church in the Buddu Province of Buganda 1879 - 1925, presented to Cambridge University , 1976. pp. 86-98, 244-245. For theological reasons why such a discontinuity was so strongly felt.  
See also A.J. Temu, British Protestant Missions, Longmans, London, 1972, pp. 5-10, 32-42, 91-168.
20. cf J.M. Waliggo, ibid, p.248 for evidence of this realisation and yet the response was one of reluctance by missionaries to utilise the religious heritage exemplified by African traditional religion as a basis for the Christian faith  
See also an interesting contrasting view in Gavin White: KIKUYU: An Ecumenical Controversy: PhD thesis, University of London, 1970, Chapter two on missions and missionaries.

- See also Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison, Ed., Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era: 1880-1920, Aros, Aboulevarden, 1982.
21. cf J.M Sentamu, op cit, p.99 quoting Mackay to Secretary of C.M.S, 27 September 1880, in Church Missionary Society Archives, London, G3 A6 14
  22. cf S.G. Kibicho's essay *The Continuity of the African Conception of God into and through Christianity: A Kikuyu case-study* in Christianity in Independent Africa, op cit, p.373
  23. Ibid
  24. op cit, 373  
See also a humorous rendering of this problem by Desmond Tutu in his essay *Whither African Theology* in Christianity in Independent Africa, op cit, p.365
  25. cf J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p101
  26. op cit, p.101 f  
See also his pointer to E.B. Taylor's book Primitive Culture, John Murray, London, 1873 where the theory is expounded fully, and also his pointer to W.D.E. Oesterley and T.H. Robinson in Hebrew Religion, SPCK, London, 2nd Ed., 1937 who adopts it as preliminary basis to the study of Hebrew religion.
  27. J.M. Sentamu, Some Aspects of Soteriology with Particular Reference to the Thought of J.K. Mozley, from an African Perspective, PhD thesis, presented to Cambridge University, 1980, p.102  
See his observation of a contrary view with supportive evidence in N. Snaith, The God that Never Was, The Religious Education Press Ltd, Oxford, 1971, p1-35
  28. Ibid, p.103

29. cf J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, Heineman, London, 1971, repr., pp.3-44 for a fitting illustration
30. J.M. Sentamu, Some Aspects of Soteriology with Particular Reference to the Thought of J.K. Mozley, from an African Perspective, PhD thesis, presented to Cambridge University, 1980, p.103  
 See collaboration in African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples, edited by D Forde, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1976 impression, p.154  
 See also A Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, Hutchinson House, London, 1954, p.42 f
31. Ibid, p.105
32. J.K. Mozley, Some Principles of Christian Theology in From Bible to Creed, by C.B. Firth, Ginn and Co., London, 1949, p.13
33. J.A.T. Robinson, Honest to God, SCM, London, 1967  
 See also R. Gray's telling article *Problems of Historical Perspectives: The Planting of Christianity in Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in Christianity in Tropical Africa*, Edited by C.G. Baëta, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968, p.19 ff
34. Edward W. Fasholé-Luke - op cit, p. 160.
35. cf J.M. Sentamu's reference to majority of All African Conference of Churches circular letters bearing this name and also its appearance in many writings by African theologians. A notable observation he makes is that of G.W.H. Lampe who opts for the dynamic name of the Spirit; see his book, God is Spirit, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977.  
 Of particular significance is a valid critique he makes in relation to S.G. Kibicho's view that it is the same God being referred to in African traditional religion as in Christianity, but different names are used. All that is needed is the baptizing of such a God with new names.

Indeed, it is this line of thought that eliminates any difficulty on his part when he claims that the Kikuyu, and Africans for that matter, had the full revelation of God before the arrival of Christianity. A stance that reveals his strong positivistic view of language, experience, culture and history. See his essay, *African traditional religion and Christianity*, in New Look at Christianity in Africa, WSCF Books, Vol.II, No.2, Geneva, 1970. The thrust of this thought is also in *The Continuity of the African conception of God into and through Christianity: a Kikuyu case-study in Christianity in Independent Africa*, op cit p.371 ff. But as Sentamu points out, such a permanence of African conceptions of God in and through Christianity are no evidence for the appropriateness of such conceptions or for the view that the African had a full revelation of 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' before the coming of Christianity. cf his thesis, op cit p.110.

36. op cit
37. H.W. Turner *the Contribution of Studies on Religion in Africa to Western Religious Studies in New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, edited by M.E. Glasswell and E.W. Fasholé-Luke, SPCK, London, 1974, p.176
38. cf John's Gospel 1:18; 14:8-9; 17
39. cf J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p.111 f
40. Robert Morgan, The Nature of New Testament Theology, SCM Press, London, 1973, p.43 f
41. ibid  
See also Paul Wignall's essay *Patterns in Theology in The Integrity of Anglicanism* by S.W. Sykes, Mowbrays, London, 1978, p.106 f
42. Otto Weber, Foundations of Dogmatics, Vol.1, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981, p.vii.

43. Robert Morgan, *ibid*, p.44

44. Paul Wignall, *ibid*, p.109

Sentamu makes a valid criticism in relation to this point when he says that African theology has until recently been hampered by over-reacting and the uncritical watering-down of Western theology - such that one sees a re-occurrence of what Paul Wignall warns us about in our theological articulation by saying 'Old battles are fought anew with a regularity which becomes tedious only when combatants fail to recognise that they are old battles' cf *op cit*, pp.1-7. A fitting illustration is that of Byang Kato's (cf his Theological Pitfalls in African Theology, Evangel Press, Nairobi, 1974) criticism of J.S. Mbiti that he is a spiritualiser and a follower of Origen - who ends up by being as universalist as the latter - yet he (Kato) himself uses Origen's proof-text technique even without due regard to biblical criticism at times in his criticisms of others.

45. J.M. Sentamu, *op cit*, p.113 f

46. D.M. Mackinnon, The Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays, Lutterworth Press, London, 1968, p.87

47. cf Allan D. Galloway, Faith in a Changing Culture, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1967, p.89 f

48. Kwesi A. Dickson, Theology in Africa, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1984, p.13

Note especially his concern to define theology beyond the scholarly discipline dominated by the expert to that understanding of it as having to do with the meaning of human existence

49. cf E.W. Fasholé-Luke, *op cit*, p.161

See also John Agbeti, *African Theology: what it is in Presence*, Vol.V, No.3, 1972, p.5 ff

50. Justin S. Upkong, African Theologies Now: A Profile, Gaba Publications (Spearhead No.80), Eldoret, 1985, p.7
51. cf E.W. Fasholé-Luke, op cit
- 52 cf Desmond M. Tutu, *Whither African Theology in Christianity in Independent Africa*, op cit, p.367
- Note: When one is dealing with the South African situation where the continuing oppression of Africans by White through the racially discriminating Apartheid system means that even the question of who participates or is involved in African theology is primary - it has to be a liberating theology for the oppressed and a challenge to repentance and liberation too for the oppressor
53. Basil Moore (Ed) Black Theology: The South African Voice, Hurst & Co, London, 1973, p.ix
54. Justin S. Upkong, African Theologies Now: a Profile, Gaba Publications, Eldonet, 1984. p.4
55. Allan Boesak's essay *Liberation Theology in South Africa*, in African Theology En Route, Edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres, Orbis, New York, 1981. p.173
56. cf John W. de Gruchy, The Church Struggle in South Africa, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p.166
57. cf Kwesi A. Dickson, Theology in Africa, Danton, Longman and Todd, London, 1984, p.122
58. cf Desmond Tutu's essay, *Whither African Theology*, op cit, p.367
59. ibid, p.365
60. cf Byang Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa, Evangel, Kisumu, 1975, whose reaction against a talk of an African theology had this concern as one of his reasons. It has to be noted, however, that this sweeping reflection of the approaches of other African theologians was somewhat

misplaced as is illustrated by his misunderstanding of J. Agbeti as advocating a return to African traditional religions rather than expressing Christianity more meaningfully to the African in the usage of African theology. And yet the latter was questioning the suitability of the expression 'African theology' as used in Christian theology in Africa. - arguing that it was misleading to use it thus, whereas strictly speaking it would properly be an articulation of that pre-Christian and pre-Muslim Africa's religious thought.

61. J. C. Thomas in his essay *What is African Theology* in Ghana Bulletin of Theology, Vol. IV, No. 4, June 1973, p.15
62. cf E. W. Smith, African Ideas of God, Edinburgh House Press, London, 2nd edition, 1961, p.1
63. cf W. Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, Adam & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1889, p.2
64. cf J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, Doubleday, New York,
65. cf D. Tutu, op cit, p.369
66. cf John Parratt, op cit, p.38 ff.
67. cf J. Sentamu, op cit, p.171 who illustrates these shortcomings as he cites official reports of the All African Congress of Churches - especially Canon Burgess Carr's remark, 'God accepted the use of violence in the Cross of Jesus Christ and thereby sanctified violence into an instrument for bringing into being a fuller human life', in The Struggle Continues, Official report, Third Assembly, AACCC, Lusaka, 1974
68. cf Charles Nyamiti's pioneering work in this area in his African Theology: its Nature, Problems and Methods, Gaba Publications, Kampala, 1971

## CHAPTER SIX

### EMERGENT PERSPECTIVES IN AFRICA'S CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

Whether it was by sheer coincidence or otherwise, the emergence of a serious attempt at rethinking the Christian faith in African terms has always been traced to the Emancipation Spirit that swept across Africa in the mid-fifties and sixties. As we already indicated in the preceding chapter, this was not only the time when the issue of a dependent Church was brought to the theological agenda, but it also marked the beginning of a clear expression by some within the Church that the time had come when there had to be a restating of Christian realities in a way that was to reflect African thinking and expression. In fact, Bolaji Idowu sets this turning point in perspective when he says,

‘During the All African Conference of Churches in 1963, it became quite clear to a number of us that the Church in Africa could only attain self-hood and be adequate for her mission when she possessed a first-hand knowledge of her Lord of the Church and was able to express that knowledge in clear accents made possible through her own original meditation and thinking.’<sup>1</sup>

This is the point which Gwinyai Muzorewa also highlights with his assertion that the inauguration of the said Conference did mark the official beginning of African theology.<sup>2</sup> This move was not so much geared towards filling a theological ‘vacuum’, but one that for once undertook with seriousness to confront the emerging Church in the Continent with the imperative challenge

of the need to exemplify that expression of originality in her response to the Gospel within her context. And nowhere else was this more evident than in the widespread desire for ‘indigenisation’ or ‘contextualisation’ of both the theory and practice of the Gospel Witness. In fact Mercy Oduyoye who has given a splendid account of this in her book *Hearing and Knowing - Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, points out that it was not only the articulated input of Idowu’s ‘*Toward an Indigenous Church*’ that gave expression to the above desire, but formed part of an ongoing process facilitated by individual and collective effort in the quest for ‘original meditation and thinking’.<sup>3</sup> This can be said to have culminated in the Ibadan Consultation of African theologians in 1966 which has rightly been described as,

‘an expression of a deep longing that the Churches of Africa might have an opportunity of thinking together of the faith which had come to them from the older Churches of the West through missionaries of a different cultural background who, in the nature of things, could not fully appreciate the reactions of their converts to their faith in the light of their own traditional beliefs and practices.’<sup>4</sup>

For as she states further, African theologians, like the Samaritans at the well, were saying, ‘It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the World.’ (Jn. 4:42).<sup>5</sup> This assertion exemplified the emancipation spirit through which the said events and the called for process was understood in no other way, but as liberating attempts that freed African Christians from ‘predigested’ theologies. For it enables them to recognise the shackles of Western categories and practices in missionary theology, thereby

facilitating their creative working out of new modes of self-expression and communication. And this is demonstrated by the various efforts undertaken by pioneer African theologians in their search for authentic forms of expression. This undertaking that was not only given a boost by the collective input of various consultations and conferences, but the self-hood movement of the churches and the impetus of the ecumenical movement.<sup>6</sup>

It has to be said though that inasmuch as some saw in the call for indigenisation a major breakthrough in the way of realising the desired authentic expression, problems connected with the whole process were already being identified. For to some, indigenisation seemed to suggest a process that lends a syncretism as some of its exponents tended toward uncritical accommodation of a given cultural form in the attempt to make the Gospel relevant, and thereby compromising its witness. To others, it seemed to contradict the understanding of the growth of the Church. As John S. Mbiti writes, ‘I have not used the term indigenisation of the Church in Africa. I find the term to be contrary to my understanding of the Church. Indeed, I reject it so far as it implies “indigenising” an already existing Church, already created Church.’<sup>7</sup>

The most serious criticism, however, is that the concept has led theologians to be far too concerned with the past, both in defining their task, and the identification of the sources for articulating the Gospel within the African setting. This tendency that has been seen on the one hand to be isolating and perpetuating a kind of fragmentary approach to theology,<sup>8</sup> and on the other hand, as one that seems to treat culture as something static rather than dynamic. This created a situation where issues being dealt with as of particular importance seem to have little or no relevance at all to the spirit of

modernity that leads Africa to the future. This is a problem that even Idowu who established himself as a leading exponent of indigenisation was not free from. For inasmuch as he challenged the Church in Nigeria (and the rest of Africa too) to exemplify that atmosphere of spiritual freedom experienced through being in Christ, - that unmistakeable stamp of an indigenous Church instead of being a kind of a colony of Rome, Canterbury, London or an outreach post serving the vested interest of some European or American missionary board,<sup>9</sup> his reliance on the symbols, thought forms and language of Africa's traditional religions as the source of authentic theological expression befitting an African Church set his approach on a vulnerable footing.

Indeed, the basic input was no doubt one of seeking for an indigenized Christianity where in the case of his native country Nigeria, the church should enable the worshipper to worship, articulate what he believes in the form, idiom and expression that is Nigerian. This is an approach and theology that does not aim at simple rewriting of European theology based on the European experience of the Lordship of Christ, but one that exemplifies the very nature of the Christian faith as fulfilling and not destroying or uprooting, making and freeing and not enslaving.<sup>10</sup> This affirms the reality of the particularity of every given Christian community in such a way that there is acknowledgement of the universal dimension of her faith and the preeminence of the eternal, cosmic and unchanging Christ who is the Only Lord of All.

But the basic problem for Idowu is that for him to rely on the said symbols, thought forms and language of Africa's traditional religions as the

only medium through which authentic indigenous theology can be expressed did not only confine his approach to the limitations of the value of their use, but exposed himself to the misrepresentation that his is a call for a ‘response to the Gospel in terms of traditional culture’.<sup>11</sup> Hence the assertion that in spite of his desire to derive those insights that were to lead Africa toward the future and those that were relevant to the spirit of Africa’s modernity, his programme of indigenisation tends to be past oriented, backward looking and retrospective.<sup>12</sup>

Amidst this crisis and restlessness with a theology and methodological framework that tended to be backward looking and was more prone to regard African culture as static rather than dynamic, coupled with a desire to move towards the future and to be relevant to the spirit of modernity in Africa, there arose the new term ‘contextualization’ which became a household name unlike adaptation, accommodation or inculturation used interchangeably with indigenisation. The dominant view was that unlike indigenisation which tended to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of the socio-religious elements of African life, contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes seriously the socio-political aspects of life such as the struggle for human dignity, justice, issues of secularity and technological advancement as it seeks to produce symbols, thought forms and language that are universal and yet inclusive of Africa’s reality. In other words, authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of genuine encounter between God’s Word and his world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in, and commitment to a given historical moment.<sup>13</sup> Gwinyai Muzorewa’s words sum it all when he says,

'contextual theology does not mean mere conformity to the past and present situations, but critical and prophetic confrontation with the movement of history.'<sup>14</sup>

This point is reaffirmed by Allan Boesak when he says that authentic contextual theology is not merely an exhumation of the corpses of tradition as seems to be the case in indigenisation, but of those traditions from the past which can play a humanising and revolutionising role in contemporary society. It takes from the past what is good, thereby offering a critique of the present and opening perspectives for the future.<sup>15</sup>

Like indigenisation, however, the representation of contextual theology has had its shortcomings. For to some, the emphasis on the context and the specific human situation has tended to suggest an orientation whose starting point is no longer the text of scripture as it is re-read within a given setting. This seems to be the case especially among exponents of black theology whose embrace of James Cone's approach has at times appeared uncritical as it tended to perpetuate that over-emphasized attachment to the black experience and the black situation as if the setting itself is the starting point of theological reflection.<sup>16</sup> Questioning this tendency, Allan Boesak has rightly stated that

'the black situation is the situation within which reflection and action take place, but it is the word of God which illuminates the reflection and guides the action. We fear that one attaches too much theological input to the black experience and the black situation as if these realities within themselves have revelational value on a par with Scripture. God, it seems to us, reveals himself in the situation, the word being heard in the situation, thereby giving meaning to the situation. The black experience provides the framework within which blacks understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. No more, no less'.<sup>17</sup>

The most recent criticism is that which we find in John Sentamu's work we referred to earlier, and which focuses on the definition of contextualisation as a term whose conception suggests a dichotomy between message and context, as though the message is apprehended apart from the acquired structure of consciousness given in the context first and then either a restatement is made in terms of indigenous categories or the context is challenged and changed according to the message perceived by those who are no doubt rooted in and committed to the historical context.<sup>18</sup>

What is questionable as he points out is the kind of understanding of human apprehension and perception suggested here. For if language and human apprehension arise together in the mind's act - as we believe to be so, and that we do not first get hold of a subject and then shop around for just the right word or language to package the subject of our experience, then the definition as given above does not adequately express the phenomena of our apprehension of the Gospel. Moreover, whatever is given as the Gospel is given us in and through, and never apart from the linguistic and conceptual structure of the context and the dominant images therein; and this does not rule out subsequent critical and reflective methods attempting to find better or richer concepts for expressing our given experience.

