

NOTE

CHRISTOLOGIES: HOW UP-TO-DATE IS YOURS?

For their second issue of *Commonweal Papers*, devoted to the topic *Jesus*, the editors of *Commonweal* asked me to contribute an article on "Christology and Contemporary Philosophy," suggesting that I might specify the question in relation to Chalcedon: To what extent do modern trends in philosophy require the revision of the one-person, two-nature definition of that council? The privilege of the last word in the symposium went to Prof. William Hamilton, to whose judgment all contributions were subjected; however, since I openly held to Chalcedon, his position in regard to me was already implicit in his title: "Good-by Chalcedon, Hello What?" That is, no more time is to be given to such an outdated view than is required to clear the decks and proceed to modern Christologies. I am therefore disposed of with two brief indications of my errors: in regard to content, I end up "with a theologically impermissible reduction of the full humanity of Jesus," and in regard to method, my "use of contemporary thought-forms to elucidate the fathers is likely to tell us more about the user than the used"—there is a reference then to Bultmann's turning Cyril "into a latent Bultmannian."

There are questions here which are more important than my Christology or Hamilton's judgments, and I am grateful for the chance to open some of them again in these pages. If this time I have the appearance of a Catholic dogmatist talking to his fellow dogmatists, that restriction is more or less forced on me by Prof. Hamilton's unwillingness to dialogue with those who defend Chalcedon; all we can do in that case is examine what it is in us that makes dialogue so difficult for him, and this means clarifying our presuppositions and relating them to those of others. The objective issue that eventually has to be taken up is that of the full humanity of Jesus, but it seems completely hopeless to strive for agreement here and almost hopeless to ask for dialogue on that question, unless we can first settle questions of method and theological stance.

The reference to Bultmann recalls a story I once heard but cannot document. Charged with using philosophical presuppositions in his exegesis, Bultmann replied: "Yes, I use philosophical presuppositions; so does every other exegete. The difference is that I know what mine are and I use them consciously; most exegetes do not know what theirs are and so use them unconsciously." Bultmann would surely agree with Lonergan's attack on the Principle of the Empty Head: the principle that the fewer ideas a man has and the less he knows, the greater is his capacity to judge truly.

I have my presuppositions and they do enter the modest theological work

I have done, but I think I know what they are and I think it is possible to make true judgments, not in spite of them, but because of them. I do not know in detail what Hamilton's presuppositions are, but a certain stance appears in his threefold test of any Christology: "The ability to drive us back to our historical tradition, the ability to drive us into Scripture, the power to move us into the world of our time." These are exactly the areas to which I think a Christology should relate, and for me too there are forces at work; but his forces and mine seem different, and we are certainly not moved by them along the same theological path.

The two forces at work in a Catholic theologian are suggested in the familiar phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*: the word of God as truth, and the exigencies of the human mind. He does not limit the word of God to truth; he also hears the word and responds in an I-Thou relationship; but as theologian he has the job of talking *about* God and the divine realities; he has nothing to talk about unless God has said something, even stooping to say it in propositions; but he holds God *has* said something which requires unconditional assent; it is the theologian's absolute. The exigencies of the human mind impose their own demands with their own way of participating in the absolute. There is the spontaneous stream of questions which you cannot repress except ineffectually and for a time; as Newman said in reference to the baptismal formula: "It was impossible to go on using words without an insight into their meaning."¹ There is the fact that, though all of us find our positions to contain internal contradictions from time to time, no one ever admits an open contradiction into his thinking. If we wish to grow more technical, we can go on to explore the structured exigencies of the human mind in its growth towards the fulness of knowledge; but perhaps the obvious is enough at the moment: the theologian must use the only mind he has and let it work in the only way it can.

There are several aspects to the movement created by these forces in Catholic dogma. One is that the emerging questions settle the formal content of the decisions reached by the Church; we know accurately what Nicaea defined only when we know accurately what the question was at the time. This again seems obvious enough, until we ask whether the antecedent of dogmatic truth is not regularly a question; if so, it may be quite important for determining what Scripture teaches. We never have the question raised there about the three-storey universe, and we have no formal teaching on the point; we did have the question raised whether Jesus rose from the dead, and we have a scriptural dogma on the point. Is this a pattern? Of one

¹ *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical* (London, 1924) p. 152.

thing at least I am sure: the role of the question in forming New Testament theology needs investigation badly.

