

# THE RISEN CHRIST, TRANSCULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE ENCOUNTER OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

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CHRISTIANITY, as we know it, is the result of a long history of grappling with "religious pluralism." In some sense, then, religious pluralism is not new. Paul's "unknown God" at Athens, Irenaeus' theology of "recapitulation," Thomas Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles*—all are instances of Christianity's encounter with the world religions. Nor did Christianity always enter into this encounter in a negative, ghettoish manner. One has only to read the following prayer of Nicholas of Cusa to catch a little of the positive attitude toward non-Christians which always formed a part of the Christian tradition:

It is Thou, O God, who is being sought in the various religions in various ways, and named with various names, for Thou remainest as Thou art, to all incomprehensible and inexpressible. Be gracious and show Thy countenance. . . . When Thou wilt graciously perform it, then the sword, jealous hatred, and all evil will cease and all will come to know that there is but *one* religion in the variety of religious customs.<sup>1</sup>

But, in an important sense, the outcome of Christianity's encounter with non-Christians was thought to have been decided beforehand. Thus, Christians confronted religious pluralism forearmed with Tertullian's conviction, "We are those upon whom the ends of the ages have come." While it might take all of man's later history for this conviction to be affirmed by all, still, the essential lesson to be learned in any religious dialogue was already known beforehand.<sup>2</sup> In this light it is not surprising to hear the sixteenth-century prior general of the Dominicans asserting, "Men must be changed by religion, not religion by men."<sup>3</sup> What, of course, stands behind this conviction is the Christian belief in the finality of Jesus Christ. And in the prehistorically conscious age, that belief was naturally interpreted in an unhistorical manner.

<sup>1</sup> As cited by Friedrich Heiler, "The History of Religions as a Preparation for the Co-operation of Religions," in M. Eliade and J. M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago, 1959) pp. 154-55.

<sup>2</sup> As cited by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Finality of Jesus Christ in an Age of Universal History* (Richmond, 1965) p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggioramento," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 32 (1971) 573-601, esp. 575 for an analysis of this text.

## HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Thus, there was clearly a Christian encounter with religious pluralism in the past. But that encounter is taking on a new shape today under the influence of several key factors. As a first primary factor bringing about this new pattern of religious pluralism, I would emphasize the growing development of a "historical consciousness." It was this that prompted Ernst Troeltsch to write his famous work *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions* in 1901; it is this that Bernard Lonergan sees as the key in Christianity's ability to give a positive assessment to the world religions.<sup>4</sup>

When we speak of "historical consciousness," we are speaking not simply of historical change and variability, but of man's conscious awareness of this fact, and of its extent. The inchoate beginnings of such an awareness can possibly be traced back five thousand years, to the invention of writing and the founding of cities. John Dunne describes what this might have meant:

Writing had to be invented; it could not be discovered like a natural process. The recording of history which began at this time must have gone with a consciousness of making history, and we can guess that this consciousness is what led to the invention of writing and to the recording of what was being done.<sup>5</sup>

But the awareness of the extent to which man makes history would demand a great deal more time, the recording of much more history, and the availability of those records to later ages. This can be said to have begun with the events making up the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

Norman Hampson describes Western man's developing of a historical consciousness as the awareness of "time as a new dimension."<sup>6</sup> Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers were beginning to consciously grasp that man has a real history, that *he* genuinely develops; in short, that he *makes* history. "Time" is seen in a new dimension; for it is no longer

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lonergan's "The Future of Christianity," lecture given at Holy Cross College, 1969. The flavor of his view can be gleaned from the following: "While classicist culture conceived itself normatively and abstractly, modern culture conceives itself empirically and concretely. It is the culture that recognizes cultural variation, difference, development, breakdown, that investigates each of the many cultures of mankind, that studies their histories, that seeks to understand what the classicist would tend to write off as strange or uncultivated or barbaric. Instead of thinking of man in terms of a nature common to all men whether awake or asleep, geniuses or morons, saints or sinners, it attends to men in their concrete living. If it can discern common and invariant structures in human operations, it refuses to take flight from the particular to the universal, and it endeavors to meet the challenge of knowing people in all their diversity and mutability."

<sup>5</sup> John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (New York, 1972) p. 146.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 1968) pp. 218-50.

simply the earthly reflection of an eternally decreed blueprint, but the genuine result of human striving itself. This awareness manifests itself in what Hampson calls "scientific time." Montesquieu in 1721 began questioning the accuracy of the six-thousand-year chronology of the Bible, and when he was proven correct, a certain historical relativizing of the Bible would necessarily result. The Bible itself, on the basis of geological knowledge, was increasingly seen to be the result of human self-making. In addition, gains were made in the area of biology by such thinkers as d'Holbach and Maupertuis which would even reveal the historicity and contingency of man's biological nature. For example, Maupertuis's theory of genetic transmission, hinting at the existence of dominant and recessive characteristics, was clearly an anticipation of Darwin.

A further ingredient of the new "temporal dimension" was a growing awareness of "historical time." An important impetus to this awareness was the quest for discovery and travel, which enlarged European horizons beyond Europe and revealed the humanly and historically conditioned nature of men's cultures. Voltaire would say in reference to China, as a result of these travels: "authentic histories trace this nation back . . . to a date earlier than that which we normally attribute to the Flood."<sup>7</sup> Again, a relativizing of the Scriptures resulted. A new use of historical texts was also developing since the Renaissance. The past was now being used critically, evidencing a sense for historicity, rather than as simply an "appeal" to ancient authority. As Peter Gay puts it:

The historians of the Enlightenment, then, did much. They did not do everything because they could not do everything, but at least they freed history from the parochialism of Christian scholars and from theological presuppositions, secularized the idea of causation and opened vast new territories for historical inquiry. They went beyond tedious chronology, endless research into sacred documents, and single-minded hagiography, and imposed rational, critical methods of study on social, political, and intellectual developments.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the new sense of "historical time" can be seen by comparing Bossuet's seventeenth-century brand of history as the unfolding of the eternally decreed with Vico's view of the same as "the developing self-knowledge of societies, which became increasingly aware of their

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York, 1966) p. 37. Note his critique on p. 38: "The philosophes' perception of a distinction between mythmaking and scientific mentalities was the perception of a fact, but since they came to it first of all through their position as critics and belligerents, they almost inevitably converted the historical fact into a moral judgment, praising, indeed identifying themselves with, one mentality and denigrating the other."

ability to control their material environment and to influence the complex of assumptions and attitudes which is misleadingly described as 'human nature.'"<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary man's increasing historical awareness is the direct heir of the above insights. It would take us too far afield to trace the political, religious, philosophical, and scientific deepening of this awareness in our own time, and besides, it is a well-known story anyway. Lonergan perhaps summed up the ingredients of historical consciousness when he wrote: "Man's making is not restricted to the transformation of nature, for there is also the transformation of man himself."<sup>10</sup> In other words, one can be said to be historically conscious when he is aware, first, of how he himself alters the world of nature—scientifically, through manipulation, or culturally, through his values and institutions—thus opening up nature to historical change; secondly, when he is aware of how he alters himself. And while we could dramatically illustrate this<sup>11</sup>—by calling attention, for example, to the use of genetic manipulation or cultural and institutional manipulation—this story seems sufficiently known already.

What is of more interest in this essay is the manner in which man's historical consciousness is giving a "new shape" to the reality of religious pluralism in the Christian mind. As Christians themselves become historically conscious, this new shape of religious pluralism becomes less and less an extrinsic "fact" outside their consciousness, and more and more an interior quality of their own perception of themselves and their Christian heritage. Less, that is, a fact that they respond to with an "established" and unalterable set of assumptions, and more a reality which qualifies the way they respond and the presuppositions they hold about their faith.

