

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE MYSTICS

GEORGE H. TAVARD

Methodist School of Theology in Ohio

THE CHRISTOLOGY of the Catholic mystics through the ages has been notoriously neglected as a source of doctrinal tradition by the many authors who have recently focused attention on Christology. Modern New Testament scholarship has dominated the historical background. The contemporary concerns for humanity itself have made anthropology a central theme, so that the humanity of Jesus has been chiefly explored. The social context of the theologies of liberation has provided new points of view in regard to the functions and the mission of Jesus, which now tends to be seen more as liberation than as reconciliation. Even the problems of theological language, brought to light by the linguistic researches of Wittgenstein, have contributed new accents to Christology.¹ But rare seems to be the author who regards the witness of the mystics as a valid and valuable source for the exploration of Christ as the center of a permanently contemporary experience. Indeed, the thesis of Dietrich Ritschl, that the proper context for theological reflection should be the contemporary experience of *Christus praesens*, has found little echo.² The presence of Christ has been seen, in recent Christologies, as a presence in society, a social presence, rather than as a presence within the self, a spiritual presence apprehended in the inner life.³

The balance needs to be corrected. As a modest contribution to this, I intend to survey the centrality of Christ in mystical experience, as this may be illustrated from medieval and post-Reformation Catholic mysticism. Rather than patristic sources, I have selected the Middle Ages and the early Counter Reformation simply because I know these better.

Medieval piety is Christocentric. This is true for all periods of the

¹ I have in mind here the "man-for-others" Christologies, e.g., Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York, 1968), and John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia, 1973).

² Dietrich Ritschl, *Memory and Hope* (New York, 1967). It was unfortunate that this remarkable book came out at the same time as Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* (New York, 1967); it was neglected by critics and reviewers, although its theology of hope was just as emphatic as, and better balanced than, that of Moltmann; its Christology was richer than that which Moltmann explained in *The Crucified God* (New York, 1974).

³ This is particularly true of some of the Christologies of liberation, e.g., José Miranda, *Marx and the Bible* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1974); *Being and the Messiah* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1977). In *Jesus Christ Liberator* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1978), Leonardo Boff investigates "ways in which the Resurrected Christ is present today" (208-25); but this presence of Christ seems always to be in others, never in oneself. This is fairly typical of a basic orientation of liberation theologies.

Middle Ages.⁴ Yet the meaning of this focus and its style evolve together with the pictures of Christ which dominate theology and art. The Christ of the monastic age corresponds to the Romanesque taste, the Christ of the friars to that of the Gothic artists. The former highlights the divinity of Christ present in the flesh or, reversely, the humanity of Christ transfigured by his divinity; the latter stresses the humanity of Jesus in its humiliated and suffering state. In terms of piety, the former leads to adoration and participation, the latter to identification and imitation. Yet these orientations stand in contrast, not in contradiction. They are not mutually exclusive, though they highlight significant priorities.

I

Already at the dawn of the Carolingian period, the monk Ambrosius Autpertus (8th c.) unites the transcendence of the divine condition of Christ and the humility of his human condition:

Thus, supreme Father, the supreme Son, always born to you according to the nature, strength, essence, greatness, and power of his divinity, was entire with men on earth and entire also with you in heaven when he said: "No one has ascended to heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven." Permanently remaining what he was with you, he emptied himself, taking the form of the servant, made in the likeness of men and looking like man; he humbled himself, being obedient unto death, the death of the cross.⁵

No period of the Middle Ages neglected either of these aspects; yet one may look at them successively. The first half of the Middle Ages pays more attention to the divinity of the Lord. Monks and scholars are persuaded that, in their spiritual sense, both the Old and the New Testament speak of Christ. How would this be possible unless Christ radically transcended the conditions of time and space under which he lived his earthly life? The Christ who is thus unveiled in the monastic *lectio divina* is the Christ of glory whose image radiates in the church buildings of the times. Thus Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1129), in the thirteen books of his monumental *De victoria Dei Verbi*, studies the victories of the Word of God in the Old Testament (Books 1-10) and the New (Books 11-13). The testing of Christ in the temptations and the Passion (Book 12) itself enhances the greatness of his victory. As is well known, Rupert identified the victory of Christ as the very purpose of

⁴ I am aware of the inadequacy of the expression "Middle Ages," as demonstrated by Régine Pernoud, *Pour en finir avec le moyen âge* (Paris, 1977), but we have as yet no other suitable phrase.

⁵ *Oratio in partes divisa*, in Jacques Winandy, *Ambroise Autpert, moine et théologien* (Paris, 1953) 108.

creation. For the divine benevolence wanted,

out of the poor and abject matter of earth, to create a glorious creature similar to angelic light, and to one person out of the multitude of this creature to give the power, the glory, and the kingdom; and this creature would have no less than the Creator of all things Himself has and would obtain the whole empire of this *respublica*.⁶

The summit of contemplation is identified with the experience of Mount Tabor, where the humanity of Jesus is perceived as transfigured by the radiance of his divinity. So does Richard of St. Victor describe "the heights of knowledge" in chapters 78–82 of *Benjamin minor*.⁷ The humanity of Jesus is the way to the summit, where it also dwells.