Sentamu sees the problem arising also from what seems to be a dubious and non-African perspective of what understanding itself is . For unlike some forms of Western thought, understanding for Africans is not a tool, a faculty that humans possess among many other faculties, but rather that fundamental form of existing, the self-referent sense of the way in which our existence takes shape amidst contemporary African realities. When we speak

of experience, therefore, it should not be regarded as just an issue of subjectivity or a domain of privacy; experience, therefore, is not some form of ‘natural’ theology in which we begin *de novo* with religious experience, but rather the use of experience as a means of understanding a faith content that is by no means derivative from such experience.

Illustrating from the New Testament, he points out that when Paul spoke of being ‘in Christ’ he did not propose to derive a theological concept of the corporate Christ from experience, but rather, given the reality, he attempted to find analogies within experience which could serve to provide understanding of what the corporate Christ meant in his actual existence. The issue here was what ‘*in Christ*’ meant, and to what extent it was exhibited and intelligently related to his experience - bearing in mind that his encounter with the risen Christ spoke of his transcendence. This is a factor he found going beyond the concern to contextualise or indigenise in that what is encountered here, it would seem, is a <sup>Christ</sup>~~theology~~ that proposed Jesus Christ’s uniqueness and defines the sense in which he is so in a special way, one that demands the combination of textual, historical, sociological and geographical, liturgical and ethical methods. It starts with the recognition that at the centre of its task is a person; Jesus Christ, who will never, logically never, be transparent to any or all models, for the point at which he is most completely one with us is the point also of dissimilarity. This is to say, therefore, that it is imperative that the root of Christology and the content of the Christian Gospel is recognised as lying primarily in the experience of New Testament Christians - which remains indispensable as the starting point of any Christian theology. For as Pannenberg reminds us,

'every interpretation of an event must be justified from the context in which it was experienced or from the context of new experience which calls forth new interpretations'.<sup>19</sup> This is to say that the interpretation of Jesus finally adopted depends in part on the estimate of the quality of traditions gathered in the New Testament. For it matters as to whether we can dismiss these as fanatical delusions or irresponsible inventions giving us a merely human religious teacher who came to be thought of as divine due to the influence of Hellenistic religions or whether we hold them as exhibiting the characteristics of reliable testimony.

The New Testament records mediate a figure of the past so that he becomes a reality in the present and they can validly be called the media of historical mediacy. and the given or datum of Christology in the sense that they constitute both its starting-point and its finishing-point; they prescribe the problems and define the issues with which a fully articulated and integrated Christology must finally deal.<sup>20</sup>

The basic argument here is that although we must wrestle with the material and try to put ourselves in the shoes of the first century Christians, it is worth bearing in mind that what we are offered is these early Christians' understanding of Jesus, stories about Jesus which were not passed on simply because they happened to be stories about Jesus which they loved to hear, but because each story demonstrated the power of God at work in Jesus, and proclaimed the significance of what was happening through him, not only for those who had met him during his earthly life, but for those who met him now, as the risen Lord. It is by sensitively examining this Christian experience that we discover where the uniqueness of Jesus lies and what sort

of a uniqueness it is. As we stated earlier on, this is not just a question of repeating biblical metaphors but an attempt at interpreting the various expressions of Christian faith, an interpretation that seeks to be truthful to the witness of those first century Christians and the experience of many Africans today; that Jesus Christ alone among men is the bestower of full salvation, and why it is that the language used to describe Jesus of Nazareth is language that a theist of a monotheistic religion would use to describe God <sup>in order to express</sup> to the significance of Jesus Christ for those who hear the Gospel. If the 'death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection represent the bearing of human guilt and man's mortal destiny by God himself, who "identifies" himself with the man Jesus and in so doing overcomes guilt and death for us all',<sup>21</sup> it means that we have to take seriously this particular moment of God's action for us. The particular circumstances, place, time and the particular culture are so bound up with the revelation itself. And therefore, if we want to understand what the Evangelists are saying to us about the significance of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, then we have to wrestle with their ways of expressing the Gospel truth; for God spoke to them in their situation, and they responded to him in the language and terms which they knew. This is seen in the various books of the New Testament where the Gospel is applied in every possible situation as is shown by the distinctiveness of the way it was represented to the Jews in Palestine, in the Gentile world, and in mixed communities. For example, Paul's expounding of the relation of the Gospel to the Jewish man to the Jews employs terms of his own background and that of his leaders, but when he is writing the same message to the Greeks in Corinth, he does so in terms of their situation as is illustrated by his relation of the Gospel to Wisdom and Philosophy.<sup>22</sup> It is the same message - but the language and form and expression vary. The same is true in John's Gospel

where the writer picks up themes of the various Jewish festivals to show how Jesus Christ embodies everything to which they were pointing. And the same can be said of the letter to the Hebrews whose focus on the Jewish cult rather than the law led to the exposition of the significance of Christ's event in terms of the Jewish sacrificial system such that for him, Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of all religious hopes.<sup>23</sup>

At issue here is that these authors used different aspects of their Jewish heritage to demonstrate Christ as the fulfilment of their own longings, the focal point of God's activity, which was true to their experience, at least they tell us so. The Gospel then must be expressed in our own language and in terms befitting our culture and situation if it is to be relevant, bearing in mind that we do not know all the answers about Jesus of Nazareth. This reinterpretation means that the Gospel is always proclaimed as relevant to the situation of the age which implies a permanent application of the Gospel. Jesus Christ himself may be the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, but the way in which he is preached changes, and must change as Jesus is set in the life of each Christian community and is interpreted in terms of their needs, ideas and culture.

The culminating point for Sentamu's argumentation and which forms the basis of his rejection of the dichotomised text-context scheme he sees inherent in the representation of indigenisation and contextualisation as we have shown above is what he views as central to the New Testament witness. As he puts it, 'the words, titles and ideas which the first Christians naturally used to express their faith in Jesus were part of a background which

is totally different from ours, *but we do well to remember that in all the varied ways in which the New Testament speaks about Jesus (as Christ, as Lord, as Saviour), what is ultimately being spoken about is the activity of God. Jesus is seen as God's involvement with man and the world'*.<sup>24</sup> This factor makes it imperative, as he says, for our Christology to point beyond the figure of Jesus to the activity of God bearing in mind C.K. Barrett's reminder that 'it is possible to study the history of Jesus at some length without ever perceiving that the issue involved in it is the truth about God. The truth that Jesus himself directs us to'.<sup>25</sup> And one which was not lost to African theologians. For in their consultation conference held in Ibadan in 1965 they demonstrated their awareness of this by stating; 'we believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, Lord of history, has been dealing with mankind at all times in all parts of the World. It is with conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African peoples, and we have evidence that they know him and worship him; we recognise the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; and yet it is because of this revelation we can discern what is truly of God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our peoples' previous traditional knowledge of him'.<sup>26</sup>

Embracing <sup>a</sup>dichotomised text-context scheme for Sentamu, therefore, seems to go contrary to this awareness and the reality that the Gospel for what it is, is apprehended in and only through the social matrix. This is especially true when thought and apprehension have no independent existence apart from the social and shared existence.

What I find debatable though, is whether a particular representation of

contextualisation such as the one under discussion can be taken as representative of contextual theology. There is no doubt that exponents of African theology whose basic concern has been one of redressing the imposition of an alien world-view and thought structure in the African church, found contextual theology rendered in terms of the dichotomised text-context scheme plausible. And the stated criticism holds true if this reaction to a theological status quo is made the standard framework for the theological task of the Church in the continent. But when it comes to the usage of term contextualisation as an exemplification of that dynamic process of the church's reflection, in obedience to Christ and his mission in the world, on the interaction of the text as the word of God and the context as a specific human situation within which the word is received,<sup>27</sup> then the issue is different. For it seems to me that the underlying concern here is the understanding of the very nature of theology . In other words, there is a recognition of what Bengt Sundkler reminds us of when he says,

‘theology .... is that ever-reviewed re-interpretation of the given Gospel to new generations and peoples, and that re-presentation of the will and the way of the one Christ in a dialogue with new thought forms and culture patterns’.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the concrete reality of God's activity in Jesus Christ may be rooted in the historical incarnation where the salvific act was concretised in historical terms. But the transcendent nature of the one at work makes it a living reality in every generation as the limitation of time and space have no place. Osadolor Imasogie as he discusses the role of culture in theological articulation, however, reminds us that

'the very fact of historical incarnation suggests that this presence is not always effectively mediated through the medium of theology formulated in one culture and generation. Symbols lose their potency and the theological formulations become atrophied when the symbols around which they are built have become irrelevant or foreign to a people of another culture. There is always a search for living and relevant symbols that mediate the saving presence of God in Jesus Christ. This is what theologians mean by the concept of the contemporaneity of the eternal Christ who comes in every age and culture to every generation waiting to be apprehended in the cultural and historical life situation of a particular people. He does not become real to the people merely on the basis of what an earlier generation and culture has said, as important and valid as this is. He becomes real only on the basis of the authentic discernment by every generation. When this discernment occurs, the new generation discovers, to its joy, that the Christ thus disclosed is the same eternal Christ known by the earlier generation in their own situation'.<sup>29</sup>

This is a discernment that does not come about through simple translation of what others have said in their language, idiom and thought forms or symbols, but one that invites critical wrestling with the text as read and heard in the present. In other words, the content of the Gospel message in all its claims is as much for scrutiny as the traditions it has come through to us. For the task of theology is as much of a dialogue with the past and the present as it is an appraisal.

When it comes to defining the task and method of our theological articulation, it is not sufficient to emphasise the contextual as if what is sought is a parochial kind of theology befitting only the African Church as the case has been in the past. As we have stated above, we reckon that elements that characterise a particular theology and contribute to its

development take shape in the tackling of problems relevant to its time and place in the sight of God's revealed Word. And the history of Western theology suffices as an illustration of what is being said here in that her confrontation with the philosophical, religious and socio-political difficulties of her time did provide a service of theological advance.<sup>30</sup> But at no time did this particularistic concern overshadow the universality of her message. Hence the reminder that no theology is authentic and universal if it does not meet the integrated needs of a particular people in a particular historical context. As Imasogie puts it, 'it is only as theology responds to the existential needs of a people within the specific cultural and historical milieu of their self-understanding that the universality of it can be enhanced and enriched. After all, what is universality if it does not mean relevance for people concerned?'<sup>31</sup> And this is the same point we find echoed by Robert J. Schreiter, though from a different approach, when he says,

'The gospel is always incarnate, incarnate in the reality of those who bring it to us, and incarnate in those who help us nurture the beginning of faith. Church is a complex of those cultural patterns in which the Gospel has taken on flesh, at once enmeshed in the local situation, extending through communities in our own time and the past, and reaching out to the eschatological realisation of the fullness of God's reign. Thus there is no local theology without the larger church, that concrete community of Christians, united through word and sacrament in the one Lord. The Gospel without church does not come to its full realisation; the church without Gospel is a dead letter. Without church there is no integral incarnation of the Gospel'.<sup>32</sup>

What is being called for here, is the need to distinguish between particularistic approaches to theology that tend to be parochial and always seem inclined to operate on exclusive frameworks that romanticise culture

and identities of given communities, and that working of theology that emanates from a given Christian community's witness of her faith - one that is always the key source for theology's development and expression. The latter seems to exemplify what authentic contextual theology implies, and one which can be said, therefore, to have been, and will continue to be the character of theological enterprise. This being the case, therefore, the challenge is to recognise that it is a shallow way of theologising to think of contextualisation in terms of the mere task of finding adequate analogies from a given setting. On the contrary, it invites us to articulate that vigorous interaction between the text as the Word of God and the context as a specific human situation. This is a form of articulation that brings to the fore both the judgmental message of the text on the given context inasmuch as it exemplifies those given values it affirms, one that can be said to depict a dialogic relationship between the biblical text and the human context where all forms of idolatrous beliefs and practices, whether secular or religious, are judged and stand condemned. And yet that which is compatible with the Gospel message or law of God as witnessed in scripture, is purified, transformed and put under the Lordship of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

In view of the above, therefore, our methodological frameworks, it seems, cannot be worked out on the common divide of either preoccupying oneself with concerns of the transmission of the Gospel message as is the case with translation models like adaptation or inculturation, or those concerned with the existential questions of the context within which the Gospel is proclaimed as contextualisation is at times portrayed to be. On the contrary, I would argue for a dialogic framework that recognised the inseparability of the former from the latter. For that dynamic interaction of

the textual message with a given context in the entirety of its experience cannot, it seems, be exemplified in any other way other than this. Moreover, this is what it entails to speak of the incarnate Word. It is worth stating that to speak of an African theology that is based on the Bible, the theology of the early church, African tradition and the living experience of the church in Africa<sup>34</sup> without excluding, as he does, experiences of the Christian faith and thought in other contexts such as that of the Western church to which the church in Africa owes its Christian heritage, is to speak of an approach that is imperatively dialogic. And one which can be said to offer a workable framework for the articulation of that which the Christian church in Africa in all its diversity testifies to.

#### Dominant themes in contemporary thinking

Having highlighted the methodological concerns that preoccupied African theologians during the post-independence period (and continue to do so) reckoning with their limitations and their strengths as frameworks of articulation, it serves our purpose to turn to those themes that have come to dominate the theological scene - thereby facilitating the characterisation of contemporary trends of theology in the continent.

In the lead as one of the recurrent themes among African theologians is the role of culture in theology. The variety of ways in which it has been (and continues to be) treated, and the wide range of issues involved in the whole question of the Gospel and culture, however, makes it difficult to adequately address all that needs to be said on the theme in a sub-section of a chapter

such as this. And it is in recognition of this limitation that we propose to focus on two basic features that have tended to characterise the thinking of African theologians in their approach to the subject

The first one falls within the framework of what we may call an *apologia* stance of African theology. For it is here that some African theologians, in their prime concern with that past of pre-Christian Africa, have not only negated the paternalistic history of some missionary approaches in their adoption of a ‘tabula rasa’ viewing of the pre-Christian African mind,<sup>35</sup> but tended to argue for a dichotomised representation of Christianity and culture. The basic reason is that it does not only operate on a false and an artificial depiction of the essence of the Christian faith, but one whose main intention (as African theologians would argue) was the suppressing of African cultures as the invading European culture took a dominant role.<sup>36</sup>

Whether one operates from that framework that seeks a *synthesis* between Christ and culture, and one in which Christ stands above, yet embracing the given culture in its aspects, as in Clement of Alexandria and Thomas Aquinas, or the *dualistic* representation where a radical distinction is made between God and man - and, therefore, Christ and culture (while maintaining rather than dissolving the tension between the two) as in Luther (and to some extent, Paul, Marcion and Augustine), or that of Christ as the *transformer* of culture<sup>37</sup> - as this treatise is inclined to, the incarnation event makes it untenable to talk of cultureless Christianity. And the same is true for theology where few today, as Oduyoye reminds us, would dispute that it is ‘a field that is not unaffected by history and culture. Myths by which we express religious intuitions that are beyond words and beyond

history are constructed out of experience. Our human yearnings to fathom the unknown life, the differentiation of existence, death, and that which is beyond death are at the base of the Creation stories that are found in primal world views including that of the Hebrews. Similarly, our hope that chaos will give place to order, isolation to communion, and death to life is also born out of experience'.<sup>38</sup> This is a point that finds affirmation in Osalador Imasogie when he states that no human perception is pure - always tainted by the distorting effect of one's culture.<sup>39</sup>

What emerges in what has been referred to as the 'anthropological' concern of African theology serves to demonstrate this recognition, in that therein is not just the acknowledgement of the above stated reality, but a move to rehabilitate the past of Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious conscience without which our articulation of the present remains incomplete. In fact, Kwame Bediako has rightly observed that those engaged in this endeavour (which is undertaken as a self-conscious *Christian* and *theological* effort) do make it plain that it is only when this is done that the true identity of the African Christian is given.<sup>40</sup> This explains why those who have been on the forefront of this endeavour have not given in to the temptation of treating the reality of Africa's religious past in terms of a 'chronological' past but as an 'ontological' past, which together with the profession of the Christian faith, gives account of the one and the same identity, namely, the religious consciousness of the African Christian.<sup>41</sup> This is to say that in as much as there is an assertion of discontinuity with the past which conversion entails, there is also a recognition of a 'continuity' that is not divorced from culture, but as Kenneth Cragg has stated in another connection, what is being spoken of here is that 'integrity in conversion' that

exhibits that unity of self in which one's past is genuinely integrated into present commitment. In other words, the crisis of repentance and faith that makes us Christian is understood as truly integrating what we have been in what we become.<sup>42</sup>

Speaking soteriologically, therefore, the passing away of 'the old' in conversion experience does not mean 'uprooting' one from his culture as past tendencies seemed to suggest. On the contrary, what is being spoken of is an affirming transformation. The danger though is to view this cultural continuity in such a way that it seems to form the basis ~~from~~ which the authority of theological articulation is derived. For inasmuch as we seek to emphasise the aspect of continuity as one that bears the particularity of a given Christian community, or an exhibit of its distinct identity, it remains finite and therefore relative. Any attempt to absolutise it is, therefore, bound to lead to the same tendencies we saw in Chapter One when the 'German Christians' of the 1930s absolutised the authority of the Third Reich's political experience. Adrian Hastings makes a fitting cautioning reminder when he says,

*'Any absolution of the authority of any particular, personal, ethnic or international religious tradition or experience - even the experience of the Reformation or the life of a saint or whatever - is inherently to deny ultimately that absolute authority of the Biblical tradition.'*<sup>43</sup>

The second dominant concern in the treatment of the role of culture, however, moves beyond this and focuses on the whole question of the hermeneutic criterion in theology. For whereas it is important to assert that cultural continuity exemplifies that reality of the particular Christian identity,

it is also essential to recognise that the way theology is articulated depends on how we address that aspect of our human experience that informs our theology as much as the Bible. This is especially imperative, for in accepting, as the Asian theologian C.S. Song puts it, that there is no such a thing as a theology immune from cultural and historical consequences<sup>44</sup>..., we are acknowledging some type of human experience as source for theology that is always in a kind of interplay with the biblical source. To many African theologians, the suppression of African culture did not only bring about a crisis of identity, but that of hermeneutics, as given frameworks which were always Western-blended, perpetuated an alien representation of the preaching and teaching of the Christian faith that had no place for traditional thought patterns of the recipients. In fact, John V. Taylor, writing in the early sixties had already highlighted this problem when he said,

‘Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions the white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the saviour of the world of the European world view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom...’<sup>45</sup>

The stress on Africa's cultural heritage as providing the hermeneutic key was, therefore, an undertaking that served to redress the too-European depiction of Christianity. But more significantly, it also served to demonstrate the acknowledgement of the fact that it provided the framework within which African Christians understood the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In other words, ‘it arose out of the understanding that at issue is not the status of a given culture, but the realisation that ‘cultural’ particularities are ‘situations’ in which people receive, and give theological shape, to the

Gospel message'.<sup>46</sup> As it has been stated, 'No such situation constitutes a privileged, cultural perspective as such. The test of theological truth is not whether a claim is espoused by a particular cultural group, but whether that claim can be shown to be legitimate in the light of the revelatory source, the scriptures. The Bible alone has privileged status as an Archimedean-point for resting encultured theological claims'.<sup>47</sup>

It has to be said, though, that inasmuch as there is a wide recognition of the relativity of cultural situations and, therefore, its role as the framework of interpretation, some would want to argue as if it can be taken to provide its own legitimacy. A case in point is what seems to emerge in the recent work of Itumeleng Mosala where in arguing for black history and culture as hermeneutic starting points for black theology, he appears to go along the way of past theologians whose objective seemed to be the creation of a parochial theology with its hermeneutic criterion drawn from within its own setting.<sup>48</sup> Indeed the history of Biblical interpretation and hermeneutics has been loaded with thought forms and even ideological inclination of those cultures and context within which it has been expressed. But it seems to me that the task and purpose of Christian theology is not served by repeating the same - though now in African clothing if the motivation is mere translation of the above. Fruitful endeavours seem to arise more from serious dialogic process between the two; each correcting, challenging and enriching the other.