While the implications of historical consciousness are legion for Christianity, I will indicate several which are important for the encounter with the world's religions. As a first implication, historical consciousness simply means that the reality of religious pluralism is experienced in a qualitatively new way today by Christians. That this is a fact, even in the highest reaches of Christianity, can be seen in the evident "shift" that has occurred in official documents. For example, at Trent the accent is clearly insensitive to historical change, emphasizing not innovation but restoration: "in confirmandis dogmatibus et in instaurandis in ecclesia moribus."<sup>12</sup> Vatican II, on the other hand, quite remarkably

<sup>9</sup> Hampson, *op. cit.* p. 235.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," in F. E. Crowe, ed., *Collection* (New York, 1967) p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, "Experiment: Man," *Theology Digest* special sesquicentennial issue, 1968, pp. 57-69, for one such example.

<sup>12</sup> *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, eds. G. Alberigo et al. (Rome, 1962) p. 640.

opens itself to a sensitivity to innovation, thus implying the relativity of certain features of Christianity:

Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine (which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit itself of faith), these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment.<sup>13</sup>

While it would be a mistake to think that the Council endorses religious relativism, evidently it is making a distinction between the historically relative and the enduring.

The ramifications of the above shift for Christianity's encounter with the world religions is important; for whereas previously the Church entered into such an encounter without an awareness of its own historically- and culturally-conditioning factors, today we are increasingly sensitive to these. This ultimately means that a dialogue with the world religions is no longer simply a matter of discussing secondary points of difference within an already established and immutable set of Christian presuppositions. The possibility remains open of those presuppositions themselves being influenced by history. An awareness of this casts the dialogue with the world religions into a new light. Wilfrid Cantwell Smith seems to have this in mind when he states:

One of the facile fallacies that students of comparative religion must early learn to outgrow is, we have felt, the supposition that the different religions give differing answers to essentially the same questions. We would hold that rather their distinctiveness lies in considerable part in a tendency to ask different questions.<sup>14</sup>

A second implication flowing from historical consciousness is that the world's religions are brought into greater prominence in the Christian mind; for a historically conscious religion no longer views itself as a "complete" manifestation of man's religious spirit. In this regard, Vatican II's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, in stating that the latter "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" but which the *Church* proclaims in Christ,<sup>15</sup> is unsatisfactory. The implication is too easily drawn that the Church's proclamation itself is complete and raised beyond history. Once history is taken seriously as a medium of saving truth, then the possibility opens up, not only of religions expressing similar insights into religious wisdom

<sup>13</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W. M. Abbott (New York, 1966) p. 350.

<sup>14</sup> As cited by Charles Davis, *Christ and the World Religions* (London, 1970) p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 662.

under the influence of their respective historical experiences, but of some religions expressing those insights more fully and powerfully than others. For example, a case could be made that the Reformers gave expression to the transcendent element in Christianity in a more effective manner than did Roman Catholicism during the period of the Reformation. Similarly, a case could be made that some of the world's high religions witness to religious values that at least remain dormant if not even reflectively grasped by the religions of the West. One need only think of how Judaism's long historical struggle or Buddhism's more intuitive and mystical tradition has sensitized their adherents to elements of the religious quest that the West has yet to understand. In this light it seems too facile to say that the West's current interest in the meditative wisdom and techniques of the East is really futile, for the same wisdom is to be found in the Western mystical tradition. Rather, a good case could be made that the Western experience, under the influence especially of technology, has influenced Western Christianity to such an extent that the more rational and didactic dimensions of religion have been brought to the fore in the West. In each case, what is at work is one's historical experience. The religions have been "shaped" by their historical experiences, and this is not simply a limitation, but the manner in which each religion is sensitized to the multiple dimensions of the religious quest.

A third implication flowing from historical consciousness is the possibility, for the first time, of real dialogue between the religions; for, first, a historically conscious religion is in the position of really understanding the religious wisdom of the various religions. In this light it is no accident that works such as John Dunne's *The Way of All the Earth* and Thomas Merton's *Mystics and Zen Masters* are appearing for the first time in our age. One might think that the qualitatively new manner in which religious pluralism is experienced today, spoken of above, might render any dialogue futile; for if there is no overarching and agreed-upon set of presuppositions within which to dialogue, how can such a dialogue and intercommunication ensue? But what this experience proves is that the dialogue is simply much more demanding than previous ages thought, not that it is impossible; for what must not be overlooked is that a historically conscious individual is in a position to grasp the historical contexts that give rise to religious wisdom, and thus is in a position to perspectivize religious claims. A historically conscious mind, as Carr puts it, "has a capacity to rise above the limited vision of his own situation in society and history. . . ." <sup>16</sup>

An example of how historical consciousness frees us for real dialogue and mutual understanding is provided by Charles Davis. <sup>17</sup> He speaks of a

<sup>16</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York, 1961) p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39.

Western tendency, under the influence of the Western experience of relativism, heavily empirical and rational, to see in the Hindu religion a similar relativism or religious indifference. But scholars' increasing sensitivities to our different historical experiences have enabled us to grasp that Hindu relativism is quite distinct from that of the West. As Robert Slater explains it:

Generally speaking, our Western relativism is cold, as cold as the science which sponsors it. It is dispassionate. But the mood of Hindu relativism is different. The breath of it is hot and scorching. It is passionately religious. It is affirmative rather than negative.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, our sensitivity to the Hindu historical experience has enabled us to grasp that its "relativism" stems from a profound sense of the "inexpressibility" of the "One" ("the real is One, the learned call it by various names"), not from a Western religious indifferentism.

Perhaps the best overview of the contribution of historical consciousness to the dialogue between the religions comes from the learned scholar Friedrich Heiler.<sup>19</sup> In a rather illuminating manner he shows, only rarely without sufficient nuance, how the scientific study of religions has led Christian scholars progressively from, first, an awareness of simply the wealth of the world's religions to "esteem" for them, and then naturally to an acknowledgment of the falsity of many Christian judgments about them. An example of the latter would be the common claim that love of the enemy is unique to Jesus. Here is Heiler's comment on this:

All high religions of the earth, not only the Eastern religions of redemption but the pre-Christian religions of the West, know the commandment to love the enemy. And the Chinese *Li-ki* (Book of Ceremonies) says, "By returning hatred with goodness, human concern is exercised towards one's own person." The wise Lao-tse emphatically demands the "reply to adversity with mercy and goodness." Loving the enemy has been commanded in India since the earliest times. We read in the heroic epic Mahābhārata: "Even an enemy must be afforded appropriate hospitality when he enters the house; a tree does not withhold its shade even from those who come to cut it down."<sup>20</sup>

When one remembers that the Christian Tertullian asserted that loving the enemy was an exclusively Christian claim,<sup>21</sup> one begins to grasp how historical consciousness is freeing him to understand the world religions.

<sup>18</sup> As cited by Davis, *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Heiler, pp. 132-60. A similar analysis has been provided by Raimundo Panikkar, "The Emerging Myth," *Monchanin* 8 (1975) 8-11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> *Ad Scapulam* 1; the full text: "For all love those who love them; it is peculiar to Christians alone to love those that hate them" (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3 [Grand Rapids, 1957] 105).

Further, just as a historically sensitized consciousness is able to better grasp the wisdom of the religions, so that same consciousness is in a position to bring the dialogue of the religions to "full term," which is not simply information-gathering, nor simply mutual respect, nor simply the breaking down of prejudices, nor simply the awareness of the common factors that unite us, but much more profoundly personal and institutional "conversion." For if one remembers that human historicity means that man develops and alters himself and his institutions, then one can begin to see that any genuine increment in understanding will necessarily effect a proportionate change in man and his institutions. As history shows, this simply indicates that knowledge is never simply the contemplation of what is, but also brings about what can be. The implications this carries for the dialogue with the world religions have not yet—nor could they have—been understood. Of necessity, that dialogue, up to now, has been "past-oriented," attempting to simply grasp the religious wisdom present in the various religions. But an awareness of the "transforming" nature of knowledge would seem to indicate that the dialogue will increasingly take on a "futuristic" orientation, leading perhaps to the discovery of religious values and religious styles of life hitherto unsuspected. Avery Dulles has alluded to the same phenomenon occurring in the inter-Christian dialogues: "To the extent that believers of different confessions share a similar commitment to the values of justice, peace, freedom, and fraternal love, they find themselves drawn together into a community of action that transcends their present denominational barriers and paves the way for a richer unity in faith and worship."<sup>22</sup> Such a phenomenon has already occurred in certain "forerunners" who have entered fully into the encounter of the world religions—a Merton, a Dunne—and it will be this essay's goal to further this progress somewhat more from a Christian perspective.