Another aspect is the distinction between the positive and the dogmatic aspects of historical theology. We are dealing in the first with theology *in oratione obliqua*, with what Mark said about the Son of God, what John said, what Tertullian said, what Nicaea said. What they said is a positive historical question and there is little difficulty in principle in agreeing with any positive historian on the matter. But there can be a vast dogmatic difference, since Mark, John, and Nicaea speak for the Church and Tertullian does not. And here we are dealing with theology *in oratione recta*, with what the Son of God is.

A third aspect is this, that the questions and answers tend to form a series in "logical" concatenation. There is much opposition to the word "logical," mainly because of the excesses of the "conclusions-theology" school, which sees developments of dogma resulting from premises much as if the whole process were occurring in a logic machine. In fact, the requisite ideas and the judgments do not occur in that way; logic cannot account for either, not even in empirical sciences, much less in theology. But logic is *involved* in the formulation of ideas and in judgment upon them, and logic is *involved* in the succession of judgments, especially in the sense that certain questions can be asked only after certain prior judgments have been made, and answered on the basis of compatibility or incompatibility with those judgments.

A fourth aspect is that, when a step has been taken and recedes into the past, there arises inevitably the problem of recapturing exactly what it was. There is, for example, an enormous weight inclining us to attribute to the Nicene "consubstantial" that meaning which it now bears in Catholic theology, and an enormous weight inclining us to attribute to the Chalcedonian "nature" and "person" (not to mention its "consubstantial") the meanings those words have today. In spite of the work of Prestige (*God in Patristic Thought*), there is still no general recognition that all Nicaea did was affirm that the Son is God in the same sense as the Father is God, and so I suppose I should not grumble that Hamilton has not seen the force of Lonergan's work in regard to Ephesus and Chalcedon. The widely-used word "reinterpretation" is extremely misleading for theology *in oratione obliqua*.

A fifth aspect is the need for relevance in the ordinary sense. I say "in the ordinary sense" to indicate that speculative developments in theology are also relevant, even if they are not so in the usual sense of the word. Some people think speculatively; when they think, they ask questions; they need

answers for their questions; and their need is as religious as that of one who is concerned more immediately with his salvation. But there is an old distinction between the questions of speculative and those of practical intellect; we have to acknowledge that most questions are of the second type; and an onus rests on theologians and pastors to relate their theology to these.

Now the work of a Catholic theologian in historical Christology (and this he has to do before tackling systematic Christology) is to follow the course of developments as they unfolded under the pressure of the two forces at work: as positive theologian here, he is simply discovering empirically what was said; as dogmatic theologian, he is learning religiously what the Church learned in the course of history. His effort is to begin with "the most primitive Christology of all," the views held by the young Church immediately after the Resurrection, to continue with the question that was operative at each step, to discover the sequence of questions and see something of the spontaneity and inevitability of the historical process: why the Gospel of Mark had to be added to Paul, why the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke had to be added to Mark, why Colossians expands noticeably Paul's earlier cosmic interpretation of the Christ, why John's Gospel of the incarnate Logos follows the others, etc.

Study of the historical sequence of ideas in the New Testament is plagued with uncertainties, but I think we have to undertake it and achieve such scientific probability as is possible, simply to put the process in continuity with patristic development and maintain our theological stance unchanged as we are moved by our two forces into later periods. We have to see how the force of the human mind, meditating on the word that was given to it, spontaneously and inevitably led from economic Trinity to ontological, and so to the question whether the Son is God in the same sense as the Father is God; we have to see that the settlement of this in the affirmative stimulated efforts to understand the God-man, that inevitably two opposed extremes developed, and that the one-sided definition of Ephesus required the complement of Chalcedon. At this point Leontius became inevitable: the adversaries were quite right in saying that the human nature of Jesus could not be anhypostatic, but they were wrong in concluding that He had a human hypostasis; the correct conclusion is that the humanity of Jesus was enhypostatic.² On the basis of Ephesus and Chalcedon, the Leontian position cannot be avoided; if there is not someone who is eternal and someone else who is born of Mary, then there is only one who is God and man; if the one-who-ness is eternal, then it is not created at the Incarnation; it follows that the human nature defined by Chalcedon has its existence in the person of the Word.

