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ANONYMOUS CHRISTIANS: KARL RAHNER'S PNEUMA-CHRISTOCENTRISM AND AN EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

JOSEPH H. WONG, O.S.B.CAM.

New Camaldoli Hermitage, Big Sur, California

A LONG THE FRONTIER of contemporary theology, two movements of special vitality and interest are the liberation theology originating in Latin America, and the theology of religions which has emerged in the encounter with the traditions of Asia and Africa. Just as the development of the so-called third Church has great significance for the universal Church, so also third-world theology has an important impact on the theological reflections of the Church at large.¹ In fact, the topic of Christ and world religions is occupying a central position in contemporary theological discussions.² People feel the need to engage in dialogue with other cultures and religions. The Church also considers interreligious dialogue to be an integral aspect of her mission.³

The attitude of the Church concerning the salvation of non-Chris-

¹ Cf. Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Slough: St Paul, 1976); idem, *The Church of the Future* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986); Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983).

² For surveys, see Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *TS* 37 (1976) 545–66; Robert J. Schreiter, "The Anonymous Christian and Christology," *Mis-siology* 6 (1978) 29–52; Lucien Richard, *What Are They Saying about Christ and World Religions?* (New York: Paulist, 1981); Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 174–92; Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982); Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985); Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985); Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); idem, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990); John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987); Leonard Swidler, ed., *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987); Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Paragon, 1990); Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991).

³ See the Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* no. 13. This document is published in different languages in *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis* no. 56, 19 (1984) 117–241.

tians is based on two basic beliefs: God's universal will to save humankind, and the necessity of the Church for salvation. In an attempt at balancing these two beliefs, the Church had formerly put greater emphasis on the necessity of the Church for salvation. Vatican II, with its openness and positive outlook, marked a watershed in the Church's understanding of her relationship with other religions. It has been generally acknowledged that Karl Rahner was the chief contributor to the teaching of Vatican II on this matter.⁴ The substance, if not the highly disputed term, of his theory of "anonymous Christians" has been endorsed by the Council in its various documents.⁵ Since then, however, interreligious dialogue has come a long way. Theologians have moved from an exclusive to an inclusive view regarding Christ and the salvation of non-Christians. But some have moved further into a pluralist view and consider Rahner's theory to be patronizing and superseded. Whereas the suitability of the term "anonymous Christians" may be questioned, I believe that Rahner's theory is open to further development. By utilizing his more recent writings, as well as those of contemporary theologians, it is possible to formulate a Rahnerian pneumatological Christocentrism. It is an inclusivist view, representative of the mainline position of Christian theologians, and, in my opinion, the appropriate view in the theology of religions.

→ In this article I shall first present Rahner's theory of anonymous Christians in the context of different approaches to the theology of religions in recent discussions. Then I shall examine various aspects of a pneuma-Christocentrism from a trinitarian perspective of salvation history. Finally, I shall highlight the rich potential in Rahner's thought for an East-West dialogue, especially by pointing out the resonance between Rahner's trinitarian perspective and a Taoist vision of reality. Rahner's treatment of human beings' transcendental experience of the mystery shows special affinity to the nondual experience of the ultimate reality common to Eastern thought. Although Rahner himself did not engage in the East-West dialogue, he fully acknowledged the mutually enriching character of the dialogue and its important role in present-day theology.⁶

⁴ See Knitter, *No Other Name?* 125; D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* 80.

⁵ For the teaching of Vatican II, see *Lumen gentium* nos. 16–17; *Ad gentes* nos. 3, 7, 9, 11, 15; *Nostra aetate* no. 2; *Gaudium et spes* no. 22. English translations may be found in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966).

⁶ See Karl Rahner, "Aspects of European Theology," in *Theological Investigations* 21 (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 78–98, at 96–98. Rahner states: "By taking foreign cultures into account along with the problematic areas they give rise to, European theology

RAHNER'S ANONYMOUS CHRISTIANS AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES

In order that we may better appreciate Rahner's theory of anonymous Christians, it would be helpful to situate his teaching in the context of different approaches in the debate. There have been several attempts to classify the various positions according to some basic models. Peter Schineller, for example, distinguishes the different views as ecclesiocentric, Christocentric, and theocentric.⁷ Some theologians have made use of other paradigms for their classification, i.e. exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.⁸ I find it useful to combine the two classifications by proposing the following paradigms with a particular type of Christology attached to each: *ecclesiocentric-exclusivist view* with an exclusive Christology, *Christocentric-inclusivist view* with a constitutive or a normative Christology, and *theocentric-pluralist view* with a nonnormative Christology.⁹ Moreover, I shall present one or two theologians as representatives of each paradigm.

Ecclesiocentric-Exclusivist View: Exclusive Christology

This represents the most restrictive position regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religions. Jesus Christ is understood as the exclusive center of the universe. In order to obtain salvation it is necessary to have an explicit knowledge of, and personal commitment to, Jesus Christ who is the one mediator of salvation. The axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("no salvation outside the Church"), formulated by Origen and applied by Cyprian, became the traditional teaching of the Church.¹⁰ This was the standard position of the Catholic Church until Vatican II.

Karl Barth may be considered as the chief exponent of an exclusive Christology on the Protestant side. Rather than an ecclesiocentrism, Barth's is a Christomonism, upholding the unique salvific mediatorship of Jesus Christ to the exclusion of any other mediation of salvation. Barth makes a sharp distinction between revelation and religion.

would not only do a little advance thinking for those who are going to come later but it could also learn for itself and be enriched in the process" (96–97).

⁷ See Schineller, "Christ and Church," *TS* 37 (1976) 550.

⁸ See Dupuis, *Jesus Christ* 105–10.

⁹ Whereas Schineller classifies both normative and nonnormative Christology under the theocentric view, I prefer to join normative Christology to a Christocentric view.

¹⁰ See Origen, *In Jesu nave* 3.5 (Annie Jaubert, ed., *Origène. Homélies sur Josué*, Sources chrétiennes 71 [Paris: Cerf, 1960] 142, n. 1); Cyprian, *De unitate Ecclesiae* 6 (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965] 5.423).

Religion is understood as the human attempt to reach God. But this is simply impossible inasmuch as only God can make God known.¹¹ Revelation is God's outreach to humanity which takes place uniquely in Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of the eternal Word.¹² Not only are human beings unable to know God, they cannot do anything to help themselves. Only God can save humanity. Hence, religion as human effort to know God and attain salvation is condemned as "unbelief" (*Unglaube*), because it attempts to do what only Jesus Christ can do.¹³ The coming of Jesus Christ brings about the abolition of religion.

Christocentric-Inclusivist View: Constitutive/Normative Christology

This second position, which moves away from an ecclesiocentric-exclusive view into a Christocentric-inclusive perspective, is currently held by the majority of theologians. A Christocentric-inclusivist view maintains the necessity and universality of Christ in the economy of salvation. Christian faith is necessary, but it is possible to have implicit faith in Christ. Salvation comes through the grace of Christ, but this grace is actually offered and available to all people. Inclusive Christology can be further divided into "constitutive" and "normative" Christology. According to the former view, Jesus Christ is not only the decisive and normative revelation of God but is also constitutive of salvation.¹⁴ Normative Christology, on the other hand, presents Christ as not constitutive but only normative of salvation for all people. It is a Christocentric view inasmuch as Christ is seen as the fulfillment of human history. He is the decisive and highest revelation of God and of human existence. But the mediation of Christ is not constitutive for all. Salvation, always possible for all humanity even apart from Christ, becomes normatively manifest in him.