#### PLANETIZATION

In addition to the above, a second primary factor giving a new shape to today's religious pluralism and the encounter between the religions is the phenomenon variously known as "world unification," "planetization," or even "cosmification." Karl Jaspers expresses this well: "What is historically new and for the first time in history decisive about our situation is the real unity of mankind on the earth. The planet has become for man a single whole dominated by the technology of communications; it is 'smaller' than the Roman Empire was formerly."<sup>23</sup> But while our first factor, historical consciousness, seems to

<sup>22</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, 1974) p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, 1953) p. 126. I will rely on Jaspers throughout this section, esp. his pp. 126-228.



highlight the positive features of the new shape of religious pluralism, planetization seems, thus far, to bring to the fore its negative features. Simultaneously, it emphasizes the urgency of taking seriously the encounter between the world religions and other "world systems." John Dunne sees in this phenomenon the *possibility* of a "collective mind" being developed by today's man, but he also grasps the *actuality* of man's failure and perhaps even fear of developing such a mentality. As he expressively states it:

The world wars, it is true, are the most obvious signs that the transition to world history has been taking place in this century. They have risen rather from a failure to pass over, and they are massive events beyond the influence of the individual. That the failure to pass over should be so deadly, though, seems to show that the time for passing over is ripe and overripe. As for the massiveness and inevitability of the events, it is perhaps only the massiveness and inevitability that always makes its appearance when a journey of the spirit is called for and does not occur. There are two ways of going through life, Jung has said. One is to walk through upright and the other is to be dragged through. We could say the same thing of time and history. The transition from history to world history is something man can walk through upright on a journey of the spirit, or it is something he can be dragged through in a series of world wars.<sup>24</sup>

Jaspers, in line with Dunne, indicates some of the difficulties involved in planetization, and I would like to indicate their relevancy to the encounter of the world religions. First, "the masses," says Jaspers, "have become a decisive factor in the historical process." What he means is that planetary communication entails an exposure to differing historical experiences, world views, and ideological systems. One might almost say an "overexposure." While this *could be* the necessary foundation for a strengthening and enriching of individuals and cultures, it seems instead to result in a lessening of personal and cultural self-identity and integration. Since *all* are exposed to these disruptive forces, the "people" are becoming the "masses." And while, of course, charismatic leaders could do much to stem this, the masses greatly seem to determine the kind of leaders they want. Something similar happens in the normal development of a child, whose varied, pluralistic experiences can eventually lead to an enriching of the personality, but all too often only end in greater confusion and inner schizophrenia. The application of this to Christianity's encounter with the world religions might throw some light on our problem.

Owing to today's complex religious pluralism, the Christian "people" may be becoming the "masses," confused, identity-less, sometimes indifferent, and unable to bring into play the kind of self-possessed identity necessary for any fruitful encounter among the religions.

<sup>24</sup>Dunne, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

Perhaps this is one of the main factors underlying the seeming lack of progress in the ecumenical effort among Christians, and we should expect that the encounter of the *world* religions, exceedingly more complex and demanding, would result in a similar ennui and indifference.

Jasper's second factor could perhaps be called the "universalization of doubt," which has spawned various movements destructive of any progress in the world dialogue. One such movement would be the natural tendency towards "thinking in ideologies" characteristic of "the abasements of psychoanalysis and vulgar Marxism."<sup>25</sup> Such a response is normal in an age of mass confusion and confrontation of world views. It is the perennial response of refusing to really meet the questions, to close in flanks, and to retreat into the clear recesses of a ghetto. And while this has always been a basic human strategy, what is new about it today is its universal and planetary influence: "But perhaps the formation of ideologies really is particularly great in its compass today. For in hopelessness there arises the need for illusion, in the aridity of personal existence the need for sensation, in powerlessness the need to violate those who are even more powerless."<sup>26</sup>

Such would not appear to be an unreal problem for Christianity too—which possibly accounts for a certain amount of fear in furthering the ecumenical effort. Karl Rahner has recently pointed out that planetization is increasingly transforming Christianity into a "real" religion, one that is no longer adhered to simply because it is the controlling religious institution of the culture. But, as this process continues, Christianity too will face the temptation of ideology and its way of coping with our universal pluralism. "If we talk of the 'little flock' to defend our cosy traditionalism and stale pseudo-orthodoxy, in fear of the mentality of modern man and modern society, if we tacitly consent to the departure of restless, questioning people from the Church, so that we can return to our repose and orderly life and everything in the Church becomes as it was before, we are propagating, not the attitude proper to Christ's little flock, but a petty sectarian mentality."<sup>27</sup> The natural outcome of such ideological thinking is, as Jaspers indicates, a tendency toward "simplification," in which easy slogans, simplistic solutions, and the seeking out of scapegoats are thought to be the answer.

Thus, the phenomenon of planetization, while it offers us the possibility of a transcultural enrichment hitherto unknown, at the same time endangers it. The possibilities for the world dialogue opening up through historical consciousness in a sense can be "universalized" through

<sup>25</sup> Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York, 1974) p. 30.

planetization. They can also be thwarted. A most decisive option is placed before us, as Jaspers perceptively notes: "For whereas all previous periods of crucial change were local and susceptible of being supplemented by other happenings in other places, in other worlds, so that even if they failed the possibility of the salvation of man by other movements was left open, what is happening now is absolutely decisive."<sup>28</sup>

#### TOWARDS A GENUINE ENCOUNTER OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Ultimately, the question which we must put to ourselves as Christians is that of *the extent* to which we will be able to participate in this new movement of religious pluralism, given the "absolute" claims we hold for Christ in man's religious quest. The twin phenomena of historical consciousness and planetization are forcing us Christians to give an account of ourselves, to discern whether we can legitimately, in consonance with our tradition, positively, and wholeheartedly enter into this new movement, or whether we must take the route of Jaspers' path of ideology. Several approaches have already been proposed, and after surveying them, I will concentrate on what might be a further avenue to follow.

A first approach might be called "believing in the Lord at the expense of a genuine encounter of the religions." What we have in mind chiefly are the theological attempts, especially prior to Vatican II, to relate the *individual* non-Christian to Christianity in various "grades" of membership. This was done through the distinction between baptism of water and baptism of desire, and found official recognition in Pope Pius XII's *Mystici corporis* and even some sections of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>29</sup> Although this represents an attempt to give a positive assessment of the non-Christian, it is based on the unhistorical presupposition that "the individual was saved in spite of pagan social environment rather than in any way because of it."<sup>30</sup> This view would make no room for an encounter with the world *religions*, but only for individuals within those various religions. Ultimately, it betrays an insensitivity to man's *historical* nature, which may explain why it was the common Roman Catholic approach to this question. Protestant thinkers such as Troeltsch, Schleiermacher, and H. R. Niebuhr, who faced up to the problems posed for Christianity by historical consciousness much earlier than Catholicism, have more commonly dealt with the question of the relationship

<sup>28</sup> Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici corporis Christi,'" in his *Theological Investigations* 2 (Baltimore, 1963) 1-88; cf. *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 31-37.

<sup>30</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 42; *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 660-668. Cf. Heinz Robert Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions* (New York, 1966).

between Christ and the world *religions*. Further, the Second Vatican Council has gone beyond this approach, chiefly because of a greater sensitivity to the role that historical context plays in man's religious life. In brief, the Council recognized that we must accept the universal availability of saving grace. Realistically, this means that we must accept its availability precisely within the concrete history and religious traditions of the non-Christian.