² Cf. *PG* 86, 1277-80.

The reader is growing bored. But let me briefly note the stance of a Catholic dogmatist at the end of his historical study of the Fathers. Historical theology is not just a pleasant exercise of scholarship for him; it is the word of God running and being glorified. As in empirical science, there is a given and one does not tamper with it; as in empirical science, results form a sequence and are cumulative. Again, as in empirical science, the only basis of concrete possibility is the given and the cumulatively established. There was always the abstract possibility, if you like, of getting to the moon, but only now is there a real, concrete possibility. Until the science of missiles was developed in our generation, the only ideas we had were Major Hoople fantasies. Similarly, any theology that disregards the given or attempts to leapfrog from the original given into the present in disregard of the cumulatively established, is a Major Hoople theology and a real retrogression.

But the differences from empirical science are enormous. In theology the given is not given on the level of experience; it is in the order of truth; it is a word of God: "He has risen." "Jesus is Lord." "What God was, the Word was." Further, if empirical science were lost, it could in principle start all over again; the data are largely still around. In theology you cannot start all over again; you cannot even go back to some partial stage of development and start there—not without grave loss. If the Lord of history gave us a primary word in Scripture and we abandon it, we cannot expect it to be given again; if the Lord of history guided the course of His word at Chalcedon and we abandon that, we cannot expect to reach the results of Chalcedon on our own. There is plenty of evidence pointing to verification of these statements.

The main point of my argument comes as we move into the Middle Ages and Scholasticism. There is direct continuity between the position of Leontius and that of the Scholastics. (I say there is continuity between their *positions*; it does not really matter if most early Scholastics had never heard of Leontius and had themselves to supply the step he had taken centuries before.) The further step needed was the ontological analysis of the constituents of the human person. Leontius had not undertaken that; he putters around with metaphysical terms, reaches the conclusion that human personhood is lacking in Christ, tries to explain it in logical terms of universals and particulars, but does not get to ontological constituents. The Scholastics did. They saw that on the basis of Chalcedon you cannot omit any human predicate from the humanity of Jesus; the full individuated essence of being human is His. But what is there beyond individuated essence? Some Scholastics talked of modes, but modes had no theological future. Another line developing through its own long history talked of the proportionate act of existence. The act of

existence, on Thomist principles, is clearly an ontological constituent of the human person that is distinct from and beyond essence. It could be exploited to solve the pressing problem of the one person and the two natures.

There is direct continuity of thought between Leontius and Scholasticism. There is the same twofold force operating in the theologians of the two periods. In a certain basic sense there is the same spontaneity and inevitability in the sequence of emerging questions and answers. But there is a great difference, and it lies, from the present viewpoint, in the enormous difficulty of entering explicitly into metaphysics and talking about being. There are fairly objective ways of measuring that difficulty. Every good Protestant historian of Christology gets as far as Leontius; I should like some expert in the literature to tell me how many mention Capreolus, who is generally credited with taking the step that got the Scholastics beyond Chalcedon and Leontius. Why that silence? Of course, there is the bad press Scholasticism has had since Luther, and the valid ground for it in the deficiencies of late Scholasticism; not even Catholics read any more of Capreolus than they have to. But Protestants do read Aquinas and Scotus; so the fault is not just a bad press. For that matter, why did Capreolus come so late? Exactly nine hundred years separate him from Leontius. Of course, there were wandering tribes and everything; but nine centuries is a very long time even if you have wandering tribes. I think we have to say that we have here a measure of the difficulty, the extreme difficulty, of the step taken.