Karl Rahner

If Vatican II marks the watershed in the Christian attitude towards other religions, Karl Rahner is rightly called the Council's chief engineer in this regard. To substantiate his contribution to Vatican II I shall present Rahner's thinking on this topic through two of his important articles written before or during the Council.¹⁵ Rahner be-

¹¹ Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 301.

¹² Ibid. 1.

¹³ Ibid. 329.

¹⁴ Vatican II presents a constitutive Christology by affirming that God "has established Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world" (*Lumen gentium* no. 17).

¹⁵ Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Investigations* 5.115–34; the German original of this volume was published in 1962. Idem, "Anonymous Christians," in *Investigations* 6.390–98; this article was originally a broadcast

believes that we are faced with two basic principles with regard to the question of the salvation of non-Christians. On the one hand, there is the necessity of faith in God and in Jesus Christ in order to obtain salvation. On the other hand, there is the universal salvific will of God that seriously intends to save all human beings. Rahner resolves these apparently conflicting principles by pointing out the possibility of having implicit faith in Christ. Consequently, Rahner proposes a broader concept of being related to the Church by affirming different degrees of relation to it, which would include the so-called "anonymous Christians" as well as the explicitly professed Christians.¹⁶

The foundation for "anonymous Christianity" is to be sought in the basic structure of humans as spiritual beings and in the design of God at the beginning of creation. As spirit, a human person is "a being of unlimited openness for the limitless being of God," whom Rahner designates as mystery.¹⁷ Rahner considers "transcendence" the most distinctive characteristic of the human spirit, through which the Absolute is encountered, nonreflectively, in each human act of knowing or loving any particular object. Thus the human being is constantly and inevitably surrounded by and ordained to the mystery as the ground and goal of human transcendence.¹⁸

What is of special importance is Rahner's insight that an inner unity exists among the following three realities: human transcendence, God's bestowal of grace, and the mystery of the Incarnation. From revelation we learn that right from the beginning of creation God decided to communicate himself to humanity in a radical closeness through the bestowal of grace. This offer of grace at the moment of creation, even prior to the free response of humanity, determines human nature in its deepest being and should rightly be described as a freely given "supernatural existential."¹⁹ For this reason, a human being's experience of transcendence is not a purely natural experience; it is already the experience of supernatural grace.

Moreover, Rahner perceives a Christological structure in God's bestowal of grace which is aiming at the Incarnation as the fullest expression of God's self-communication. As self-transcendence is a human being's most basic characteristic, a human being truly realizes himself when he gives himself away into the incomprehensible mystery of God. The Incarnation is thus understood as the highest instance

review of the book by Anita Röper, *Die anonymen Christen* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1963), which was put on the air by the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* in the summer of 1964.

¹⁶ Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Investigations* 6.390–91.

¹⁷ Ibid. 392.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 393.

of human transcendence accomplished through the self-communication of God. Seen as “the uniquely supreme case of the actualization of man’s nature in general,” the Incarnation constitutes the goal of creation and human existence.²⁰ For this reason, in accepting one’s own human existence through silent fidelity and constant dedication to the duties of everyday life, a person is responding to God’s offer of grace and accepting the mystery of Christ, perhaps even without realizing it explicitly.²¹ In this way, Christian revelation can be seen as the explicit statement of the basic revelation of grace which the human person always experiences implicitly in the depths of his being.

Thus far we have seen the possibility of the salvation of non-Christians through an implicit acceptance of Christ. What about the function of the extra-Christian religions as such? Are non-Christians saved “in spite of” or precisely “through” their religions? Rahner presents four theses in his article on Christianity and non-Christian religions. The first thesis states that Christianity claims to be the absolute religion intended by God for all. But this absolute religion comes to human persons in an historical way, i.e., when they are existentially and seriously confronted by it.²² The second thesis is based on the social aspect of salvation. A human being is called to be a “religious person” in order to attain salvation, but he becomes this religious person in the concrete religion in which he finds himself. Hence, until their followers are seriously confronted by the Christian message, non-Christian religions must be considered as lawful religions leading to salvation.²³ The third thesis recognizes the members of extra-Christian religions as “anonymous Christians.” Christianity, it is said, makes explicit a previously anonymous state through an inner dynamism.²⁴ The fourth thesis then reflects on the idea of mission in the light of the first three theses.²⁵ To label the title “anonymous Christians” as arrogant or patronizing is to misunderstand Rahner’s original intention. The title was not meant to be used as an immediate tool for dialogue with other religions. Rather, it was meant to clarify and

²⁰ Ibid.; cf. also “On the Theology of the Incarnation,” in *Investigations* 4.105–20, at 109.

²¹ Ibid. 394.

²² Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” in *Investigations* 5.119.

²³ Ibid. 130.

²⁴ Ibid. 132; the name itself suggests the tendency towards explication.

²⁵ Ibid. 133; for the importance of missionary activities of the Church, see also “Anonymous Christians,” in *Investigations* 6.396–97.

broaden the then-standard outlook of the Catholic Church on the followers of extra-Christian religions.²⁶

John B. Cobb

John B. Cobb, a major representative of process theologians, presents a Logos Christology which is generally considered as normative but not constitutive.²⁷ Cobb admits the universal presence of revelation and redemptive grace. According to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, each actual entity is formed by the integration of past experiences with an aim or purpose towards the future. God in his primordial nature is the transcendent source of the "initial aim" offered to each actuality. To the degree that the new aim is successfully appropriated by an emerging entity there is creative transformation in the world. Cobb designates the Logos as the transcendent principle of "creative transformation" pervading the world.²⁸ *Christ* is the name for the immanence or Incarnation of the Logos in the world, especially in human beings.²⁹ The Logos is immanent in all things as the initial phase of their subjective aim. Any creative transformation is based on the reception of this initial aim.

While the Logos is incarnate in all human beings in varying degrees, Jesus is the "paradigm case of incarnation," because his very selfhood is constituted by the Logos.³⁰ The distinctive structure of existence of Jesus is characterized by his personal identity with the immanent Logos. While Christ is present in all things, *Jesus is Christ*. Moreover, the perfect Incarnation of the Logos in Jesus is at the same time the highest embodiment of human being.³¹ For this reason, Jesus' distinctive structure of existence is normative for all. This view is often taken as representing an inclusive-normative Christology. However, while Cobb himself might not envisage it as a constitutive Christology, he does explain the saving significance of the paschal mystery of Jesus in terms of a spiritual "field of force into which people can enter."³² Since the finality and normativeness of Jesus are based on the "distinctive structure of existence" or "field of force" achieved by him, I would

²⁶ Cf. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* 89–90. Rahner was once asked by Nishitani, the well-known Japanese philosopher, "What would you say if I were to treat you as an anonymous Zen Buddhist?" Rahner replied that Nishitani might and should do so from his point of view ("The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," in *Investigations* 16:199–224, at 219).

²⁷ Knitter, *No Other Name?* 137–38.

²⁸ John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 62.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 76.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 138–39.

³¹ *Ibid.* 171.

³² *Ibid.* 117.

argue that Cobb's Logos Christology is constitutive as well as normative.

Theocentric-Pluralist View: Nonnormative Christology

This third approach presents nothing less than a radical change of paradigm. The mediation of Jesus Christ is considered as neither constitutive nor normative for salvation. This new paradigm is theocentric as opposed to Christocentric, inasmuch as it holds that salvation ultimately comes from God who has manifested himself in different religious traditions. Jesus Christ is perceived as simply one among many mediators of salvation. Judgments about claims to uniqueness or normativeness are unverifiable and therefore lacking in basis. Is this theocentric pluralism a legitimate and tenable Christian position? This view can well explain one of the two basic Christian beliefs, namely, the universal salvific will of God. But it can hardly explain the second basic belief, that Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and humanity.³³ These two fundamental articles of Christian faith are in fact stated together in one Pauline text (1 Tim 2:4–6).