What has been called the "dialectical" approach among Protestants is closely allied to the above position. This view, espoused in its strongest form by Karl Barth and in a mitigated and more ambiguous form by Paul Tillich,<sup>31</sup> would try to make room for the non-Christian religions by stressing the oppositional or dialectical relationship between Christianity and God's transcendent offer of grace. The latter would transcend Christian boundaries, thus including the non-Christian religions within God's salvific plan. While this view has the advantage of granting some place to the various religions (and not just individuals), it is excessively negative toward all actual concrete and historical religions. The positive nature of the latter is not brought out. Again, I think this is the "catholic" mistake transposed in another form. Ultimately, it too seems to betray an unhistorical view of religion. A historical consciousness, while to some extent critical of the possible conditioning factors of a religion's historicity, would not view the latter in simply a negative light. Rather, a religion's historicity is itself the medium of man's religious experience. It would seem that we can only realistically participate in a genuine encounter of the religions by grasping the positive nature of one another's historical traditions.

A second approach might be called "an encounter of the religions at the expense of belief in the Lord." While the above approach tends to underestimate the historical in religion, this avenue tends to undercut the absolute. Championed chiefly by Troeltsch, this view would relativize all religious claims, and is commonly known as the Liberal Protestant solution to our problem. "All religions strive for the same thing," "Christianity may be a higher form of religion than other religions, but nothing more"—such might be typical assertions of this view.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," in *Church Dogmatics* 1, Part 2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1963) 280-361; Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York, 1963) and "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian," in J. M. Kitagawa, ed., *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* (Chicago, 1967) pp. 241-55. The traditional Protestant emphasis on the transcendent, often to the point of excluding the human in religion, may partly account for these positions. Tillich's special contribution is that of showing to what extent we must include contemporary secularism within the encounter of the world religions.

My basic response to this would be as follows. I have already suggested that the Christian cannot genuinely participate in the new encounter of the religions unless he is willing to grant full significance to the historical (and thus cultural and traditional) elements in the various religions. Now I would suggest that this genuine encounter cannot really occur unless the Christian takes seriously the element of the absolute in the various religions. For not only is Christianity adamant in its assigning a unique and absolute significance to Jesus Christ; the high religions are equally adamant in their acceptance of the absolute. Heiler has described this well:

Above and beneath the colorful world of phenomena is concealed the "true being": *to ontōs on*, as Plato says; the "reality of all realities," "the one without a counterpart" according to the Upanishads; "the eternal truth" in Islamic Sufism. Above all things transient rises the great cosmos, the eternal order, the *Tao* of ancient China, the *ṛtam* of ancient India, the Logos of ancient Greece. This reality is constantly personified in religious imagery as Yahweh, Varuna, Ahura Mazda, Allah, Vishnu, Krishna, Buddha, Kali, Kwan Yin. . . . The personal and rational elements in the concept of God, the "Thou" toward God, however, at no time exhaust the fully transcendent divine reality.<sup>32</sup>

Further, it is because the various religions take the element of the absolute so seriously that any genuine encounter will also have to reckon with differences in the various absolute claims. As Davis puts it, "the great religions are beyond pretence in conflict over the nature of the transcendent and over man and his fulfillment,"<sup>33</sup> Finally and most importantly, the Liberal Protestant solution represented by Troeltsch is closely tied to the relativistic historicism which gave it birth. Any number of recent theological studies have plausibly pointed out the hidden *a priori* against the supernatural involved in that historicism. The position seems to be gaining acceptance among theologians that historicity does not necessarily lead to the denial of the absolute. It rather highlights the long and varied historical road which man travels to reach out to the absolute.

<sup>32</sup> Heiler, *art. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 50. As I will try to show later, however, the insights of Merton and Dunne may be bringing us to a higher viewpoint on this matter. A recent study by Roderick Hindery, "Pluralism in Moral Theology: Reconstructing Universal Ethical Pluralism," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 28 (1973) 78, indicates well the problems for a world dialogue involved in relativism: "relativism blocks interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogues. As a basic rebuttal of a moral point of view, it leaves force or manipulation as the only alternative for solving political and personal differences. . . . Moreover, relativism excuses individual and group egoism and provides a rationale for social non-involvement and toleration of the status quo. In protection of group interests, industrial peoples can relativize values like health and longevity and say of colonial peoples: 'they like dirt and disease and a short life-span, because it is part of their way of life and always has been.'"

What seems to be gaining ground among current writers is a more "synthetic" approach, willing to accept the absolute claims of the various religions and yet not viewing these as obstacles to any genuine encounter. Thinkers such as Rahner, Davis, Dunne, and H. Richard Niebuhr view this as a real possibility. Davis, who is perhaps the best representative of this position, would include the following elements within it.<sup>34</sup> First, he would maintain a belief in Christ's universality and finality, which should be distinguished from Jesus' own time-conditioned teaching and that of faith doctrines about him. Secondly, this would not necessarily imply the denial of a genuine, grace-given faith outside the Christian tradition. Thirdly, this would imply that Christians can learn "religiously" from the other traditions. Fourthly, and what is perhaps most far-reaching in consequences, this would not deny a "providential" place to the non-Christian religions, since, as Davis puts it, "even under the sovereignty of God history is open-ended, offering a manifold of possibilities for actualisation by men."<sup>35</sup> This element shows to what extent this position is thoroughly historically conscious. Fifthly, he would interpret Christianity's mission as one of representation, involving the elements of both service to the world and redemptive suffering on its behalf. Finally, he cautions that while he assigns a positive role to the various religions, this should not be taken to mean that he regards all of them as equally valid or helpful to man. "I see no reason for indiscriminately swallowing all that the various religions offer and every reason for engaging in a careful discussion of the difficult issues they raise."<sup>36</sup>

This synthetic approach seems to offer the greatest possibilities for the encounter of the world religions. It is historically conscious, able to assign a positive place to the various religions, genuinely able to learn from and thus be changed by the various religions, and, at least theoretically, free from Jaspers' worry about ideology. Of necessity, Christian theologians have concentrated, as this position shows, on whether a genuine encounter of the religions is possible at all. What I think merits more consideration is the question of just *how* the Christian might actually participate in this encounter of the religions. Thus, I would broadly like to place this essay's view within this more synthetic approach. What I think still needs to be asked is just what form the Christian's participation in the world encounter might helpfully take. In line with this, I would ultimately like to propose that the Christian's belief in the Christ, rather than being an obstacle to the encounter of the religions, rather furthers and develops that encounter. Just how this might be so will be the subject occupying us now.

<sup>34</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-32.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

## TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN TRANSCULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

*A Transcultural Maturation of Christianity*

Recently, Eugene TeSelle has argued that the universal finality and relevance of Jesus Christ could probably be better attributed to the period following "the triumph of Christianity in Western culture," and that this triumph itself was perhaps projected onto the person of Christ by Christian thinkers.<sup>37</sup> Further, this tendency received its most formidable form from nineteenth-century thinkers (theologians under the influence of Kant and Hegel), from whom it passes into our own times—for example, in Karl Rahner's theory of "anonymous Christianity." What we should notice is that thinkers such as Kant and Hegel stem from periods of intense Western supremacy and imperialism, a not unnormal thing, considering the plurality of world views which became consciously present to the Christian mind at that time. In other words, TeSelle would seem to be arguing that some of the claims made for Jesus are actually projections onto him of a Christian, Western imperialism, and thus examples of the kind of ideology which Jaspers has taught us to expect in an era of planetary intercommunication. I would agree that a case could be made to this effect. Perhaps much of the intense anti-Semitism of our own times stems from this same imperialism. However, I do not think it is the whole truth.