There is more evidence pointing the same way. It is a thesis of Gilson that the question of being was forced into philosophical thought by the exigencies of faith seeking understanding. Again, Heidegger set out confidently in his youth to deal with the question of being; but he approached it through what he considered the being of man, the existential categories, and myriads of avid readers rushed into the field to exploit those categories while ignoring his original intention. Heidegger complained. But what could he expect? His own difficulties in finishing his blessed book on being could teach him a lesson on how few are likely to follow him into that arid region. A third bit of evidence: Lonergan wrote a book called *Insight*, which indeed dealt with (direct) insight but reached its metaphysical heights in a view of truth and being; it has gone through seven printings in ten years and quite a few of his readers are catching on to the psychological fact of insight; but of his view of truth and being there is considerable incomprehension so far.

More is at stake here than the defense of a hoary Scholasticism in particular or of a metaphysical theology in general. What is involved is the fundamental issue of tradition and understanding. The new theologians are strong on honesty, and in their book it is simply dishonest to talk of what we do

not understand. I will speak to them on their own terms in due course, if they are listening; meanwhile let me put the matter in more traditional terms for my fellow Chalcedonians.

If the phrase "faith seeking understanding" is a valid description of our enterprise, we are always talking about what we do not understand; we are condemned to that occupation. We have as our given a truth that is, or pertains to, the word of God; its full meaning is that which God gives it in His own understanding; our efforts to understand are a pursuit of something we can never reach, as the parabola continues its hopeless pursuit of its asymptote, in the figure that since Newman's time has been familiar. An empirical scientist works from data through insight and hypothesis to a judgment—at least to an opinion of high scientific probability. The theologian, on the contrary, starts with a judgment of faith as his datum, and tries to work back to an understanding. But his understanding is not that of the scientist; it is only analogical, that imperfect but most fruitful understanding that Vatican I declared to be the most we could hope for in regard to the divine realities. We have to define our terms, and define them carefully, in reference to an empirical base; yes, but we have also to leave that base behind in our use of the terms for the mysteries of faith.

This applies to every stage of development in dogma and theology. "Jesus is Lord" is not a record of observation or the result of a crucial experiment; the primitive believer could not utter it except in the Holy Spirit nor, having uttered it, could he understand except dimly and imperfectly what he had said. "The Son is God in the same sense as the Father" is not a statement whose content can be unpacked like that of a mathematical formula; the Nicene fathers uttered it because they were compelled to, the contradictory being clearly incompatible with what the word of God required them to hold, even though the positive content of that word was only analogously understood. Finally, "The act of existence proportionate to human nature is supplied in Christ by the being of the Word" is not something the Catholic theologian can demonstrate by graphs or experiments; epistemologically it is in the same class as the statement "Jesus is Lord" and "The Son is God in the same sense as the Father."

The difference with regard to the Scholastic thesis is that neither Scripture nor a council vouches for its truth. It is a theological conclusion; it is not a dogma. It probably never will be a dogma; I myself do not expect the Church ever to sanction with the full weight of her authority a thesis that enters so deeply into explicit metaphysics; it simply lacks the note of "catholic" immediacy required in the pronouncements of popes and councils.

But what now is the force immediately operative in carrying the theologian

forward? The force at work in Athanasius is clear: it is the word of God coming down to him in such statements as "Jesus is Lord." The force at work in Leontius is clear: it is the definition of Chalcedon, epitomizing the word of God, that the one who is eternally God is the same one who in time became perfectly man. Under the unyielding pressure of the truth that comes from God, the theologian of the early centuries went forward in a snail-paced pursuit that he would long before have abandoned were it not for the force so relentlessly applied by an absolute authority. What, then, is the force that is immediately operative in the theologian who follows Capreolus? It is the weight of opinion in the theological world; it is the consensus of the *auctores probati*; it is, in some broad sense of the word, tradition.

I do not think the value of tradition, understood in that broad sense, should be underestimated. It stimulates an interest that would otherwise lie dormant; it pushes thinking into fundamental areas that would otherwise lie unexplored; it forces new conclusions and new understanding (always analogical) that bring our theology forward to the level of our times. It has the effect of all education in which tradition is an element, of speeding up enormously the recapitulatory process; we do not have to relive the nine hundred years between Leontius and Capreolus; we cover them in a week's work in theological education.

