

## REVIVING ADAMIC ADOPTIONISM: THE EXAMPLE OF JOHN MACQUARRIE

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**H**OWEVER THINGS may stand in other areas of theological discourse, it is arguable that something like consensus has emerged on the question of how to do Christology. Three basic moves appear to be de rigueur. The first involves comparing and contrasting the New Testament with the Christological doctrine hammered out at the early ecumenical councils, using criteria provided by modern historical and philosophical canons. The second is to trace how those canons arose, how they were sooner (on the Protestant side) or later (on the Roman Catholic) brought to bear on traditional ways of understanding Christ's person and work, and how more recent theologians have endeavored to take them into account. The third move is from indirect to direct discourse: from an account of Christology as it has been to a Christological position for today consistent with the same canons that have guided the other two moves.

Such, in general, is a pattern that any number of books on Christ have made familiar. It posits two discontinuities: on the one hand, between the Christ of the NT and the Christ of patristic, medieval and reformation doctrine; on the other, between modernity and all that preceded it. Only in modern times, of course, as a result of this second discontinuity, has the first come to be viewed as such. Indeed, viewing it as such is itself a way of effecting discontinuity, inasmuch as the makers of "classical" Christology never supposed they were innovating. If they were, however, and if their innovations cannot stand up to modern critique, the one possibility remaining is that a theology of Christ different from theirs can be built more or less directly on the NT. Working out some such possibility constitutes the third, constructive move in the standard operating procedure of contemporary Christology.

It is by no means an inflexible procedure. Its general outline admits of wide variation, and how it will be filled in depends on the intelligence and judgment of the theologian who adopts it. When a theologian as eminent as John Macquarrie does the filling in, he may be expected to produce a volume as well worth extended commentary as the one he has

in fact written: *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*.<sup>1</sup> A thorough assessment of Macquarrie's achievement in this book would have to take into consideration his earlier writings, especially *In Search of Humanity* and *In Search of Deity*, which were written as the first two volumes of a trilogy meant to culminate in a systematic treatment of Christ as both human and divine.<sup>2</sup> But while *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* includes what Macquarrie had planned for his third volume, he intends it to stand on its own. So it does, and very well at that. Accordingly, it will be considered here as an independent work, as representative of much that now flows in the mainstream of Christological thinking, and hence as indicative of questions that may have a wider significance for theology today.

#### BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

The title of Macquarrie's long and learned book is misleading in one respect and in another very apt. It is misleading in so far as it suggests that its author is interested only in what other people have been thinking about Jesus since the Enlightenment. No so. The book does chart the major routes Christology has taken in the last 300 years, but the charting accounts for only one of three roughly equal parts. All the same, a description of what this part contains is quite suitable as a title for the whole, because Part 2 is central in more than one sense. Macquarrie's assessment of modern trends governs not only Part 3, his own systematic Christology, but also his approach in Part 1 to theologies of Christ from the Bible through the 16th century.

As this structure already suggests, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* makes all the usual Christological moves—which is not to say they are made in the usual way. For one thing, Macquarrie is not content to rehearse yet again the theological repercussions of applying Higher Criticism to Scripture. More than most English-speaking theologians, he is on familiar terms with continental philosophy, so that, while the likes of Reimarus and Strauss are given their due, it is Kant and Hegel who take leading roles in the tale he tells in Part 2. That Macquarrie tells it from such a viewpoint is in itself one of the great strengths of his book. In telling it, however, he also defines the meaning of a question, borrowed from Bonhoeffer, that serves as a heading for the third, constructive part: "Who really is Jesus Christ for us today?" How that question is to be answered depends largely on how its last two words are construed, and

<sup>1</sup> London: SCM, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. All page references will be made parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity* (London: SCM, and New York: Crossroad, 1982); *In Search of Deity* (London: SCM, and New York: Crossroad, 1984).

when Macquarrie begins his own answer he has in effect defined "us today" as heirs of the German Enlightenment. Given such a heritage, we cannot (or anyway should not) regard our more remote intellectual ancestors without misgivings. Although such objections to classical Christology as began to be raised in the 18th century may not be decisive today, they are not to be ignored; our presumption will have to be that, until proven otherwise, Jesus Christ for us today cannot be who he was for citizens of the Christendom deliberately abandoned by those who founded modern thought.

Thus the basic problem that theologians have to face at the end of the 20th century remains for Macquarrie pretty much what it has been for 200 years: how to acknowledge the intellectual accomplishments of the Enlightenment while at the same time preserving, in some recognizable sense, the identity of historic Christianity. None of the standard loci of theology escapes this dilemma, once its premises are granted; but Christology's confrontation with modern thought has perhaps been the most direct, the most obvious, and the most distressing. One reason for this is that the confrontation has been more than a matter of academic disputation. Because Christ is proclaimed and followed as well as thought about, Christology has a pastoral as well as a speculative or theoretical dimension; and in so far as professional theologians therefore frame their answers to the question about who Christ is for "us today" with an eye to how far the rest of "us today" are likely to find the answers acceptable, they take on the apologist's role.