While TeSelle tends to argue that contemporary man's planetary experience and world-consciousness has been an occasion for Christianity to project planetary claims upon the Christ, Rahner would seem to argue from the same planetary experience to more cautious conclusions. In an article on dogma's history, he indicates that the history of Christian thought has two great epochs, "that of the process of the attainment of this full development" through a history of relating with the world to various degrees, "and that of the global dialogue with the entire unified (which does not mean peacefully reconciled) mind of humanity."<sup>38</sup> But most importantly, he thinks that the great lesson Christianity is learning from this experience is not to "project" exaggerated claims upon Christ, but to increasingly discern that "the message of Christianity is not tied to any particular stage or region of man's self-understanding. This meant that the understanding of the faith had to be detached from the mental horizons of Judaism and Hellenism, to become, as it ought to be, a

<sup>37</sup> Eugene TeSelle, *Christ in Context* (Philadelphia, 1975) p. 168. One of the problems throughout this creative work is the tendency not to distinguish the Logos from the human, risen Jesus. As I hope to show, this makes a difference. It leads TeSelle to a questionable interpretation of the Fathers, in my opinion. Further, it seems possible to maintain the open-ended view of history which TeSelle espouses and still maintain Christ's finality, as Davis shows well.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Rahner, "History of Dogma," *Sacramentum mundi* 2 (New York, 1968) 104.

dialogue with the world." Rahner seems to be arguing that the experience of planetization is enabling us to more clearly distinguish the culturally-limiting from the universally significant features of the Christian message. Planetization, in other words, need not be an occasion for fallacious projection onto, but a deeper penetration into, the significance of Jesus Christ.

Following the lead of Rahner, I think it would be worth while to ask if our present planetary experience might not represent an experience for the contemporary Christian which will enable him to grasp perhaps a facet of the reality of Christ unknown to or only vaguely glimpsed by preplanetary man. What this view would presuppose is that we notice how man's normal developmental process has always been an intricate aspect of Christian development too.<sup>39</sup> That is, under the influence of its own current experience, theology may be undergoing a process of sensitization to certain values that hitherto have remained only dimly glimpsed.

The kind of "development" through sensitization that we are suggesting has happened more than once in Christianity's history. For example, we could probably illuminate the Christological claims found only in the *later* strata of the New Testament if we were to view them in the light of what seems to be man's normal process of development. That some kind of development has been at work is clear, given the fact that Jesus himself very probably did not make claims about his own divinity. These claims are only asserted later by the Church. In fact, the biblical scholar Raymond Brown thinks that we can with historical certainty isolate only three New Testament texts which clearly assert Jesus' divinity: Heb 1:8-9; Jn 1:1, 20:28.<sup>40</sup> A common explanation of this development is to say that what is at work here is the Hellenization of the Christ, a projection onto Christ of Hellenic and ontic categories. There can, of course, be no doubt that Hellenic influences are at work, especially through supplying more "ontological" categories and nuances to the early Christian thinkers. But what also needs to be kept in mind is the profound alteration that early Christianity made of that same Hellenic thought, by rejecting dualism, polytheism, emanationism, and Stoicism. It is not emanationism, with its implied antimaterialism, that

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," in C. M. Beck *et al.*, eds., *Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (New York, 1971) pp. 23-92, for the kind of development I have in mind. For a theological application, with important nuances, see Peter Chirico, "Is There a Specific Christian Morality?" *Ecumenist* 13 (1975) 22-26.

<sup>40</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?," in his *Jesus: God and Man* (Milwaukee, 1967) pp. 1-38, esp. 33-38, where he explains this slow development as partially due to the predominant Jewish identification between "God" and "Yahweh." This chapter was first published in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 26 (1965) 545-73.



John's Gospel espouses, but incarnation.<sup>41</sup> Thus, in addition to Hellenic influence, another kind of development is at work, and I personally think that this development occurred in the early Christians themselves, through their own natural maturation and increasing ability to ask ever more basic and ultimate questions about the Christ. Reginald Fuller has this in mind:

It may, of course, be argued that this ontic language is merely the translation into Greek terms (and mythological terms at that) of what the earlier functional Christologies were affirming. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. For it is not just a quirk of the Greek mind, but a universal human apperception, that action implies prior being—even if, as is also true, being is only apprehended in action.<sup>42</sup>

What Fuller is pointing to is a development in the experience of the disciples themselves, a development sensitizing them to facets of the Christ hitherto unknown. This kind of development is not the same as the "scholastic logical type from the implicit to the explicit." It represents not simply logical deduction but *human* development. As such, it is as open-ended, precarious, and contingent as man himself. It emanates from development in human experience and understanding, and while it may make use of logic, its basis is a maturation in experience. But given such a maturation, it is not surprising to see the later disciples making statements that even the Christ did not, or perhaps could not, make.

More contemporary examples of the same kind of development can be discerned in the theology of our own times. In grappling with the issues of human historicity and freedom since the Enlightenment, theologians, precisely under the influence of this experience, have been sensitized to features of the Christian message hitherto unclearly known. Thus, whereas previous ages could not grasp the contradiction between the universal commandment of love and the institution of slavery, our age can. Whereas previous ages thought that to admit history's open-endedness would involve a denial of God's providential control of the universe, our age sees little difficulty here. Examples could be multiplied, but what they clearly show is the profound manner in which man's current experience sensitizes him and enables him to grasp aspects of reality hitherto unknown. Vatican II seems to point this out: "the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. . . . Hence we can already

<sup>41</sup> For a critique of the Hellenization theory, cf. Floyd V. Filson, *The New Testament against Its Environment* (London, 1950); more recently, Gerald O'Collins, *The Case against Dogma* (New York, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York, 1965) p. 248.

speak of a true social and cultural transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well."<sup>43</sup>

I would propose, then, that our contemporary experience of planetization represents a new experience for Christianity. As Jaspers puts it, what is decisively new is the real unity of man. I would further propose that this new experience is contributing to a sensitization in the contemporary Christian. One could almost say a new "universalized" consciousness is being developed, insofar as this new experience is qualitatively altering the contemporary Christian's way of perceiving himself and his faith. And I would further propose that this new experience represents a plus for Christianity, insofar as it seems to be the catalyst for a more profound understanding of our belief in the Christ himself. Like TeSelle, I would agree that our new planetary experience can lead to ideology in our view of the Christ. Unlike him, I also believe that it occasions a more profound penetration of the Christ.

*Dunne and Merton on a Transcultural Consciousness*

First, then, our contemporary experience of planetization, while it is the cause of great world disorder and religious and political ideology, is also the basis for a fundamental maturing of the contemporary Christian's consciousness. Certain forerunners, in whom I would say the experience of planetization has been healthily integrated, have indicated the general features of this new development in the Christian consciousness. The rest of us, unfortunately, would seem, to borrow a Greeley image, to be in the "twilight" stage: the contours of what we are experiencing are neither black as at night nor white and clear as during the day; rich in possibilities, but obscure and confusing, the multifaceted richness blocking us from a clear perception of what might eventually ensue.

Among such forerunners I would clearly place John Dunne.<sup>44</sup> He speaks of the emergence in our times of a "collective mind," and I think this is the kind of consciousness or quality of consciousness being developed—or being feared—through our planetary experience. Briefly, such a consciousness characterizes Dunne's "historic" man, the man who creatively participates in the issues that are of truly historic significance to man. Historic because they are the historically recurring and enduring issues that *all* men must face: life's meaning, human destiny, evil, and death. These are the kinds of issues which the great religions seek to face, which accounts for their enduring quality and perennial relevance to man. Dunne puts it interestingly: "The difference between a civilization

<sup>43</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 202.