An objective measure of that value is at hand again in the present episode. Prof. Hamilton is a young and brilliant theologian; he is brimming over with ideas, and ideas are the sign of intelligence and understanding. I, on the contrary, am growing old and I was never particularly brilliant. Yet I grasp in a dark manner the problem the Scholastics were trying to solve and understand something of their solution in terms of being, whereas Hamilton has shown that he does not understand at all. The difference is in tradition. The Catholic theologian is carried by his respect for tradition to an understanding he would never otherwise reach. Still, that understanding is not so much *in facto esse* as *in fieri*; so theologians converse with one another to share their meager insights. This is what we have been trying to do since the Middle Ages in regard to the act of existence in the Christ, and so I came in my article in *Commonweal* to talk of being and the act of existence.

It was a foolish thing to do in a paper of five thousand words which had to talk about many other things as well. So what would I do, if I were to write the paper again? I would do the same foolish thing. There is no alternative. But I think my own preoccupations slanted my exposition towards explaining the unity of Christ rather than the reality of His human nature. I was taken up with answering Tillich's "two blocks," and I think in the back of my mind I had Rahner's requirement of a "uniting unity" that gets beyond

mere logical predication. However, the presupposition of the whole argument is that the full humanity of the Christ must be protected. It is precisely to protect the humanity that we were forced into discussion of being.

I do not intend to try again in a short note to explain the view of being that is operative in my Christology. But on the basis of the meager understanding I have reached, I am going to be quite dogmatic. Let me say, then, that there is nothing belonging to humanity that cannot in principle be predicated of the Christ. (I say "in principle," for I do not pretend that He had formulated Einstein's relativity theory.) All the categories of *Being and Time*, temporality, historicity, care, liberty, thrownness, the various moods, all are pertinent to the study of Christ. All that the sciences in the universities tell us of man, the physics of his movements, the chemistry of his body, the neural determinants of his consciousness, the psychic and the rational, the social, political, game-playing character of man—you name it and Scholastic theology will tell you it belongs to the theology of Christ. That is a little rhetorical, but there is worse to come. I will say plainly and bluntly that if a theologian thinks any of these characteristics is missing from the humanity of Jesus as conceived by the Scholastics, he has not understood what it is possible to understand under the educating force of tradition. If he thinks we must revert to an *assumptus homo* theology to shore up a defective humanity in Jesus, again he has not understood. If he thinks the proportionate act of existence is needed to make the humanity a complete humanity, he has not understood. The function of the act of existence is not to make the humanity human but to make it real, and by this criterion Christ's humanity is as real as ours and as human as ours.

The preceding paragraphs are surely not the best approach to dialogue; nevertheless, it is of dialogue that I am now going to speak. I have the impression that Hamilton and a traditional Catholic theologian simply live in different worlds. Is there any possibility at all of their speaking to one another in this situation? More in general, what are the possibilities of discourse between those holding the same Christology as I do and others whose theological stance is quite different? If we cannot force anyone to talk to us, at least we can clarify our presuppositions for ourselves and try to draw up prolegomena to discussion.

My first question would regard dialogue with fellow Scholastics. The Thomist world of objective being, organized in a hierarchy of grades, with each grade analyzed into its ontological constituents, has had heavy weather for a long time. Not only that, but the Scholastics themselves split into various schools. There is a consensus that we have to talk about questions of essence and existence; there is a common tradition on principles extending

farther than the vehemence of the old controversies suggests; but the tradition has not effectively united us in advancing to a further stage. Is it the moving power of the question that is lacking? And what might that question be? If the metaphysics of the objective world is fairly well established, will the question have to do with the subjective appropriation of that world, with the methodology that settles the approach and gives meaning to the results through the meaning the subject's cognitional activities have for him? The reader senses my answer, but my point regards only prolegomena to dialogue: Is there any way of settling these questions in common? Scholasticism, without abandoning the Fathers, moved from the patristic world into the world of being. Have we similarly moved into a new world, and can it be characterized as the world of the subject who is open to being, so that retaining the achievements of Scholasticism we can add a new dimension?