Such an apologetic concern for presenting Christianity in a convincing and believable way has been especially strong in Macquarrie's own tradition. Anglican theology was late, compared with continental Protestantism, in acknowledging the problems raised by modern philosophy and historical scholarship, and the acknowledgment, when it did come, came in the professedly apologetic shape of a "series of studies in the religion of the Incarnation" edited by Charles Gore under the title *Lux Mundi*.<sup>3</sup> It was Gore's own essay that drew the fire of critics, who not surprisingly singled out its argument that biblical criticism had made it very difficult to entertain the received theological teaching as to the scope of Christ's knowledge, and that the traditional doctrine of his omniscience would have to be replaced with something more credible. The "kenotic" Christology that Gore proposed as an alternative in *Lux Mundi* and went on to elaborate in other writings was something of a stopgap, recognized even at the time as less than perfectly coherent, and

<sup>3</sup> Charles Gore, ed., *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (Oxford Univ., 1st ed., 1889). A number of further editions followed, both in England and in the U.S.

Macquarrie gives it only a passing mention. Nevertheless there is a sense in which *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* belongs unmistakably to a tradition of theology of which Gore is commonly reckoned the wellspring. Christianity as the religion of the Incarnation; Christology as the axis around which theology therefore revolves; Christ as the light of the Enlightenment world—these characteristic themes of Gore's "liberal catholicism" also permeate Macquarrie's book. So too does an emphasis on theology as apologetic. *Can We Then Believe?* was one of Gore's titles, but all his writing was propelled, one way or another, by the same question, and it is Macquarrie's question as well. Though hardly a popularizing book, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* is plainly written out of firm conviction that the content of the Church's preaching and education ought to be significant, relevant, and believable for people who are going to receive it, if at all, from some standpoint bounded by the intellectual horizon that modern thought defines.

Committed as he is to the apologist's role of making Christology credible to the contemporary reader, Macquarrie has also committed himself to certain overall strategies. Anything that strikes such a reader as "unreal," if it has to come up at all, should not come up at the beginning, and not very prominently anywhere else. God, Logos, Trinity, the supernatural, transcendence—about such notions as these, people today have little understanding. They can, on the other hand, be expected to know what it is to be human. In Christology, therefore, the humanity of Jesus takes first though not necessarily final priority. But it must be a complete and unadulterated humanity. The one heresy that must be abjured, come what may, is what Macquarrie calls docetism, using the word in a rather broad sense that takes in every tendency to see Jesus as more or other than altogether human. That no compromise can be allowed on this score is a warning issued so often as to become a little tiresome, but it does make very clear that, although Macquarrie has no fondness for the jargon of "Christology from below," that is what he is calling for. At the same time, however, he also calls for a Christology from *before*. The humanity that takes first priority is the humanity of someone who lived long ago, and contemporary readers are historically minded, at least to some extent; it follows, Bonhoeffer notwithstanding, that the first Christological question is not "Who is Jesus?" For Macquarrie it is "Who was he?" He thus endorses the nearly unanimous view that Christology today should turn first to the NT, and turn to it as historical evidence.

#### CHRISTOLOGY FROM BEFORE: WHO WAS JESUS?

The route towards a credible account of who Jesus was must avoid two extremes. Bultmann, high though he obviously stands in Macquarrie's

esteem, goes too far in contending that historical-critical investigation can retrieve nothing but a theologically irrelevant "Christ after the flesh." That on the one hand. On the other, Schillebeeckx also goes too far in relying as heavily as he does on a conjecturally reconstructed Jesus-tradition older than anything for which there is direct evidence in the NT witness. Macquarrie seeks a *via media* by adopting and adapting John Knox's use of the term "Christ event." Briefly stated, what this means is that Jesus is inseparable from the community of his followers. Their answers to the question "Who was he?" belong to the Christ-event as much as do the words and deeds of the individual, Jesus of Nazareth, about whom the question was asked; consequently, so too does the Church itself, which by answering this question acquired an identity as well as a message. In Macquarrie's version, what prompted question and answers alike was a "transvaluation of values," and it was this transformation, centered *in* the Church *on* the figure of Jesus, that properly speaking gave rise to Christianity. Not that locating Christian origins in an "event" of this sort, rather than in an individual, relieves theologians of the difficult work of historical discrimination. To judge by the NT evidence, the Church gave more than one answer to the question "Who was he?" As for how these various answers are related, there is also general agreement that something like "development of doctrine" took place in the NT period itself. The key question, however, is what sort of development was going on, and how it is to be assessed. To answer this question is to take the first step towards a constructive Christology, and there would seem to be two quite different ways of taking it.

One way is to argue that the NT's multiple Christologies are all headed for, driving at, or moving in on a single unified conception, which none of them by itself succeeds in grasping and stating explicitly. Sorting things out took time; the closing of the NT canon only established what it was that had to be sorted out; not until the general councils of the fourth and fifth centuries did the Church really make up its mind. Hence, if the dynamic of question and answer within the Church is to be regarded as integral to the Christ-event, it follows on this first line of argument that the Christ-event did not finish happening until something like equilibrium was achieved in the Nicene and Chalcedonian answer to "Who was Jesus?" It was not the whole answer. It did not foreclose further questions. But it did mark the turning of a corner in the Church's ongoing life.