One other significant theme that has claimed a central place in the work of many African theologians has been that of liberation. In fact, Adrian Hastings' assertion that it is the central theme of African theology<sup>49</sup> is no

exaggeration when we take note of the fact that anyone engaged in the African Church's theological reflection, is always confronting that concrete reality that bears the past history of colonial experience, neo-colonialism, the dehumanising experience of apartheid in Southern Africa, the continued suppressive, corrupt and dictatorial regimes in many independent African states, militarism and the inhumanity of endless coup d'etats, civil wars and the depressing realities of human deprivation brought about by poverty, hunger and disease.

Indeed Zablon Nthamburi, who has established himself as one of the leading exponents of the theology of liberation in the continent, argues that African theology's emergence as a theology of liberation arises out of its attempt to address itself to the above as they exemplify that concrete and existential situation of the African people.<sup>50</sup> To talk of liberation as a theme, therefore, is first and foremost to make a statement of what is understood of the task and function of theology. For unlike what seems to be the inclination in some forms of Western theology, the function of theology is not only confined to articulating Christian teaching with a view to providing spiritual edification, but is also an engagement with those aspects pertaining to the physical and material well-being of persons.<sup>51</sup>

This is to say that in treating this theme, there is an awareness that when we speak of salvation which is liberation's frame of reference, we are neither speaking of an event that is reduced to a purely inward personal affair with 'other worldly' emphasis, nor that tendency toward reducing it into a political, social and economic programme that has no bearing on that

dimension of humanity that transcends every programme and project.<sup>52</sup> As it has been stated, taking either approach does not serve but mutilates the Gospel. The Gospel announces the freedom of all people from sin and servitude - which as Gustavo Gutierrez has pointed out ‘includes hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance, injustices and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.<sup>53</sup> In this regard, salvation is more than a fruit of personal asceticism. For it has that social, historical and political dimension that negates any tendency to relegate it to a promised eternity. The basic point here is that salvation is both transcendent and immanent, other-worldly and this-worldly in that it addresses the whole person who is at once spirit and matter, soul and body.<sup>54</sup> And any attempt to treat it otherwise would only lead to a false representation of what is said of salvation in the Christian Gospel.

Taking the cue from Latin America's liberation theology, African theologians who have addressed themselves to this theme of liberation have taken the view that it is to be understood within the above depiction and aspiration to salvation. This is an exciting promise of freedom that beckons in both the Old and New Testament. And one which already finds a fitting exhibition in the exodus event. This is what comes out forcefully in Andre Neher, as cited by Gutierrez when he says,

‘With the Exodus a new age has struck for humanity - redemption from misery. All constraints are accidental; all misery is provisional. The breath of freedom which has blown over the world since the Exodus can dispel them this very day.’<sup>55</sup>

And the same is true of the New Testament proclamation where as in

Galatians 5:1 the declaration is that ‘for freedom Christ has set us free’. The only distinctive point in this biblical way of speaking about freedom is that it is freedom *from* sin which is the deepest root of all misery, poverty, injustice and oppression. And at the same time freedom *for* God and for others.<sup>56</sup>

To suggest that sin and guilt play a lesser or no role in the treatment of liberation because the emphasis and conception of sin is reduced to social ills as in liberation theology seems to be misleading. Indeed Tokunboh Adeyemo has rightly said that African peoples are humanistic in their approach to religion, that they do not seek God for his own sake, but rather that they may receive favour in return. With such a utilitarian attitude, sin can only be understood in terms of social ills whose eradication is in terms of meting out adequate punishment that is received here and now.<sup>57</sup>

A strong affirmation comes from Baëta who has pointed to the continuity of this thought among African Christians. For as he writes,

‘While such terms as ‘sin’, ‘grace’, ‘the precious blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’, and other Christian themes are constantly spoken about, the central preoccupation is and remains how to cope effectively with the ills of worldly life. ‘Sin’ is really relevant only in so far as it is a potent cause of bodily, mental and social disorders. The significance of ‘the blood of Christ’ resides in the fact that, by doing away with sin, it prepares the way for, or itself directly effects, bodily healing. ... The ‘Gospel’ here may be summed up in the actual words of a very typical separatist church public invitation: ‘Bring all your worries of unemployment, poverty, witch troubles, ill-luck, enemy, barrenness, sickness, blindness, lameness, sorrow. Jesus is ready to save all who come to him in belief and faith (Rev. 22:17, John 6:37)’.<sup>58</sup>

John Mbiti, however, reminds us that inasmuch as this may be the case, there is also that understanding of sin as alienation of the individual and society from God and which is only bridged in the salvific act of God that does not only happen in the here and now, but also in the hereafter.<sup>59</sup>

Mbiti takes this as representative depiction of sin, and therefore, the understanding of salvation that has found its continuity into Christianity as demonstrated by the common depiction of sin and salvation among African independent churches, and to some extent in the mission of the historical churches.<sup>60</sup> This then lays the foundation for the dominance of thinking that represents salvation, first and foremost as deliverance from the here-and-now oppression, and only secondarily and remotely, spiritual in the sense of life to come.<sup>61</sup>

Inasmuch as this may be the case, however, it seems to be an overstretched depiction of both African religious thought on sin, evil and the way of deliverance and salvation, and that which is represented in African Christianity. For as Mbiti reminds us, African traditional world view has that depiction of human life as a unity between physical and spiritual entities. And as long as one is alive in this body, physical threats have spiritual consequence and spiritual threats have physical consequences.<sup>62</sup> Bearing in mind that these effects are of individual as well as communal nature, the said threats do not only affect the social harmony in the community, but that between the individual and God. Taking an illustration from John Pobee's treatment of sin and evil among the Akan of Ghana, it is evident as he says

that sin does not only disrupt the social harmony and the personal achievement (in form of acceptance) sanctioned by traditional code, but that of society and the spirit-world or God.<sup>63</sup>

It seems to me, therefore, that any attempt to pursue the line of argument taken by Adeyemo inasmuch as it has a lot to offer is to follow the same pattern of a dichotomised viewing of life which is alien to African thought itself. In fact, there seems to be a plausible point in the argument that the focus on the liberation theme has helped to refocus Christian thinking on what is essentially a biblical view in that both the Old and New Testaments' treatment of man's relation to God is in holistic terms. To revisit Mbiti once again, 'Man is the object of God's salvation as it is narrated and recorded in the Bible. And man is both physical and spiritual. So biblical salvation embraces these entities together. When only one is stressed at the expense of the other, a distraction of biblical salvation ensues and one part of man is virtually excluded and starved out'.<sup>64</sup>

The emphasis on the socio-political environment in contemporary Africa by exponents of liberation theology has tended to suggest that any talk of liberation is centred on this area of human life where sin is exemplified by common social oppression. But it is clear from the above that this cannot be dealt with in isolation, but as an integral part of the Gospel message. A fitting summary that seems to depict that which is central to the liberation theme in christological terms is that given by Walter Lowe when he says,

'The real issues emerge not by an abstract consideration of freedom and reason, as occurs even in existentialism, but by concrete encounter with the negative realities of injustice and victimisation. Salvation in this context is

experienced as liberation and Christology comes to centre upon Jesus' ministry and Crucifixion. By his active identification with the poor and outcast, Christ pronounced judgement upon all the self-serving ideologies - including the complacent Christologies - which ignore and thus condone the hidden violence of the status quo. Thus the context the liberationist proposes for Christology is not a generalised notion of history at all, but the concrete, self-critical practice of following in the way of Christ's own prophetic ministry'.<sup>65</sup>

In this regard, belief in Christ's redemption does not make one an immigrant out of history, but challenges one to proclaim and live the reality of what that means in the here and now as one sojourns to the hereafter of God's Lordship in eternity. For there is a widespread awareness that to speak of liberation or salvation in the ultimate sense is actually to state that which belongs to God. This is an awareness that is the basis of the believers' confidence and hope in the living out of that experience though inexhaustibly in the present - sojourning to the hereafter of God's eschatological reign where this is experienced in full.

There is no doubt that even in the sketchy attempts at representing the variety of approaches to liberation, we cannot claim to be offering what one would call 'the whole embracing' depiction of it by African theologians. But at the heart of it as it has been shown above is that what is spoken of is that which is the kernel of the Gospel - embracing both the physical and spiritual dimension of life, for human beings and for Creation at large and thus exhibiting that which is meant by the Gospel as good news.

There are also other themes of major or minor concern to articulators of theology in contemporary theology in Africa and which serve to exemplify

their orientations and what can be said to be an African perspective in contemporary theological thought. But it seems clear from the above that in whichever way these themes are treated, emerging orientations demonstrate that unending dialogue between today's Africa and that of the past. This is a dialogue that does not shy away from those realities of discontinuities, but brings them to the fore as it does those affirming continuities finding expression in Christian thought. This is a process that is not served by attempts at stressing the universal reality of the Christian faith with a tendency toward parochial emphasis, nor are they served by the contradicting stance. The reality of Christian identity exhibits both the particular and the universal and it is in focusing the issues facing the particular that the agenda of the universal is shaped and *vice versa*. The same is true for such a central theme for Christian faith as liberation. For the theology and the church would seem inward-looking and with no bearing on the daily experience of those addressed if the Gospel remained focused on the spiritual and not physical. Any attempt at taking either stance as is the tendency among some African theologians would only serve to exemplify what seems to be a mistaken understanding of the theological task and the very teaching and preaching of the Christian Gospel itself. This explains how imperative it is to address oneself to the question of religious authority, thereby setting in perspective the formulation of Christology as articulated in Africa's contemporary theology. This question is our concern in the next chapter.

### Notes

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10. Mercy A. Oduyoye, op cit, p.75.
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12. J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p.128.
13. Allan Boesak, op cit, p.14.
14. G.H. Muzorewa, op cit, p.110.
15. Allan Boesak, op cit.

16. By way of illustration cf. Basil Moore's article, 'what is black theology?' in The challenge of Black Theology in South Africa, Ed. B. Moore, John Knox press, Georgia, 1973.
17. cf quotation by Louise Kretzschmar: The Voice of Black Theology in South Africa, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1988, reprint, p.76.
18. cf J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p.129. Note especially his observation on a suggested dichotomy between message and context in the treatment of Pauline Eschatology where it is argued that it is a product of different circumstances and contexts by C.F.D. Moule in his essay, '*The influence of circumstances on the use of Eschatological terms*', in the Journal of Theological Studies, Vol.XV, ed. H. Chadwick and H.F.D. Sparks, Clarendon, Oxford, 1964, p.1-15, which he contrasts with that of J.P.M. Sweet, Revelation, op cit, p.1-52.
19. W. Pannenberg: Theology as History, ed. J. Robinson and J. Cobb, John Knox Press, Richmond, 1963, pp.314-335.
20. cf John McIntyre, op cit, p.20 f.
21. cf Martin Hengel: The Son of God, op cit, p.93.  
For a similar point of view see also Eberhard Jüngel: Death: The Riddle and the Mystery, St Andrews Press, Edinburgh, 1975 (English trans. Ian and Ute Nicol), p.95 ff.
22. cf I Cor.2:1-13.
23. cf Martin Hengel, op cit, p.85-88.
24. J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p.129-134 - especially p.134. See also H. von Balthasar: Engagement With God, SPCK, London, 1975, p.36
25. C.K. Barrett: Jesus and the Gospel Tradition, SPCK.,London, 1967, p.103. See also African Ideas of God, London, 1967, p.180-200.  
Where the observation is made that for Africans who have always been

aware of a transcendental being and have had several mediums, Jesus remains unnecessary if he does not exceed them.

- 26.cf. K.A. Dickson and P. Ellingworth, op. cit. p. 16.
- 27 cf. B.J. Nicholls' article *Contextualization* in New Dictionary of Theology, ed. S. Ferguson and D.E. Wright, IVP., Leicester, 1988, p. 164.
28. Bengt Sundkler: The Christian Ministry in Africa, SCM Press, London, 1960, p.281.
29. Osadolor Imasogie: Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa, African Christian Press, Ghana, 1983, p.18.
30. cf Charles Nyamiti: African Tradition and the Christian God, Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Spearhead No.49, p.20.
31. Osadolor Imasogie, op cit, p.20.
32. Robert J. Schreiter: Constructing Local Theologies, SCM Press, London, 1985, p.21.
33. B.J. Nicholls, op cit, p.166.
34. J.S. Mbiti, op cit, p. .
35. cf Dietrich Westermann: Africa and Christianity (Duff Lectures, 1935), Oxford Univeristy Press, London, 1937, p.94.
36. Robert J. Schreiter, op cit, p.16.  
See also Lesslie Newbigin's The Other Side of 1984, WCC, Geneva, 1983, p.5f., where he alludes to the same problem of denying or destroying many cultures encountered via Christian missions on the basis of the said false notion which in reality equated the invading European culture with Christianity.
37. cf H. Richard Niebuhr: Christ and Culture, Faber and Faber Ltd, London, 1952.

See also R. Cochrane's 'Christ and Culture: Now and Then', in South African Journal of Theology, edit. de Gruchy, Capetown, June 1990, No.71, p.5.

38. Mercy A. Oduyoye, op cit, p.67.
39. Osalador Imasogie, op cit, p.16.
40. Kwame Bediako: *The roots of African theology* in International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol.13, No.2. Ed. Gerald H. Anderson, Connecticut, 1989, p.59.
41. op cit.
42. Kenneth Cragg's 'Conversion and Convertibility with special reference to Muslims', in Down to Earth - Studies in Christianity and Culture. Edited by J.R.W. Stott and R. Coole, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980, p.194..
43. Adrian Hastings: 'On African theology' in Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol.37, op cit, p.359. n.b. Italics mine.
44. C.S. Song: 'Open Frontiers of Theology' in Asia in Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation Bulletin, Vol.26, No.3/4, Summer/Autumn 1982, p.52-53.
45. John V. Taylor: The Primal Vision: Christian Presence and African Religions, SCM Pess, London, 1963, p.16.
46. cf Richard J. Mouw: 'Christian Theology and Cultural Plurality' in the Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology, No.5-6, Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1987-88, p.194.
47. Ibid

48. cf Itumeleng J. Mosala: Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1990, especially p.18-66 & 98.
49. Adrian Hastings, op cit, p.368.
50. Zablon Nthamburi: 'African Theology as a Theology of Liberation' in AFER, Vol.22, 1980, p.232.
51. Kwesi A. Dickson, op cit: p.125. Note the correction that already took place in Western theology itself. For whereas the tendency towards an abstract, theoretical and otherworldly inclination of theology has been traced to Barthian positivism within the Protestant tradition, twentieth century reactions to it served to reassert this worldly reality. A fitting illustration is found in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann whose reaction to Barth's emphasis on God's absolute transcendence and freedom (seen by some to have given rise to the 'death of God' theology) emphasised the divine immanence, relying heavily on the Hegelian conception of history. The consequence being that there was a rethinking of the concept of revelation and the relationship between it and history as we showed in Chapter One. But there was also the second consequential point in that it was in the light of this that there was a re-evaluation of the temporal order and its relationship with spiritual order. Both were seen as interconnected, and the right of the Christian to a critical appraisal of the temporal order was, therefore, asserted (cf Justin Upkong, African Theologies: A Profile, op cit, p.47f).
52. cf Denis Carroll: What is Liberation Theology? Fowler Wright Books, Leominster, 1988, p.31.