Next there are the fellow dogmatists who are not fellow Scholastics. We all get as far as Chalcedon or, if you like to include the mopping-up operations that followed Chalcedon, as far as Constantinople III. We cannot fall back beyond that, as the Monophysites fell back and the *assumptus homo* theologians fell back. There may be disagreement on whether this or that modern trend revives an old position rendered untenable by the councils, but there would be general agreement on the criteria of judgment. Can we go any farther together? In accordance with the theological stance I have described and defended, I would have to ask: Does the question of Leontius occur to you? If the question does not occur, no dialogue is possible, for the occurrence of the question is the indispensable condition for meaningful discussion. But, if the question does occur, is there any way to avoid the enhypostasia? And, if there is no way to avoid it, are we not committed to ontological analysis of the person and the metaphysical Christology of the Scholastics? Is there any other way to be serious about our commitment to the word of God and to the exigencies of intellect?

Thirdly, we come to our Protestant brothers, with whom dialogue today is a theological need, as well as a religious duty imposed in a special way by our sins of the past. We have to begin with Scripture, of course, and I will try to indicate what suppositions I would bring to discussion here. When the biblical movement completed its successful rebellion against Scholastic imperialism and embarked on its own imperial course, it treated us to a good deal of propaganda about importing Greek notions of truth and Scholastic principles like that of noncontradiction into the Scriptures. This movement reached Catholic circles about the time I became involved in the theological enterprise and gave us some difficulty when we tried to assign the biblical foundations of our dogmas. The political aspect of the problem,

as it had its source in Protestant exegetes, seems to be finding its solution there too. I mean, James Barr came along and relieved the pressure; we could relax and leave the battle to him; he is young and vigorous, and no one was listening to us anyway. All the same, the theoretical side even of Scripture is our special responsibility, which we may not abdicate. It appears as often as the word "is" occurs in the Scriptures, for we are immediately introduced to questions of absolute truth and its foundations and indeed to questions of implicit metaphysics. It appears as often as there is an argument in Scripture, for we are immediately introduced to fundamental principles of rational discourse. Solomon did not tell the quarreling prostitutes who both claimed the one baby: "Look here, you're invoking the principle of non-contradiction. Once admit an un-Hebraic activity like that and you are on the way to chronic poisoning of the sources from Greek philosophy." On such foundational matters we would have to reach some agreement before we could really discuss the content of the Scriptures effectively.

I have not mentioned hermeneutics in the strongly theological sense the word has assumed today. It seems clear to me that the trend here is similar to what Lonergan calls the shift from theology *in oratione obliqua* (what Paul or Nicaea said about the Son of God) to theology *in oratione recta* (what the Son of God is), and that the course of evolution follows his *via analytica*, with questions and answers emerging in an ordered series carrying us further and further into the divine mysteries. At this point, then, I would ask a Protestant theologian exactly what I ask a Chalcedonian or a Scholastic among Catholic theologians. In the imagery of a cable car climbing a mountain, with transfer platforms at intervals where dizzy tourists may interrupt their journey, my question would be: Where do you get off the cable car? If it is at the end of the New Testament writings, does your theology speak to our times? If it attempts to do so, is it by dint of leapfrogging over nineteen centuries into the present? If, as I hope, the Protestant theologian respects the ordered sequence and hermeneutical progression of the *via analytica*, even if he does not agree on the normative character of the results, then I could in some measure collaborate with him; but what is simply positive theology for him would have both positive and dogmatic relevance for me. Meanwhile I am willing to learn from the leapfroggers too; every idea, even a Major Hoople one, has its value as an idea; it is grist for the theologian's mill. And insofar as in fact no one talks independently of his past and the great tradition, the Major Hoople theologians may speak with more relevance than their professed principles can account for. In any case, I would have no objection to taking up discarded ideas of the last thirty years in Protestant Christology. When your Christology is conceived in basic terms

like essence and existence, it is remarkably open; it can admit, for example, ideas like presence and encounter, which may have collapsed in Protestant Christology, not because they were invalid, but because they were being made to bear too great a burden.