An argument such as this might seem to be quite compatible with certain aspects of Macquarrie's position. He allows, for example, that the formulations of the early councils are legitimate, inasmuch as they guard and clarify the gist of scriptural Christology, and furthermore that in

some sense the emergence of a unified theological conceptuality in the patristic period was a genuine achievement (150). Not, however, a permanently valid or normative achievement. Whatever continuity there may have been in the series of questions and answers that links the fifth with the first century, deference to patristic thought and conciliar dogma exerts no discernible influence on Macquarrie's own treatment of the multiple Christologies of the NT. His is instead a second and more typically modern line of argument, based on a different judgment as to what is normative in the development of theology in general and of Christology in particular. In this case the norm is not, as for the first way of assessing development, the eventual outcome of primitive Christian witness to Christ; it is the earliest element within that witness. Newman was wrong, in other words, and the image he tried to invert is still the right one: a river is purest at its source. So, if Jesus the individual were presumed to be the source of the Christological river, it would be necessary to have another go at filtering out later ecclesiastical contamination. But since for Macquarrie Christianity's point of origin was the Christ-event rather than Jesus (72), no such old-fashioned and probably futile project need be attempted. There is, to be sure, a historical question to ask, but it is a more manageable one: Which NT Christology came first?

The answer for which Macquarrie makes his case is that the earliest stratum of Christological thought was adoptionist and Adamic. A certain man, Jesus of Nazareth, received God's spirit; by reason of his faithfulness to this commission through a life of obedience and servanthood, he was raised to the status of Christ; in doing and suffering what he did, all the way to Calvary, he was fulfilling the destiny for which the first Adam, the human race, was created in the beginning. Such a Christology is adoptionist in the sense that Jesus *became* Christ; it is Adamic in the sense that this elevation, as intended, is the goal of humanity as such. Macquarrie finds it a simple and profound Christology. Also, and for apologetic purposes most importantly, it is believable (167). It involves no personal preexistence, no break in the natural order such as a virginal conception or birth might be thought to imply, no intrusion of an alien being into the world (207), no mythology or speculation worth worrying about (59), no docetism; in a word, nothing "supernatural" in the opprobrious sense, which is the only sense Macquarrie uses. What it does involve is the appearance, in one particular human life, of the "archetype" of humanity to which every man and woman is called (183). Christ succeeded, where "Adam" did not, in realizing the inherent and naturally human potential for being human (205).

It turns out, then, that a Christology "from before," beginning with

what is earliest, coincides with a Christology "from below" that begins with the human Jesus. On both counts, it commends itself as plausible even today. Not that this is the whole of what Macquarrie himself goes on to propose. The label of adoptionist does not frighten him (343), but he makes it clear again and again that starting from Jesus' humanity is only the half of what has to be said; it needs to be supplemented by adding a further, "incarnational" movement that begins "from above" with deity. Hence the full recipe for his own position is Adamic Christology plus the affirmation that "all this is from God" (2 Corinthians 5:18), with emphasis on the word "all."

Before turning, however, to this further and properly theological dimension of his constructive proposal, we ought to ask why Macquarrie thinks the idea of a spirit-filled human being adopted into Christhood is what stands as the source and origin of NT Christology. A somewhat technical issue, this; yet worth looking into because of a very basic issue on which Macquarrie's way of resolving it turns.

#### EXCURSUS: WHO COULD JESUS HAVE BEEN?

If the sermons reported in the Acts of the Apostles could be relied upon as authentic samples of Christian preaching shortly after Jesus' death, Macquarrie would be home and dry. They cannot, and he knows it. Paul, not Peter, is the earliest Christian for whose contribution to the Christ-event there is first-hand evidence, and it is in the Pauline letters, if anywhere, that Christology is going to be found in pristine form. But although Paul does speak of Christ in second-Adam terms, that is neither the only manner of speaking he uses nor, on the face of things, the most important. Even if you count out Ephesians, as Macquarrie does, there is still the Christ-hymn quoted in Philippians 2, ever a major obstacle in the path of arguing that "preexistence" and Christology "from above" are late Johannine innovations. Both, on the contrary, are at least as old as Paul's Adamic Christology—unless, of course, the hymn means something quite different from what it has been thought to mean by all ancient and most modern interpreters. Macquarrie negotiates the obstacle in the only way possible, by maintaining that it does mean something different. When it speaks of Christ as being in "the form of God," no preexistent, divine condition or status is implied; the phrase is simply an allusion to the "image of God" in which man and woman are made. In short, the hymn moves entirely from below and its symbolism is Adamic.