John Hick

One of the most distinctive representatives of religious pluralism is John Hick. He advocates a "Copernican revolution in theology," namely, a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths. Hick considers the world religions, including Christianity, to be so many different human responses to the one divine Reality.³⁴ The basic criterion for evaluating a religious tradition is to be found in its soteriological effectiveness—whether it is capable of offering a better quality of human existence.³⁵

As is to be expected, this "Copernican revolution" involves a new Christology. The Christian claim to uniqueness and normativeness is based on the doctrine of the Incarnation which, according to Hick, is mythical and needs reinterpretation.³⁶ There is a shift of meaning in the title "Son of God" in early Christian tradition. In its original Jewish context, the title bears a functional meaning and is often used for the Messiah. When it comes to the Greco-Roman culture, the title

³³ Cf. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* 25.

³⁴ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973) 131; idem, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 5–6.

³⁵ John Hick, "On Grading Religions," *Religious Studies* 17 (1981) 463.

³⁶ John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in idem, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1977) 167–85.

suggests the idea of Incarnation and deification.³⁷ The process of deification was evident already in John, but especially during the controversies of the early councils. According to Hick, the language of Incarnation is not meant to be "factual statement" about "empirical, metaphysical" realities; it "lacks any non-metaphorical meaning."³⁸ The statement that "Jesus was God the Son incarnate" is not literally true. Rather, it is the application of a "mythical concept" which gives expression to Jesus' efficacy as Savior from sin and ignorance.³⁹

The pluralist position of Hick has met serious criticism from various quarters.⁴⁰ J. J. Lipner, among others, accuses Hick of ingenious relativism and ahistorical idealism.⁴¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg pinpoints Hick's real problem with Christian inclusivism as the problem of Christology.⁴² Hick's proposal of religious pluralism hinges on the condition of a prior rejection of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Pannenberg believes that the quest of the thread of continuity that leads from the historical Jesus to the apostolic proclamation of Christ has not yet been examined by the proponents of *The Myth of God Incarnate*.⁴³ In fact, Jesus' claim on the anticipatory presence of God's kingdom in his own activity involves his person in a way that basically implies what later on was explicated by incarnational language and by titles such as Son of God.⁴⁴ I would question whether it is necessary, or even possible, to make a choice between theocentrism and Christocentrism. Is not the *either/or* a false dilemma? For Christians, the only adequate knowledge of God is "God the Father of Jesus Christ." For this reason, Christian theology is theocentric inasmuch as it is Christocentric, and vice versa.⁴⁵

³⁷ Ibid. 174.

³⁸ Ibid. 177–78.

³⁹ Ibid. 178–79.

⁴⁰ For a recent critique, see Gregory H. Carruthers, *The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions: An Elaboration and Evaluation of the Position of John Hick* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990).

⁴¹ J. J. Lipner, "Does Copernicus Help?" in Richard W. Rousseau, ed., *Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Scranton: Ridge Row, 1981) 154–74.

⁴² Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: The Problem of a Theology of the World Religions," in D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* 96–106, at 100.

⁴³ Ibid.; see also note 36 above.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Pannenberg indicates the continuity between Jesus and early Christology as a central issue in his book, *Jesus: God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) esp. 21–37.

⁴⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ* 110.

Raimundo Panikkar

Owing to the evolution in his thinking, it is not easy to classify Raimundo Panikkar. In view of his earlier fulfillment theory, Gavin D'Costa considers him an inclusivist, while Paul Knitter places him among the theocentric pluralists on account of his more recent development.⁴⁶ To indicate Panikkar's developing position, I shall present some salient points from the two editions of his major work, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.⁴⁷ The first edition of the book clearly represents a fulfillment theory in respect to the relationship of Christianity with other religions, especially Hinduism. Christianity is presented as the "catholic" or "universal" religion. Christianity is the fullness of religion and thus the real perfection of every religion.⁴⁸ While he finds inadequate those analogies that express the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity in terms of "falsehood/truth,"⁴⁹ or "natural/supernatural,"⁵⁰ he sees Hinduism as a kind of "Christianity in potency,"⁵¹ inasmuch as a dynamism exists in Hinduism towards Christianity.

However, Panikkar has changed his position in his more recent writings. In the second and completely revised edition of *The Unknown Christ*, not only the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism in terms of polar opposites is found inadequate,⁵² but various "fulfillment" theories that present Christianity as the completion of Hinduism are equally deemed unsatisfactory.⁵³ In his long introduction to the new edition, Panikkar advocates a universal Christology. For him, Christ is more than an historical figure. As a universal principle Christ is the most powerful living symbol of the total reality which he calls "the Mystery."⁵⁴ This symbol may assume other names, such as Rama, Krishna, or Isvara. Each name expresses the same Mystery, each dealing with an unknown dimension of Christ.⁵⁵

Panikkar had been formulating this universal Christology much

⁴⁶ D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* 22–49; Knitter, *No Other Name?* 146–52. For a more recent statement of his pluralistic position, see Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness," in Hick and Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* 89–116.

⁴⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964); rev. edition: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1981).

⁴⁸ Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1st ed.) x.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 40–50.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 36–39.

⁵¹ Ibid. 59.

⁵² Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (rev. ed.) 70–80.

⁵³ Ibid. 90–3.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 23, 26–27.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 27–30.

earlier than the second edition of his major work. There is universal salvation, but the Savior (Christ) is not an individual, not merely an historical figure.⁵⁶ The statement "Jesus is Christ" cannot be identical to the statement "Christ is Jesus." Jesus is simply one concrete historical name for the "Supername"—Christ, which can also be called by other historical names. Jesus is only one expression of the cosmotheandric principle (Christ) which finds an historically sui-generis epiphany in Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁷ Thus Panikkar not only distinguishes between Jesus and Christ; he actually separates the two when he affirms that the universal saving principle (Christ) is equally embodied in other religious figures. This universal Christology of a Christ disconnected with the historical Jesus creates serious problems which will be discussed below.

RAHNERIAN PNEUMA-CHRISTOCENTRISM IN A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION HISTORY

I have presented Karl Rahner's theory of anonymous Christians in the context of different approaches to the theology of religions in contemporary discussion. I consider an inclusive and constitutive Christocentrism, which is represented by Rahner, as the proper approach to indicate the universal saving presence of Christ in the world, and hence in all religions. It is the only paradigm capable of explaining the two basic statements of the Christian faith (see 1 Tim 2:4–6). This inclusive Christocentrism is to be unfolded from a trinitarian perspective of salvation history. It hinges on the relationship between the salvific design of the Father and the Christ event which is the "mystery of his will" (Eph 1:9). The Holy Spirit serves as the dynamic link between the saving plan of God and its realization in Christ.

This inclusive Christocentric paradigm implies several basic aspects that are related to some of the crucial issues we raised earlier. The following three major aspects will be discussed here: (1) the relation between finality and causality, or between normative and constitutive significance of the Christ event; (2) the relation between the historical Jesus and the transhistorical, cosmic Christ; and (3) the relation between the particular event of Jesus Christ and its universal significance. In view of the special role played by the Holy Spirit in mediating between the salvific design of God and the Christ event, as well as between this particular event and its universal saving significance,

⁵⁶ Raimundo Panikkar, *Salvation in Christ: Concreteness and Universality* (Santa Barbara: privately published, 1972) 62.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 71–72; also idem, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973) 53–54.

the inclusive Christocentric model is aptly called a pneumatological Christocentrism. My reflection will be inspired primarily by Rahner, while making use also of the writings of contemporary theologians who manifest an affinity to Rahner's thinking. My intention is to show both continuity and further development between Rahner's "anonymous Christians" and the Rahnerian pneuma-Christocentric view presented here.