Can we dialogue with Hamilton himself? The project has great difficulties. In terms that I am sure he would make his own, it is almost impossible for a thoroughly contemporary Christology to dialogue with one that is completely antiquated. Now it will bring out the full force of my presuppositions (and my pretensions) if I say that my Christology is the modern one and his is the antiquated. The criterion is supplied by the question: Where do you get off the cable car? I think various Scholastic theologians got off shortly after Capreolus and are five centuries behind the times. I think various patristic theologians got off shortly after John Damascene and are a thousand years behind the times. The Monophysites got off at Chalcedon and went back to Ephesus. The adoptionists got off at the local Council of Antioch in 268. And so on. Hamilton seems to have got off very early indeed, about the place where the centurion of Mark 15:39 got on, and that does not leave much common ground for a Christology. If it is true that we should get beyond Scholasticism, would it be utterly naive to borrow a phrase from Kierkegaard and suggest that it might be useful first to try to reach Scholasticism?

Nevertheless, if Hamilton cannot work with us towards a really contemporary Christology, we on our side can learn a great deal for our Christology from him; for the distinction is still valid between questions of speculative and those of practical intellect. Bonhoeffer's question belongs to the second class: "What is Christianity, and indeed what is Christ, for us today?" In the twenty-four years since he wrote that line, speculative Christology has continued to go ahead, but we are still struggling to answer his question. Prestige's study of the rise of devotion to the sacred humanity (chapter 8 of his *Fathers and Heretics*) shows us how the Middle Ages tried to solve their parallel problem. We would hardly speak today of devotion to the sacred humanity, but we have the same problem of identifying with the man Jesus.

In this task we can learn from Hamilton. It seems to me that the "latest" school of theology, to which he belongs, is telling us with great feeling and penetration what man is in this second half of the twentieth century, and what lies in his heart when he says: "I have faith. . . help me where faith falls short" (Mk 9:24). This is not directly a Christology any more than Romans 1-2 is a Christology; but, like Romans, it is indispensable if Christology is to be brought into relation with the times. It can even contribute indirectly to a historical Christology, insofar as it can give us a deeper insight

into the human heart of Jesus. But primarily it is a humanism for our times which we cannot afford to ignore. When we have assimilated it, our Christology will have been considerably enriched, while the Christology of those who enriched us will be infinitely poorer.

There is no place for smugness in such an assertion. Smugness is dishonest, and it is a time for honesty. One cannot fail to be impressed by the sincerity of Hamilton's efforts to be true to his contemporary world. The theologians he represents are a continual stimulus to me (final patronizing touch from a dogmatist) to inquire into my presuppositions, to eliminate old areas of inauthentic theology, to preach a salvation in Christ that I can dimly manage, as by "puzzling reflections in a mirror" (1 Cor 13:12), to relate to the needs of our time. But then I have to say that in all of us eternal vigilance is the price of consistent honesty. I do not think Hamilton has escaped inconsistency when he says my position on the act of existence is a "reduction of the full humanity of Jesus" but does not offer us any indication of how he conceives the act of existence. But that item of inconsistency is rooted in a far graver defect of his school and of the times that I could characterize, if I were to admit it into my own theology, only as a failure to be true to the exigencies of the word. If, in my effort to relate the given of Christology to the times, I were to find the project hard and abandon the given, this would not be an honest effort to become contemporary but a dishonest evasion of the problem as well as a betrayal of what is more sacred than contemporaneity. Thus, in the old Fathers with their violent denunciations and obstinate incomprehension of their opponents, just as in the Scholastics with their stodgy repetition of traditional terms and reverent adherence to the *auctores probati*, I find an honesty, rugged or unimaginative as you like, but altogether basic in a theologian, from which there is much for the newest generation of theologians to learn.

Is it possible for them to learn? I mean, is it a real, concrete possibility? Not without that conversion I spoke of in my *Commonweal* article, which is more intellectual than moral, from the level of ideas to that of being and truth. Being and truth are solidary with one another; the Scholastics could only save their doctrine of being by proceeding to the foundations of truth; the anti-Scholastics rejected the doctrine of being and now they cannot lay hold of truth, even in the Scriptures, or assign its foundations. What is left when we lose touch with truth and being? There is still the world of ideas. It is extraordinarily rich, with all those fertile areas to explore that phenomenology and secularity are discovering. It is an exhilarating world in which to live. It is magnificently and exuberantly human. It is peculiarly human—human in the sense that it is directly proportionate to human