Now the passage in question is notoriously slippery. Exegetical questions relevant to grasping what it really means are many and complicated, and the scholarly literature is even more than ordinarily vast. The chief warrant for the interpretation Macquarrie favors is a minority report

filed by J. D. G. Dunn, whose discussion of the various issues is nothing if not thorough.<sup>4</sup> But although Dunn's is not a solo voice, the supporting chorus is small, and Macquarrie admits as much—although it does not keep him from writing about "Paul's 'last Adam' Christology" as though Paul had no other. This leads to a question that Macquarrie raises himself, in Pope's words: "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" Macquarrie does decide, and it is fair to ask how. Like most systematic theologians, he cannot but rely on the conclusions of those who specialize in exegesis; since the correct interpretation of Paul's Christ-hymn cannot be decided on strictly exegetical grounds, it falls to him to weigh the merits of each and arrive at a reasoned and therefore responsible judgment between them. What reasons has he, then, for adopting Dunn's position rather than the more conventional one? The overriding reason appears to be that if Paul believed in the preexistence of the person who was Jesus—as, on the majority view, Philippians 2 shows that he did—then he believed something mythological and, worse still, destructive of Jesus' true humanity (57). Even the earliest Christologist would be guilty of supernaturalism. "If we can make sense of Paul without it," Macquarrie writes, "that is in itself supportive of Dunn. I remember another New Testament scholar . . . saying to me that he was an adoptionist in christology because it was the only christology he could understand! An excellent reason!" (145).

What Macquarrie is contending in effect is that Paul should be given the benefit of the doubt. Preexistence is incredible today; the humanity of Jesus must at all cost be preserved and docetism avoided; such considerations can, and in this case do, carry enough weight to tip the scales on the side of giving the Philippians hymn an interpretation consistent with the more plausible Adamic and adoptionist Christologies found elsewhere in Paul and in the Synoptic Gospels. But what Macquarrie says in the quotation at the end of the last paragraph above not only suggests the surprising hermeneutical principle that what an ancient author could have meant depends on what it is possible here and now to accept as true. It also brings to light a theological principle which, besides guiding Macquarrie's reading of Paul, also governs, directly or indirectly, the architecture of the whole imposing Christological edifice he has built—the principle, namely, that credibility depends on intelligibility. That which is (potentially) believable extends no further than that which is (actually) understandable; and, what is more important, understanding it comes before believing it.

About this principle two points should be noted. First, the priority of

<sup>4</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 113–28.



understanding to belief has obvious links with the apologetic aim of Macquarrie's book, in that statements proposed for acceptance or assent or belief—scriptural statements, in this instance, but credal affirmations too, and for that matter all of what Christianity teaches—must first of all be rendered intelligible. But, secondly, to put the matter so is also to put it in a distinctly modern way. By acknowledging at least implicitly the Enlightenment's discovery of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of human intelligence, it reverses the order of Anselm's *crede ut intelligas* ("believe so that you may understand"); by saying instead, "understand so that you may believe," it goes a long way towards ruling out any conception of theology as an effort to grasp the intellectual coherence of believed truths which in the last resort defeat human understanding as the sun defeats human sight. To say that Macquarrie entirely abandons this older program of belief in search of understanding, so as to throw in his lot with the kind of rationalist, humanist theology produced during and after the Enlightenment, would be doing him less than justice. Nevertheless, the Christological doctrines advanced by Kant and Schleiermacher, especially, do appear to be the milestones from which he thinks there can be no turning back. Nor is it difficult to see the direction in which those milestones point. To think of Jesus Christ, following Chalcedon, as "like us in all respects" is not enough. He must also be thought of as *not unlike* us in any respect.

In order to conform with this standard of credibility Christology must attribute to Jesus all—but only—those characteristics which are supposed to be naturally human. Hence the anti-docetic hermeneutic of suspicion that Macquarrie applies to the history of Christology from Paul onwards. It goes without saying that miracle-working, along with preexistence and virgin birth, fails the test. Jesus was no *theios anēr*, divine man, such as even the earliest Gospel portrays; indeed Mark's Christology is "something of a regression from the first and last Adam Christology of Paul" (81). Perhaps more important, however, is what the full humanity on which Macquarrie sets such store does and does not imply for conceiving Jesus from a personal or existential point of view. Not two wills, the doctrine of the Sixth General Council; that would be a "pathological condition" (167). Jesus was one person, with one activity of willing; he was a human and not a divine person (163); and he was an autonomous person, free and responsible, like everyone else.

This last assertion, unexceptionable in itself, leads Macquarrie to the more contentious conclusion that Jesus cannot have been impeccable, incapable of sin. Had he been so, his freedom would have been compromised and real temptation impossible. But it is not impossible for us; ergo, not for him. Jesus could sin, and Macquarrie is inclined to take the

next step by suggesting that he did. If something more than a priori reasoning is wanted, there is some supporting evidence in the Gospels themselves. They report, for one thing, that Jesus advocated paying taxes, thereby implicating himself in the corporate sins of the Roman Empire. Again, as to individual sin, there is the Gethsemane episode, which, despite scholarly consensus against its historical veracity, Macquarrie accepts under the rubric of "true legend" as a genuine insight into Jesus' mind (89). The agony in the garden could not be "true," even in this sense, unless Jesus was really tempted to evade suffering and death; but if the temptation was real, then before finally rejecting an easier course of action he must actually, if only for a moment, have consented to it (145, 398). Having borrowed this admittedly speculative reading from Knox, Macquarrie invests it with positive significance. Since sin, as he understands it, consists fundamentally in separation from God, the way to make sense of the traditional doctrine that Christ was sinless is to think of him as overcoming the human sinfulness of which, as a human person, he must have had personal experience. This reinterpretation, in turn, allows Macquarrie to incorporate his view of freedom as entailing the ability to sin into his Adamic-adoptionist Christology. For since it was precisely by defeating temptation and alienation that Jesus succeeded where Adam failed, his autonomous achievement of sinlessness turns out to be equivalent to his being elected or adopted as Lord and Christ.