At the first degree of charity the soul is led into the wilderness in a spiritual exodus: "In this state the soul can feel her beloved but she cannot see him." At the second the "inaccessible light may be seen but not reached." At the third "the mind of man is ravished into the abyss of divine light so that the soul, having forgotten all outward things, is altogether unaware of itself and passes completely into its God."⁸ Then the soul has access to the fourth degree of love, where, being totally united to Christ, she also participates in his sufferings: "This is the form of the humility of Christ to which everyman must conform himself if he desires to attain the highest degree of perfect charity."⁹ At the third degree the soul is glorified; at the fourth she is humbled for Christ's sake. At the third she is conformed to the divine light; at the fourth she is conformed to the humility of Christ. And though at the third she is in a way almost in the likeness of God, nevertheless at the fourth she begins to empty herself, taking the form of the servant, and begins to be found in the fashion of man. At the third degree she is, as it were, put to death in God; at the fourth she is raised in Christ.¹⁰

Others insist more on the transitory aspect of the humanity of Jesus. William of St. Thierry (1080–1148) sees its function as temporary. The faithful are drawn to it by love in the earlier stages of contemplation. But the *noli me tangere* of Jn 20:17 is addressed to them; then they should seek to enter the heart—that is, the divinity—of Jesus; they should abandon all images, including that of the humanity of Jesus, and desire to know God in spirit and in truth, in order to pray, at the summit, to God as God.¹¹ Pilgrims toward the fullest union with God must be made

⁶ *De victoria Dei Verbi* 2, 5.

⁷ Clare Kirchberger, ed., *Richard of St Victor: Selected Writings on Contemplation* (New York, 1955) 116–22.

⁸ *Of the Four Degrees of Passionate Charity* (Kirchberger 225, 227).

⁹ *Ibid.* 228.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 230.

¹¹ *On Contemplating God (The Works of William of St Thierry 1* [Cistercian Fathers Series 3; Spencer, Mass., 1970] 38–40).

to conform to the image of the suffering Christ, for the sufferings of Christ lead to his recovered glory.

With St. Bernard (1090–1153) devotion to the humanity of Jesus acquires further importance, although the great Cistercian remains primarily oriented toward the divinity, which is both veiled and vehicled by his humanity. His *Sermons on the Song of Songs* constitute an encomium to the humanity of Christ, which alone is “kissed with the mouth of God.” On Jesus “uniquely and in one sole instant the mouth of the Word was pressed, when the fulness of the divinity yielded itself to him as the life of his body.”¹² By effecting our salvation, the Incarnation allows us to desire the kiss of the mouth of God. This kiss is Jesus in his humanity. “Therefore I ask him what I ask neither man nor angel: that he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.”¹³ Jesus alone, as the kiss of the mouth of God, is the channel of the divinity for our salvation and sanctification. The purpose of the Incarnation was precisely to draw sinful man, through the allurements of the humanity of Jesus, along the scale of love, so that, attracted to Christ the man by “physical” love, the faithful may eventually reach him, the kiss of the mouth of God, in perfect, spiritual love.

Yet this was not the only effect or purpose of the Incarnation. In *De gradibus humilitatis* Bernard adds that the Word wanted Himself to experience the human misery which He already knew by divine knowledge. He wanted to share humanity. Thus the Incarnation acquires the aspect of a self-humbling of God. This self-emptying goes as far as death on the cross. God could “have restored His original design without all that hardship,” yet “He chose the way of personal suffering” in order to urge us to greater love: “The immense sacrifice he has made for you, o man, is clearer than the light of day. He who was Lord became a slave; he who was rich became a pauper; the Word was made flesh; and the Son of God did not disdain to become son of man.”¹⁴ This justifies devotion to the humbler aspects of Jesus’ life, the infancy and the sufferings, which Bernard and the Cistercian Order contributed to popularize. The child Jesus at the age of twelve is the topic of an admirable treatise by Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167).¹⁵ Aelred addresses his *Oratio pastoralis* to “Jesus, Good Shepherd”: “Sweet Lord, here before you is your chosen people with your cross before its eyes and the marks of your passion in them.” The same sweet Lord is also “the font of wisdom,” reigning from his “throne of might.”¹⁶

¹² *Sermon 2 on the Song of Songs 2* (*The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux 2* [Cistercian Fathers Series 4; Spencer, Mass., 1971] 10).

¹³ *Ibid.* (*Works* 9).

¹⁴ *Sermon 11, 3* (*Works* 75).

¹⁵ Aelred de Rievaulx: *Quo J sus eut douze ans* (SC 60; Paris, 1958).

¹⁶ *The Pastoral Prayer 6* (*The Works of Aelred of Rievaulx* [Cistercian Fathers Series 2; Spencer, Mass., 1971] 113); see Am d e Hallier, *The Monastic Theology of Aelred of Rievaulx* (Shannon, 1969).

Although the Middle Ages practice Communion under both kinds less and less, the chalice is a symbol of Jesus' chalice of bitterness in the Garden of Olives. Bernard writes: "Good Jesus, the chalice you drank, the price of our redemption, makes me love you more than all the rest."¹⁷ In the *Meditations* of Guigues the Carthusian (end of 12th c.) the first seven beatitudes evoke the body of Christ, the eighth is the beatitude of his blood. At the Last Supper Jesus consecrated the chalice of his passion: "The first-born, prince of all, received the chalice first, drank, gave thanks, and then gave it to his disciples, saying: Drink of it, all of you."¹⁸ The institution of the Premonstratensians in 1121 is explicitly focused on participation in "the poverty of Christ" at the service of the "apostolic life."¹⁹

II

The Christology of the thirteenth century is dominated by three movements: the flowering of scholasticism, the development of Gothic art, and the spirituality of the friars. Although Franciscans and Dominicans followed differing orientations in their apostolic work and their practice of religious life, they both spread a Christocentric piety centered on the humanity of Jesus.

This is particularly obvious in the case of St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) and his followers. At La Verna, on September 17, 1224, Francis had his vision of Christ crucified under the aspect of a winged seraph. Emerging from this vision, Francis carried the stigmata in his body. In the *Itinerary of the Mind into God*, Bonaventure interprets this event as a mystical transformation in the likeness of Christ.²⁰ Thus Franciscanism placed the picture of Christ crucified at the center of spiritual life. This profoundly affected the later history of the Church. Opposition to the friars at the University of Paris, under the leadership of William of St. Amour (d. 1272), revealed a profound cleavage on the nature of the imitation of Christ, and this brought about the later conflict between William of Ockham and Pope John XXII in 1323. Bonaventure himself, who reinterpreted the life and the rule of Francis in the direction of mitigation and institutionalization, maintained the centrality of Christ crucified, the meaning of the seraphic vision, the value of the imitation

¹⁷ *Sermon 20 on the Song of Songs 2 (Works 148)*.