53. Gustavo Gutierrez: *Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith in Frontier*, p.21.
54. Denis Carroll, ibid.
55. cf Gustavo Gutierrez: A Theology of Liberation, Orbis, New York, 1973, p.158.
56. Denis Carroll, op cit, p.32.
57. Tokunboh Adeyemo: Salvation in African Tradition, Evangel Press, Nairobi, 1979, p.93.
58. C.G. Baëta, *Conflict in Mission: Historical and Separatist Churches* in G.H. Anderson (ed.): The Theology of the Christian Mission, SPCK, London, 1962, p.293f.
59. John S. Mbiti: 'ο ωτηρη ημων as an African Experience' in B. Lindars and S.S. Smalley (eds.) Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, Cambridge University Press, London, 1973, p.412.
60. cf C.G. Baëta: *Conflict in Mission: Historical and Separatist Churches* in G.H. Anderson (ed) The Theology of the Christian Mission, SCM, London, 1962, p.293f.
61. T. Adeyemo, op cit, p.94.
62. John S. Mbiti: Bible and Theology in African Christianity, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1986, p.158.
63. John Pobee: Toward an African Theology, Abingdon, 1979, p.111.
64. John S. Mbiti, op cit, p.158f.
65. Walter Lowe: *Christ and Salvation in Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks*, op cit, p.218f.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CENTRE FOR RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Africa's theological and religious scenery may have its peculiarities and distinctive characteristics that set it apart from that of Otto Weber's continental Europe in the 1930s. But the existing plurality and diversity therein throws one into a theological jungle that would seem to lead one to the same problem Weber had had to wrestle with during his time. And that is the problem of religious authority. For where the negation of liberalism and the general orientation of theology in Europe brought about the crisis of direction, and therefore, an authoritative framework, the above reality facing theology in Africa confronts one with no less a problem. More so when amidst the chaos and suffering, the apparent lack of power of the World Church to alleviate the suffering of many demonstrates that the external authority of a great church is not adequate. As in Weber's Germany, therefore, there is a real yearning for spiritual authority: the authority of a holy and loving God in the dimension of the whole human race, and not just of the individual country or person. And as the case was for Weber and theologians of his time, the need to discern this authority and nature of the Bible, the meaning of revelation and inspiration, and the nature of human response to revelation needs no stressing.<sup>1</sup> As recently observed, this involves the realisation that authority can be settled in a religious way; and as the past few years have vividly illustrated, the godlessness of many regimes

in Africa and the failure of many governments after independence to satisfy the African dream for freedom and liberation has made it imperative to recognise that the call here is for a transference of the supreme problem of life to the area of the personal conscience. For the whole moral tragedy of the African world is now in the arena of the single soul no longer sheltered by the African extended family or the Church. Authority has to be seen in the nature of the redeemer: Christ is the new conscience and the new King; and the cross and not the ecclesiastical body must be seen as the new seat of his authority. Yes, the cross as Christ crucified, ‘the power of God unto salvation’ afresh in the ‘evangelical’ experience of the desperate soul, and rising anew its new trust and new life. Like Kant whom we visited in Chapter One, we have to break with rationalism’s quest for theoretical truth as the prime object in theology if we are to find an answer to the question of ultimate authority. We have to emphasise a shift from sheer rationalism to reality, from the purely intellectual to include the ethical. If language is an exploration of reality, it becomes apparent that thought is not an end in itself but only an instrument serving the purposes of the actualities of life. And as it has been said, it might be helpful if the notion of reality replaced that of truth. For as African traditional beliefs show, religion does not place us in line with the way the world relates to us, but in rapport with the reality of it. Moreover, ‘pure thought’ with the character of complete detachment is inadequate when dealing with the interests of human life. The ideals and purposes by which we live cannot be decided by impartial intellect alone. Our ideals result from value judgements which involve the will, and consequently they are moral judgements. And is not the holiness of God, a holiness that is best expressed in ethical terms as the absolute moral reality, the identification of the moral norm and the ultimate reality? If such holiness

be the nature of the ultimate reality, then by this measure man's righteousness or his moral judgements must stand or fall. Again' as African traditional beliefs indirectly bear witness, the supreme task of all religions must be the securing of that holiness. And the absence of an eschatology in African traditional beliefs<sup>2</sup> is partly due to the realisation of the fact that man is dislocated from such holiness and all attempts must be made to be attuned to it and hence the whole notion of the 'living-dead'.<sup>3</sup>

The imperative question that arises from the above, however, is how this ultimate moral reality is made known. For the holy is both urgent and inaccessible, imperative and unapproachable. Neither thought nor experience unaided can rise to it.<sup>4</sup> The answer seems to lie nowhere else other than in revelation or the self-disclosure of this ultimate moral reality. And as we already pointed out in Chapter One, the basic argument here is that there is a recognition that what we are dealing with is utterly and completely other, outside us and yet confronting us and thereby being the given of our starting point. In this regard, what we hold as truth or right, and indeed our very perception of reality can only be understood on the basis of the ultimate moral reality's act of confronting us. Now, this is not to say that our viewing of Christian discourse will be in terms of what would seem like the holding of eternal moral truths as the reference point, and thus, depict our relationship to God as dependent on the recognition of them. But an undertaking that recognises Christian proclamation and therefore Christian teaching, always directs us toward a history in which, in a way absolutely in kind, God's grace and truth were present in action for our salvation. Unlike the older supernaturalism's representation of revelation as supernatural communication of ultimate truths, or the romantic-idealistic speculation's

representation of it as the overcoming of man's limits, there is a representation of that reality of God's coming to us and being for us in this event.<sup>5</sup>

Hence the emphasis of faith as the framework on which rationale of that which is received in revelation is made. But then, what is the nature of this revelation? To start with, it is evident from the above that revelation belongs to God and not an object of human discovery. In fact, it is not only our knowledge of him that derives from his initiative, but it is the very basis on which our faith is constituted. And thus, we have the reverse order in which theology represents our knowledge of God. For unlike other disciplines, the starting point is not with us, but God whose initiative in encountering us forms the basis on which our knowledge and religiosity is based. This is the point that was echoed by Karl Barth in Chapter One when he argued against the rationalist tendency's attempt to depict religious knowledge as if it were about God whom we know. For the basic thrust of his famous 'No' was his concern to emphasise the beginnings of Christian faith in God who knows us, and thus diverting the then dominant concern with rational exemplification of Christian faith as if it rests on propositions, statements and truths revealed to man, to the reality that at issue here was the being of God and his knowing of us is his revelation (cf Gal 4:8-9).<sup>6</sup>

Now this is not a lapse into a kind of theological incomprehensibility, but a recognition of the fact that our speaking of the revealed knowledge is in itself a pointer to a kind of knowledge distinctive from that which we attain through our own effort or thought. The recognition of the fact that what we

are dealing with here is that knowledge which has come to us as a gift, and thereby underlining the testimony of faith that God makes himself known to us rather than that we attain to the knowledge of him. The Bible, as John Macquarrie has rightly pointed out, never suggests that man has to strain his mind to figure out a shadowy something behind the phenomena. There is indeed recognition of man's innate quest for God, but God himself meets and satisfies the quest. Man does not search out God, but rather the reverse is true. One of the greatest Psalms begins, 'O Lord, thou has searched me and known me', and goes on to describe the ubiquity and inevitability of the encounter with God.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, we do not speak here only about this revealed truth of God's being, his design and plan concerning humanity's fate and future situation and position which can never be found out by any scientific research, but that of reality in general as God's Creation.<sup>8</sup> This is factor that does not set the question of Christology at the centre of theological discourse, but one that defines its task.

One other significant element in dealing with revelation is that it is personal. For what we are dealing with as revealed is not knowledge about things but a relation to a subject. In this regard, theological enterprise is in reality a person's intelligent response to a person, the response of a will to a will, of the whole finite person to a whole person, absolute and holy.<sup>9</sup> This is the same point expressed by John Baillie<sup>10</sup>

*in virtue of*

In fact, it is the realisation of this point that many theologians see a proper response to revelation in terms of ethics rather than as an intellectual assent to new truth. Indeed, the unity of theory and practice in Christian faith is exemplified by our submission to the revealed will of God - without

which one can easily trip oneself up in what appears to be a mere intellectual assent to the imperative of divine love. In other words, there will be no recognition of the fact that the assent to this divine imperative demands submission of the will - a submission which very often leads from the Upper Room, to Gethsemane, and Calvary without seeking for the guarantee from God as to whether such submission will lead to resurrection. The end result here is simply a reflective and contemplative obedience to the God whose imperative comes to us in an act of self-abandonment.<sup>11</sup> But as William Temple reminds us, 'every revelation of God is a demand and the way to knowledge of God is by obedience.<sup>12</sup> This is the same point stressed by Walter Kasper from another perspective when he says,

'Faith is the comprehensive re-action of the human being to the prior action of God in revealing himself, it is a trusting in God and a building on God, a gaining of a foothold in God, a saying of 'Amen' to God, with all the consequences this entails. To have faith is to take God seriously as God, without reservations. It is to give him the honour and to glorify him as Lord. It is to acknowledge his Lordship with praise and thanksgiving.'<sup>13</sup>

Having said this, however, I share the view of those who see the need to guard against the temptation of turning obedience of will, and response, into a kind of virtue or the hypostatising of it. For what we are dealing with here is our obedience, response and will as people known by God. This is to say that the kind of response we are talking about here has to be like that of Isaiah 6 - where we have an exemplification that is characterised by admiration and dread:

Woe is me!  
For I am lost;  
for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the  
midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes  
have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'<sup>14</sup>

This is an act of reckoning with the revelation of the *holy* that revives or brings into light, even more vividly the perversion, defilement and the godlessness of our being. In this regard, our speaking of revelation demands our recognition that what we are dealing with is a revelational event that deals with our human predicament as sinners - for it is redemptive. The same text of Isaiah 6 underlines it all when it says:

‘And he touched my mouth, and said: Behold, this has touched your lips: your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.’<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Pungur has, therefore, rightly stated that the rejection of the tendency to treat revelation content as metaphysical knowledge about God or some speculative undertaking, stems from the realisation that the very object of revelation is the exigency of our existence.<sup>16</sup> In fact, it would be a mistake to suppose that revelation gives us the science of man. There is no revealed anthropology or psychology. The failure on the part of many missionaries, social anthropologists and students of comparative religion, to see this object of revelation, made them treat African religion as if it were a bizarre museum, entirely different from other religious phenomena formed in Western culture.<sup>17</sup> The content of revelation must be of a practical nature, confronting the great realities of this world - the moral poverty of all ages. And that is why theology can be always *ad hoc*. Is not the concern of all religious the ultimate knowledge about our existence, rather than the subsidiary knowledge about our universe? And whatever views one may hold as to how the world came into being, whether God created man out of nothing or he is the product of big-bang theory, or evolution - or to use Albert Camus, the French novelist and playwright's words, ‘It does not

matter whether the earth goes round the sun or the sun round the earth, the only really serious question is whether, either way, our life on earth is worth living - *and whether we are advancing morally*'.<sup>18</sup> Writing along the same lines, Paul Tillich says,

‘Revelation is the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately. The mystery which is revealed is the ultimate concern to us because it is the ground of our being.’<sup>19</sup>

An interesting point on this has also been made by John Baillie.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever else can be said about revelation, it is clear from the above that it is a statement about the grace of God. It is the gospel of redemption, God giving himself to man, pouring himself into human history, sacrificing himself for human recovery and ~~nor~~<sup>ke</sup> showing or the teaching of something. And if we are to teach or show this revelation, it has to be accompanied by deed or tested by our deeds in a world that is godless. And this action of God has to be seen not merely as knowledge of the way of deliverance but the deliverance itself. For what is being spoken of is not primarily the knowledge of salvation as revealed, but salvation itself.<sup>21</sup> Nor just the truth about God, but God coming as his own truth - in the form of life in this salvific act. Hence J.K. Mozley's assertion that ‘when the church confesses the doctrine of the incarnation, of God manifest in flesh, she does not claim a rationalistic triumph; what she contends is that eternal mystery has come into special contact with men through temporal mystery, and that the knowledge of the truth has thereby been increased. Truth . . . came through Jesus Christ, not ultimately because he spoke true things, but because he was the truth.<sup>22</sup>

Echoing what we said of the Christ event in Chapter Four, it is evident from the above that there is no place for the kind of thinking represented by Wilhelm Herrmann, who by following his teacher, Ritschl, seems to depict God's self-manifestation in terms of the spiritual or the moral ideal.<sup>23</sup> For any entertainment of such a thought or vision of the ideal can do nothing to man but fill him with despair and a sense of the unattainable. As Paul realised in Romans 7, we need the power that would enable us to be and do what we know to be the truth. To put it in Weber's words, 'The basic instruction for us as a believing community is to learn Christ (Eph 4:20) - the power and promise of God's Yes and Amen (II Cor 1:20) to us, the basis *where the truth of life in the place of death is exemplified*'.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, revelation is never understood as God giving me all I need to know to enable me to fulfill what had been revealed to me, but as God's giving of himself to me, and enabling me in a relationship of love to become and begin to imitate what I am discovering from the relationship. Thus, Baillie would rightly state that our concern in revelation is not primarily the knowledge of salvation that is spoken as revealed, but salvation itself as manifested in Christ. In the same breath, he says that 'it is not enough to say that what God reveals is not a prescription by which we may save ourselves, but the knowledge that he himself has saved us ... God does not give us information but communion; he give us himself in communion'.<sup>25</sup>

Since mere illumination or the statements about man's moral predicament or the nature of God is not adequate, God needs to do something to man. It is not a re-interpretation of what life is all about that is needed, but, as Jesus told Nicodemus, at the heart of this encounter is a *reconstruction*, the coming into being of a new creation, a new birth, a

passage from death to life. And it is in reckoning with this that Weber, as we pointed out in Chapter Four, sees the task of Christology as never a mere exercise in the knowledge of God the redeemer, but is simultaneously the experience of a turning around in our existence.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it is this same point that Edward Schillebeeckx makes from another context when he says that Christianity does not merely throw light on man's existence, but aims above all to renew that existence, and the *theoria* of Christianity is an implicit element of this.<sup>27</sup> And so we could say as John Baillie has remarked that what we have here is an exemplification of that two dimensional rendering of God's word in Hebrew thought where God's fiat and his effective action are one. God speaks and it is done. We are to some extent then, prepared for the New Testament affirmation that the Word can be seen and touched as well as heard and read (The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, John 1:14).<sup>28</sup>

The essence of revelation does not lie in the consciousness of Christ, construed psychologically and acting aesthetically, but in his personality as embodied in an act which changes the whole of human destiny. The authority and nature of revelation does not lie in Jesus, 'the superlative of man's conscience', but in Christ as the redeemer of the conscience and its new life. To echo Otto Weber once again, revelation is in reality redemption, the Good News of God's 'being for us' in that it exemplifies that decisive dealing of God with the moral tragedy of man. For the destruction of man's insularity typified by his self-glorification that takes place in the event of Jesus Christ, is in reality man's liberation precisely because it shows him where his limitations are.<sup>29</sup> The primary and unequivocal revelation of God

is therefore, nothing other than the fact of Jesus Christ. I share the view of those who say, therefore, that if this had been realised by many missionaries, their extravagant claims about African culture and religion would have appeared to them to have suffered from cultural deficiencies and would have prevented them condemning everything in African culture as pagan. It would also have become apparent to the exponents of African theology, that it was unnecessary to write endless volumes justifying the starting of African theology. It seems to me that it is only when the nature of revelation forms the basis on which we witness and articulate the truth of the gospel that we can best characterise God's saving action which is at the heart of our Christological task. Whether we are dealing with the African Church as the specific context of our articulation or the broad perspective of the universal church, it seems to me that the only way we can do justice to this central point of the Christian Gospel is by taking it as the only framework of our orientation. And one that serves to judge methods we employ in our articulation.

If revelation is to be understood as God's action through Christ which redeems and reconciles man to himself, how does this conception of revelation bear on the Bible? The African scene as it has been rightly observed, seems to go on unaffected in any large measure by the critical treatment of the Bible which has dominated Euro-American Christianity for many years. The way history has fallen on faith like a beast of prey threatening to tear it to pieces, however, has not escaped Christian thought in the continent. Indeed, there are still many traditionalists who continue to hold the view that the origin of scripture was unique. God himself has dictated it and writers were merely authoritative instruments of the Holy

Spirit. They thus equate the Word of God with the words of scripture. What the Bible gives us is divine knowledge communicated in the form of propositional truths. Consequently, the authority of the Bible is grounded in the process of its origin;<sup>30</sup> despite the fact that this whole doctrine of its unique origin has been challenged and denied by the historical critics.<sup>31</sup>

The dialogic insight of Otto Weber does remind us of the need to learn from the past. But this seems not to have been taken note of by those who pursue the above stance in their treatment of the Bible. For if they had done so, they could have realised how the challenge that occurred in Europe to that kind of thinking brought about the inevitable collision between faith and history. In fact, it was as a result of this collision already pointed out by Weber, that all future doctrines of the origin and nature of scripture could not be formulated without taking into consideration its unique historical character; the fact that Christianity has its root firmly planted in concrete events of the past, in the acts of God in history, and finally in the advent of Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, we need not stress the datedness of any view that seems still to hold the doctrine of unhistorical and verbal inspiration of the Bible. I share the view that the Bible has to be understood as an historical book, written and transmitted by fallible human beings, and therefore, exposed to the same risk of error and alteration as any other ancient book. In other words, the Bible must always remain open for a purely secular interpretation in as much as we recognise that which we encounter in its proclamation.