In light of all this it should come as no surprise to find that Macquarrie has reservations about what he calls the "happy ending" of the Jesus-story or that he offers an alternative, "austere" ending with more than a hint that it is preferable. Here it is the Fourth Gospel that offers support. Unreliable though it may be as history, there is something worth keeping in the way John comes close to identifying Jesus' death with his exaltation, for by using "lifted up" in this double sense he points to the same transvaluation of values that for Macquarrie is Christianity's origin and essence. Moreover, a resurrectionless Easter, while surely austere, need not be "unhappy." That would be so only if Jesus had not already won the victory over evil in Gethsemane, maintaining to the end his commitment to God's reign (412, 445)—his commitment, as Macquarrie puts it elsewhere, to "a new, fuller, better life for ordinary people" (34). Still, we cannot have it both ways. Between an ending that would "draw the bottom line under the cross" and an ending that follows the conventional Lukan resurrection-ascension sequence enshrined in the creeds and the liturgical year Macquarrie sees no possibility of harmony. He leaves it to the modern reader to choose, however, observing only that in either case

the distinctive and essential affirmations of Christianity remain: God is love and God is revealed in Jesus.

#### CHRISTOLOGY FROM ABOVE: HOW IS ALL THIS FROM GOD?

What about God, then? Like virtually every other Christology today, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* is anabatic first and foremost. The route from Jesus to Christ does not, however, exclude a movement "from above"; far from being at odds, adoptionism and "incarnational" Christology are, in Macquarrie's judgment, complementary and equally necessary (373). "All this is from God" cannot any longer be the first Christological affirmation, but affirming it is no less essential for being postponed.

Both the person and the work of Christ, as traditionally understood, have a divine as well as a human component, and Macquarrie wants to say the same. By declining to deal with questions about Christ's constitution of the kind that theologians debated in the Middle Ages, he does give partial endorsement to Melancthon's dictum equating knowledge of Christ with knowledge of his benefits; but he is equally disinclined to go the whole way to a purely functional Christology that would dwell on Christ's beneficent work to the exclusion of every question about his person, and more especially about his divinity (296). If nothing is said about who Jesus was except that he was a thoroughly human being, there is nothing to say about what he did, except possibly that he proved the truth of Pelagianism by successfully overcoming sin (373). In an account of how Jesus became Christ, therefore, human striving from below needs somehow to be understood in such a way as to make the gospel narrative a story about God. The question, then, is: What conception of God makes the most sense in this regard?

Not, at all events, a conception defined by contrast or otherness. Anything like an "infinitely qualitative difference" between God and the universe is as much a *bête noire* for Macquarrie as docetism is. Here again the relevant criterion would seem to be comprehension on the part of modern readers. It is the credibility of the affirmation that "all this is from God" that has to be established, if Jesus is to be understood as—and, consequently, believed to be—divine; and that credibility is best established by thinking in terms of a continuum that embraces both finite and infinite being. The relevant instance of finite being, however, is human being, which precisely as human reaches towards that which transcends it. Macquarrie's elaboration of this continuity, as might be expected from a catholic Christian who has translated Heidegger, follows something like the lines of Rahner's transcendental anthropology. Autonomous beings choose their essence; they decide, that is, what they

shall become, and in becoming what they decide to be, they surpass themselves. But their self-surpassing has no predetermined limit; the essence they have, yet also have to bring into being, is indefinitely plastic. To be completely and genuinely human, then, is also to be in some way infinite, limitless, transcendent, divine (370–71). Or so it would be, supposing that the potential divinity which is everyone's birthright has ever been actualized. Jesus *has* actualized it: that is the sum and substance of Macquarrie's Christology—also of his soteriology, as will presently appear. Far from claiming originality, however, he would argue that the Gospels say the same, in a more symbolic way, when they portray Jesus "as truly man, or even as the true man, who simply by being man in the fullest sense is also Son of God" (91; cf. 43). Which of course is another way of formulating Adamic adoptionism.

As divine, in this sense, Jesus is not unique in kind or quality but only as regards the degree of his sonship. Everybody, by virtue of being human, is in some measure similarly endowed; otherwise, nobody would be able to recognize in Jesus that supreme self-transcendence which constituted him as uniquely a son of God. If Macquarrie had been at Caesarea Philippi, he could have explained to Peter that what prompted his confession was "recognition deep within you that this is the humanity to which you and all human beings are called" (183). Peter already had in his human constitution an ideal or archetype of his own highest good, which already drew and lured and beckoned him through conscience or moral sense. In Jesus he saw this same ideal, but saw it realized. Likewise, those who make Peter's confession their own are motivated by a recognition of humanity realized in its divine completeness. The realizing may well have taken place in more than one particular life—that is how Macquarrie would address the thorny issue of what he calls "non-Christian saviour figures"—but the definitive instantiation of essential humanity remains for him the "rerun of the programme which came to grief in Adam" that was the career of Jesus Christ (59).