Finality of Christ: Normative and Constitutive

The Christocentric-inclusivist view may adopt a constitutive or a normative Christology. Exponents of a normative Christology, as we have seen, admit that Jesus Christ is the norm of religions or the criterion for judging authentic salvation, but they deny that he is also the cause constituting salvation for humankind. The central message of the New Testament, however, does not tell us that Jesus has come merely to reveal the meaning of salvation, and therefore to be the ideal type of salvation; rather, it teaches that he *is* the Savior who has brought salvation to the world through his death and resurrection. The frequently repeated "for us" formula of the New Testament has found its way into the Nicene Creed. My thesis is that if one holds seriously the normativeness of Christ, one must also admit Christ's constitutive significance for salvation. In other words, a coherent normative Christology should merge with a constitutive Christology, and vice versa.

The claim to normativeness implies a claim to uniqueness and finality. If Jesus were not unique and unsurpassable, he would not be the supreme norm and criterion for religion and salvation. But the ideas of uniqueness and finality already imply the idea of a certain causality. To understand this statement it is necessary to examine the kind of causality involved. According to Rahner, in relation to the saving design of God, the Christ event is its effect rather than its cause, understood as efficient cause. It would be un-Christian to imagine that the cross of Christ has transformed an angry God into a merciful one. On the contrary, it is the eternal love of God which has effected the Christ event, including his sacrificial death.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, one must admit that the Christ event also exercised a certain causality on our salvation. Rahner understands the Incarnation and the cross of Christ as the "final cause," or summit, of God's universal

⁵⁸ Rahner, "Universality of Salvation," in *Investigations* 16.207–11. For a similar view see Donald M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956) 184–89.

self-communication to the world.⁵⁹ The idea of the finality of Christ means that salvation history is tending towards a goal or fulfillment in Christ. God's self-communication to humankind is driving towards an irreversible climax with a visible manifestation in history in which the ambivalence of the divine-human encounter, owing to the freedom on both sides, will be resolved by God's eschatological commitment and humanity's total response.⁶⁰ As the summit of God's self-communication, this goal draws the whole process of salvation history forward with an inner dynamism. In this sense the Christ event is both the effect and the final cause of God's offer of salvation to the world.

The normativeness of Christ can likewise be expressed in terms of sign. He is the supreme model of the genuine relationship between God and humanity as well as among humans themselves, and as such the sign or sacrament of salvation. For this reason, Rahner also designates the causality of the Christ event as a "sacramental sign causality." The cross, together with the resurrection of Jesus, has a "primary sacramental causality" for the salvation of humankind. From the beginning, grace is already universally operative in the world and is tending towards a full expression of itself. The cross is the sign of "its victorious and irreversible activity in the world," i.e. a sign of the definitiveness of God's self-communication through grace.⁶¹ As the historical and social embodiment of grace, a sacrament is a real cause of grace precisely by "signifying" it.⁶² Rahner explains the mutual relationship between grace and its sign in terms of "real symbol": the sign is in fact brought forth by grace as its "real symbol," so that grace itself achieves fulfilment and finds historical expression.⁶³ In light of this, Rahner points to the interdependence between God's salvific design and the paschal mystery, inasmuch as the cross and resurrection of Christ are effected by God's offer of grace as its "real symbol" so that this divine grace may become a concrete reality in it.⁶⁴

Rahner also distinguishes between "objective" and "subjective" redemption. Just as the effectiveness of a sacrament depends also on the inner disposition of the recipient, so, in a similar way, the paschal

⁵⁹ Karl Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," in *Investigations* 17.39–50, at 46.

⁶⁰ Rahner, "Universality of Salvation," in *Investigations* 16.213–14.

⁶¹ Ibid. 212.

⁶² Ibid. 213.

⁶³ Ibid. For Rahner's theory of symbol see Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Investigations* 4.221–52; also Joseph H. Wong, *Logos—Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1984) 75–82.

⁶⁴ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol" 214–15; cf. also his *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 284.

mystery of Christ accomplished an objective saving situation (*redemptio objectiva*) for humankind, which may be appropriated as subjective redemption through the free response of each individual. In contrast to any form of Pelagianism, Rahner observes that the free acceptance of salvation is itself a gift of God's grace.⁶⁵

Based on the unity of revelation and salvation, a consistent normative Christology must coincide with a constitutive Christology. To claim that Jesus is the final norm or ideal type of salvation for the world means to say that he is the definitive revelation of God's salvific relationship with humankind. But how can Jesus be the definitive revelation of God's offer of grace to the world if this definitive offer did not actually take place in the Christ event? A revelation without the corresponding salvific reality being given would be the manifestation through an empty sign, not a sacramental sign. Hence, through the idea of sacramental symbol, revelation and salvation, sign and reality, norm and constituting cause all become one in Jesus Christ. Christ is the universal norm of salvation precisely because he is the constitutive cause of it. Moreover, the dichotomy between the theocentric and Christocentric views is also overcome. If God's salvific love finds its sacramental sign in the Christ event in which this love is fully given and manifested to the world, then the theocentric and Christocentric views actually become one in Christian theology.

Historical Jesus and Cosmic Christ: Symbol and History

As mentioned earlier, Panikkar's universal Christology presents Christ as the "cosmotheandric principle" or symbol of the Mystery. Jesus is the Christ, but Christ is more than Jesus. Panikkar not only distinguishes between the two, but actually separates Christ from Jesus in his assertion that the universal Christ is embodied in different religions under different names, such as Rama, Krishna, Isvara, etc. I find this separation of Christ from Jesus inadmissible. In this section I shall enter into dialogue with the "universal Christology" of Panikkar and attempt to clarify the relationship between Jesus and Christ.

The word "Christ" is first of all the title given to the historical Jesus who is called "*the* Christ." The title "cosmic Christ," then, may indicate the risen Jesus in his transhistorical existence. Paul also uses the title "Christ" for the preexistent Son of God who has been active since the beginning of creation and was destined to become Jesus Christ in history. Without the Christ event Paul could not possibly apply the title

⁶⁵ Ibid. 207.

to the preexistent Son. Hence the idea of the "cosmic Christ" can mean the Logos—the second person of the Trinity—prior to the Incarnation, or the resurrected, transhistorical Christ. In both cases, as will be seen, the title is inseparably linked with the historical Jesus.

According to Rahner, the unity of the preincarnational Christ and the historical Jesus can be expressed in terms of "final causality." As the final goal of God's self-communication to the world, Jesus Christ is present from the beginning in the mind of God. This goal, like a hidden entelechy, activates and draws the whole process of God's self-bestowal in its forward movement with an inner magnetism.⁶⁶ One may say that all the activities of the cosmic Christ prior to the Incarnation are directed towards and are modelled after the historical event of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, when the title "cosmic Christ" is applied to his glorified state, it refers precisely to the risen Jesus who, through the resurrection, has entered into a pneumatic existence, becoming a "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). Rahner describes this new existence as a transhistorical and pancosmic existence that renders the risen Jesus the transforming center of the world through his Spirit.⁶⁷

Panikkar's Hindu-Christian theology is an attempt to respond to the challenge to Christianity by an ahistorical Hinduism. He recognizes that India is not prepared to believe in a spatiotemporally situated divine reality.⁶⁸ We may add that not only in India, but in Asia in general, religions and doctrines of salvation are based on timeless universal truths rather than on any particular historical event.⁶⁹ As Bede Griffiths rightly states, the doctrine of the Incarnation presents the specific novelty of Christianity.⁷⁰ He defines the basic difference between the Incarnation and an *avatara*, which means literally a "descent" of God to the world from time to time in order to restore the order of righteousness.⁷¹ On the contrary, the distinctive character of

⁶⁶ Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Investigations* 5.157–92, at 175–78.

⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Festival of the Future of the World," in *Investigations* 7.181–85, at 184–85.

⁶⁸ Cf. Robert Smet, *Essai sur la pensée de Raimundo Panikkar: Une contribution indienne à la théologie des religions et à la christologie* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Center d'histoire des religions, 1981) 105; see also Dupuis, *Jesus Christ* 188.

⁶⁹ An exception may be found in Mahayana Buddhism; see Aloysius Pieris, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," in Hick and Knitter, eds., *Myth of Christian Uniqueness* 162–77.

⁷⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1990) 142, 165.

⁷¹ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1983) 123. According to classical views, there are usually said to be ten *avatars*. However, the modern Hindu would add further *avatars* to this number.

the Incarnation consists in the fact that it is God's self-revelation at a definite historical time and place, in which all things are to be fulfilled.⁷² In a similar way, Rahner views the humanity of Jesus as the "self-expression" of the Logos in the world. As the total commitment of God to humankind, the Incarnation is a unique event that can occur only once in human history.⁷³

Long before our time, the early Fathers of the Church were confronted with the same problem when Christianity came into contact with Greek culture. The basic issue lay in the different concepts of time: the Judaeo-Christian concept of time is linear, while that of Hellenism is cyclic.⁷⁴ According to the linear concept of time, one may speak of beginning and end, and various "*kairoi*" of divine providence. On the contrary, in the Greek concept of time, human existence is experienced as enslavement within an eternal circular course and thus as needing to be freed from time itself. Salvation is conceived in spatial terms, which means transferring from the actual world into a timeless Beyond. This possibility is thought to be always present in the form of some timeless mysticism. For this reason, the outcome of the dialogue between Christianity and Hellenism depended largely on the choice of the concept of time. When the Judaeo-Christian concept of time as linear was abandoned in favor of a cyclic concept, the result was gnostic docetism. This heresy not only denied a real human body to Jesus; its chief distinguishing mark, as rightly pointed out by Oscar Cullmann, was the denial of the redemptive significance of an event that occurred in time.⁷⁵

In a similar way, by relaxing the indissoluble tie between the universal Christ and the concrete historical Jesus, Panikkar risks turning the Christian message into a kind of gnosis.⁷⁶ He views Christ as "symbol" of the Mystery. But this Christ symbol is not necessarily joined to the historical Jesus; it may be equally embodied in other major religious figures, independently of Jesus of Nazareth.

Bede Griffiths, on the other hand, presents a different model for the Christian-Hindu dialogue. While the idea of symbol is central to his reflection, Griffiths distinguishes between mythical symbol and his-

⁷² Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 125; *New Vision* 166.

⁷³ Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in *Investigations* 4.116. Cf. Peter C. Phan: "If the Incarnation of God in Jesus is the *self-identity* between the Jew Jesus and the Logos . . . , then it is metaphysically and psychologically difficult to see how there can be more than one Incarnation of God in *this* sense. There would be what might be called an 'ontological schizophrenia' of the Logos himself" ("Are There Other 'Saviors' for Other Peoples?" in idem, ed., *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* 163–80, at 174).

⁷⁴ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 51–60.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 55.

⁷⁶ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ* 187.

toric symbol. Rama and Krishna are mythical symbols belonging to the world of cyclic time with its endless recurrence.⁷⁷ By contrast, Jesus Christ is a symbol which is firmly "rooted in history." Griffiths describes the Christ symbol as "an event of supreme symbolism."⁷⁸ Whereas Rama and Krishna may have a universal meaning for human existence, the event of Jesus Christ is at once a symbolic and historic event that has actually changed human history by introducing a new consciousness and a new relationship with God.⁷⁹

Griffiths indicates a certain complementarity between the two conceptions of time. On the one hand, a cyclic view of time tends to devalue the reality and meaning of the present world and history.⁸⁰ He believes that the present situation of poverty in India is partly due to this cyclic view of time, "the wheel of *samsara*."⁸¹ On the other hand, Christians who adopt an historical view of time and are committed to the here and now of our human existence must be reminded that the kingdom of God is not to be identified with this present world.⁸² The whole creation must be seen as a sacramental complex pointing to a transcendent world beyond time and space. Even Jesus is a sacrament of God and of his saving grace. Griffiths invites us to go beyond the signs to the ultimate reality.⁸³ By this, however, he does not mean to bypass the humanity of Jesus, for this human reality has been eternally taken up, body and soul, into the Godhead, through the Incarnation and resurrection.⁸⁴ Between Jesus and the Father there is a strict "unity in duality," or "identity in relationship."⁸⁵

Griffiths' idea of "historical symbol" shows great affinity to and certain dependence on Rahner's theory of "real symbol."⁸⁶ The idea of "unity in duality" is best conveyed by Rahner's concept of "real sym-

⁷⁷ Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 125.

⁷⁸ Ibid. The word "event" is important. Similarly Avery Dulles insists on the profound affinity between the symbolic and historical approaches to revelation by proposing the expression "revelatory sign-event" (*Models of Revelation* 145–46).

⁷⁹ Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 127–28; idem, *The Marriage of East and West* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1982) 180.

⁸⁰ Griffiths, *Marriage of East and West* 181.

⁸¹ Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 118.

⁸² Griffiths, *Marriage of East and West* 181.

⁸³ Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 129–30.

⁸⁴ Griffiths, *New Vision* 168–69.

⁸⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith* (Los Angeles: Dawn Horse, 1973) 55; cf. *New Vision* 124–27.

⁸⁶ For the similarity with and certain dependence on Rahner's symbol theory in Griffiths's idea of symbol, see Judson B. Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue: Towards Interreligious Understanding* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Dissertation Information Service, 1992) 241–47.

bol," which implies a "mediation to immediacy" by mediating the symbolized reality through a self-identity.⁸⁷ As real symbol of God in the world, the humanity of Jesus is inseparably united to the Logos and has an eternal significance. The mystery of the Incarnation means that the Logos, by taking our human nature, has assumed a human history: "the changing history of this human reality is *his* own history: our time became the time of the eternal, our death the death of the immortal God himself."⁸⁸ The humanity of Jesus is the permanent gateway to any genuine encounter with God, even in the beatific vision when we contemplate God face to face: he who sees Christ sees the Father. Thus Rahner states: "We may speak about the *impersonal* Absolute without the non-absolute flesh of the Son, but the *personal* Absolute can be truly *found* only in him, in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead in the earthly vessel of his humanity."⁸⁹

Mediation between Particularity and Universality: Spirit of Christ

Now we come to the difficult question of the relationship between a particular historical event and its claim to universal significance. The solution to this delicate problem is to be sought in the Spirit of Christ. For this reason, Walter Kasper advocates a Spirit-oriented Christology: "a pneumatologically defined Christology can in fact best convey the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his universal significance."⁹⁰ In Christ the Spirit has definitively reached his goal, namely, a new humanity and new creation totally open to God. Now the function of the Spirit is to integrate the whole reality into that of Christ.⁹¹

To demonstrate that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ from the outset, even prior to the coming of Jesus, Rahner points out that the traditional formula "*intuitu meritorum Christi*" ("in view of the merits of Christ") needs a new interpretation. The fact that the universal imparting of the Spirit is in view of Christ should be explained, again, in terms of "final causality."⁹² Rahner considers God the Father as the

⁸⁷ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Investigations* 4.244.

⁸⁸ Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in *Investigations* 4.113; cf. idem, "Current Problems in Christology," in *Investigations* 1.149–200, at 167.