The trickling of Biblical criticism into African spirituality and theological thinking, however, raises a situation of concern. For the scenery

that has been emerging appears to perpetuate the common divide in Western theology where one either belongs to the liberal school-characterised by what seems to be the subjection of one's orientation to the mercy of historical criticism, or fundamentalism or conservatism whose preoccupation seems to be one of retreating behind the crumbling walls of the traditional view of Biblical scholarship (by far the majority in the African scene). This state of affairs, it seems to me, enhances polarisation that is not healthy for creative scholarship. Indeed, it serves as a hindrance rather than one that gives impetus to what can be said to be an authentic quest of faith of the African Christian. This is the kind of quest that does not shy away from the challenges of critical scholarship, but as one that wrestles with them in that true character of a faith seeking understanding. This means that one has to be prepared to enter into dialogue with all schools of thought and be prepared to appreciate the penetrating insights of those who may not necessarily share your inclinations. Alan Richardson gives us a fitting example in Barth, who inspite of his detestation of liberal scholarship, could not help acknowledging some of the insights. For example, he cited him as acknowledging what was very much an insight deriving from liberal scholarship when he said,

‘As human words the words of the Bible are, like those of any historical documents, open to investigation by the techniques of modern historical and critical science. Such science can serve a useful purpose in investigating the historical Christ of the New Testament, provided that it is clearly recognised that the ‘real’ historical Christ is none other than the Biblical Christ attested by the New Testament, that is, the incarnate Word, the risen and exalted one, God manifested in his redeeming action as the object of his disciple’s faith.’<sup>33</sup>

What is needed in African Christianity, especially in the light of this conception of the proper function of the historicocritical method, is the appreciation of the penetrating insights made by P.T. Forsyth long before 1919 when Karl Barth, though avowedly rejecting liberal theology, was able to demonstrate that historicocritical method is not necessarily bound up with the presuppositions of those who had first used and developed it.<sup>34</sup> The penetrating insight is that the subject matter in Scripture is more than literature, history and religion; it is a witness that extends over more than a thousand years to a relationship between God and humans in which first in Israel, and then in Jesus Christ and his Church, the deepest mysteries of humanity's life in time and beyond time were revealed.<sup>35</sup> But one that in treating this subject matter does not shy away from facing the witness to it, as had been done in and through all that which is historical and belonging to human experience. In other words, one that embraces the fact that the Scriptures are a theological as well as a historical entity, and demanding, for their scientific investigation a methodology that is as responsible theologically as it is historically.<sup>36</sup>

This is to say that we have to learn from Biblical criticism (especially as preachers) the need to make the Bible for the listeners a real historic and living book. For it is by doing so that we can get rid of the amateur habit of laying out the Bible in diagrams, schemes which treat it like a game park and which ignore the historic and critical study. In fact, those who tend to maintain allegorical interpretations of Scripture in the hope of maintaining by saving the now negated concept of verbal inspiration, as with many preachers of the East African Revival and some independent Churches, are a fitting example of what we have stated above. The lesson here goes beyond

the concern to save verbal inspiration. For what they are doing in effect is a repeat of what was found among some exponents of Karl Barth's tendency to draw too sharp a separation between historical and theological interpretation of the realities we encounter in Scripture. Exponents who, in accepting the above approach as given, and thereby treating the former as preparatory and therefore of secondary importance, were inclined to concentrate on the latter as the primary task. And yet it was by doing so, as James Smart points out, that they, in embracing Barth's use of analogy and typology in his interpretation to reintroduce not only analogy and typology but also allegory as legitimate devices in extracting an edifying meaning from the text, ended up with what seemed like a return to the Middle Ages' forms of theological interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

The sacredness of Scripture, and therefore its authority, is not maintained by obscuring the full human character inherent in it and by attempting to remove it into a world other than the one that we inhabit. For any attempt to do so leaves the text of Scripture a static formulation of divine truth rather than the human historical words of men like ourselves. But when we recognise the two dimensional reality we encounter in Scripture; i.e. the encounter, the relationship, the interaction of God and man, then we are able to appreciate the lessons from historico-critical method that the historicity and aliveness of the Bible is exemplified in the upholding of both realities. This is to say that therein is the proclamation of the willingness of him who is God to embrace, speak and act through all that which is human and relative. Now, the demand to face this truth, it seems to me, does not kill the Bible or diminish its authority, but serves to demonstrate the true character of

Christian faith. The character that shows that in self-surrender even unto death is no destruction but resurrection. The change is therefore not in the Scriptures themselves, but in the way we handle it and the numerous presuppositions we bring to it. In our views of the Bible there is much scaffolding that must be taken down if the house is to appear for what it is. In fact, James Smart argues that the tendency to shy away from this responsibility of being ready to take them down amounts to an act of theological dishonesty. For as he says,

‘Dishonesty takes subtle forms; a closing of the eyes at certain moments or to certain elements in the phenomena that are before us, a twisting of the facts to make them fit our theory or support our practice, a colouring of the facts to make them appear other than they are. It happens in personal relationships and destroys the integrity of the relationships. It happens in society and leaves one segment of it blind to the injustices it has for years been inflicting on another segment. And it happens in the use of Scripture far too often as we protect ourselves against those elements in Scripture which contradict our cherished convictions, our way of life, and our religious establishment. But where people stand before God their eyes are opened to the truth no matter how painful and distressing that truth may be. God is truth, and to be open to his presence is to be receptive to the truth from whatever quarter it may appear. Honesty and integrity thus belong to the very essence of faith in God, and theology, as the attempt to define the realities to which faith bears witness, can live only in the atmosphere of unconditional truthfulness.’<sup>38</sup>

However, historicocritical method or any other critical approach to the Bible cannot go unchecked. Surely, the final criticism of the Bible, as has rightly been observed, is not the ‘higher criticism’ but the highest, the criticism whose principle is God and the supreme object in the Bible, the object of reconciling grace. The Gospel is the critic of criticism and therefore

criticism is secondary and ancillary, and the synthetic principle in the Bible is the Gospel. P.T. Forsyth makes even a more pointed statement about this after granting that we need historical criticism, that literary criticism has its rights, that psychological criticism is worthy, by saying from a christological perspective,

‘But allowing for all such things, the questions remain dogmatic, was He, is He, what Christian faith essentially believed? Did His convictions, of His and of the Church, correspond to reality? Was He, is He, in God what he thought He was and what He was held to be? When the first Church worshipped Him with God's name, and set Him on God's throne, were they a new race of idolators? Was His influence so poor in quality that it could not protect from that? He thought himself redeemer; did he really redeem? Did God redeem in him? Was God the real actor? These questions; and in all such questions, criticism is *ultra vires* (beyond its power). These things are settled in another and higher court. ...The soundest criticism is the criticism by a believing Church, daily living on the grace of the Cross and venture of faith. ...The real criticism is not our criticism of Christ, but Christ's criticism of us, His saving judgement of us.’<sup>39</sup>

This is also the underlying thought and recognition that led Otto Weber to state,

‘Theological labour in the exegesis of the bible is already derived from hearing and takes place in readiness to hear. Thus it has no demonstrable security supporting it. It lives from the Witness of Christ, and it can fulfill its task when it investigates every text with the question, how does it relate to the Witness to Jesus Christ?’<sup>40</sup>

Having conceived of revelation as God's action through Jesus Christ which redeems and reconciles man to himself, and that this action is witnessed to in the Bible, the Bible exists for the sake of the Gospel within it. Therefore, in considering the relation of the Bible to revelation, the

following facts already observed, clearly present themselves. These are that; first revelation cannot be equated with the Bible, for it is what gives value to the Bible - the Gospel witnessed in the Bible. Revelation is not a book saying something, but a person doing something, and what he does secondarily says something in turn. In fact, it has validly been argued that the dichotomy between thought and action which seemed to have been perceived as characterising the resultant depiction of soteriology in missionary Christianity, as we implied in Chapter Six, seemed to have come about due to the inability to recognise and accept the above.<sup>41</sup> Second is that if revelation is the Gospel, the act of God can be described in fewer words than those of the Bible; and yet the range of the Gospel is certainly beyond the compass of any book. For God's saving action has to do with the total conquest of history which involves the whole resources of the infinite God. This cannot be contained in any book or library of books. It is only possible in the action of God, in a present reality of God's presence in the Holy Spirit.

And thirdly, an infallible book implies that man's primary need is for what a book could convey, namely propositional truth; whereas man's primary need is not intellectual but moral, not truth but grace, not illumination but redemption, and can only be had in a person. In a word, the primary revelation is Jesus Christ himself.<sup>42</sup>

I, therefore, share the view that revelation is the coincidence of event and appreciation. For in the light of the above, we cannot say that the Bible is the act, but the record or product of the act; the confessional recital of God's acts. If we were to have a summary depiction of this relation of the

Bible to revelation, then P.T. Forsyth's metaphor seems to tender a befitting depiction when he says,

‘God smote upon the world in Christ's act of redemption; it sounded in the Apostles' word of reconciliation; and reverberated and goes on doing so in the Bible.’<sup>43</sup>

What does this mean for the Christian's regard for the Bible? The first point to be made is that Scripture cannot be regarded as source, but the fruit of faith. Inspiration is not in the document, but rather in the development of those who lived in the faith. We therefore, cannot say that we believe in the resurrection because the Apostles said so. We will have to see the Apostles' teaching as a gateway to becoming witnesses to the Living Christ. We too have to know him and not just about him. Assembling all the facts about Christ is not enough - we have to reverse this critical process. For the Apostles started with ‘experiencing’ Jesus Christ, they were given the Holy Spirit to understand what they had experienced but had not understood before, and it was from this context that they thought and acted theologically, working out the implications of their reflection in the doctrinal statement of the written Bible. For us starting at the end of their credal statement, we have to go beyond them to the experience. An outer authority,- e.g. the Bible or the creeds is not adequate if we have not encountered the Living Christ in their testimony. We have to strive to understand God as he means us to understand him.

This leads us to our second point emerging from the above. The point that when we speak of scriptural authority, we are actually speaking of God who encounters and confronts us in the words of Scripture. His act in the event of Jesus Christ being the concrete manifestation of that encounter.

Now, our recognition of this reality makes it imperative for us to note that in as much as we strive to understand God's act, we shall need his version of the way in which his acts need to be understood - him remaining the interpreter if we were to understand rightly. We need to listen to Scripture in submission to his divine authority.<sup>44</sup>

It may never become a matter of 'one's own interpretation' (new in every age), because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (II Peter 1:20,21)<sup>45</sup>.

Inasmuch as the Bible is understood as the record and not the act it proclaims, it is worth noting that it is a necessary part of the act and of its effect. For if we are affirming that the absolute authority of faith is the Living Christ himself, and that he so bound himself to the historical attestation concerning his self-revelation in Scripture, then the latter (Scriptures) necessarily participates in the authority of its Lord.

Having conceived of revelation as the Gospel, God's redemptive act that confronts us in the testimony of Scripture and our encounter of it in our experience, and the fact that this takes place in the realities of concrete history, it is imperative for us to state what we understand of the faith we have stressed as the basis of appropriating what is given in revelation. Christian faith seems to be understood by many Africans as primarily assenting to given 'truths'; a notion that this is contrary to what is always understood of 'belief' in traditional religion. This misconception has been attributed to the legacy of missionary theology that tended to have been influenced by the traditions of Western theology that understood revelation as

the ‘communication of truths’. But if what we have regarded above as the nature of revelation be true, namely that revelation is a redemptive deed done once and for all, and not propositional truth, and that what is revealed is God himself doing something and not ‘truths’ about God, our faith, our response to this act of God, has to undergo a radical change. For what is demanded here is trust in or self-commitment to rather than mere assent to propositions.<sup>46</sup>

An act of individual response to the revelatory act is an act in return: the act of trusting obedience. Faith becoming personal fellowship with God rather than the holding of correct doctrines, a fellowship that helps the shaping of our doctrinal and theological formulation. More so as the Gospel is made alive to the recipient by the Holy Spirit. A fitting summary of the point is made by Otto Weber when he says,

‘The knowledge of God is not the poetic reception of ‘something’, but the relationship and behaviour which involves all of man, which takes place between the individual ‘I’ (or ‘we’) of knowing man and the thou of the loving God. The knowledge of God is fellowship with God.  
...Fellowship *that* takes place in grateful and obedient response to the Word given to us, in faith which answers the faithfulness of God.’<sup>47</sup>

Criticism has validly been made against African theologians who seem to pay little attention to the working of the Holy Spirit and yet what we have stated above makes this imperative. Ours can be truly a faith seeking understanding if there is a recognition of this truth that unless God ‘breaths into our labours, all may be in vain’ (cf Gen 2:7).

We have seen that religious authority in Christian faith is vested in

God witnessed in Scriptures as having encountered and confronted us in the holistic reality of our existence in the event of Jesus Christ. Discussing the problem of Biblical authority is, therefore, addressing oneself in effect to the question of his (God's) authority over humanity. And since the Christian Gospel makes it plain that this claim is made so explicit nowhere else than in the said event of Jesus Christ, the issue at stake seems to be none other than that of Christology.

Our foregoing discussion on the question of revelation's relation to the Bible did not only demonstrate how historical criticism's questioning of the 'authority' of Scripture in nineteenth century protestant theology seemed to shift the basis of belief to history, but also that of Christology. For unlike the traditional approaches to Christology which defined the issues at stake in terms of the ontological problem which dominated the patristic period, the framework of reference now revolved around the question of the relationship between revelation and history,<sup>48</sup> with the historical critics posing anew the questions of the relationship between the historical figure of Jesus and the Christ of faith. Were they indeed one and the same person? Could the New Testament as historical - especially the synoptics - help the reconstruction of the historical figure of Jesus and thereby reveal one not unworthy to bear the claims which the Church made of its Lord and Head? This is the point made by McGrath when he says,

‘It must be emphasised that the new interest in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth who actually lived in first century Palestine through the means of the newly established historiographical methods was based upon the presupposition that this real historical figure had become obscured and distorted through the doctrinal presentation of him in the New Testament, the creeds and the Christian Church.’<sup>49</sup>

The way to realise this objective according to many historical critics whose approaches began the so-called ‘Quest for the historical Jesus’ was by isolating the synoptic Jesus from the rest of the New Testament with the hope that this would lead to the recapture of the historical figure as the basis of faith - and thereby substitute the religion of Jesus with the apostolic faith. The problem as Weber shows in his tackling of this question is whether our faith should be based upon Jesus’ teaching or whether we should try to reproduce his own personal faith. If our aim is to base our faith upon the teaching of Jesus, the question to be asked is whether this does not reduce Jesus to no more than a prophet and teacher of ‘truths’!

In Weber’s own words ‘Jesus ‘can’ not have been something other than an admittedly very extraordinary religious figure or preacher of ethical demands.’<sup>50</sup> And so Anton Friedrichsen would rightly say,

‘Anyone following the slogan ‘Back to Jesus!’ will therefore go further back than he intends. He will go past Jesus and land in the synagogue. He will simply take his stand on the sermon on the mount and the Parables, believing himself to be in the footsteps of Jesus. But even when preaching the sermon on the mount and relating his parables, Jesus is on his way to Calvary and the glory of the Father ... If we do not realise this, we are stuck in an *interpretatio Judaica* of his words.’<sup>51</sup>

The same is true for the attempt to reproduce Jesus’ own personal faith by similar methods of reconstruction with the objective of basing our faith on it. The end result of the exercise seems to do nothing more than reduce Jesus to no more than a saint who leaves to us the value of his inner life. And thereby raises seven greater problems for faith. For as it has been pointed out, the immediate question that has to be faced is how to copy

Jesus' private and intimate religion - the communion of the Father and Son - when our data for this relationship are so limited, and even the data we have are beyond us, ambiguous and silent on the central issues?<sup>52</sup> In fact the whole process invites the shifting of faith from that authority of God's revelation in Jesus Christ which confronts us in the proclamation of the Gospel to the results of scientific historical research and the opinions of historical experts. And this turns our response to the Gospel to be one formed by historical sense rather than faith. It seems to me that there is justification in the point that has been made that 'even if this method proved successful in its aspirations, an almost unbelievable folly that we can become certain of Christianity by historical means, the best that can result would be a religion of scholars, who in turn would become the 'authority'.<sup>53</sup> This is the underlying criticism of McGrath on Pannenberg's pursuit of the question of historical Jesus. For while acknowledging that the analysis of the history of Jesus of Nazareth is the most appropriate and desirable method of reconstructing a Christology, the question is whether that method is still open to us today? We are primarily concerned with the question of how a Christology may be constructed, or an existing Christology or range of Christologies verified, here and now, twenty centuries after the history of Jesus of Nazareth has taken place. The only persons in a position to undertake such an analysis were the Apostles, and their conclusions - as both event and interpretation, inextricably linked - are encapsulated in the *Kerygma* - Pannenberg's method need only - and in fact does little more than - demonstrate that the content of the *Kerygma* is inherently plausible.<sup>54</sup>

Our treatment of the Biblical witness to Jesus Christ in Chapter Four demonstrated that what we need to take into account is what was at the heart

of their witness. For theirs was a proclamation of the Gospel, not a presentation of biographical material. The evangelist's story was history with a claim on men's lives; history seeking a verdict from their hearers. They made history preach: a story with a purpose. And any attempt on our part, it seems to me, which does not seek to exhibit this, but aims only at what may be the bringing of Jesus to our time as the moral ideal of religious teacher of timeless ideal of God, the true, beautiful, the immediacy and nearness of God, only repeats the negated tendencies of speculative theology.

Indeed, we encounter in the Gospel an historical event which has taken place in the realities of history. Exaggerated statements or material that may be there in the New Testament do not alter the fact that Jesus is a figure of history. The event witnessed to by history cannot be replaced by myth. What is even more significant is that what has survived history is not a myth but a person - the living Christ. And therefore, it is unbelief that hinders the recognition of him as the one through whom God has wrought salvation for us and not the lack of his testimony in history. Indeed, the growth and triumph of the Christian faith finds its valid explanation in no other place, except in his Lordship over it as the living Christ. It is too shallow a line of thought, therefore, for those belonging to the History of Religions School in Africa to attribute the triumph over religions in the continent to colonialism. For the rapid growth of the Churches after independence renders the argument questionable. And so I share the view of those who see the real answer lying in the nature of the Gospel. For it is therein that the absoluteness of Christianity is manifested. The inescapable reality one faces in dealing with the question of Jesus Christ is that the history of his person is

inseparable from the witness of him as the Christ of faith. For it is through the achievement of his life, death and resurrection that his teaching is given worth. Otto Weber reminds us of what I see as particularly significant in this whole question of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. He states,

Faith does not live out of the fact that Christ has entered into our midst ‘in the flesh’. But it also could not live unless this did happen. The ‘Christ of faith’ is ‘outside of us’ (*extra nos*). And historicity is the decisive aspect for that assertion. But it is not the only aspect. That the ‘Christ of faith’ is disclosed to us only in our confrontation with each other is another aspect of it. And the eschatological aspect is a third one. They all belong together. The issue is that Jesus Christ comes to us ... and not the securing of faith.<sup>55</sup>

Contrary to what may be said of the testimony of the Apostles, their assertion that the risen and exalted Christ interpreted his work cannot be questioned. For it is from this particular context that the true significance of Christ's event is understood.