For Macquarrie, then, what it means to affirm Christ's divinity is basically the same as what it meant for Schleiermacher, namely that in Jesus a variable human attribute reached its maximum. The variable is "God-consciousness" in Schleiermacher's case and self-transcendence in Macquarrie's, but the principle is no different: Christ was divine because he was as human as could be. That being so, there is no need to resort to trinitarian theology in order to understand how someone who prayed to God could be God, and it comes as no surprise that the Trinity is as incidental to Macquarrie's Christology as it is in *The Christian Faith*. He is well aware that trinitarian doctrine emerged side by side with the doctrine of the Incarnation, that each entails the other, and that for

classical theology it is through a trinitarian conception of God that Christology is intelligibly related to other elements of Christian teaching (378). But while this may once have been an appropriate way to make sense of the NT witness to a new experience of God that was bound up with Jesus, it is not the only way nor, at present, the best. The firm line drawn at Nicea between God and creatures, with the Son of God on one side and human beings on the other, is defensible insofar as the alternative, divine immanence in creation generally and in Jesus particularly had at that time dangerously pagan associations. For Macquarrie the danger has passed, however, and dynamic continuity can and should be adopted in place of static separation as the relationship of finite to infinite that is most suitable as a framework for conceiving the incarnational, "from above" aspect of Christology.

So much for divinity with respect to Christ's person. As for his work, it may be noted that one of Macquarrie's objections to docetism is that an other-than-human Christ would be an irrelevant alien, an intruded being that might possibly "convey a revelation to the human race (as in Gnosticism) but could not *do* anything decisive for them" (145). It is therefore pertinent to ask what Macquarrie's fully human Jesus *did* by living and dying as the true Adam and so as Son of God. The answer is none too clear. Atonement theories of the kind associated with Anselm are set aside, both on the ground that their vindictive and legalistic God is unacceptable today and, perhaps more decisively, because redemption cannot be so objective as to exclude the efforts of the autonomous human beings who are redeemed. But not much is forthcoming by way of a more credible alternative. At one point Macquarrie mentions John McLeod Campbell's very suggestive idea of Christ as the perfect penitent, adding that the suggestion becomes all the more convincing if, as in his own proposal, Christ was not perfectly sinless (402). The idea goes no further, however, and on the whole atonement remains a peripheral theme. In Macquarrie's estimation it was not primarily, if at all, for the sake of repairing the damage of the fall that a second Adam re-ran the first one's program; Scotus and Rahner, not Thomas and Calvin, were on the right track when they taught that the Incarnation would have occurred, sin or no sin (170). Moreover, in a post-Enlightenment milieu, even "redemption," though a more agreeable term than "atonement," is still too negative; "salvation" is preferable, provided it does not imply being rescued from anything, but advancing from immaturity towards the fulfillment of human potential (205), with Jesus leading the advance. In a word, Macquarrie's soteriology begins to look like straightforward exemplarism. It is not a word he uses; "representative," not "example," best describes Christ's office. But it is hard to see what rerunning Adam's

program could *do* for the human race, other than exemplify and thus "convey a revelation" of what it is to be human—pretty much "as in Gnosticism."

All in all, what it means to say either of Jesus' identity or of his activity that deity enters into it turns out to be very elusive. Whenever Macquarrie spells out their content, statements that appear to be theological have a way of taking an anthropological turn so sharp that "all this is from God" becomes indistinguishable from "all this is authentically human." The maneuver is not, of course, his own invention. It is one way of acknowledging and coping with the fact that since Kant, God-talk, as such, has been problematic at best. Not surprisingly, Kant's is a pervasive and sometimes prominent influence throughout *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*. The intellectual history recounted in Part 2 opens with Kant; the debt that Part 3 owes to *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* would be plain even if Macquarrie had not mentioned it; and Kant's strictures on theology, mediated through the neo-Kantianism of Bultmann and his school, inform much of the interpretation of the NT in Part 1.

But if Kant has the first word, he does not get the last. It may well be that some variety of exemplarism would be the way of understanding salvation most logically consistent with holding, on the one hand, that human being is autonomous and, on the other, that objective statements about divine being are impossible. But another and quite different branch of soteriological thought is the one that Macquarrie prefers to graft onto the Kantian trunk of his Christology. Taking a cue from Schleiermacher, he conceives salvation as the final (but still natural) stage of creation. The argument runs as follows: As noted above, Jesus of Nazareth's particular achievement of divinity presupposes a general human capacity of transcendence. This Godward orientation of humanity at large itself rests, however, on a yet a more universal presupposition. The reason why divine condescension, God's "self-presencing," could take place in and through the development of humanity as *imago dei*, and could thus eventually culminate in Jesus, is that all along it had been taking place on a cosmic scale. In fact, that is what the cosmos *is*. The entire universe, conceived dynamically as a process of coming-to-be, is God's gradual involvement in space and time; and this whole progressive, self-disclosive penetration of the finite by the infinite can be said to constitute an incarnation of transcendence.