⁸⁹ Karl Rahner, "The Eternal Significance of the Humanity of Christ," in *Investigations* 3.35–46, at 43. Rahner continues: "Without him every absolute of which we speak or which we imagine we attain by mystical flight is in the last analysis merely the never attained, objective correlation of that empty and hollow, . . . infinity which we are ourselves: the infinity of dissatisfied finiteness" (43–44).

⁹⁰ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 252.

⁹¹ Ibid. 361–62.

⁹² Rahner, "Jesus Christ," in *Investigations* 17.44–46.

holy mystery who communicates himself to the world in two basic modes: through the Word, and through the Spirit.⁹³ God communicates himself as offer and truth through the Word. In order that this self-communication may meet with response in human persons, God simultaneously bestows the Spirit as acceptance and love. Rahner also indicates a further distinction in God's self-communication, i.e. history and transcendence. Whereas God's offer in truth is made through concrete history, acceptance in love opens up towards transcendence. But these two aspects form an inseparable unity: God's self-communication through offer and acceptance is always carried out by means of historical mediation which renders human transcendence possible.

Owing to the freedom of the two partners in dialogue—God and human persons—this history might continue without ever reaching a definitive climax. From Christian revelation we come to know that in the Incarnation and the paschal mystery of Christ the history of God's self-communication has definitively reached an irreversible summit. The mystery of the Incarnation means that the fullness of God's self-communication through the Word met with a perfect human acceptance through the action of the Spirit. According to the neo-Chalcedonian teaching of *enhypostasia*, the humanity of Jesus came into existence by subsisting in the very *person* (*hypostasis*) of the Word, or the eternal Son, who is pure receptivity and response to the Father in the Spirit. It is the special merit of Rahner to underscore the fact that Jesus lived out his filial relationship to God with a genuine human consciousness and freedom under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴ Hence the Christ event can be viewed as the goal of the working of the Spirit in the world, and for this reason the Spirit can rightly be called the Spirit of Christ even from the beginning of salvation history. Thus Rahner writes, "Since the universal efficacy of the Spirit is directed from the very beginning to the zenith of its historical mediation, which is the Christ event (or in other words the final cause of the mediation of the Spirit to the world), it can be truly said that this Spirit is everywhere and from the very beginning the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine Logos."⁹⁵ There exists between the Spirit and the Christ event a "mutually conditioning relationship" as is the case between an efficient and a final cause. Inasmuch as the Spirit, who is the efficacious cause of the Incarnation and the paschal mys-

⁹³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 91–99.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 61–63, 98–103.

⁹⁵ Rahner, "Jesus Christ," in *Investigations* 17.46; cf. *Foundations of Christian Faith* 318.

tery, bears his goal, i.e. the Christ event, within himself as an intrinsic entelechy, he is from the outset the Spirit of Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

In view of this mutually conditioning relationship, either the Christ event or the Holy Spirit may be taken as the starting point of theology. Whereas "European theology" makes Christology the initial point for its reflection, methodologically speaking, the order may be reversed. Rahner is of the opinion that an "Eastern theology," or Asian theology, may adopt a Pneumatology that is based on the universal salvific will of God and the presence of grace for all human beings as the fundamental point of departure for its entire system, and then attempt from this point to arrive at a real understanding of the Christ event.⁹⁷

In his encyclical letter on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et vivificantem*, Pope John Paul II recalls that grace bears essentially a Christological and pneumatological aspect. He also invites us "to go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ—from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Covenant."⁹⁸ We may ask in what, precisely, this action of the Holy Spirit before the coming of Christ consists. While Irenaeus recognizes the special task of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Dispensation,⁹⁹ Clement of Alexandria understands the action of the Holy Spirit as having inspired the Greek philosophers as well as the prophets of Israel.¹⁰⁰

Based on analogous concepts of inspiration, some contemporary theologians contend that, parallel to the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, the sacred writings of other religious traditions are also inspired by the Holy Spirit and contain genuine truths which lead people to salvation.¹⁰¹ If Vatican II recognizes the presence of elements of truth and holiness in other religions,¹⁰² these elements are to be found above all in the sacred writings of these religions. Rahner holds that non-Christian religions should be considered as part of the history of revelation properly so-called. The existence of imperfection and debase-

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Rahner, "Aspects of European Theology," in *Investigations* 21.97–98.

⁹⁸ *Dominum et vivificantem* no. 53; English trans.: *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1986) emphasis in text.

⁹⁹ *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.8 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1.490).

¹⁰⁰ *Strom.* 5.13 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 2.465).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1977) 211–27; idem, *Jesus Christ* 165–77; Mariasusai Dhavamony, ed., *Revelation in Christianity and Other Religions* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1971); Duraisamy S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scripture* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1975); Michael Amaladoss, "Other Scriptures and the Christians," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 22 (1985) 104–15.

¹⁰² Cf. *Lumen gentium* no. 17; *Ad gentes* no. 15.

ment, which are also found in the Old Covenant, should not invalidate the presence of genuine revelation in the sacred writings of non-Christian religions.¹⁰³

If the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ even before the Incarnation, with greater reason can he be called by this title after the glorification of Jesus. During his earthly life Jesus was endowed with the Spirit and led by the Spirit. In the resurrection, Jesus became a "life-giving Spirit," or giver of the Spirit. From now on the title "Spirit of Christ" acquires its full meaning.¹⁰⁴ In *Dominum et vivificantem*, the pope not only urges us "to go further back," but also invites us "to look further and go further afield," keeping in mind the teaching of Vatican II on "the Holy Spirit's activity also 'outside the visible body of the Church.'"¹⁰⁵ We must acknowledge the Holy Spirit's presence and activity everywhere in the world.

In his reflection on the presence of Jesus Christ in extra-Christian religions, Rahner espouses the necessity of supernatural faith in non-Christians in order to achieve salvation. Moreover, this faith must be related to Christ, even if only implicitly. Such a faith is made possible by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In this way Rahner comes to the conclusion that "Christ is present and efficacious in the non-Christian believer (therefore in the non-Christian religions) through his Spirit."¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere Rahner presents the universal presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of an everyday mysticism which is available to all.¹⁰⁷ For Christians and non-Christians alike, human experience of transcendence in daily life is already genuine experience of the Spirit which remains implicit and unthematic in most cases.¹⁰⁸ This experience takes place in the ordinary course of human life, especially through one's commitment to daily duty, love of neighbor, and acceptance of death.¹⁰⁹ In sketching a list of examples of experience of the

¹⁰³ Karl Rahner, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," in *Investigations* 18.288–95, at 290–94.

¹⁰⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975) 325; Joseph H. Wong, "The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus and of the Christian," *Gregorianum* 73 (1992) 57–95, at 73.

¹⁰⁵ *Dominum et vivificantem* no. 53 (emphasis in text); cf. *Lumen gentium* no. 16; *Gaudium et spes* no. 22. See also Hans Schwarz, "Reflection on the Work of the Spirit outside the Church," in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum: Atti del Congresso Teologico Internazionale di Pneumatologia* 2 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983) 1455–71.

¹⁰⁶ Rahner, "Jesus Christ," in *Investigations* 17.43.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Karl Rahner, "Experience of the Holy Spirit," in *Investigations* 18.189–210. For Rahner's mysticism of everyday life, see also Harvey D. Egan, "The Mysticism of Everyday Life," *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 10 (1989) 7–26; idem, "Karl Rahner: Theologian of the *Spiritual Exercises*," *Thought* 67 (1992) 257–270, at 262–64.

¹⁰⁸ Rahner, "Experience of the Holy Spirit" 199, 205.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 208.