intelligence, human in the sense that it encloses us in the human; it cannot bring us to the existence of God, or even make the word "God" a term of meaningful discourse, let alone such oddities as John's "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." This is the world of the secularist theologians, and the very exuberance of their ideas keeps them from finding God. One needs leisure to discover the finer things of life. In the old days it was leisure from manual labor, and so the priests of Egypt were the ones to develop geometry. In the Middle Ages it was leisure from both hard labor and the wealth of the sciences, and so the monks and clerics discovered being. Today the world is exploding with knowledge, sciences are proliferating, methods of information retrieval put them within our reach, the mind is filled with ideas, and there is no room for the reflection that brings us to truth and being, and enables us to distinguish the act of existence.

Is there place for hope? This is the age of a rebirth of hope, and I refuse to be a prophet of doom. I refuse, first of all, to be pessimistic about the situation in which idea-men are divided from theologians of the word. The world and the sphere need various types; if some did not abandon the absolute of truth in an intoxicating addiction to ideas, the ideas would be longer emerging and the dogmatic theologian would be slower to face them when they did emerge. There must be divided fields; maybe there must also be fence straddlers. But it is important for the lines to form, and so I have written this conservative, dogmatic, argumentative, intransigent, and not at all "engaging" article. It was important not to be engaging. The options must appear in stark clarity: whether in theology we are to retain truth as the absolute with ideas as our instruments, or are to give ideas the hegemony and then, since they are inescapably involved in relativity, be carried about by every wind of new idea.

Again, I refuse to be pessimistic about our capacity to assimilate the new ideas, to make our theology relevant to the times, and to develop a new Christian culture, a second spring after the winter of these post-Christian years. There are a priori grounds for confidence: whether you take the objective view of a universe of being or turn to the subject as one who is open to the universe of being, you have an infinite power of assimilation and adaptation. There is the example of the medievals who found a piety towards Christ to suit their times, even in their theological fidelity to the exigencies of the word. I refuse to concede defeat to secularist forces today; it is the secularists themselves, awakening us from our dogmatic slumbers and forcing the problem sharply upon us, who will ensure the success of our efforts. Some think the signs of the second spring are already here, but it seems

better at the moment not to start talking about that; the options had best remain starkly clear.

Is there hope for the idea-men? Can they find again the absolute of truth they have abandoned? I write this article with a depressing sense that hardly anyone who does not agree with it in advance is likely to pay it the slightest attention. I have a sense of Romans 11 finding a new application here: “. . .their offense means the enrichment of the world. . . . ‘Branches were lopped off so that I might be grafted in.’” I mean, their loss of faith in the dogma of Christ will serve the enrichment of our Christology, provided that we be not “complacent about [our] own discernment.” It is only an analogy; let it not discourage us. Nevertheless, we should not minimize the difficulties, the natural difficulties. The advance from ideas to truth and the concept of being is not just more of the same, as when Columbus sailed just a little farther and discovered just more of the earth. It is much more like the explorations of the space age, a dread venture into a new universe. It is analogous to the crucifixion of intellect that faith is (analogous, I said). It is so great an advance that the idea-men do not even know what they are rejecting.

But at that point hope returns. As in rejecting “God” they believe in God, so in rejecting “metaphysics” they practice metaphysics. I take courage from the fact that God has planted a fifth column within them: they cannot stop using the word “is.” Using it, they cannot forever refrain from asking what it means, not for more than five or ten thousand years anyway, much less than that if they are willing to learn with and from tradition. If they gain a dim notion of its meaning, they will have the natural complement they need (final blasphemous claim of Scholasticism) to form a Christology based on the truth that Jesus *is* the Christ, the Son of God, that the one who *is* God *is* also fully man. But I was not joking when I hinted in *Commonweal* at the need of grace for this kind of conversion. If that is their need, what is God waiting for? I greatly fear that He is waiting for us to get the point they are making; then their work will be done and “they. . .will be grafted in” again. Or is “waiting” the right word? Is God moving us, just through such a judgment as that to which *Commonweal* submitted us, to think out more vigorously for our times “the faith which [He] entrusted to His people once and for all” (Jude 3)?

Regis College, Willowdale, Ont.

F. E. CROWE, S.J.