It cannot be said that this is the most convincing part of Macquarrie's book, or the clearest. To an already eclectic mix, mainly existentialist in flavor, he adds ingredients from Hegel and the process philosophers, making it no easy matter to follow the resulting movement back and

forth from God's evolving finitude to the world's evolving infinity, and from there to the consummation of both evolutions in creation's climax, the passion/exaltation of Christ. Certainly the theme is magnificent, drawing in many of the NT images that had to be bracketed for the sake of beginning with the human Jesus. What seems to be missing is a coherent, systematic, philosophical framework for articulating what that imagery means and how its meaning coheres with natural and human sciences for which the very idea of teleology is dubious at best. But, on the other hand, this objection may be wide of the mark. To ask Macquarrie for a consistent metaphysic would be to ask for something which there is reason to think he has omitted on purpose. Since it was metaphysical game playing that led classical Christology on what he regards as its most irrelevant detours, perhaps his own apologetic aims would likewise be thwarted rather than furthered by the introduction of technical philosophy (344). Nor is this the only reason. Despite his repeated condemnation of anti-intellectualism and his criticism of theologians such as Tillich for lack of clarity (303), Macquarrie again and again denounces precision as such. Almost at the outset he declares that theology cannot detach itself from the concrete, symbolic, inherently ambiguous language of metaphor. True, some metaphors are better than others (207), but all the same our "lack of mental capacity" keeps us from speaking of God in any but figurative terms (21). Besides, Gadamer and the later Heidegger should persuade us that the work of art, not the unambiguous diagram, best discloses the essence of subject matter such as theologians are concerned with. That is perhaps why one can speak of "true legends," and it could also be that Macquarrie's own account of creation "in Christ" should be assessed in the same light, as a philosophical poem that, by disclosing artistically the divine humanity of Jesus, convinces even if it does not explain. A more precise, differentiated, unambiguous account of salvation as creation in its fullness might be less persuasive.

#### CONCLUSION: WHAT IS THEOLOGY FOR?

Persuasion is the overriding objective of *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*. That is the end to which Macquarrie has adopted, as his means, the all but prescriptive three-phase sequence outlined above, and in so doing he has written what may well come to be regarded as an epitome of the modern theological project as applied to Christology. Instead of asking, as premodern theologians did, how that which the Church holds and proclaims as true is best understood with the help of the most intelligent philosophy available, Macquarrie assumes the standpoint of Christianity's cultured despisers, makes comprehension from that stand-

point the condition for assent, and accordingly puts the question of possibility first. He asks, to begin with, whether a God-man can even be conceived; and he pursues this question, not for the sake of shedding light on what Christian believers in fact profess, but in order to render Christianity intellectually respectable to persons whose antecedent willingness to believe it has been undermined—or, if you prefer, whose dogmatic slumbers have been interrupted—by the Enlightenment.

It is not that Macquarrie is wrong in giving high priority to apologetics. Nor is he mistaken in his assessment of the plausibility structure to which a defense and commendation of Christian doctrines that is meant for North Atlantic audiences will have to address itself. The question, rather, is whether transposing these doctrines into such a framework as early modern European philosophy has set up fulfills the aim either of apologetics or of systematic theology—which, for Macquarrie, are so closely intertwined as to be virtually inseparable. It is true enough that for the last 200 years the legitimacy of appealing to any authority beyond that of ordinary human experience has been denied again and again, and that consequently the movement “from below,” from what is human and is experientially known to be so, is an indispensable aspect of theological method today. But if the meaning of transcendence, divinity, salvation, and the like can be converted without remainder into the language of a philosophical anthropology, why keep the older terminology at all? If theology has nothing of its own to say, the apologist is hoist with his own petard: translating what used to be said about God into what currently is said about something else has the net effect, not of promoting acceptance of what the older ways of speaking were speaking about, but of confirming that in fact they are superfluous. Christian symbolism may still be aesthetically gratifying, but it says nothing about anything that cannot be said otherwise. From this quandary there is no escape, if, as Macquarrie seems to hold, religious doctrine must be fitted into a nonnegotiable conceptuality, and so rendered understandable, before it can be accepted as true. For if that is in fact how belief arises, the one course open to the apologist would seem to be the potentially self-defeating course that Schleiermacher adopted in his *Speeches on Religion*.

It is another question, though, whether religious belief does depend on intellectual understanding. That it does not, anyhow not primarily and certainly not entirely, was Newman's thesis in his *Grammar of Assent*. The purpose of the *Grammar* as a whole is plainly apologetic, and it begins where post-Enlightenment theology has to begin, with human experience. Yet Newman's analysis of what it is, as experienced, to believe led him to adopt a way of achieving his purpose that differs markedly from methods analogous to translation. By distinguishing



assent from apprehension—belief from what it presupposes and builds upon—and by distinguishing further the notional apprehension proper to theology from the real apprehension proper to religion, Newman could maintain that real assent to religious propositions, grounded as such in a real apprehension of their meaning, is grounded in imagination and affectivity as well as in understanding. Assent, in a word, is “existential”—an act of the whole person. Thus, when the final chapter of the *Grammar* sets out an argument intended to give the reader a real apprehension of Christianity, what it presents is not doctrine as such but an imaginatively composed history. For Newman Christianity is ordinarily embraced as a religion, as a complex whole embodied in concrete persons and events. Its embodiment in doctrine is part of this whole, and for that reason expounding particular doctrines may have a certain apologetic value. But, if it has, it will be the value of one component, and not the first or foundational one, in a more comprehensive argument.