Spirit in concrete life situations, Rahner privileges the “way of negation” by pointing to experiences of emptiness, darkness, failure, and deprivation as particularly apt to mediate the experience of the Spirit.¹¹⁰

I believe that the “objective saving situation” effected through the paschal mystery of Jesus, as proposed by Rahner, may be described in terms of a *Christic* structure of existence in the world. Through his twofold self-transcendence, i.e. total surrender to the Father and total dedication to the brethren, Christ established a new sphere of existence in the world. The new existence is characterized by the Spirit of love and freedom. Through the paschal mystery, Jesus shattered the bondage of selfishness, destroyed the barrier of divisions among humans, and created a new sphere of freedom and communion for humankind. Wherever persons surrender themselves to God or the ultimate reality, under whatever name, and dedicate themselves to the cause of justice, peace, fraternity, and solidarity with other people, they have implicitly accepted Christ and, to some degree, entered into this Christic existence. Just as it was through the Spirit that Jesus established this new sphere of existence, in the same way, anyone who enters into this Christic existence of love and freedom is acting under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ. The possibility for non-Christians, even non-believers, to participate in the paschal mystery of Christ through the Spirit is taught by Vatican II.¹¹¹ To participate in the paschal mystery of Christ is to enter into the new sphere of Christic existence.

RAHNER'S TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE AND A TAOIST VISION OF REALITY

A Rahnerian pneuma-Christocentrism is essentially rooted in a trinitarian perspective of salvation history which hinges on the Pauline idea of the “mystery” that was “kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed” (Rom 8:25–26). This mystery has a twofold character. While the hidden aspect refers to the eternal saving design of the Father, the manifest aspect consists in its fulfillment in the Christ event in the fullness of time (Eph 1:9–10). Thus Paul can call it “mystery of God” (Col 2:2) or “mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4).

The Pauline idea of “mystery” finds a contemporary expression, with different nuances, in Rahner’s thought. Here the concept “mystery” is central, signifying the hiddenness or incomprehensibility of God and his mysterious saving design. As already noted, Rahner also employs the key ideas of “sacramental sign” or “real symbol” to designate the manifestation of the hidden mystery in the Christ event. Thus, for

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 200.

¹¹¹ *Gaudium et spes* no. 22.

Rahner also, mystery has a hidden as well as a manifest aspect. Moreover, Rahner views the Holy Spirit as the dynamic bond between these two aspects, who directs the gradual unfolding of the mystery in history towards its summit in the Christ event. In this final section, I shall explore the rich potential in Rahner's system for a fruitful East-West dialogue, with particular emphasis on the resonance between his trinitarian perspective and a Taoist vision of reality.

Analogous to the Pauline mystery, Tao has a twofold dimension: hidden and manifest. The opening chapter of *Tao Te Ching* is essential for our discussion:

The Tao that can be spoken of is not the unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the unchanging name. Wu (nonbeing) names the origin of heaven and earth. Yu (being) names the mother of the ten thousand things. Therefore, stay in Wu, if you desire to penetrate the mystery; stay in Yu, if you desire to penetrate the manifestation. These two (Wu and Yu) have the same origin, but are different names. Both are mystery, mystery upon mystery, the door of all wonders.¹¹²

Tao is nameless and ineffable. It has essentially a twofold aspect: it is both Wu (nonbeing) and Yu (being). As "origin of heaven and earth," Wu is not nothingness. Tao is called Wu, nonbeing or void, inasmuch as it is *formless*. But Wu actually means the fullness of being, for it is the source and origin of all things. While Wu refers to the hidden, mysterious character of Tao, Yu, being or existent, indicates the manifestation of Tao, inasmuch as the formless manifests itself in *form* and appears in the ten thousand things in the world. Wu and Yu are the two aspects of one and the same Tao. As the manifestation of Tao, Yu is said to be derived from, or born of Wu: "The ten thousand things under heaven are born of Yu; Yu is born of Wu."¹¹³

Tao is called "mystery," or "mystery upon mystery," which is at once transcendent and immanent. The transcendent character of Tao can be seen in the following description: "There was a thing, formless yet complete in itself, born prior to heaven and earth. Silent! Empty! Existing by itself, it remains unchanging. Pervading everywhere, it is

¹¹² Translations from *Tao Te Ching* are mine. They are based on the translation by John C. H. Wu, *Tao Te Ching* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989) and the texts found in Chwen Jiuan A. Lee and Thomas G. Hand, *A Taste of Water: Christianity through Taoist-Buddhist Eyes* (New York: Paulist, 1990). In the course of the history of this passage, it has been punctuated in various ways. E.g., before Wang An-Shih (1021–86), the usual reading had been that of joining Wu and Yu to the word "name," by rendering "nameless" and "named." Wang was the first to put a comma after Wu and Yu, giving a verbal interpretation to the word "name" as in the translation I have adopted.

¹¹³ *Tao Te Ching* 40.

inexhaustible.”¹¹⁴ On the other hand, to indicate the immanent aspect of Tao, Lao Tzu employs the term “Te” (virtue or force) which is presented especially in the second half of *Tao Te Ching*. Thus, for example, we read: “It is Tao that gives them life. It is Te that nurses them, grows them, fosters them, shelters them, comforts them, nourishes them, and covers them under her wings.”¹¹⁵

The idea of Tao as Wu and Yu resembles Rahner’s concept of God as mystery that manifests himself through the Logos. In his germinal article on the topic, Rahner presents mystery as a “nameless” and “ineffable” reality.¹¹⁶ By tracing the apophatic tradition of the Greek Fathers, beginning from Gregory of Nyssa, through Denis the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, and continuing down to Thomas Aquinas in the medieval Latin tradition, Rahner reaffirms the essential hiddenness of God, which can be called “inexpressible darkness” or “bright incomprehensibility.”¹¹⁷ This ineffable mystery is utterly transcendent: “It is there in its own proper way of aloofness and absence; it bestows itself upon us by refusing itself, by keeping silence, by staying afar.”¹¹⁸ However, this transcendent mystery is at the same time wholly immanent. Rahner views human transcendence as the most distinctive feature of the human being who carries in himself, or better, *is* essentially, an unlimited openness towards the infinite being.¹¹⁹ Thus the human being is by nature ordained to the mystery as the horizon and goal of his transcendence.¹²⁰ Being constantly and inevitably confronted with the mystery, the human person always lives by the mystery, even when unaware of it. Moreover, through the idea of God’s self-communication in the bestowal of grace, Rahner is able to affirm the “radical proximity” of the mystery that becomes the innermost reality of the human person.¹²¹ Hence there exists a profound unity in distinction between human beings and the mystery.

According to Rahner, our primal experience of the mystery is non-reflective and unthematic. Rather than as an object, the mystery is perceived as the wider horizon in each human act of knowing and loving a particular object. This nondual experience of the mystery is

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 25.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 51. The word “Te” in *Tao Te Ching* has a twofold meaning. It may mean “virtue” in the moral sense, or, as in this chapter, it signifies the “movement” of Tao in its manifestation.

¹¹⁶ Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,” in *Investigations* 4.36–73, at 50–51.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 57–59.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 52.

¹¹⁹ Rahner, “On the Theology of the Incarnation,” in *Investigations* 4.109.

¹²⁰ Rahner, “Concept of Mystery,” in *Investigations* 4.53.

¹²¹ Ibid. 66–67.

analogous to the intuitive perception of Tao. As hidden and mysterious, Tao is imperceptible in itself. But by emptying the mind and observing the movement of surrounding things, one can have a mystical insight into Tao as the root of all things: "Attain to utmost emptiness; cling single-heartedly to tranquillity. The ten thousand things—side-by-side they arise; and by this I see (Kuan) their return. Things come forth in great numbers; each one returns to its root."¹²² The Chinese word for "seeing" (Kuan) in this passage actually means having an "insight" into the true nature of things. This intuitive perception of nondual mystery is at the heart of all Eastern thought.