How is this given expression in the formulation of Christology in Africa's contemporary theology? Christianity in Africa exemplifies the constant concern for truth that takes an holistic rather than fragmentary approach. And Christology is no exception. In fact, the modern search for the historical Jesus which we have already discussed, has not been met with bewilderment and a sense of loss because of its critical scientific orientation, but because of its tendency to create gaps between Christian faith and New Testament scholarship and consequently appearing as if to hinder rather than facilitate integration into the thought-world of the Bible. This is made even more critical by the fact that the thought world of Africa has been

acknowledged as more akin to that of the Bible. For the question arises as to how it is appropriate to preoccupy oneself with what seems to be an endeavour to obtain factual consensus on the story of Jesus (as concerns of modern search for the historical Jesus show) while the African Christian's holistic approach demands more than facts. Indeed the Gospel story does not only speak about the historicity of Jesus, but the fact that in Him, God's salvific act for humanity has been and is being enacted. The question then, is not primarily one of creating a true picture of Jesus, but of how the crucified and risen Christ is a living reality in the thought of our time and in the lives of men and women of faith.<sup>56</sup>

It is in reckoning with this critical challenge to the task of Christology that observations have been made, of the need to distinguish between the common tendency to discuss Christology in metaphysical terms, due to our indebtedness to Greco-Roman culture, and the orientation of the Biblical faith. For whereas the former seemed to orient itself toward a kind of abstractionist framework, with the Christological task appearing as if it were a mere exercise in theoretical reflection, the latter exemplifies the expression of Christology in very functional terms such that there is that concrete emphasis on Jesus Christ as expressed in terms of his Activity. As John Pobee states<sup>57</sup>,

“The biblical approach is different: metaphysical speculations about the relations within the Godhead are absent. Even the Fourth Gospel, which declared ‘The Word was God’, nowhere speculates how the Word was. Indeed, it soon leaves the heavens and comes down to earth with the tremendous affirmation “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; We beheld his glory”. (John 1:14 RSV) <sup>58</sup>

Indeed it is in recognition of this particular orientation toward concrete expression, that he does not only find a viable framework of articulation, but one that seems to be on the same wavelength with African thought, whose preference for concrete expression over against abstractions needs no stressing. Furthermore, if there was a need for some confirmation of the suitability of the functional approach for discussing Christology within the African setting, the use of Proverbs in serious discussions in Akan society is a fitting example.<sup>59</sup> What is clear to Pobee and to many African scholars, is the inappropriateness of the process of philosophical abstraction from the concrete biblical texts which has been the chief trend of Western theology. For as he says '*this* is not terribly effective in Africa, at least if theology is to engage the Church as a whole and not just the initiates'.<sup>60</sup>

Inasmuch as this treatise affirms this view and the functional framework as one befitting the discussion of Christology, the question remains as to how this has been given expression in African scholarship, and in what ways do concepts employed to express impressions of Jesus depict him as the ground of faith, and therefore, religious authority?

An overview of recent attempts at the specific question of Christology in African Christianity show that besides the inherent variety of emphasis, two broad inclinations seem to stand out as dominant. The first is that which focuses on the functional representation of the Person of Jesus Christ in terms of his nature as truly human and divine. This is the approach pursued by John Pobee and a recent not so in depth discussion by Siggibo Dwane among others. The second is that which preoccupies itself with functional concepts attributed to Jesus Christ such as Christus Victor, Saviour,

liberator, and the mediator or the Great Ancestor besides others, as demonstrated by John Mbiti, Kofi-Appiah-Kubi, Mercy Oduyoye and Charles Nyamiti among others.

Starting with the first line of approach, the embrace of the functional framework as demonstrated by John Pobee's *Toward Christology in an African Theology*, follows the New Testament emphasis of discussing the humanity and divinity of Jesus in terms of His activity rather than speculating about 'His nature as human, or the metaphysical relationships within the Godhead in expounding His divinity. When it comes to the humanity, the basic thrust is that Jesus was a personality in history like any others. He as brought into the world by a woman like other men and with family relations and with traceable lineage through David (of the common knowledge of his mother, father, brothers and sisters as in Mark 6:3 RSV). He was of flesh and blood like any other man as is demonstrated by His subjection to all the limitations of all human beings, weak in flesh and potentially capable of sinning, limitation of His knowledge, and the loudest of all being His mortality. God does not die! Moreover, it is plain that He demonstrated His finitude by the fact that whatever power He wielded, He acknowledged as being derived from and dependent on God. And so we have Jesus' activity as man exemplifying that reality of life totally and solely dependent on God. The basic thrust of this point being that the biblical faith makes it plain in the humanity of Jesus that God has not dealt with human beings through a superbeing, but one truly of same kin and kith.<sup>61</sup>

The same is true even in the depiction of Jesus as divine. For the emphasis (as Pobee illustrates from John's Gospel) is not in speculating how

the Word was in spite of its declaration that it was God. As he states, 'the most important issue is what the Word does, for that is, so to speak, a window onto His divinity. Jesus' divinity is sensed or deduced from His operations in the world'.<sup>62</sup> This is to say that to some extent, the divinity of Jesus is mirrored through His humanity, a factor that serves to demonstrate the emphasis as not being in His metaphysical status but on God's relation with man. And so Pobee would assert:

'In Jesus the disciples saw what man is meant to be, i.e. Jesus is the *imago dei*. The determinative theological moment came when the disciples were compelled to say: 'What I see in this man commands my worship. What I see in him changes my concept of God. What I have seen in terms of his manhood I now recognise as Divinity, My Lord and my God'.<sup>63</sup>

This is indeed what terms like sinlessness serve to affirm. For at issue is not the qualitative distinction of His moral standing, but the fact that in Him was exhibited the meaning of a total devotion to God. The same is true for the authority and power He wielded - exhibited as divine power. The thrust of it all was the manifestation of the reign of God in the world. Furthermore, even the description of Him as creator seems to centre on the point that Jesus is the medium of revelation about God and about the meaning of existence. Hence the assertion of Him as not only the agent of creation but also the judge at the end. The same can be said for pre-existence and eternity. Siggibo Dwane affirms this same point though from a different perspective when he says:

'Jesus of Nazareth is man like ourselves, but from the beginning of His life He is the son of God. At creation, man is made God's companion and fellow worker. Jesus as the second Adam is the

locus of the invisible dwelling and activity of God. In Him and through Him God tabernacles with man in such a unique fashion that we are able to say Immanuel, God with us. This man is God-receiving and God-bearing. His works are the works of God, and His passion the compassion of God. He is the God-man.<sup>64</sup>

Turning to the second approach, the emphasis on the functional concepts attributed to Jesus Christ further exemplified the issue of Christology as that of God's relation to man, one that is not dealt with in metaphysical terms, but in concrete reality of the event of Jesus Christ. With the soteriological concern informing, but not determining the process of articulation, that which is enacted says as much of the act as it does the bearer of it. We have a fitting illustration in the conception of Jesus as Christus Victor in John Mbiti's treatment of it in *Some African Concepts of Christology*. For as he shows, the special appeal that this conception for an African Christian seems to be rooted in an African World View that is so aligned to that of the Bible. In his words:

'Africa knows all too well that there are many forces at work in the world. These are both real and imaginary, but they include spiritual powers, spirits, witchcraft, sorcery, fear, anxiety, sickness, diseases, the power of evil, and the greatest of them all, death'.<sup>65</sup>

But the problem is that in spite of all the rational explanations for misfortunes and other manifestations of evil (normally blaming any of the above as the cause) the ultimate remedy seems non-existent. In fact, many myths that tell of the origin of death and the subsequent loss of original immortality, resurrection and rejuvenation seem to impress on humanity the reality of an irreversible state that all that is left is the acceptance of the *status quo as a fait accompli*. The Christian gospel's depiction of Jesus Christ as

the one who fought victoriously the forces of evil, spirits, sickness, hatred, fear and death itself, and thus bringing about a radical turning around of the *status quo*, could only find full expression in Christus Victor. For what is said of His salvific act is not that of providing a temporary protection or refuge, but a once for all salvation, a complete alteration of the old world that was backward looking (others may have a circular rather than a theological orientation of life) with no futuristic dimension to one that is. This is a re-orientation of the way of death to that of life, the way of the past that seems to belong to fate to the way that reorientates life towards the eschatological purpose of God in which all things will be made new. An act that can only be attributed to one who is of God and one who is God.

Closely related to the above is the conception of Jesus Christ as Saviour. And even though there are no parallels to its biblical representation in traditional African concepts as Mbiti has rightly argued, its depiction strikes the African world with such dynamic meaning because of its being the ultimate answer to the obvious gap stated above as existing in matters of life, death and reconciliation with God. This portrait of Jesus fits into the yearnings and longing of African peoples in fulfilling something for which there has been no other known means of fulfilment. In both the backward looking and circular world views which seem to have been dominant in African myths, the African is placed in a situation where he seems to be waiting in darkness not knowing that a Saviour would come. For generations myths of how paradise was lost, how immortality was lost, how death came about, and how God and human beings were separated have been handed out by word of mouth. But nobody knew how this loss could be

repaired, how resurrection could be regained, how the gap between God and human beings could be bridged. In Jesus Christ, however, all this falls into place, it makes sense, it becomes a revelation, a hope, and a destiny to which the Church and the Heilsgeschichte are moving.<sup>66</sup>

Reckoning with this transforming reality of the salvific work of Jesus, therefore, it seems superfluous to reduce African Christian understanding and conception of it to a very superficial level of morals. In fact, to argue as Mbiti does, that physical concerns of survival are basic factors driving African Christians to embrace Jesus Christ as Saviour (physical rescuer and redeemer),<sup>67</sup> seems to be too narrow a depiction of their faith.

If the above was to be taken as the common understanding underlying the conception of Jesus as Saviour, then a lot of explaining has to be done in regard to what Jesus Christ meant to those who had to face martyrdom for their faith as in Uganda or persecution in refusing to take oaths as in Kenya in the 1950s and 1970s.

Much that is said of the above conception of Jesus as Saviour can be said to be expressive of that firm belief in Him as liberator. For the salvific work of Jesus Christ which is not only confined to the human soul, but the totality of all that which belongs to human existence, can only be expressed in terms of liberation. And this is especially true in that liberation here is understood in that holistic sense of the removal of all that which keeps the African in bondage, all that makes him less than what God intended him to be. It connotes the total idea of liberation of life subject to fate, uncertainty, fear, evil powers and principalities subjecting one to spiritual bondage, and

even domination and oppression in the physical sense.<sup>68</sup> In this regard, Jesus does not only save, but sets free or rather restores that life of true freedom the Christian gospel declares as derived from God. Indeed, the prominent usage of passages, such as Luke 4:18-22, referred to as the "Manifesto" of Nazareth, and like 1: 46-55, the Magnificat, referred to as Mary's Song of Revolution, serve to illustrate how this understanding of Jesus in terms of His work has struck African life with such meaning that a fitting description is none other than that of a liberator.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the emphasis of this biblical depiction is understood as not speaking of this liberation act as something distant in the future, but in the here and now of the Gospel proclamation. This is the point echoed by Desmond Tutu when he says,

Liberation is a serious preoccupation at the present time and it is not seen as being an alternative to personal salvation in Jesus Christ. No, it is seen in Africa as the inescapable consequence of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ seriously'.<sup>70</sup>

It is understood as more than a solace to the untold numbers in the Continent who are subjected to poverty by human creed and oppressive systems, captivity of oppression perpetuated by human self-interest, made refugees and displaced by those they looked upon as liberators from foreign domination. For it is a proclamation of judgement on that concrete reality of human beings' constant refusal to recognise the rule of God in human affairs and the declaration of what that recognition actually entails. This is to say that the embrace of Christian faith of Jesus Christ as saviour, and therefore, liberator, is to acknowledge this demand of His word in the concrete reality

of human existence. This factor Edward Schillebeeckx also asserts when he says that Christianity does not merely throw light on man's existence, but aims above all to renew it.<sup>71</sup> This is the same point Otto Weber echoes when speaking of reconciliation in Christ by stating,

'Reconciliation finds its concrete form in the reconciliation of the Community. But it does not affect just the Community. God reconciled the world to himself, Paul says (2 Cor 5:19).

"World" for Paul is not merely the neutral totality of what is. "World" as "this World" is the epitome of all that contradicts and strives against God (cf. I Cor 1:2 of., 27ff - if we add I Cor 2: 6 ff. to this, then we see that "World" is nothing otherthan "this age").<sup>72</sup>

The conception of Jesus Christ as mediator commonly expressed in terms of the Great Ancestor has recently emerged as a dominant representation of functional Christology for African theologians; the leading work here being that of Charles Nyamiti - Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African perspective.

Now, studies in African traditional religion have demonstrated the common understanding of Ancestors as not only the living dead who continue to be members of the community of the living, but mediators between it and the spirit world and especially the supreme being or God. In effecting this role, ancestors have not only been understood as mediators or the link through which a strained relation between God and human beings can be harmonised, but also that of executing judgement or punishment.<sup>73</sup>

The mediatorial role of Jesus Christ as depicted in the New Testament cannot be said to be dissimilar. For like the ancestors, His incarnation

established that consanguineous relationship with us, especially in the emphasis of His Adamic origin. A relationship that is also grounded in His supernatural status acquired through His death and resurrection which linked His humanity more closely to the divine family.

Among other similarities adduced also is that of a model of behaviour or conduct, as well as a source of Christian tradition and its stability - just as the Ancestors are, for the living relatives as well as sources of tribal tradition and its stability.<sup>74</sup>

The differences, however, serve as a warning against easy equation of the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Christian gospel and that of the Ancestors. For as Nyamiti acknowledges, it is true that like Ancestors, Christ's relationship to us is linked with consanguinity on account of His Adamic origin.

But even though He is Adamic in character, Christ's brotherhood transcends all family, class, tribal or racial limitations. In fact, a more profound difference lies in the fact that Christ is God Man. By virtue of His hypostatic union, He has been established as our brother and mediator. The implication being that His relation or brotherhood to us is rooted not only in consanguineous ties but in the mystery of the trinity itself.

Furthermore, there is the radical distinction of His (Christ's) sonship to the Father in that while even as man, he is the natural Son and descendant of the Father, our Sonship and descent is by adoption.

As already mentioned, Jesus Christ is the model of behaviour for His brother, and, therefore, the foundational authority for Christian tradition as Ancestors are to traditional life. But even here, the difference needs no stressing in that His divine status alone suffices as manifesting his superiority.<sup>75</sup>

One view in this study is that the mediatory role of the Ancestors in traditional African religion provides the symbolism that can serve to express the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ in biblical faith in a way that is more homely for the African Christian. This is to say that unlike other terms and conceptions, here we have a depiction of a role that needs no translation or adaption, but the expression of its qualitative difference as stated by the New Testament. Indeed, this is the point made by J. Mutiso-Mubinda when he talks of Jesus Christ as 'Ancestor per excellence'<sup>76</sup> and also John Pobee when he talks of 'the Great and Greatest Ancestor'.<sup>77</sup>

Just as there is the contrast between the priestly mediatorial role in the Old Testament in that Jesus Christ is the one for all great high priest, His depiction in terms of the above seems not only to express that qualitatively contrasting role, but its concrete representation too. For His mediation is not grounded anywhere else other than in His humanity. In fact, the biblical witness exemplifies His whole life from incarnation to resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand as one of the mediation. And His divine nature is not only to demonstrate the qualitative distinction of His role, but the reality of His Authority. In Pobee's words, 'He is superior to other Ancestors by virtue of being closest to God and as God. As Nana (or

Greatest Ancestor) He has authority over not only the world of men but also of all spirit beings, namely the cosmic powers and the ancestors'.<sup>78</sup>

Having outlined these two broad inclinations that have characterized the treatment of Christology in African Christianity, the basic thrust is the recognition of the question of Christology as that of our relationship with God. And the place where this can be understood in its true sense is in the salvific work of Jesus Christ. For it is here that the true understanding of God and the reality of our situation is manifested. This is a situation that has been acted upon and one which in acknowledgement of this effected salvific work of God experiences transformation.

As David Tracy has stated, though from a different perspective,

'Christ event lays hold upon an individual as a pure gift. Through that sense of giftedness, in the Christ event, the Christian rediscovers an experience of the whole which is, in fact, the experience of the Power of Judging, healing love who is God'.<sup>79</sup>

To know this in the Christian sense is to acknowledge in faith its challenge for personal life and for society. This is well summed up by the assertion that the memory of the one who preached the reign of God, who lived and ministered, who met the fate of crucifixion and was vindicated by God in resurrection-lives throughout Christian history as a Presence transforming all Christian experiences of the event into the living praxis of an *imitatio christi*.<sup>80</sup>

In this way, the Church in Africa as elsewhere can therefore say, 'He is the Lord of all'.

### Notes

1. cf Otto Weber: Foundation of Dogmatics, Vol.1, op cit. Especially pp.169-34.
2. cf J.S. Mbiti: Concepts of God in Africa, SPCK, London, 1970, pp.253-271.
3. cf J.S. Mbiti: Concepts of God in Africa, op cit, pp.69-91.
4. A fitting reminder has been made by J.M. Sentamu when he says that what is being spoken of here is of ultimate moral reality that has a transcendent nature not just above, but objective to man. And yet the 'otherness' of it is associated with our own being such that it becomes imperative to strike a balance between the transcendence and immanence. op cit, p.142.
5. cf Otto Weber, op cit, Vol.1, p.176.
6. cf Joseph Pungur: Theology Interpreted: A Guide to Christian Doctrine, University Press of America, London, 1987, p.62. Vol. 1
7. cf John Macquarrie *How is theology possible?*, The Honest to God Debate, Edward L. Edward (Ed.), SCM Press, London, 1963, p.190 f.
8. Joseph Pungur, op cit.
9. cf William Temple's article in Revelation, John Baillie and Hugh Martin (Eds.), Faber and Faber, London, 1937, p.94 f.
10. John Baillie: The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought, Oxford University Press, London, 1956, p.24. 'The revelation of which the Bible speaks is always such as has place within personal relationships. It is not the revelation of an object to a subject, but a revelation from subject to subject, a revelation of mind to mind.'