¹⁸ Guigues le Chartreux, *Lettre sur la vie contemplative et Douze méditations* (SC 163; Paris, 1970) 190.

¹⁹ The Premonstratensians are canons regular, founded in 1120 at Prémontré by St. Norbert (ca. 1080–1134).

²⁰ See G. Tavad, "Théologie et présence de Dieu," *Année théologique* 37 (1951) 233–38, 321–34; "St. Bonaventure as Mystic and Theologian," in Margaret Schatkin, ed., *The Heritage of the Early Church: Festschrift in Honor of Fr. Georges Florovsky* (Rome, 1973) 289–306.

of Christ. Jesus is the "tree of life" and the "mystical vine";²¹ his cross is the crossroads of all knowledge and science.²² Bonaventure wrote an opusculum on the "five feasts of the child Jesus."²³ His thought certainly influenced the *Meditationes de passione Christi* by the Franciscan Johannes de Caulibus (ca. 1300), which became a favorite book of piety.²⁴ They were incorporated in the compilation *Meditationes de vita Christi*, which provides the substance of the *Life of Christ* of Ludolph the Carthusian (1300–1370), itself the model of numerous later "lives of Christ." Franciscan influence was also at work in new forms of popular piety, notably on devotion to the crèche and the infant Jesus, after the example of Francis, who, for Christmas of 1223 at Greccio, revived the custom of setting up a crèche with live personages.

The Friars Preachers also promoted a Christocentric piety, as instanced in the Rosary as a meditated prayer focused on the mysteries of Jesus and Mary. At a more intellectual level, they too practiced a Gothic piety. The vision of Christ crucified in the form of a seraph in chapter 43 of the *Life* of Henry Suso (1295–1366) may well have been inspired by Francis' previous vision. Yet the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* is entirely focused on the passion and deposition of Jesus, ending with prayers to Christ on the cross. The *Soul's Love-Book* is a sequence of prayers to the Eternal Wisdom at the Passion, to Mary in the Passion, to Christ the Beloved after the deposition from the cross. Suso wants to hold together the love of the human Jesus and the awesomeness of the divine Word. The sufferings of Christ enhance the divine Wisdom. Dominican spirituality passes easily from the depths of Jesus' humiliation to the height of Eternal Wisdom, with varieties of accent and tone among different authors. Suso, Tauler (1300–1361), and Catherine of Siena (1347–80) keep a good balance between the two natures of the Lord and these two aspects of piety. Yet they are also inclined, especially Suso, to sentimental language about the "sweet Lord." Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) speaks a more detached language, walks a more arid way, and pays no heed to visionary experiences. His Christological concern is bare, sharply aimed at the Eternal Word, who is both in heaven and in the faithful soul:

The Father utters the Word and speaks in the Word and no otherwise. But Jesus speaks in the soul. What he says is a revelation of himself and all the Father has

²¹ *The Tree of Life* (José de Vinck, ed., *The Works of Bonaventure* 1 [Paterson, N.J., 1960] 95–144); *The Mystical Vine* (ibid. 147–205).

²² See Emma T. Healy, ed., *De reductione artium ad theologiam* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1955).

²³ *On the Five Feasts of the Child Jesus* (de Vinck 3 [1966]).

²⁴ This text will be found in *Obras de San Buenaventura* 2 (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos; Madrid, 1946) 748–816. On Bonaventure's Christology see Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Theology in St. Bonaventure* (New York, 1981).

said to him, in proportion as one's soul is sensitive to it. . . . Jesus reveals himself in unmeasured sweetness and fulness, which flows from the powerhead of the Holy Spirit, overflowing its unsearchable richness and sweetness into hearts which are sensitive to it.²⁵

Most of the influential mystics of the Rhineland belong with Eckhart, Suso, and Tauler. Yet some are also relevant to Christology in other ways. In *The Vision of God* (1453), Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) recommends meditating before a special kind of picture or "icon of God," where the face seems to look in all directions at once; for God is "absolute sight." Reflection on God leads to the Holy Trinity, for God could never be "perfectly seen" and could not be "bliss" unless He were Three. The "loving God" begets the "lovable God," the "absolute mediator," who has become flesh:

Since you are Son of Man, human sonship is in the highest degree united in you, Jesus, to the divine sonship, so that you are rightly called Son of God and Son of Man, for in you naught mediates between the two. In that absolute sonship which is the Son of God is enfolded all sonship, and to it your human sonship, Jesus, is supremely united.²⁶

Undoubtedly, Gothic devotion to Jesus occasionally takes odd forms. That St. Gertrude (1256–1301) on Christmas day should take into her arms the infant statue from the crib seems reasonable. But it is more surprising that the following Christmas, during the Mass, the Virgin Mary herself should hand her baby over to Gertrude, as is reported in her *Spiritual Memorial*.²⁷ Yet Gertrude practiced also a profoundly theological and Trinitarian piety. This is a good example of the tension, latent in late-medieval devotion, between the divine and the human aspects of Jesus. St. Gertrude belongs among the Rhineland mystics. So does an anonymous "friend of God," author of *The Book of the Poor in Spirit* (ca. 1530), who however is not so Christocentric and presents the following of Christ as only one among four ways to God.²⁸ On the contrary, the *Theologia Germanica*, an anonymous work written in or near Frankfurt around 1350 and known to the modern world chiefly through the two editions published by Martin Luther, stresses equally the apophatic, negative character of the experience of God and the necessary mediatorship of Christ.²⁹

²⁵ *Sermon 13* (Raymond Blackney, ed., *Meister Eckhart* [New York, 1957] 160); see Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Master Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics* (New York, 1957).

²⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God* 19 (New York, 1960) p. 96.