<sup>44</sup> Dunne, esp. chap. 5, "A Map of Time," pp. 135-56. Dunne relies on Jaspers and Lonergan in many sections of this work.

and a religion is that a religion is capable of engaging the whole heart, the whole mind, and the whole soul of man, while a civilization, as its decline and fall testifies, is not."<sup>45</sup> The quality of the historic man is precisely that of an "expanded" consciousness, one not tied to issues of simply immediate interest, like the child; nor simply to those which lie on the level of one's own life taken as a whole, like the youth. The problem for historic man, Dunne says, "lies on a level which reaches beyond the self and its life to other persons and other lives."<sup>46</sup> Although one could make a case for the existence of "historic men" in previous ages, today's planetary experience is qualitatively altering the historic man into a "world-historic" man, someone who *consciously* knows he is participating in the historic issues of mankind. Dunne's over-all view of the "collective mind" this experience is developing is as follows:

What the collective mind would be like can be seen in the experience of passing over, in the experience of having entered by sympathy and understanding into the life and way of life of another. The other half of the process, nevertheless, the coming back to one's own life and one's own way of life, indicates that the individual returns to himself. In the moment of passing over there is "no self" (*anatta*), as in Buddhism, or a universal self (*atman*), as in Hinduism; in the moment of coming back, however, there is a self as in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The end of the process of becoming, therefore, the end of life and the end of time, is both self and no self, both an individual and a universal self. Or, as a Buddhist wisdom book might say, it is neither self nor no self, neither an individual nor a universal self.<sup>47</sup>

Thomas Merton, writing essentially of the same phenomenon as Dunne, adds some important nuances to this "collective mind."<sup>48</sup> Writing from his vast experience with both the wisdom of the East and the Christian mystical tradition, he proposes that man's final goal—that which gives birth to "final integration"—is not a limited state of health stemming from usefully adapting to any particular society's expectations, but a matured and *transcultural* psyche. The difficulty with simply adapting to society—even though it can result in a useful and productive life—is that it "always implies partiality and compromise," especially if one's society is characterized by an "overemphasis on cerebral, competitive, acquisitive forms of ego-formation."<sup>49</sup> Maturing from cultural adaptation to final integration will inevitably cause anxiety, frustration, and terrible suffering, but this would be a healthy form of suffering and a

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Merton, "Final Integration: Toward a 'Monastic Therapy,'" in *Contemplation in a World of Action* (New York, 1973) pp. 219-31.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225, 222.

necessary condition for entry into a more complete, transcultural identity. Here is Merton's description of the man of final integration:

He is in a certain sense "cosmic" and "universal man." He has attained a deeper, fuller identity than that of his limited ego-self which is only a fragment of his being.

The man who has attained final integration is no longer limited by the culture in which he has grown up. . . . He accepts not only his own community, his own society, his own friends, his own culture, but all mankind. He does not remain bound to one limited set of values in such a way that he opposes them aggressively or defensively to others. He is fully "Catholic" in the best sense of the word. He has a unified vision and experience of the one truth shining out in all its various manifestations, some clearer than others, some more definite and more certain than others. He does not set these partial views up in opposition to each other, but unifies them in a dialectic or an insight of complementarity. With this view of life he is able to bring perspective, liberty and spontaneity into the lives of others. The finally integrated man is a peacemaker, and that is why there is such a desperate need for our leaders to become such men of insight.<sup>50</sup>

What I found especially valuable in Merton, and a necessary clarification of Dunne, is his emphasis upon the acquisition of a transcultural identity, an identity capable of perspectivizing, appreciating, and thus discerning the true but partial values inherent in every culture. He thus shows that the collective or transcultural mind is no mere syncretistic mind. In this way he offers us a way of carrying out Davis' program of not "swallowing" everything that the various religions have to teach. Further, in endeavoring to understand both Dunne and Merton, it would be a mistake to view their notions in a "quantitative" manner, as if the finally integrated man knew all the values inherent in every culture. Both seem to be speaking qualitatively. They have in mind the emergence of a man of sufficient inner calm and personal and cultural detachment that he is *capable* of recognizing the genuine values present in every person and every culture. Such an individual is able to become truly transcultural through the experience of our contemporary planetary world.

#### *A Transcultural Interpretation of Christ*

Secondly, as the contemporary Christian's consciousness develops in the above transcultural manner, the possibility emerges of grasping more fully what it means to profess belief in the risen Christ. What we need to remember at this point is our developmental principle, according to which a development in the Christian's experience can sensitize him and,

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-26.

at least in certain cases, enable him to grasp aspects of his own faith hitherto unknown. What I think is at work in our specific case is this: *a transcultural consciousness is capable of grasping the transcultural meaning of the risen Christ*. Merton himself hints at this:

For a Christian, a transcultural integration is eschatological. . . . It means a disintegration of the social and cultural self, the product of merely human history, and the reintegration of that self in Christ, in salvation history, in the mystery of redemption, in the Pentecostal "new creation."<sup>51</sup>

If this were to be true, then the Christian profession of belief in the risen Christ, rather than being an obstacle in the encounter of the world religions, becomes itself a means of furthering that very encounter.

It is my own belief that this deepened understanding of the Christ is provocatively rich in its possibilities for the encounter of the world religions, and marks a decisive—to use Jaspers' term, an "axial"—understanding of the Christ. It clearly marks an advance beyond the tradition's tendency to speak of the risen Christ in terms of "fulfilment" and "imperial" language; for example, Christ the *Pantokrator*. While this may have been a genuine attempt, stimulated by the cultural experience of the early Church, to grasp the meaning of the risen Christ, we know all too well, especially through Hans Schmidt's perceptive study,<sup>52</sup> how much this owes to the Roman-Byzantine court, and also how much it furthered the kind of Christian imperialism of which TeSelle warns us. Further, this transcultural view also marks an advance beyond, or at least an important qualification of, perhaps the most creative attempt to understand the world religions. I have in mind Rahner's theory of anonymous Christianity.<sup>53</sup> For if belief in the risen Christ truly entails the development of a transcultural consciousness, then it means not simply that the Christian expresses what is only "implicit" among the non-Christians, but that Christianity itself will only discover the richness of its own faith through a transcultural encounter. Finally, I think this view of the Christ makes a real contribution to the kind of encounter that thinkers such as Niebuhr and Davis have tried to further. If I may put it this way, in reference to Davis, it is not simply the case that we can assign a providential place to the world religions because "even under the sovereignty of God history is open-ended, offering a manifold of possibilities for actualisation by men." It is rather, or more strongly, that precisely through our encounter with the world religions

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Schmidt, "Politics and Christology: The Historical Background," *Concilium* 36 (1968) 72-84.

<sup>53</sup> Cf., for the relevant Rahnerian texts, Anita Röper, *The Anonymous Christian* (New York, 1966).

and systems of thought will Christians be able to discover what is entailed in belief in the risen Christ.

Unfortunately, Merton's intuitions about the transcultural implications of belief in the risen Christ seem somewhat ahead of contemporary theology's probings of the risen Christ. Although, for example, Gregory of Nyssa seems to have developed a rich theology of the Risen One,<sup>54</sup> the Fathers generally concentrated on the Incarnation for their Christology. Besides, we cannot expect that the Fathers would have worked out a transcultural Christology in a preplanetary age. Later Protestant theology has generally concentrated upon a *theologia crucis*, while Catholic theology since Trent has emphasized the aspect of merit implied in Christ's death. When the Resurrection was treated, it was generally seen in an extrinsicist manner, as the event which "vindicated" Jesus, rather than as an event which marked a decisive development in his very being.<sup>55</sup> Contemporary theologians writing on the Resurrection have concentrated on deciphering the complex factual issues involved, and its theological meaning has received much less attention. Part of the current difficulty, of course, is the seeming a priori against the supernatural stemming from the Enlightenment. This has forced theologians and exegetes to concentrate not on the Resurrection's meaning but on its facticity. However, it seems to me that if we are ever to credibly explain the imperative of developing a transcultural consciousness to our Christian people, we will need to ground such a thing in Christology. Some probings have already been made, and I would like to sketch some of the aspects which seem to be involved.<sup>56</sup>

That believing in the risen Christ ultimately entails the development

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Herbert Musurillo, ed., *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* (New York, 1961), with an important introduction by Jean Daniélou.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Bruce Vawter, "Resurrection and Redemption," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953) 11-23.