Newman's own argument at the end of the *Grammar* is manifestly personal and not, perhaps, so compelling today as it was when it first appeared. Nevertheless there may still be something to learn from his procedure. He does not deny—in fact he explicitly affirms—that image and affect need to be regulated by intelligence. That is what theological science, as distinct from apologetics, is for: to deal, among other things, with the “ten thousand difficulties” which may arise in trying to understand what one has assented to, but which in themselves “do not make a doubt.” Doubt, like its opposite, assent, is a personal stance. And just as it is possible to assent, really and without reserve, despite notional difficulties, so too, conversely, resolving difficulties is not in itself a cure for doubt.

It is unlikely that Macquarrie would accept any such distinction. The whole drift of his argument implies that unless the difficulties can be resolved, classical Christianity is untenable, for despite its “transvaluation of values” there is one value left intact: the value of the human intellect's sovereign independence. That is why, in bringing Christianity and modern thought into harmony, all the adjustments get made on one side and all the critique comes from the other. This unilateral aggiornamento is nearly as old as modernity itself; indeed, it is beginning to seem a bit old-fashioned. To be sure, what Louis Dupré has called the dubious heritage of the 18th-century philosophers cannot be simply disowned, woven as it now is into the whole fabric of Western culture. Nevertheless it can be, and increasingly is being, called into question. Yet even the most penetrating critiques of the Enlightenment, although Macquarrie is not unaware of them, have left his own loyalties unshaken. Despite his

agreement with Gadamer in other respects, he still harbors the early modern prejudice against prejudice; the Cartesian precepts of bracketing every received opinion, beginning neutrally, and proceeding by way of methodical doubt are all still in force (266); and the tragic plight of D. F. Strauss, the theologian who by following those precepts made himself an unbeliever, has in Macquarrie's view become the tragedy of the Church (228). If by the end of *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* all there is left to recommend is Stoic acceptance of a gospel that draws the bottom line under the cross, that is at least understandable.

There are, however, indications that Macquarrie himself is not entirely comfortable with where the trajectory of his Christology eventually leads him. He presents the "austere ending" of Jesus' career in a chapter called, oddly but significantly, "The Mysteries of Jesus Christ." The oddity follows from some muted but unmistakable hints that he is using the word "mystery" in the sense associated with the devotion of the rosary. For by steering his book, almost at the end, in a quasi-doxological direction, Macquarrie appears to be suggesting that the light in which Christological questions will finally be answered is not, or not only, the light of critical philosophy but the light of prayer. And if that is so, then the doxological fittingness of assertions about Christ becomes as much a theological criterion as is their conceivability. "No dogma," to quote another Anglican writing in another book that ends with the rosary, "deserves its place unless it is prayable,"<sup>5</sup> and whether a dogma is prayable has more than once been the question that decided whether it would be accorded official status as an item of the Church's teaching.

But if something along these lines is what Macquarrie had in mind, he never says so. There are eighteen chapters before the one on mysteries, and they more or less systematically exclude from serious consideration the idea that worship or mystagogy or spirituality might be intrinsically relevant to theological method. Even within the chapter some tension is evident. Macquarrie begins by characterizing the mysteries under review as combining an element of historical happening with what he calls a penumbra, an indistinct fringe or envelope, of imagination or interpretation or theological creativity—and with that he has pretty much determined the sequel in advance. Built into this version of the kernel-and-husk metaphor is an epistemological judgment to the effect that whereas a historical happening really and objectively occurred, its imagined or created penumbra, however doxologically meaningful, is subjective and thus, for scientific reason, negligible. Some penumbras, perhaps, can still be entertained as true legends when others, like the resurrection

<sup>5</sup> Austin Farrer, *Lord I Believe* (London: Faith, 1958; Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1989) 10.

and transfiguration of Jesus, have been quietly dropped; but this qualification only serves to underscore the dichotomy it qualifies. That dichotomy—fact on one side, meaning and value on the other—is another Kantian legacy, and try as he will Macquarrie cannot join together what Kant has put asunder. The “need to be absolutely honest” compels letting Easter go, while at the same time “the happy ending *deserves* to be true” (412). The resurrection can only be “an event in the disciples,” while at the same time “the meaning of the resurrection is in Jesus himself” (414). Jesus’ preexistence can only be “in the mind of God,” while at the same time it enjoys, as such, “a very high degree of reality, even if it is different from the reality of existing in space and time” (391). And so on.

If these and similar passages show, as they seem to do, that when it comes to setting out “the mysteries of Jesus Christ” Macquarrie is a little ill at ease with the position his philosophical tenets oblige him to take, the reason may be that the dichotomy he has to cope with is a dichotomy that every genuine act of worship performatively negates. If nothing else, then, the doxological turn at the end of *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* could at least raise questions about the way of accepting the challenge of modernity which Macquarrie follows in the rest of the book, and which theologians in general have been following for 200 years and more. If, when Christianity has been recast in a new and perhaps a more persuasive mold, there is something left over, something as basic as the realities mediated by prayer, then it may legitimately be asked whether the mold is inadequate in other ways too. That the philosophies sparked by the Enlightenment are less than satisfactory vehicles for saying what Christianity has to say is not the conclusion that Macquarrie himself arrives at. It is, however, a conclusion that his book might compel its readers to draw.

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