²⁷ The *Spiritual Memorial* constitutes Book 2 of *The Herald of the Love of God*; text in Pierre Doyère, ed., *Gertrude d' Helfta: Oeuvres spirituelles 2* (SC 139; Paris, 1968).

²⁸ *The Book of the Poor in Spirit* (New York, 1954).

²⁹ Bengt Hoffman, ed., *The Theologica Germanica of Martin Luther* (New York, 1980). This edition contains the longer text, as published by Luther in 1518; a shorter version had been published, also by Luther, in 1516.

I venture to think that St. Jeanne d'Arc (1412-31) is best understood as a witness to the spread and popularity of Rhineland mysticism. In her own strait way, she provides a simplified version of the same insights. Her piety is germane to that of the friars, Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans, whom she liked to see among the followers of the army. The names of Jesus and Mary were inscribed on her great standard with a picture of Christ as the King of heaven; the banner she ordered made for the priests who accompanied the army showed a painted crucifix. And if her voices or visions were of saints and Michael the Archangel, these were messengers of the King of heaven. Jeanne's piety was deeply sacramental and more Eucharistic than was generally customary at the time.³⁰

Among the mystics of the Netherlands John Ruysbroeck easily stands out, although he is too original in his theology and philosophy to be quite typical. His Christocentrism is that of the Eternal Word and of our own "eternal being" in Him.³¹ The more practical and yet profound mysticism of the first three books of *The Imitation of Christ* is a better guide to the piety of the Brethren of the Common Life and the *devotio moderna*. It seeks, above all, friendship with Jesus: "When Jesus is present, all goes well and nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent, everything is hard."³² Jesus is seen primarily in his earthly life and doctrine: "Let it be our chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of Christ surpasses all the doctrines of the saints; and whosoever has the Spirit will find therein hidden manna."³³

The fourteenth century in England is also noted for its spiritual writings, which are connected chiefly with hermits and recluses rather than, as along the Rhine, with older or newer religious orders. The *Revelations of Divine Love* by Mother Julian of Norwich (1342-ca. 1416), allegedly received on May 8, 1373, set profound reflections on the Holy Trinity in the framework of considerations on the Passion. The revelations are presented as answers to a previous request: "Some time earlier, she asked for three gifts from God: to understand his passion; to suffer physically while still a young woman of thirty; and to have as God's gift three wounds . . . the wound of true contrition, the wound of genuine compassion, and the wound of sincere longing for God."³⁴

³⁰ This clearly appears from her daily behavior, as this is described in the rehabilitation trial; see Régine Pernoud, *Vie et mort de Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris, 1972); Raymond Oursel, *Les procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris, 1959).

³¹ See A. Wautier d'Aygalliers, *Ruysbroeck the Admirable* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1969). The claim that Ruysbroeck's Christology is Nestorian (ibid. 171-81) seems unjustified. Several of Ruysbroeck's works are available in English, e.g., *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (London, 1951); *The Spiritual Espousals* (New York, 1953); *The Chastisement of God's Children, and The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* (Oxford, 1957).

³² *The Imitation of Christ* 2, chap. 8, no. 1. ³³ Ibid. 1, 1, 1-2.

³⁴ *Revelations of Divine Love* 2 (London, 1966) 63-64.

Thus Julian follows a penitential way, in which suffering is subordinate to desire for God: "I forgot all about the first two desires, but the third was with me continually."³⁵ Her revelations are cast in the form of imaginative and intellectual visions, and they follow, in the main, the sequence of the Passion: (1) the crowning with thorns, (2) the discoloring of Christ's face, (3) the creation, (4) the flagellation, (5) Christ's victory over the "Fiend," (6) the heavenly reward, (7) God's goodness, (8) the death of Christ, (9) the relation of the Trinity to the Passion, (10) the pierced heart of Jesus, (11) the Mother of Christ, (12) the glory of Christ, (13) the will of God, (14) Jesus as the foundation of prayer, (15) Jesus as our reward in heaven, (16) the indwelling of the Trinity in our soul. Mother Julian spends much more time on the last four revelations than on the first twelve, thus showing the Passion as a passage to the high mystery of the Trinity. In Julian's language, God is not only our Father but also our Mother. In her perspective, fatherhood is attributed to the Father, motherhood to the Son, leadership to the Spirit. Thus Mother Julian writes:

I saw that the Second Person, who is our Mother with regard to our essential nature, that same dear Person has become our Mother in the matter of our sensual nature. We are God's creation twice: essential being and sensual nature. Our being is that higher part which we have in our Father, God almighty; and the Second Person of the Trinity is the Mother of this basic nature, providing the substance in which we are rooted and grounded. But he is our Mother also in mercy, since he has taken sensual nature upon himself. Thus, 'our Mother' describes the different ways in which he works, ways that are separate to us, but held together in him. In our Mother Christ we grow and develop; in his mercy he reforms and restores us; through his passion, death, and resurrection he has united us to our being. So does our Mother work in mercy for all his children who respond to him and obey him.³⁶

For Walter Hilton (d. 1395), the most abundant writer among the English mystics, the *Ladder of Perfection* is entirely erected on man's relation to Jesus. Union to Jesus (chap. 12) and meditation on his humanity (chaps. 86-87) form the backbone of the first book of the *Ladder*.³⁷ The second book covers the same ground more theologically under the rubric of reforming the image of Jesus in us. The anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing*, written around 1370, differs from the other writings of the English mystics with its more Dionysian conception of mystical union. Yet here too the author speaks of "weeping in sorrow for the sufferings of Jesus."³⁸ The spiritual person must be like Mary before "our

³⁵ Ibid. 64.

³⁶ Ibid. 58 (165-66); see G. Tavard, *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, 1973) 144-46.

³⁷ *The Ladder of Perfection* (London, 1957).