11. cf J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p.144.
12. William Temple: Nature, Man and God, MacMillan & Co, London, 1934, p.354.
13. Walter Kasper: The God of Jesus Christ, Crossroad, New York, 1989, p.122.
14. Isaiah 6:5.
15. Ibid v.7.
16. Joseph Pungur, op cit, p.52.  
See also Otto Weber, op cit, Vol.1, p.174.
17. Indebted to J.S. Sentamu, op cit, on this. See also Eric O. Ayisi: An Introduction to the Study of African Culture, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, London, 1972, p.57-67. Examples also in Evans Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, Oxford University Press, London, 1965, p.67, where, using the evolutionary view of religion, Samuel Baker in his address to the Ethnological Society of London in 1866 said about the Nilotics, 'Without any exception they are without belief in a Supreme Being. Neither have they any form of worship nor idolatory nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition. The mind is as stagnant as the morass which form its puny world'. Nothing could have been further from the truth than the above statement. Certainly they were interested in ancestral spirits, but all the same, they still believed, however inadequately, in some sort of a supreme being. These writers failed to see that religion in Africa was attempting to deal with the same spiritual matters although the procedures varied according to the social development of each people.
18. cf John Baillie, op cit, p.42 f.

19. P. Tillich: Systematic Theology, Vol 1, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1951, p.110.
20. John Baillie, op cit, p.46. Especially his assertion that 'Revelation was indeed regularly conceived as issuing in knowledge, but this knowledge was always of a practical kind. It was knowledge which concerned our ultimate exigency, and what was given us to know was a way of deliverance from that exigency.'
21. Ibid, p.47.
22. J.K. Mozley: The Doctrine of the Atonement. Duckworth Press, London, 1948, p. 65  
p. 205.
23. cf Otto Weber, op cit, Vol.2, p.17.
24. Ibid, Vol.1, p.176.
25. John Baillie, op cit, p.47.  
  
See also George Newlands: Theology of the Love of God, Collins, London, 1980, p.85.
26. Otto Weber, op cit, Vol.2, p.164.
27. Edward Schillebeeckx: The Understanding of Faith, Sheed and Ward, London, 1974.  
  
See also Karl Barth's article in Revelation, edited by John Baillie and Hugh Martin, Faber and Faber Ltd, London, 1937, p.75.
28. John Baillie, op cit, p.81.
29. Otto Weber, op cit, Vol.1, p.176.
30. This is the view held by most members of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar.
31. cf J.M. Sentamu, op cit, p.149, whose observation here I am indebted to.

32. cf J.K. Mozley: Historic Christianity and the Apostles Creed, Duckworth Press, London, 1949, p.vii-ix.
33. cf Alan Richardson: *The rise of modern Biblical scholarship and recent discussions of the authority of the Bible*, in The Cambridge History of the Bible, S.L. Greenslade (Ed.), Cambridge University Press, London, 1963, p.322.
34. Ibid.
- 35..James D. Smart: *The theological significance of historical Criticism* in The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture, edited by Donald K. McKim, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 228.
36. Ibid
37. op. cit. p. 231
38. op. cit. p. 234.
39. cf. quotation by Donald G. Miller in his article *The Bible*, in The Authoritative Word, op. cit. p. 115.
40. Otto Weber, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 345.
41. See James Ngugi: The River Between, H.E.B. (AWS 17) London, 1973, for a classic example of a Kikuyu woman whose embrace of Christian faith within the context of a narrow teaching that did not take into account her cultural and historical identity resulted in a crisis of both faith and identity as she faced the soul searching question of what it actually meant to be a Christian.
42. cf. J.M. Sentamu, op.cit. p. 153, to whom I am indebted for these points.
43. P.T. Forsyth: Revelation - Old and New, Indepenent Press, London, 1962, p. 243.

44. H.N. Ridderbos: *The inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture* in The Authoritative Word, Eendmanns, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 193
45. Ibid, p. 194
46. cf. Alan Richardson, op. cit. p. 328.
47. cf. C.F.D. Moule: *Belief and Trust in the New Testament Vocabulary*, Paper presented to D. society in 1977, cf. also Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol. 1, p. 198.
48. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol. 1, p. 198f.
49. Alistair McGrath: The Making of Modern German Christology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 2.
50. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol. 2, p. 19.
51. Anton Friedrichsen (Editor) :*Jesus, St. Paul and St. Paul*, in The Roots of the Vine, Dacre Press, London, 1953, p. 40.
52. J.M. Sentamu, op.cit. p. 165.
53. Ibid, p. 166.
54. A. McGrath, op.cit. p. 179
55. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol. 2, p. 162.
56. S.O. Abogurin: *The modern search of the historical Jesus in relation to Christianity in Africa*, in Africa Theological Journal, Vol. 9, 1980, p. 26.
57. John Pobee: Toward an African Theology, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1979, p. 82.
58. Ibid.
59. op. cit. Especially the examples of their use he draws from L.A. Boadi's *The language of the Proverb in Akan in African Folklore*, Edited by R.M. Dorson, Doubleday, New York 1972, p. 183. And also from Elizabeth Amoah; Moral and Social Significance of Proverbs

- among the Wassaws - An Akan people (M.A. Thesis for University of Ghana, 1974), especially Ch. 1 p. 1-63, including J.B. Christensen's *The role of Proverbs in Fante Culture*, in Africa, ed. Daryll Forde, Vol. 28, Oxford University Press, London, 1958.
60. Op. cit. Italics is mine.
  61. Op. cit. p. 83, 88-92.
  62. Op. cit.
  63. Sigqibo Dwane: Issues in the South African Theological Debate, Skotaville Publishers, Broambontein, 1989, p. 53.
  64. John S. Mbiti: *Some African Concepts of Christology* in Christ and the Younger Churches, Edited by George F. Vicedom, SPCK, London, 1972, p. 54.
  65. Ibid, p. 70.
  66. John S. Mbiti: "*Σωτήρ ήμῶν as an African Experience*" in Christ and Spirit in the New Testament Ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley, Cambridge University Press, London, 1973, p. 411. See also Kofi Appiah-Kubi who seems to argue along similar lines in his *Christology in African Christian Theology*, Ed. John Pomatt, op. cit. p. 72f.
  67. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, ibid, p. 74.
  68. Mercy A. Oduyoyei op cit. p. 106.
  69. Desmond Tutu as quoted by Kofi Appiah-Kubi, op.cit. p. 75.
  70. Edward Schillebeeckx: The Understanding of Faith Sheed and Ward, London, 1974, p. 67.
  71. Otto Weber, op.cit. Vol. 2, p. 187.
  72. E. Bolaji Idowu: African Traditional Religions, SCM Press, London, p. 184 ff.

73. Charles Nyamiti: Christ and Our Ancestors: Christology from an African Perspective, Mambo Occasional Papers - missio-pastoral series, No. 11, Mambo Press, p. 19.
74. Ibid.
75. cf. J. Mutiso-Mubinda: *Anthropology and the Pascal Mystery* in Spearhead No. 57, Gaba Publications, Eldoret 1979, p. 52.
76. John Pobee, op. cit. p. 54.
77. Op. cit.
78. David Tracy: The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism, SCM Press, London, 1981.
79. Ibid.

# **Inspiration of Faith**

## CHAPTER EIGHT

PROSPECT FOR CONTEMPORARY ORIENTATION

In the preceding chapters, the dialogic characteristic of Christological discourse has been demonstrated. For therein we reckoned with the fact that no contemporary Christology begins completely anew. On the contrary, it is part of a grateful and critical dialogue with Christologies of predecessors and other contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> Decisive in this dialogic process, however, has been the recognition of the fact that the undertaking has never meant a mere act of affirming what has gone before or harmonising what may appear as the unbalanced antithesis of the one-sided emphasis at times exemplified in Christological discourse. Instead, there has been a demonstration of that constant ‘encounter’ and ‘confrontation’ with the question of what the event of Jesus Christ means in our day and time.

It has been imperative to go back to the original event of Jesus Christ as testified to in the New Testament as the foundational framework of any Christological discourse. There has also been an exemplification of its representation in the succeeding centuries culminating in ‘classical Christology’ (cf Nicea and Chalcedon definitions) that has held sway in the Church through many centuries to this day. Above all, there has been the reckoning with how this carefully wrought structure characterising traditional Christology was hit by the tidal wave of the enlightenment (especially in Euro-American Christianity) as all that typified its framework of expression was cast in doubt. Indeed, the initial impetus may have been an angry outburst against the long story of intellectual oppression.<sup>2</sup> But its consequential challenge going beyond the negative reaction, was the

considered re-addressing of the question of Christology that began with Schleiermacher and culminated in Barth's emphasis of the whole activity as having its premise in faith. This is to say that amidst the prevailing concern with the truth of Christ's event within the concern for truth in the growth of human knowledge, the recognition and acknowledgement of that which was central to Christology meant that the given premise was the only adequate framework. Furthermore, the realisation that Christianity does not live by an idea, a Principle, or an axiom but an event and a person - Jesus Christ, meant that Christology could not be said to be true to its function if it did not exemplify that reality as being an account whose premise was a living faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

But then the question that already arose in the preceding chapters and has to be faced is that of the form of appropriateness that can be said to render our speaking of this distinctive particularity of Christian faith relatively adequate amidst the realities of diversities and plural expression in Christology ?

To start with, traditional Christology's representation depicts a carefully wrought structure in its articulation and response to Christ's event. But even this does not smooth over the reality of the New Testament witness as an entity that is unified. In fact, Otto Weber's submission holds true when he says that the differences in the Church's Christology are rooted since the very beginning in the differences found in the New Testament, notable examples being the powerful tensions one encounters between the synoptics, Paul and John. Furthermore, the New Testament documents themselves were written in very different places, with their influence unevenly strong in various areas from the very beginning such that 'the' Church in the early

period was just as differentiated as ‘the’ New Testament witness. This is to say that, what is ‘given’ in the beginning is neither the Church nor Christology, but the person of Jesus - not exhausted in the various New Testament texts nor in a dogma or dogmatics.<sup>4</sup>

It is the contention of this treatise, therefore, that inasmuch as it is imperative to recognise traditional Christology in the reality of its diversity, the primary lesson to be borne in mind is that Jesus rules their speaking and in no way is he held captive to the represented structure of their response.

If there was one major blind alley in the average Enlightenment theology, it was the inability to recognise the above due to the tendency to participate fully in the movement of the period to such an extent that what may have been a critical response to the traditional Christological statement turned into a total loss of the very theme expressed therein.<sup>5</sup> And as already stated, it had to take such stormy experiences as those of the first World War for theology to recapture once again the unpredictable and incalculable aspect of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The issue here is not one of calling for a kind of return to the traditional Christological position as the answer to our stated question. For one only needs to look at the numerous criticisms of twentieth century theologians of Christological tradition to realise the nature of its representation as becoming the ammunition for self criticism. Ours is to reckon with the view of those who argue that the way forward seems to be in recognising the New Testament in the reality of its witness. And the same is true for subsequent representations of Christology.

If the concern is to realise a depiction of Jesus Christ confessed by faith as a man of historical reality as has been the concern of the quest for historical Jesus school, then there has to be the understanding that the texts of the New Testament represent Him within a theological framework.<sup>7</sup> Indeed they are interested in him as he was; but not only or primarily so. The documents seek to tell the truth that is not told apart from its theological framework. They do offer us a way to the historical Jesus. But for them the historical Jesus has already become without any loss of historical reality, also of suprahistorical significance.<sup>8</sup> Reckoning with this reality as was demonstrated in chapter four, demands of the theologian's treatment of the New Testament, the need to understand the particular focus of the fundamental theological questions impelling each expression, and which have been disclosed as part of the world of meaning of the witness to Jesus Christ. David Tracy observes that inasmuch as there have been major developments, corrections, refinements and significant challenges to our understanding of the biblical texts as a result of the recent inputs from form criticism, redaction criticism and literary criticism, the fundamental point that remains is the particularity of responses to Christ event shaped by the particular theological questions that led to distinctive Christological emphasis found in the New Testament (cf early Palestinian, Judaic-Hellenistic, Gentile, Markan, Lukan, Matthean, Pauline, Johannine and apocalyptic expressions).<sup>9</sup> This is the same point that Weber acknowledges to have been recognised by Barth when he successfully endeavoured to conceive of Christology in terms of the whole wealth of New Testament statements as he rejected any tendency to absorb the person of Jesus Christ into a given system of thought or structure.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of the above, therefore, it seems proper to argue that the fuller truth of the New Testament and of contemporary Christology does not lie

anywhere else other than in that interwoven complexity of the related forms of proclamation - narrative - image - symbol and reflective thought depicted in the New Testament itself.<sup>11</sup> This is to say that inasmuch as it is important to reckon with the need to take into account the earliest witnesses as well as the full and diverse forms of Christological expressions of the New Testament, including later expressions such as those of classical Christology in understanding the full range of Christological responses, the above remains decisive for its fuller truth, and as the place with the surest clues a theologian can find to be relatively adequate in expressing the said event as disclosed in the texts.<sup>12</sup> For example, if it is a matter of demonstrating the here and now of the event, proclamation is never represented as a distant message but as one hurling at us in the here and now, often like a stone; unsettling, provoking as the word of address that upsets, shakes, questions and both judges and heals us. The narratives do not smooth over the story of Jesus Christ. On the contrary it exemplifies it in a manner faithful to our experience of the storyline character of life itself; full of tensions and surprises, shocks and achievements and disclosures of authentic and inauthentic life.<sup>13</sup> To illustrate further, New Testament disclosures in the confessing narrations of this singular individual - show this strange, authoritative Jesus who proclaims God's reign in words that confront our ordinary modes of apprehension, who acts in word and deed with a freedom and a sometimes harsh, sometimes tender love that commands the attention of his contemporaries and of us; this Jesus who consorts with all, especially with the outcast - the privileged ones in his eyes whom the privileged in every age feel free to ignore or to crush with either violence or patronising contempt; whose story challenged the compulsions and temptations of his contemporaries to domesticate and control God through laws and doctrines as it challenges the contemporary Christian Church's temptation to do the

same, he who dies disgraced through death reserved for outcasts of society while the Pilates die in their beds, this Jesus who is yet raised by God and vindicated as the one who is God's own; who discloses what authentic life might be to all who hear that story, and in hearing join the plot in trusting hope to the non-end of this strange narrative'.<sup>14</sup>

The same is true for those tensive symbols disclosed in the narratives. For their focus on the meaning and truth of Christ event takes place in images which disclose and transform it a new. The cross with its conflict and contradiction as we find in Paul's language, hurls at all human attempts at self-sufficiency and thereby breaking through our cherished defenses to disclose healing, judging, and graced scandal.<sup>15</sup> the symbols of glorification - exaltation exemplified in resurrection, incarnation, and even the 'lifting up' of the cross expressed in the meditative releasement of John's theology, the reader is invited to sense the 'already' reality of God's own self in Jesus Christ. What is being said here, therefore, is that the fuller truth of Christology exemplified in the full complexity of these symbols and modes of thinking - incarnation - cross- resurrection - expressed in both dialectic (of Paul) and meditative thought (John) disclose the reality of an event which is here even now, which has always already been here, which is still not yet here. The dialectic of these symbols being the adverbial dialectic of an always-already which is yet a not-yet.<sup>15</sup>

The danger of singling out one aspect of Christ event at the expense of others always seems to lead to one sided emphasis or even a distortion of its true reality. One example is Otto Weber's criticism of traditional Christology's tendency to develop a Christology that solely regarded the Exalted One - the resurrected and ascended Lord of Glory as decisive to an

inadmissible degree that both the incarnate and the Exalted One in his historical encounter was lost in favour of a kind of static reconstruction of the said event.<sup>16</sup>

Since the scriptural representation is the framework of our articulation, it seems imperative to take our lead from the view that any adequacy that is sought in Christological expression, can only be found in the endeavour to conceive the subject in terms of the whole wealth of New Testament statements.<sup>17</sup> For they are impelled by the dynamism of the event of Jesus Christ itself and its self-expression into the otherness of a wide range of responses or witnesses to it. The tendency to fit it within a given system is, therefore, bound to be a misrepresentation of the reality of the event rather than a genuine response that is exemplified by faith. Furthermore, the character of the New Testament as demonstrated by James Dunn in his treatment of Christ and Christologies offers us a diversity whose unity is grounded in the said single event of Jesus Christ witnessed to by early Christian communities, an event demanding response and encouraging all later Christian responses, and not one forced into the demand for a single expression.<sup>18</sup> After all, it seems inconsistent to talk of Christological expressions as personal, concrete and decisively rooted in the given situation of the encountered, if a unitary response is what is sought. The recognition of diversity as impelled by the dynamism of the events invites us to a framework of dialogue with the variety of responses as they are acknowledged to be new interpretations, bearing personal responses to the one foundational event that is the fundamental criterion of appropriateness.

But what does this mean in terms of our viewing of the various areas of emphasis in Christology? First, is the need to acknowledge the reality of the distinctive input expressed in the particular emphasis and which may not be

given in others. Second, is to recognise the inter-relatedness of these particular areas of emphasis. For example, the various logos Christologies' emphasis on incarnation disclose a situation where wonder, fundamental trust in humanity, history and the created order live as the disclosure of the always-already reality of the gracious presence of the God of love who, though disclosed in the history of Israel, in other religions and in all authentic human searches for truth and life, is decisively disclosed for the Christian as that which has taken place in Jesus Christ. In these Christologies rooted in John, in Colossians and Ephesians, in Luke's Paul of the Aeropagus speech - the cross and its disclosure of negativity, conflict, contradiction and sin, tend to be transformed into the exaltation of a fundamental trust, a wonder at the giftedness of life itself, a radical universal and finally incomprehensible grace, a pervasive sense of a God of love who is never an 'inference' but an always present reality to each and to all.<sup>19</sup>

The Christologies of the Cross as in Moltmann and Sobrino disclose a different situation where the concreteness and decisiveness of the event of Jesus Christ is seen in terms of the conflict, contradiction and the negativity of the Cross. In this regard, there is more on the pain, conflict and suffering at the heart of all individual repressions and all social and historical oppressions and alienations rather than the always already character of our graced state. Thus, we have the sense of our situation being charged with the prophetic, apocalyptic, eschatological sense of a great refusal to the present order of things, an exposure of all the rest as deceptive, and the treatment of the theology of glory associated with incarnation and resurrection Christologies with suspicion and as possible culprits of the dangers of ideological manipulation<sup>20</sup> (though the latter cannot be said to be free from it either).