<sup>56</sup> Works that seem particularly helpful are: Gerald O'Collins, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Valley Forge, 1973); Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York, 1961); "Resurrection," *Sacramentum mundi* 5 (New York, 1970) 323-42; "Experiencing Easter," *Theological Investigations* 7 (New York, 1971) 159-68; "The Position of Christology in the Church between Exegesis and Dogmatics," *Theological Investigations* 11 (New York, 1974) 206-14; Edouard Pousset, "La résurrection," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 91 (1969) 1009-44; "Croire en la résurrection," *ibid.* 96 (1974) 147-66, 366-88. As regards the factual aspects of this complex issue, I would maintain the following: (1) The biblical texts, although articulating a reality, stem from differing traditions and cannot be harmonized. (2) We need to avoid an excessively "spiritualist" interpretation of the appearances, for the biblical data cannot be reduced to an entirely subjective experience of the disciples. (3) We equally need to avoid a simple "literalist" interpretation, for the texts are describing an experience which transcends human comprehension, Cf. X. Leon-Dufour, "The Appearances of the Risen Lord and Hermeneutics," in P. De Surgy, ed., *The Resurrection and Modern Biblical Thought* (New York, 1970) p. 125.

of a transcultural consciousness would seem to follow only if Christ himself became transcultural through his resurrection experience. While the biblical authors, especially Paul, would not have fully grasped this in a preplanetary age, that would not seem to annul the possibility of our doing so. This would be an example of the kind of experiential development spoken of earlier.

One of the aspects of the biblical presentation of the risen Lord most suggestive of a transcultural interpretation is the fact that Jesus' resurrection is never identified with the resuscitation of a corpse (as, for example, in Lazarus' case; cf. Jn 11:1-44). A number of factors indicate this. None of the Gospels actually describes the Resurrection, as John describes Lazarus' raising. Jesus, in fact, is unrecognizable (cf., for example, Lk 24:16), and a great deal of discernment is required before he can be known. Lazarus, on the other hand, is easily recognizable. Further, the resurrection texts allude to the biblical "third day" motif (Hos 6:1; Gn 22:4, 42:18; Ex 19:11, 16), which is suggestive of some new and decisive change in Jesus' life, as it was in salvation history. One of the ways in which we can make sense of these data is to view Jesus' resurrection precisely not as a return back to life *as we know it*, but the entry into a qualitatively new mode of being. Thomas Aquinas seems to have had something similar in mind: "Christus resurgens non rediit ad vitam communiter omnibus notam, sed ad vitam quandam immortalem et Deo conformem."<sup>57</sup> Gerald O'Collins tends to confirm this through his view that the exaltation Christology, found, for example, in Philippians, may stem from a different tradition than that of the Resurrection texts. This "exaltation tradition" grasped that "the Resurrection was no return to earthly life and transcended any mere resuscitation of a corpse."<sup>58</sup>

Why was Jesus "different"? That seems to be the basic question put to us by the Resurrection texts. A possible way to answer this is, with Merton, to view Jesus' resurrection as the event in which Christ became the "finally integrated" man. The biblical texts themselves suggest this kind of interpretation. Luke, for example, with his Jerusalem motif, seems to present Jesus' death as a culminating, not a terminating, experience (Lk 24:47). John's notion of "the hour" (Jn 17:1) is very similar in its meaning. Jesus' death seems to lead, not to destruction or termination, but to what could be called a "final integration." Final integration because the *wholeness* of Jesus' person came to actuality through that death. This view would require, of course, that we attempt to see death not simply as a destructive reality but as an expansive one, made such through a final and decisive surrender to our destiny in God.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 3, 55, 2. Cf. Gerald O'Collins. "Thomas Aquinas and Christ's Resurrection," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 31 (1970) 512-22.

<sup>58</sup> O'Collins, *The Resurrection*, p. 52; cf. pp. 46-53.

From a Christian perspective, this makes good sense. If man is indeed destined for the Unlimited God, death, as the final moment of openness to the Unlimited, could be viewed as an expansive experience, rendering us radically "open." This is perhaps why the biblical texts speak of Jesus' death and resurrection as a "universalizing" experience, leading not to an absence from the world, but rather a participation in God's universal presence within it. As Jn 12:32 puts it, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself."<sup>59</sup>

From the above perspective, then, Jesus could be said to be the paradigm of the finally integrated man. This need not jeopardize his divinity; it rather points to what the Divine can do for man. It further clarifies why Jesus is considered by Christians *the* revelation of God, for the finally integrated and whole man is precisely the most complete way in which God could possibly reveal himself to man in *human* terms. But, for our theme, what is most important is that professing belief in the risen Lord would then entail a belief in a universalized, and thus transcultural, Jesus.

D. E. H. Whiteley, in a perceptive study of Paul, indicates to us that the biblical manner of speaking of the universalized Jesus is the phrase "Jesus is Lord" (cf., for example, Rom 10:9).<sup>60</sup> In Hellenistic usage the term "Lord" would normally refer to an individual, not as isolated from others but as related to others, by way of some kind of mastery over them. This term was probably preferred by Paul, rather than "God," since it did not infringe on monotheism but rather associated Christ with his Father's own authority over men. While Paul's use of the term indicates that the risen Christ exists in a universal relationship with men, the connotations of "mastery" indicate that Paul had not broken through to a fully transcultural understanding of the Christ. Nor should we have expected him to in a pretranscultural age. From a transcultural perspective, confessing "Jesus is Lord" would not so much indicate that he is man's "master" as that he becomes Merton's "cosmic" and "universal man": "He is in a certain sense identified with everybody: or in the familiar language of the New Testament, he is 'all things to all

<sup>59</sup> This is how Rahner interprets the matter: "because death in some way opens to man the real ontological relationship of his soul to the world as a whole, it is through his death that man in some way introduces as his contribution the result of his life into the radical real ground of the unity of the world. Applying this hypothesis of the metaphysical anthropology of death to the death of Christ, we must say that through Christ's death, his spiritual reality, which he possessed from the beginning, enacted in his life, and brought to consummation in his death, becomes open to the whole world and is inserted into this whole world in its ground as a permanent determination of a real ontological kind" (*On the Theology of Death*, p. 63).

<sup>60</sup> D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Philadelphia, 1972) pp. 99-123.



men.'"<sup>61</sup> If this is correct—I do not by any means think that it expresses the fulness of Christology—then belief in the risen Christ would ultimately seem to entail transcultural implications. Personally, I think that the best candidates for expressing these implications are Dunne's "collective mind" and Merton's "finally integrated man." In short, seriously professing belief in the risen Lord would entail the necessity of developing a transcultural consciousness.

In summary, then, *the first element that our contemporary transcultural experience is teaching us about our faith is that the risen Lord needs to be understood in a transcultural manner.* When we profess belief in a risen Christ, we are professing belief in final integration as the ultimate revelation of our faith. Through the final universalizing experience of his death and resurrection, Jesus became what Merton calls the "universal man," no longer subject to personal and cultural partiality and compromise, but "in a certain sense identified with everybody." If you will, it was at his death that Jesus became a "Catholic" in the most profound sense of that word: the final and decisive death to personal and cultural partiality. Perhaps we can see this transcultural aspect of Jesus in the transition which occurs in Matthew's Gospel. In Mt 10:15 we read: "These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'" The emphasis is clearly upon the historical and culturally limited Jesus. The transition to the risen Jesus, expressed in Mt 28:19-20, brings out more clearly the universal and transcultural dimension of the Christ: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." If this transcultural interpretation is correct, it means that all genuine values found anywhere possess saving significance for the Christian.

*The second element that our transcultural experience is teaching us is that not only must we understand Christ in a new way; we must also understand ourselves in a new way by grasping the transcultural dimension of our own profession of faith.* For only a man who authentically strives to transcend all personal and cultural partiality and compromise can understand, and witness to, his belief in the transcultural implications of the risen Lord. Ultimately, this simply means that believing in the risen Lord means attempting to be "Catholic." Not, of course, in the limited sense which the word carries when "being Catholic" is identified with a partial cultural manner of living the

<sup>61</sup> Merton, *art. cit.*, p. 225.