³⁸ *The Cloud of Unknowing* 12 (London, 1971) p. 69.

loving Lord Jesus Christ."³⁹ "Sweet indeed was that love between our Lord and Mary."⁴⁰ For the mystic as for all Christians, the cross is the condition of salvation: "... all men are lost in Adam and show by their works their desire for salvation, and are saved by reason of the sufferings of Christ and none other. . . . All who still quit sin and ask for God's mercy will be saved by reason of Christ's sufferings."⁴¹ Here again Gothic piety is focused on the sufferings of Christ.

III

No date can be assigned with assurance to the end of medieval Christology and the flowering of the Christology of the Counter Reformation. But as regards the spiritual aspects of Christology, one can easily detect both continuity and a new accent between the medieval mystics and those of the sixteenth century and later.

Continuity is patent in the centrality given to the image of Christ. The influence of St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) in this is undeniable. With its high point reached in the meditations on "the call of the temporal king" and "the two standards," the second week of the Exercises leads to a decision to follow Christ in all things.⁴² One should also note the importance of Jesus in the writings of the Carmelite reformers. For both Teresa of Jesus (1515-82) and John of the Cross (1549-91), the true mystic never outgrows an absolute need for the mediation of Christ.⁴³ On the one hand, John of the Cross could support new views of the Incarnation, as in *Romances* 1-9: the purpose of creation is to provide a bride whom the Son of God will espouse in the Incarnation. On the other, the Carmelite doctor was more emphatic than anyone else that Jesus Christ is the one, only, and total Word of the Father, after whose coming the Father has nothing to add.⁴⁴

Yet a new Christological style was inaugurated by the altogether remarkable treatise on *The Names of Christ* of the Augustinian Luis de León (1528-91). Begun in 1574, published in 1583, and enlarged for the 1585 edition, this is one of the first Catholic Christologies composed in

³⁹ Ibid. 20 (78).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 22 (81).

⁴¹ Ibid. 25 (85). Were this survey intended to be complete, it would have to include a study of the Italian mystics, such as Angela di Foligno (1248-1309), Catherine of Siena (1347-80), and Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510).

⁴² *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Westminster, Md., 1951).

⁴³ Teresa describes the experience of the humanity of Christ even at the highest levels of mystical life, e.g., *Relations* 35; *The Interior Castle*, seventh mansion 2 (Allison Peers, ed., *The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Jesus* [New York, 1950] 1, 352; 3, 334-38).

⁴⁴ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2, 22, 4-6 (Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* [Washington, D.C., 1973] 180-81). There is much more to say about the Christology of St. John of the Cross; I intend to do so in a special study.

the vernacular. Devotion to the name of Jesus was a spiritual legacy of the later Middle Ages. Luis de León initiated the tradition, revived in our times, of Christologies based on the analysis of the biblical names of Jesus. He himself justified this method with reference to the importance of the name in Semitic culture. Luis de León selected the following names for special study: Seed, Face of God, Way, Shepherd, Mount, Father of the World to Come, Arm of God, King, Prince of Peace, Spouse, Son of God, Beloved, Jesus, Lamb of God. In each case biblical evidence concerning the name is presented; its theological and spiritual implications are then drawn out and explained. The overall result is a Christology of glory, of the Word-made-man as he now presides from heaven over the Church and the universe. Being intimately present in the hearts of the faithful, he leads them to the heights of spiritual experience. The Christ of Luis de León has a universal dimension: "From the beginning of the world he was sacrificed in all the sacrifices which men offered to God since they began their existence."⁴⁵ He himself is the way of God, the salvation, the mount which, from being a despised stone, has grown into a rock which now fills "the earth and the heaven."⁴⁶ This cosmic perspective brings Luis de León to stress the name, Father of the World to Come, to the point of ascribing fatherhood to the Second Person: Christ is father in relation to the new man re-created through salvation.⁴⁷ By this focus on the glory of the presently reigning Christ, the treatise of Luis de León already belongs to the Counter Reformation's triumphant theology.

Luis de León is a spiritual author and a poet, not a scholastic or speculative theologian. His Christology derives from a spirituality. This will become the central mark of what Henri Bremond called the French school of spirituality.

IV

Influenced by the Fathers of the Church, by the medieval scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, by the Christian Neoplatonism of Denys and, more recently, of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94),⁴⁸ by the Rhineland mystics, and by the mystical tradition of the Reformed Carmel, the major authors of the French school build a powerful synthesis of theology and piety in their spiritual writings. The founder of the movement, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), teaches a highly original Christocentric spirituality. I would venture to call it the first modern Christology. The adjective "modern" is meant to stress the

⁴⁵ *Los nombres de Cristo* (Luis de León, *Obras completas castellanas* [Madrid, 1959] 717).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 455.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 502.

⁴⁸ See Henri de Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole* (Paris, 1974).

major features which differentiate it from the medieval perspective. The approach initiated by Bérulle injects a subjective experience of Christ into the formulation and solution of Christological questions. Christology does not posit problems; rather, its questions point to mysteries. These cannot be unraveled by systematic study of the available evidence; they are to be faced and contemplated through an affective entrance into the mystery itself. Already the practice and concept of faith at the beginning of the Reformation went in this direction. Yet the synthesis of theology and experience was not achieved by the early Protestants. On the one hand, Melancthon (1497-1560), who initiated Lutheran systematics, shied away from speculative questions, as witness the exclusion of the Trinity and the Incarnation from his *Loci communes* (1521). On the other, the Lutheran systematicians of the seventeenth century, such as Johann Gerhardt (1583-1637), returned to the scholastic approach discarded by the Reformers, thus sharing the frame of reference of the Catholic scholastics. It was only with the growth of pietism, under the influence of Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), that Lutheran theology tried to recover Christian experience as a theological source.⁴⁹

Bérulle effectively achieved a synthesis of experience and theological reflection. For this reason he deserves special attention. Although he never couched his writings in a systematic form, the profundity of his thought derived from sharp insights joined to prolonged reflection. His influence has, in fact, been immeasurable. That Bérulle was primarily interested in the spiritual life appears evident from his intense work to spread the reform of the Carmel, from his letters, and from several of his more didactic works. In this concern for spirituality, his chief interest was in the participation of man in the inner attitudes of Jesus as Word Incarnate. This is indicated already by the titles of his main works: *Discourse on the State and the Grandeurs of Jesus* (1623); *Elevations to God on the Mystery of the Incarnation* (1625); *Life of Jesus* (1629). Further, a large section of his *Opuscula of Piety* (composed through the latter half of his life as notes for sermons and spiritual talks) deals with Christological considerations.⁵⁰

The perspective adopted by Bérulle ties together the mysteries of the Trinity and of the Incarnation so that, strictly speaking, they constitute

⁴⁹ J. Gerhardt, *Loci communes theologici* (1610-22); P. Spener, *Pia desideria* (1675).