Yet there is also the reality of inter-relation impelled by the holistic nature of the Christ event as given witness to in the New Testament. This is to say that inasmuch as we have the given particularities of emphasis, each needs the other as a self-corrective moment in its own particular framework of emphasis. For example, the incarnation emphasis of the different logos Christologies from John through Nicea and Chalcedon through many Anglican, Orthodox, Catholic and liberal Protestant - Christological traditions to Maurice, Rahner, Ogden and Cobb in our period, cannot be said to be fully expressive of the holistic reality of Christ-event without the negations and the not-yet input of the cross as well as the hope and future orientations of the resurrection Christologies and *vice versa*. Similarly, the symbol-image expressions we find in the New Testament witness need the narratives of the ministry and message of Jesus, the passion resurrection accounts as well as the confessional proclamations of the original apostolic witness in order to exemplify what can be said to be an adequate representation of the said event. The issue here is not one of merely having an external corrective or reminder of other aspects of the whole, but the realisation that each needs a real, internal, self-exposing relationship of its thinking to those de-emphasised by its own concentration.<sup>21</sup> It is recognition of this inseparable inter-relatedness that makes a dialogic framework imperative in that through it one is able to assert the unifying factor of the event of Jesus Christ while taking into account the diverse responses to it. When dealing with theological orientations in African Christianity in Chapter Six we did reckon with the emphasis on particular situational contexts as an exemplification of vigorous interaction between the text as the Word of God and a specific human situation. And the same can be said here in regard to the above. For the decisive factor in the variety of responses that have come to characterise Christological articulation is that faith of the encountered

believer, whose response as with New Testament Christians, is shaped by the decisiveness, the fullness and adequacy of the one event of Jesus Christ, one that is decisively true word and the manifestation of that which already happened, happens now, always happens, and will happen in the future of God.

The basic thesis here, therefore, is one of acknowledging that as with the New Testament depiction, contemporary Christology addresses itself to a diversity of expressions that belongs to the very nature of personal response. This can be dealt with in an enriching way through a dialogic framework that recognises the decisive and primary criterion as that single event of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. For sure every theologian's way may have many turns as has been observed, but the above remains decisive if it has to be an undertaking that is to serve, inform, challenge Christian witness. Furthermore, what is being spoken of here is not something passed on from one generation to another, but an event evoking a faith response that is expressed in realised experience exemplifying the recognition of Christ event in the present. Leonardo Boff rightly reminds us that in Christology, it is not sufficient to know what others have known, but to reckon with the question of what it all means for us in our day.<sup>22</sup> For if Christology is a response to the Christ event, the imperative demand is an exemplification of that reality of encounter where Jesus Christ confronts the totality of our personal as well as the social, ecclesial and cultural life. This is to say that what emerges in our contact with Jesus Christ takes on that double function where in the first part, there is a critical judgemental function relative to whatever is not in accord with the criterion by which Christ lived, and secondly the critical refining saving function where the absolute reference point that we discover in Christ gives us a new impulse, an opportunity for conversion, and the certainty that with him we can achieve the goal. In this sense Christ is a permanent crisis

in human existence, but a crisis that operates like a crucible that purifies, refines, and saves.<sup>23</sup> And this is the point already made by Weber when he talks of Jesus Christ as not just the object of our knowledge but the Giver of New Life.<sup>24</sup> Jesus in his identity, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, is oriented towards life and not towards death. And this is why in this event of his person and work we do not only speak of him as the One who brings salvation, but demonstrates why he has the audacity to define himself in terms of everything which symbolised life; e.g. bread of life; light of the world; door to life; good shepherd; living word; resurrection and life; vine; truth and life. And since the faith response of individual Christians to Jesus Christ is at once highly personal and irrevocably communal, there is the imperative challenge for a reflection of the above in daily living. Our obedience to Jesus as Christians, demands that we are united to him in a network of renewing relationships and the forming of a new community (1 Cor. 6:15).<sup>25</sup> 'He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him', affirms Paul (1 Cor. 6:17). The ethical imperative for the Christian community, therefore, emanates from this reality of what obedience to Christ does entail. For as Christians experience the event of Jesus Christ in the witness of the community of faith, the representation of it in word and sacrament, in individual and communal prayer and fellowship, there is also that aspect of its reflection in the daily living in community, in the struggle for justice and freedom, and that exemplification of God's resolving of those fundamental conflicts of life such as sin, hatred, any form of alienation and even death. Therein is a proclamation of a new reality found and displayed in this person and act of Jesus Christ. This is the claim that the response of faith does not remain an assertion of the Christian tradition, but becomes our own in that through our experience of this event we are made to realise the new meaning human life and reality in general has received. This is what

finds eloquent expression albeit from a different perspective in Lesslie Newbigin when he says:

.the whole existing order of nature and history is confronted by a new reality that gives it a new meaning. It means a radical contradiction of this world as it is. But the affirmation that this is so can be made only by a community that is itself engaged in that contradiction, is actually pitting its life against the ‘ruler of this world’ and - in fellowship with Jesus - is bearing the cost in its own life’.<sup>26</sup>

The dilemma is that the Christian Church gifted from God as primary mediator of that new reality exemplified in the event of Jesus Christ has not always done so. In fact, through its sinfulness (human institution) it has always tended to compromise, act in duplicity and even betray that reality. And we only need to look back at Martin Luther's ninety five theses, Kierkegaard's protestation, the famous cry ‘Jesus, yes: the Church no’ of Tolstoy, and recent challenges of liberation theology to understand what is being said here.

The challenge for Christology in the contemporary period then goes beyond an academic concern if it is to serve its rightful purpose of challenging Christian witness in its task. This is not to say that there is any substitute for rigorous and disciplined scholarship. Already in Chapter Seven, it was emphasised that any tendency to shy away therefrom such concerns of critical scholarship, as is at times the case in African Christianity, would eventually impair its effective witness.

Rather than looking at their input from a negative sense, the argumentation that the input of historical - critical scholarship and all other specialised fields like form, redaction and literary criticism performing their true function, should be expressions of the necessary reformatory impulse at

the heart of the gospel and Christian tradition is, therefore, a welcome one that is shared by this treatise. For when historical - critical methods provide a modern and trustworthy way to interpret the earliest apostolic witnesses to the presence of Jesus - their confessing memories of His message, actions and fate - more clearly and cleanly (as they do), then the results of those methods also provide a modern, reformatory way to uncover the distortions in the tradition, to challenge its and our thought and life to radical fidelity to the actual, remembered Jesus who is the Christ.<sup>27</sup> In a more explicit way, literary-critical scholarship's treatment of the parables of Jesus serve to illustrate what is being said here. For through these methods a new and critical corrective of traditional and present thought is given. For example, the interpreter learns through it to cease allegorising, moralising, and historising these parables, allowing them instead to confront us with their provocative disclosure of what the reign of God is like. In the parables, the reign of God is not an idea clothed in a dispensable story, not a moral point, not an allegory, not another occasion to search for the historical Jesus. Rather, as parable, in parable, the reign of God is confessed as like what happens in these stories. As remembered parable, the message of Jesus continues to confront and challenge every complacency, every attempt to disown and forget the radicality of his challenge to those who have ears to hear. And so they help the Christian of today to see that challenge, to hear it anew by honouring its form and refusing to allow the parable to become domesticated or replaced by some other traditional, more manageable, less troublesome form.<sup>28</sup> The same can be said also of such challenging insights of Praxis-oriented Christologies of Metz, Moltmann, Sobrino, Cone, and Ruether among others. For the event of Jesus Christ in their exemplification confronts the ideologically inclined distortions of the Christian tradition as it offers new correctives upon its various temptations.

For example, where Christian tradition has had the tendency to sentimentalise love and appear to remove the reality of conflict present in that love witnessed in Jesus Christ, it has brought it to the fore. Amidst the temptation to endorse what amounts to fatalism in much official Christian preaching to the poor and the suffering, it proclaims the gift of the suffering love of Christ as empowering all persons, especially the oppressed, and indeed inspiring them in their struggle for justice elicited by the hope of all history revealed in Jesus Christ. And as if to demonstrate in concrete terms this point, there is a pointer to the Christian Church's own testimony of Jesus' preference for the outcast in society. The climax is the negation of tendencies of existentialist individualism that seem to be blind to this event of God in Jesus Christ as embracing that non-mythological universal, historical, future oriented disclosure of resurrection as validating and vindicating Jesus and his power as the Christ and Risen Lord.<sup>29</sup>

The summary point from the above then is that it is only when Christology enters continually into these dialogues, highlighting this challenging and corrective insight from whatever approach that it can rightly inform, challenge, purify and indeed enhance the witness of the Christian Church. Central to it all remains the affirmation of Christ's event in the language of faith. For it is by doing so that we can speak of recognising who we are and who God is in it. Indeed it is the only context in which we can declare that in the experience of it, our deepest yearnings for wholeness in ourselves, our history, nature and the whole structure of reality has been met.<sup>30</sup> This rightly stresses as Weber does that Christology is never just the knowledge of God the Redeemer but simultaneously the experience of turning around in our existence.<sup>31</sup>

### Notes

1. cf Jürgen Moltmann: The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions, SCM Press, London, 1990, p.39.
2. cf John Macquarrie's reference to the work of Reimarus - the so-called Wolfenbuttel fragments as a fitting illustration in his Jesus Christ in Modern Thought, SCM Press, London, 1990, p. 339.
3. cf David Tracy: Analogical Imagination , *op cit.* p. 317.
4. Otto Weber, *op cit.* Vol. 2, p. 143.
5. Ibid, p. 146.
6. *Op cit.* p. 147.
7. cf Colin E. Gunton: Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1983, p. 61.
8. Ibid.
9. cf David Tracy *op cit.* p. 305.
10. Otto Weber, *op cit.* Vol. 2, p. 151.
11. cf David Tracy, *op cit.* p.307.
12. *Op cit.*
13. *Op cit.*
14. *Op cit.*, cf. Van Austin Harvey: The Historian and the Believer, SCM Press, London, 1967, p. 273.
15. *Op cit.*, p. 308. See also James D.G. Dunn: Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity, SCM Press, London, 1977, p. 216-30.
16. Otto Weber, *op cit.* Vol.2, p. 156.
17. Ibid, p.151.
18. James D.G. Dunn op. cit. , p. 226-33.
19. cf David Tracy *op cit.* p. 311.
20. Ibid, p. 312.

- 21.*Op cit.* p. 314.
- 22.Leonardo Boff: Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology of our Time, Orbis Books, New York, 1986, p.229.
- 23.Ibid.
- 24.Otto Weber, *op cit.* Vol.2, p.163.
- 25.cf Masamba ma Mpolo's article 'Jesus Christ - Word of Life' in An African Call for Life, Ed. Masamba ma Mpolo, Reginald Stober and Evelyn V. Appiah, WCC, Geneva, 1983, p.37.
- 26.Lesslie Newbigin: Foolishness to the Greeks, WCC, Geneva, 1986, p.62f.
- 27.David Tracy, *op cit.* p.325.
- 28.Ibid, p.325.
- 29.*Op cit.* p. 325.
- 30.*Op cit.* p.329.
- 31.Otto Weber, *op cit.* Vol.2, p. 164.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In this undertaking, it has been our concern to show that amidst the problems of diversity and plurality in Christian witness and theology, the way of dialogue and critical discussion offers a framework through which we may construct a Christology that is expressive of that which is at the heart of the Christian faith. For as exemplified in Otto Weber whose thought seems to embody this search, the framework does not only provide a way that seeks to do justice to that inner dynamic in the Christian witness without concealing the reality of the divergent responses and theological approaches to it, but also that which retains the uniqueness of the Christian claim and faith without concealing the variety of its representation. Otto Weber took the Christian discourse for what it is; a response to that given activity of God in the person and event of Jesus Christ, an activity given testimony to in scripture, and doctrinal formulations of the Christian Church emerging therefrom as consensus attempts to state its significance, with theologies giving interpretation to those stated formulations. Indeed, it is in reckoning with this reality that Otto Weber made a distinction between the givenness of the event as the criterion on which Christian witness and theology is grounded, and the response to it. He tried to show that the uniqueness of faith is centered on the recognition of the former as an activity that is of God; a divine reality that when recognized as such involves the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of human words and logic in attempting of itself to speak of it. And yet because it was a response to a given event, it was in no way free from the demands of human quest for truth. His basic concern, as already demonstrated, is that this never takes place in isolation from what has gone before irrespective of how daring the undertaking may be. Indeed, it

was his concern to show that the very recognition of Christ-event as the starting-point and terminus <sup>of</sup> theology makes it imperative to dialogue with the scripture as the prime source and testimony to it. And even so with the *fathers* and *brethren* who have sought to understand and give expression to it.

The story, for Weber, could not begin with the particular stage of our response. As in modern theology, the pressing questions may be those arising from the challenge of the enlightenment. But for these to be treated in the proper perspective of what is entailed in the Christological question, it is imperative to go back to the source of the witness to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and therefrom trace subsequent developments in a continuous critical engagement with insights derived thereof to this day. This is what makes the dialogic process imperative. And since it has to be true to its character, it cannot attempt to conceal the nature of that which is encountered in the process, if it is to remain true to its task: an insight that was very clear to Weber. Even his critics acknowledge that inasmuch as he was obedient to the norm of keeping visibly clear the criterion of the Christological starting point and terminus, it did not lead him to conceal the variety of response within the Christian tradition. Instead he brought them to the fore as he critically engaged with their formulations; many of its internal dialogues being heard.<sup>1</sup> What is significant for Weber is the understanding of these varieties as impelled by the dynamism of the event of Jesus Christ itself in the particularity of its encounter and confrontation with us. In fact, it is this that he sees as underlining that particularity inherent in the expression of faith, and one which is the basic uniting point of the Christian response itself even in the New Testament witness, as James Dunn has recently argued.<sup>2</sup>

His Christian apologia was not one of working in isolation from the demands of reason and the human quest for knowledge. Instead, he demonstrated a synthesized approach in his definition of the theological task as a faith seeking understanding; a stance that met the challenge and demands of the human quest, while retaining the uniqueness of faith. The same is true when it came to theological formulations as interpretations of those significant insights arising from scriptural exegesis. For inasmuch as they arose from rigorous treatment of scripture, it was evident to him that at no time could this substitute the historicity and particularity of what is given in the scriptural texts. And this was evident in his confrontation with issues of culture and ideological formulations arising from philosophy. For inasmuch as they were descriptive of a predominant self-understanding in a given culture (cf. Cultural Ideologies of the Third Reich), the uniqueness of the Christian witness and faith was maintained when its grounding on the Word of God and the event of Jesus Christ remained acknowledged as given criterion. Indeed, his whole theology demonstrates this dual process, where on the one hand the demand of faith and Christian witness is held in tension with the concerns of reason, philosophy and culture- a reality that expresses the character of his protestant heritage as it does that of Western Christianity in general. His Christology may have exemplified so much that was expressive of this tradition, but his dialogical insight led him to see beyond the confines of his undertaking; a lesson that contemporary Christologies need to recapture.

Otto Weber's contribution, however, lay in his basing of his entire theological thought upon the Biblical witness and the responses to it in Christian tradition, and the constant awareness that anything doctrinal or

ethical that was to remain Christian could not be thought of otherwise than in the context of that given word. He never lost sight of the fact that Christian theology was by definition not ultimately an end in itself, but a servant of the Christian community. This is to say that it could not adequately serve that purpose if its sole preoccupation was meeting the concern of human quest, but reckoning with the imperative need to listen afresh to the word of God. Indeed, he saw no substitute to serious enquiry, but inasmuch as he did so, he reckoned this had to have its basis on faith that recognised its dependence on God's continual address through his Word. And it was on this basis alone that he saw the theological task as meeting the challenge of serving the church in her task of presenting the claims of the Christian gospel in a way that had claim on people's lives. This is a lesson that every theological undertaking that seeks to serve its rightful role in the church cannot afford to lose sight of.

Otto Weber's Christology may not bear the sensitivity that arises from the demands of contextualization exhibited in liberation theology's exposure of the problems of subjectivity in theology; the insistence that the self which constructs the world is not isolated or neutral as it does its work, but is profoundly influenced by its economic, political and cultural setting.<sup>3</sup> But his rendering of the Christological discourse as dialogical in character bears that imperative need of not only bearing in mind the insights from the past and present, but is also an invitation to recognise<sup>se</sup> its openness to the concerns of the particular, as well as those of universal nature, and thereby exemplifying a reality that characterises an approach that is not parochial. His concern which supercedes the demands of a particular context is the need to recognise the one who encounters and confronts us in our enquiry; the person of Jesus Christ who does not only make himself known, but declares

his claim on us. Indeed, his work as a theologian and pastor exemplifies an insight that saw the theological endeavour as not only seeking to know, but as experiencing that turning around in our existence. And to follow his methodology even when seeking to write a Christology from an African perspective demonstrates that it is only when one reckons with the above that we can say of our endeavour; we have not only heard and known him who is the Christ, but experienced his transforming love.

**Notes:**

1. cf. Alan Lewis in his Review of Otto Weber: Foundations of Dogmatics, Vol. 1, op.cit. in Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 37, 1984, ed. T.F. Torrance, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh.
2. cf. James D.G. Dunn: Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, op. cit. p.230
3. cf. Sallie McFague's article, 'The Christian Paradigm' in Christian Theology, ed. Peter Hodgson, & Other, op. cit. p. 323.

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