Catholic faith. That interpretation of "Catholic" was normal enough when Christiãnity aligned itself with the Western culture from the time of Constantine on. The kind of "Catholic" we have in mind is one who, according to Merton, "does not remain bound to one limited set of values in such a way that he opposes them aggressively or defensively to others. . . ." But neither does this Catholic swallow anything that any religion or system of thought has to offer. He recognizes the partiality of every view, not setting them up in opposition to each other, but, as Merton indicates, unifying "them in a dialectic or an insight of complementarity." Or, as Dunne would have it, he "passes over" to the partial values of others, becoming a "no self" or a "universal self," not so as to uncritically swallow everything but to "come back," having gleaned the values which truly enrich and render him a more integrated "self." From a traditional theological point of view, this perhaps enables us to see why the "communion of saints" is implied in belief in the risen Lord. Insofar as the Resurrection is a summons to final integration and transcultural appreciation, it entails a belief in that suppression of all partiality and compromise characterized by the communion of saints.<sup>62</sup>

What must not be overlooked, however, is that Christians cannot create a transcultural consciousness simply by fiat. It would be a fatal mistake for Christians to notionally think that their belief in the risen Lord makes room for transcultural values, and then to continue on with their narrow and provincial lives. If our historical consciousness has taught us anything, it is that man truly learns and transforms himself from his actual historical experience. A child's consciousness is narrow and partial, because his experience is narrow and partial. As Dunne likes to point out, the child lives "on the level of the here and now."<sup>63</sup> If what counts as an ultimate value for a child is immediate gratification, it is not because he is evil, but because his experience is largely limited to the immediate. Similarly, the youth's consciousness is only slightly less partial and narrow, not because he too is simply egocentric, but because his experience has not yet widened to the point of being able to grasp values which transcend one's very own self. The key is experience, and the desire to both widen and learn from that experience. Dunne's historic man focuses on problems which "reach beyond the self and its life to other persons and other lives" because his experience has brought him there. Just as one becomes "historic" when one experiences and participates in the historic issues of man, so one will only develop a transcultural consciousness through actually experiencing the transcul-

<sup>62</sup> Such might be a transcultural interpretation of this belief which, as far as I can tell, does justice to the data involved. Cf. Stephen Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum communio* (London, 1964).

<sup>63</sup> Dunne, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47, 144-47, 204-5, for this section.

tural. This would seem to mean, then, that an active participation in and serious commitment to the encounter of the world religions is no longer a secondary matter for Christianity. The authenticity of its very own witness to the risen Christ is intimately bound up with the way in which it relates to the unified world. Planetization, if you will, is *the* contemporary test of our belief in the Risen One.

As Jaspers and Dunne both point out, we Christians are now in the process of experiencing transculturalization. The two world wars clearly prove the fact for the world as a whole. Its manifestation in the Christian churches is the breakdown of "Christendom," the slow and painful detachment from a Church of simply a Western and European culture. Rahner has perceptively noticed this:

The often lamented decline of Christian ways and faith is not the work or effect of sinister forces nor even primarily a decline of really necessary, saving faith. . . . It is simply the disappearance of the precondition of that very special kind of faith and Christianity, by no means identical with the essence of faith and Christianity, which was involved in social conditions which are now disappearing.<sup>64</sup>

In other words, contemporary Christianity is being universalized and transculturalized, and this in direct proportion to its ability to detach itself from a simple identification between Christendom and Christianity. What needs emphasizing is the word "detachment." Just as we cannot create a transcultural consciousness by mere fiat, so we cannot do so without great cost to ourselves. Merton indicated that a sign within the individual of the passage from simply cultural adaptation to final integration is anxiety. So too, then, we should expect a similar anxiety to manifest itself in the Church as a whole, throughout the difficult process of detachment.<sup>65</sup> It is not difficult to isolate what forms this detachment will take. Segundo has given us an excellent analysis.<sup>66</sup> Detachment, first, from the sociological phenomenon of Christendom and its identification of the Western culture with Christianity. With this goes an inevitable tendency to stress Western cultural stability, which simply stresses the preservation of a hereditary faith at the expense of the kind of transformation required by our planetary situation. Detachment, secondly, from a conception of the faith which simply stresses unanimity of thought and expression, meaning by this the inherited forms of Christendom. Detachment, finally, from our all too natural defense mechanisms, in the face of the development we are being asked to undergo: the feeling of being threatened by our ecclesial situation, the

<sup>64</sup> Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> For an interesting analysis of the role of detachment in our planetary situation, see Wilfrid Desan, *The Planetary Man* (New York, 1972) pp. 143-51.

<sup>66</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community Called Church* (New York, 1973) pp. 44-49.

yearning for the better times prior to Vatican II, the desire for certitude at the expense of a serious dialogue with the world, intolerance, etc.

*The final element that our transcultural experience is teaching us about our faith is that our belief in the risen Lord, rather than being a hindrance, is itself creative of the encounter with the world religions and systems of thought.* For, if that belief ultimately entails the transcultural consciousness we have been describing, then that belief itself can aid man in turning his experience of planetization in more positive directions. What we can usefully remember is that belief itself is not simply the result of convictions already well formed, but itself creates those convictions. The more a belief in the risen Lord becomes the center of Christianity, the more that belief itself should universalize the Christian consciousness—the more, that is, the Christian himself should participate in that paschal mystery of death to one's narrow and compromising horizons and resurrection to wider and more universal horizons.

### *Conclusions*

In conclusion, we might usefully remind ourselves of a tradition within the Christian mystical literature, of which William Johnston has recently reminded us.<sup>67</sup> He indicates that the Church Fathers loved to quote Jn 16:7: "It is to your advantage that I go away." Johnston's understanding of the patristic exegesis was that Jesus himself wanted to liberate his disciples from an excessive and possessive attachment to him. Johnston's comment is quite instructive: "They might well have added that in all friendship separation plays an important role in leading friends away from absorption to an even greater universality." In other words, the risen, universal Lord himself leads us to a greater participation in his own universality, beyond absorption, possessiveness, partiality, and compromise. Along this same line, Johnston cites a favorite text from the twelfth-century Aelred of Rievaulx. It has become a favorite text of mine, too, precisely because of my own attempt to grapple with planetization. Unlike Johnston, however, I shall not disappoint the reader by not quoting it in full. In his discussion on the nature of friendship, Aelred says:

. . . there is prayer for one another, which, coming from a friend, is the more efficacious in proportion as it is more lovingly sent to God, with tears which either fear excites or affection awakens or sorrow evokes. And thus a friend praying to Christ on behalf of his friend, and for his friend's sake desiring to be heard by Christ, directs his attention with love and longing to Christ; then it sometimes happens that quickly and imperceptibly the one love passes over into the other,

<sup>67</sup> William Johnston, *Silent Music: The Science of Meditation* (New York, 1974) pp. 160-65.

and coming, as it were, into close contact with the sweetness of Christ himself, the friend begins to taste his sweetness and to experience his charm. Thus ascending from that holy love with which he embraces a friend to that with which he embraces Christ, he will joyfully partake in abundance of the spiritual fruit of friendship, awaiting the fullness of all things in the life to come. Then with the dispelling of all anxiety by reason of which we now fear and are solicitous for one another, with the removal of all adversity which it now behooves us to bear for one another, and, above all, with the destruction of the sting of death together with death itself, whose pangs now often trouble us and force us to grieve for one another, with salvation secured, we shall rejoice in the eternal possession of Supreme Goodness; and this friendship, to which here we admit but few, will be outpoured upon all and by all outpoured upon God, and God shall be all in all.<sup>68</sup>

Aelred's point, as Johnston indicates, is not that the friend disappears as we grow in our friendship with Christ, nor that the friend is a mere "means" to a supposedly better friendship with Christ. What is rather meant is that the risen, universal Christ universalizes the love of friendship, increasingly away from possessiveness, absorption, partiality, and compromise. As Johnston puts it, "In true friendship . . . we find a movement away from absorption towards universality, away from self-centeredness towards cosmification."<sup>69</sup> This movement—away from self-centeredness to cosmification—is precisely what we mean by the development of a transcultural consciousness.

<sup>68</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *On Spiritual Friendship* (Cistercian Fathers Series 5; Washington, D.C., 1974) pp. 131-32.

<sup>69</sup> Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 160.