⁵⁰ See Fernando Guillén Prekler, *Bérulle aujourd'hui: Pour une spiritualité de l'humanité du Christ* (Paris, 1978). There are few studies of Bérulle in English. William M. Thompson includes a critical survey of Bérulle's "Christic spirituality" in his book *Jesus Lord and Saviour: A Theopathic Christology and Soteriology* (New York, 1981), but his notion that Bérulle's term *état* reflects the structure of French monarchy under Louis XIV is indefensible: Bérulle's *état* is a strictly theological word, coming straight from *status* in the Latin language of the medieval mystical tradition.

only one mystery. One cannot look at them separately without misunderstanding them, although, starting from their encounter in the Christian life, Bérulle's reflections begin with the Christian's participation in Christ. "The principle of our birth and, as it were, the matrix in which we have been born is the mystery of the Incarnation. . . ." After thus stating the Incarnational principle, Bérulle continues with the Trinitarian principle: ". . . just as the Father's womb and its fecundity are the locus where the divine Persons are produced."⁵¹ There is an analogy between Trinity and Incarnation. The Son "giving His essence to our humanity," while maintaining essential distinction, is analogous to the Father "giving His person to His Son, with distinction of persons."⁵² In the eternal generation the Father made to the Son "two very great donations of Himself: He gave His essence, His greatness, His life in unity, for He makes this essence, this greatness, this life the essence, the greatness, the life of His Son; and He gave His person by residence: *Pater in me est*."⁵³

God communicates Himself in two ways: "The communication of His essence posits the mystery of the Trinity, and the communication of His subsistence posits the mystery of the Incarnation."⁵⁴ The divine essence is given to the Son and the Spirit; the divine subsistence is given to "this new nature of this new man." Subsistence, translating the traditional word *hypostasis*, which Bérulle also renders as "residence," is identical with "the greatness and the duration of all the fulness of divinity which dwells in him corporally."⁵⁵ In the Incarnation the Christian, "dedicated and called, by quasi-essential vocation, to contemplation,"⁵⁶ may contemplate the three Persons; for the Incarnation "is properly the work of the Trinity, each of the divine Persons taking part in it not only by attribution but also by application and appropriation of Their personal properties."⁵⁷ The Son is personally identical with Jesus, who is "God visible."⁵⁸ The Father is directly involved as Father in the process of incarnation, for the birth of the Son in time is identical with His eternal birth. It may be called a "new birth,"⁵⁹ since it takes place in time and proceeds from the will of God; yet it is only the "application," to time and by will, of the eternal generation by nature:

In the Father's womb it [the Son's residence] is hidden and enclosed in His fatherhood and His eternal generation; for, begetting His Son with this same necessarily wrought generation, the eternal Father voluntarily applies Himself to

⁵¹ Gaston Rotureau, ed., *Bérulle: Opuscules de piété* (Paris, 1944) 75.

⁵² *Ibid.* 74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 172.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* To my knowledge, the only other theologian who renders *subsistentia* as "residence" is Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1, 13, 6.

⁵⁶ *Bérulle: Opuscules* 75.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 156.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 161.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 253.

the mission of this same Son upon earth in the mystery of the Incarnation. . . . By this same act by which he begets His Son in Himself, the eternal Father destines Him to personal union with our humanity.⁶⁰

Thus the conception and the birth of Jesus are not a new generation; they are the temporal form of the eternal generation. The Father, who is "always producing His only Son within Himself," is now "producing Him within the Virgin, with the preparation brought about by the Holy Spirit." The Annunciation is a mystery of the Father: "The Incarnation takes place by the virtue of the Father, as Father begetting His Son; and the Eternal Father, interior to the Virgin, applies Himself to the Virgin, sends her, gives her, communicates to her His person and His virtue, so that she may produce in herself the same one He produces in Himself."⁶¹ This dense text posits the basis of Bérulle's Mariology and suggests a Pneumatology. In relation to the Incarnation, the Spirit had a task of preparation. As a result of the Incarnation, the Spirit now proceeds from Jesus, being sent from Him upon the faithful: "From this Jesus there proceeds a Spirit, a way, a life: a life that we should possess, a Spirit that we should receive, a way that we should follow. . . . There is only one who sends, the Father; one who is sent and who comes, the Son; one who intervenes, the Holy Spirit: one Father by commission, one Son by application, one Spirit by operation."⁶²

A second point is essential to Bérulle's approach: "the substance" and "the economy" of the mystery should be distinguished. These expressions, obviously borrowed from the Fathers, are understood in a new way. In patristic language, the Incarnation itself belongs to the economy. For Bérulle, the substance is the Incarnation as such, whereas the economy corresponds to the forms borrowed by the Incarnation from the circumstances in which it took place. Explaining the substance, Bérulle employs formulas germane to those of the Council of Chalcedon and the patristic creeds. "The substance of the mystery can be explained in a word: God and man. This abbreviated word contains the created being and the uncreated Being, and the ineffable, very tight, very profound link between these two beings who are so different and so distant."⁶³ Bérulle's originality lies in his view of the economy. "The economy corresponds to the dispensation and usage of this new life of the Man-God in all his states, functions, actions, and mysteries."⁶⁴ In the substance of the Incarnation, the Son of God "lowers His divinity into our humanity;" in its economy, He "lowers His deified humanity into all our states and miseries."⁶⁵ While the name "Son of God" refers to the former, the name "Son of Man"

⁶⁰ Ibid. 160.

⁶¹ Ibid. 192-93.

⁶² Ibid. 200.

⁶³ Ibid. 184.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 189.

denotes the latter. Addressing himself to Jesus, Bérulle writes: "This name shows us not only your new state and quality and your human essence (for, as son of man, you are consequently man), but also the way and the manner which you were pleased to choose to become man, among several other ways and manners which the divine wisdom could follow. . . ." ⁶⁶

The distinction between substance and economy leads to a third point of Bérulle's Christology: in the economy, the Son undergoes several "states" in which the faithful are called to participate. The heart of the Berullian conception of spiritual life rests in a meditation of the "states of Jesus," which brings about a participation in them. Bérulle does not believe that the "states" in which the humanity of Jesus lived have now passed away forever. Since they were the states of the God-Man, they have persisted, not indeed in their external forms and circumstances but in his internal acceptance and disposition; and they will thus endure forever. The following passage is capital:

[The mysteries] are past in some circumstances, and they endure and are present and perpetual in another way. They are past in their execution, but they are present in their virtue; and neither will this virtue ever pass, nor the love with which they were fulfilled. Therefore the spirit, the state, the virtue, the merit of the mystery remain present always. The Spirit of God, by which the mystery was acted, the interior state of the exterior mystery, the efficaciousness and virtue render this mystery alive and active in us; this state and virtuous disposition, the merit by which he acquired us for his Father and deserved heaven, life and himself, and even the present state, the acute disposition in which Jesus fulfilled this mystery, are always alive, actual, and present in Jesus. ⁶⁷

It follows that contemplation of the states of Jesus belongs to the very heart of Christian life. The faithful are called to participate in the mysteries of the Incarnation, not as these were visible in the earthly life of Jesus but as they are eternalized in his ever-present states. In a theology of grace, this view entails the consequence that men's participation in Christ is effected in their interiorization of the external mysteries. The faithful share the states of Jesus, experiencing in themselves the same interior attitudes in which Jesus lived his mysteries. In this sense the whole of life should be Christ-centered; but this center is not exterior to oneself. It lies within us by participation in the states of Jesus. Bérulle felt personally attracted to several of the states of Jesus: his infancy, his link with the Virgin, his obedience, the unity of life and death in him, the Eucharist as sacramental embodiment of his states. Special mention should be made of the state of "exinanition" or "annihilation" which Bérulle perceived in the taking of flesh by the eternal Son; thus a basis

⁶⁶ Ibid. 194.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 201.

was posited for a kenotic Christology. Bérulle, however, exploited this theme to invite the Carmelites and the Oratorians to pronounce "vows of servitude" as a participation in the self-annihilation of the Son of God. But a further analysis of this would take us too far into details of his conception of the spiritual life.

V

Bérulle's influence was considerable. In the Oratory which he had himself founded in 1611, his Christological intuitions were followed, though sometimes in directions that were not his own. François Bourgoing (1585-1662), the most faithful among his followers, published in 1629 his own meditations on the *Truths and Excellence of Jesus Christ*, which simplify the doctrine, without however betraying it. Guillaume Gibieuf (1591-1650) pursued Bérulle's suggestions on the participation of the Virgin in the states of her Son and on her association to God the Father in the Incarnation (*La vie et les grandeurs de la très sainte vierge Marie, mère de Dieu*, 1637). Charles de Condren (1588-1641) exploited Berullian themes with originality in his remarkable study of the priesthood of Christ, *L'Idée du sacerdoce et du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ*, published posthumously by Quesnel in 1677.⁶⁸

Bérulle's impact was also felt outside the Oratory. Yet, as his ideas were popularized, they lost, with their recondite character, much of their exactness. Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-57) applied the Christ-centeredness of Bérulle to the spiritual training of seminarians, but he also accentuated the Marian aspects of the Incarnation. With St. Jean Eudes (1601-80), the states of Jesus gave way to what was intended to be a concrete substitute, the "heart of Jesus," as expressing the incarnate and Eucharistic love of the Savior. This degenerated somewhat when Jean Eudes, streamlining Bérulle's teaching, associated the heart of Mary to that of Jesus (*The Admirable Heart of the Mother of God*, 1670). This perspective was still fuelled by contemplation of the interior states of Jesus; yet the way lay open to less theological interpretations of the heart symbol, as was the case with the later devotion to the Sacred Heart, spread by St. Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (1647-90) under other influences.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ All of Condren's works are posthumous: *L'Idée du sacerdoce et du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ* (actually composed by his disciples out of Condren's material; 1677); *Considérations sur les mystères de Jésus-Christ* (1899).

⁶⁹ Besides his main works, *La vie et le royaume de Jésus-Christ dans les âmes chrétiennes* (1637) and *Le coeur admirable de la très sacrée mère de Dieu* (1681), Jean Eudes composed offices for the Sacred Heart of Mary (1648) and the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1672). See *Oeuvres complètes du vénérable Jean Eudes* (12 vols.; Vannes, 1905-11); P. Hirambourg, *St John Eudes: A Spiritual Portrait* (Westminster, Md., 1960); Louis Verheylozon, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart* (London, 1955).

Bérulle's Christocentric tradition of piety remained very much alive, with depth though less subtlety, in a more accessible language and without Marian emphasis, in the works of Bossuet (1627–1704), especially his *Elevations on the Mysteries* and *Meditations on the Gospel*.⁷⁰ Through Eudes, Olier, and Bossuet, the Christology of Bérulle became predominant in the formation of the French clergy until well into the twentieth century.

Bérulle's ideas were also carried forward in a different way through the Jansenist movement. One of the fathers of Jansenism, Jean Ambroise Duvergier de Hauranne, more popularly known as Saint-Cyran (1581–1643), had been closely associated with Bérulle, whose chief insights he defended in Latin writings, couching them in the garb of scholastic expositions and thus giving them status in the universities (*Assertio epistolae episcoporum*, 1632). The new Christology, however, was immortalized in its Jansenist form by the pen of Blaise Pascal (1623–62). Pascal's Christological concerns were already evident before his mystical experience of November 23, 1654.⁷¹ His *Summary of the Life of Jesus Christ*, which was done by the end of 1654, seems to have been conceived as early as 1649. The meditation entitled (though not by the author) "The Mystery of Jesus" dates from 1655. Above all, the centrality of Jesus dominates the *Pensées*:

All those who seek God outside Jesus Christ, and who stop at the nature, either find no light that can satisfy them, or succeed in giving themselves a means to know and serve God without a mediator; and thus they fall either into atheism or into deism, which two things the Christian religion abhors all but equally.

Without Jesus Christ the world would not subsist, for it would have either to be destroyed or to be like hell. If the world subsisted to instruct man about God, His divinity would shine in it everywhere incontestably; but since it subsists only through Jesus Christ and by Jesus Christ and in order to instruct men of their corruption and their redemption, everything radiates with the proofs of these two truths (n. 602).⁷²

Nn. 607–28 examine the miracles of Jesus and his fulfilment of the prophecies. Nn. 630–47 and 728–35 deal, though in another vocabulary, with the states of Jesus. Undoubtedly, however, the meditation on "The Mystery of Jesus," classified as Thought n. 736 by Chevalier, has done

⁷⁰ See Jean Calvet, *Bossuet: L'Homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris, 1941); Aimé Martinort, *Le gallicanisme de Bossuet* (Paris, 1953). Written in 1694, Bossuet's *Meditations on the Gospel* were published only in 1731; his *Elevations on the Mysteries* were published in 1729.

⁷¹ Usually called "the Memorial," the record of this experience was found in the lining of Pascal's garment; see Jacques Chevalier, *Pascal: Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1954) 553–54.

⁷² The number refers to the *Pensées* in Chevalier's classification, *ibid.* 1281.

most to perpetuate Pascal's Christology. The approach is deeply subjective both in its form and in its contents. The Berullian tradition persists in the concern to share in Jesus' internal attitudes and feelings, while the Jansenist bent of Pascal appears in his concentration on the sufferings of Jesus, which, in properly Berullian fashion, are considered to be perpetual: "Jesus will be in agony till the end of the world; we must not sleep during that time." The state of Jesus is personalized, and participation in it is stressed: "Be comforted; you would not seek me unless you had found me. I thought of you in my agony; I poured these drops of blood for you." Assimilation to Jesus continues: "I must add my scars to his and join him, and he will save me when he saves himself." The conclusion brings back the dimension of the divinity, which can be experienced in us because it is manifest in Jesus: "To do the small things as though they were great, on account of the majesty of Jesus Christ who does them in us and who lives our life; and the great things as though they were small and easy, on account of his omnipotence" (n. 736).⁷³

Besides the centrality of Christ which it shared with other schools of theology, Jansenist piety brought a more negative note into the doctrine of redemption. Through the self-annihilation which he practiced all his life, the Incarnate Word reconciled the elect with God according to divine predestination. The elect are few. They are identified with the new Adam, and they participate in his adoration of the Father. In fact, the negative consequences of a restrictive doctrine of redemption became widespread in the popular practice of the Eucharist, which, well into the twentieth century, was thought to require a long and strict preparation.

Admittedly, Jansenism has not been the only source of more recent Christological piety. The Society of Jesus stands in good place, and not only because of the impetus given by the Exercises of St. Ignatius to meditation on the life and examples of Christ. This is particularly stressed in the school of Louis Lallemant (1587-1635) and his *Spiritual Doctrine*, substantially written by Lallemant but revised by his disciples Jean Rigoleuc (1595-1658) and Pierre Champion (1632-1701), who published it in 1694.⁷⁴ "Union with our Lord" forms the sixth principle of the *Spiritual Doctrine*. Here, however, the states of Jesus are no longer his interior attitudes as understood by Bérulle, but the successive stages of his life. Great importance is also given to the theme of the self-annihilation of the Man-God ("l'Homme-Dieu"). The headway being then made by a Christology of "annihilation" may also be illustrated from another quarter. In *The Cross of Jesus* (1947), Louis Chardon, O.P. (1595-1651), sees the entire mission and life of Christ as moving so inexorably toward

⁷³ Ibid. 1312-15.

⁷⁴ Louis Lallemant, *Doctrine spirituelle* (Paris, 1959).

the cross that Jesus finds no joy in the hypostatic union and in his love for the Father:

At one and the same time, grace was for Jesus a reason for rapture and an occasion of abasement, of presence and of absence. Although it determined and directed him to a vision of the divine essence, its weight inclined to the Cross and prevented him from tasting the joy of the blessed, holding back for thirty-three years the natural overflow of glory to the inferior part of his soul.⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

This last quotation suggests that the Christology of the mystics needs itself to be critically assessed. Not everything in it is acceptable. Indeed, one could easily cull many strange, quite objectionable views of Jesus in the writings of Christian mystics. But if this literature cannot be the only source of Christological reflection, its contribution should not be unduly minimized. I have devoted more space to Bérulle because he at least was fully conscious of spiritual experience as an inspiration not only for piety but also for theology. By and large, study of the mystics will call for a new Christological balance; for, despite its insistence on the humanity of Jesus as the way to the Father, mystical experience does not favor the predominant anthropocentric trend of recent Christologies. It is in his divinity as the eternal Word, manifested to the human heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus speaks inwardly. Neglect of this would immeasurably impoverish the Church's Christology.

⁷⁵ *The Cross of Jesus* (2 vols.; St. Louis, 1957) Vol. 1, Part 1, chap. 4, pp. 29-30.