Just as Yu is the manifestation of Wu, the hidden aspect of Tao, so, following the Christian tradition, Rahner views the Logos as the revelation of the hidden mystery.¹²³ The Father is by nature the "unoriginated and essentially invisible" mystery, while the Word is, by definition, the revelation of the Father.¹²⁴ Rahner also designates the Logos as the Father's "real symbol," because he is generated by the Father as his perfect image and self-expression.¹²⁵ The Logos is both the Father's immanent expression and his freely given outward manifestation to the world in creation and salvation history.

Thus the twofold dimension of Tao as Wu and Yu finds an analogous pattern in Rahner's idea of the hidden mystery manifesting himself through the Logos as his image or real symbol. But what about the Holy Spirit? Can we find a triadic parallel in *Tao Te Ching*? I believe that a triadic vision of the origin of the world is implied there:

Tao gave birth to one. One gave birth to two. Two gave birth to three. Three gives birth to the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry Yin and embrace Yang, deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending of the twofold Ch'i (breath or vital force).¹²⁶

The meaning of this text is especially obscure. Based on the classical explanation of Ssu-ma Kuang (1019–86), followed by some contemporary scholars, I would present the following interpretation on the process of Tao giving birth to all things.¹²⁷ "Tao gave birth to one": before giving birth to all things, the hidden Tao as Wu first manifests itself by

¹²² *Tao Te Ching* 16.

¹²³ Rahner, "Concept of Mystery" 71.

¹²⁴ Karl Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" in *Investigations* 4.77–102, at 91. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.6.6 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1.469).

¹²⁵ Rahner, "Theology of the Symbol," in *Investigations* 4.236.

¹²⁶ *Tao Te Ching* 42.

¹²⁷ Cf. Yen Ling-Feng, *New Edition of the Four Taoist Sages*, in Chinese (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1968) 39; Lo Kuang, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, in Chinese (Taipei: Student Book Store, 1982) 193–200.

giving birth to Yu.¹²⁸ “One gave birth to two”: Yu further differentiates into the twofold Ch’i, i.e. Yin and Yang.¹²⁹ “Two gave birth to three”: the proper blending of the twofold Ch’i (Yin and Yang) produces a harmonious state. “Three gives birth to the ten thousand things”: out of this harmonious interaction between Yin and Yang, all things are derived. “The ten thousand things carry Yin and embrace Yang, etc”: all things are not only originated from the harmonious blending of Ch’i, but continuously depend on the proper interaction of Yin and Yang. In this passage, therefore, *one* or Yu, which is generated by Wu, stands for Ch’i before its differentiation. Ch’i is a basic concept in Chinese thought, both in Confucianism and Taoism, which signifies a life-giving force circulating in human bodies and the entire universe.¹³⁰ Of divine origin, Ch’i vivifies, unifies, and transforms humans and the material world into a cosmic body of universal harmony.

The triadic dimension of the origin of all things according to the Taoist vision is in fact based on two dyads: Wu/Yu on the one hand, and Yin/Yang on the other, that is, Tao as Wu giving birth to Yu, which further differentiates into Yin and Yang. This Taoist view of a double dyad finds a similar pattern in Rahner’s trinitarian theology, especially regarding the Trinity in the economy of salvation. This time Wu and Yu correspond to the mystery and its self-communication to the world. Just as Yu differentiates into Yin and Yang, the self-communication of God in creation and the history of salvation is accomplished in a twofold manner: through the Logos and the Pneuma.¹³¹ As has been shown, Logos designates God’s offer in truth through historical manifestation, while Pneuma represents God’s self-communication as the response in love that occurs in human hearts. Logos and Pneuma are the two inseparable modes of the one self-communication of God. Likewise, in the Taoist vision, Yin and Yang are two complementary elements that are always joined together. While Yang stands for the masculine, active, strong, and well defined, Yin denotes the feminine, responsive, subtle, and pervasive. Thus Yang can be compared to the Logos as God’s self-communication through his offer in truth, and Yin to the Pneuma as God’s self-communication through responsive love.

¹²⁸ See *Tao Te Ching* 40.

¹²⁹ That Yin and Yang are meant to be Ch’i can be inferred from the following sentence of the chapter: “The ten thousand things carry Yin and embrace Yang, deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending of the twofold Ch’i.”

¹³⁰ See Aloysius B. Chang, “Ch’i and Some Theological Themes,” in Chinese, *Colleganea Theologica Universitatis Fujen* 53 (1982) 341–68; Hans Küng and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 261–68.

¹³¹ Rahner, “De Trinitate,” in *Investigations* 4.97–102; idem, *Trinity* 91–99.

Whereas the Taoist vision of reality is based on a cyclic view of time, the Christian vision follows a linear concept of time that is moving towards a goal and fulfillment. The distinctive character of the Christian revelation consists in presenting, as does Rahner, Jesus Christ as the fullness of God's self-communication to the world, in whom God's supreme offer through the Logos, or Yang, met with a total human response through the Pneuma, or Yin. Thus in Jesus Christ—in whom the working of Logos and Pneuma, Yang and Yin, has reached a perfect harmony—we encounter the perfect union of divine and human, as well as a unifying center for the cosmic communion: a reintegration of the entire universe in God. However, as Rahner distinguishes between the "objective saving situation" and our "subjective participation" in it, the event of Jesus Christ marks the focusing point, rather than the end of history. The interaction between Logos and Pneuma, Yang and Yin, still continues in each one of us and in the world until the end of time. Owing to human freedom and its resistance, Logos and Pneuma carry on their interweaving throughout human history, with all its dark and conflictual passages, as though human history flowed between these two principles, through rugged and precipitous places, towards a final participation in their union. Nevertheless, in the Christ-event, the center and focal point of history, a sure pledge of the final wedding banquet is already given. The Taoist vision does not envisage such a focusing point in history; nor does it exclude its possibility *a priori*.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article has presented Rahner's theory of anonymous Christians in the context of different approaches to the theology of religions in contemporary discussion. Rahner's reflection represents the mainline position of Christian theologians. It is a Christocentric-inclusivist view, as distinct from the traditional ecclesiocentric-exclusivist view on the one hand, and the liberal theocentric-pluralist view on the other. The inadequacy of the pluralist view has been pointed out in different ways. Our purpose has been to show that, despite the doubtful suitability of the term itself, the deep insight of Rahner's concept "anonymous Christians," especially as understood in a pneuma-Christocentric perspective, not only continues to be relevant, but offers an appropriate view to present-day discussion on the topic.

A Rahnerian pneuma-Christocentrism maintains the finality of Jesus Christ. It argues for the merging together of a constitutive and normative Christology, especially under the category of final and sacramental causality. This view also defends the unity of the historical

Jesus and the cosmic Christ, as against the ahistorical or transhistorical approach of Panikkar. Rahner's position further indicates that the mediation between the particular event of Jesus and its universal saving significance is to be sought in the universal presence of Christ's Spirit, who is at work in the world both before and after the coming of Christ, even outside the visible confines of the people of God. Whereas "European theology" makes Christology its starting point, Rahner observes that an "Eastern theology" may take a Pneumatology based on the universal presence of grace for all human beings as the point of departure. The two diverse starting points, Christology and the doctrine on the Holy Spirit, should both lead us back to the ultimate source of the Godhead, i.e. the Father, the hidden and silent mystery.

It is precisely Rahner's concept of God as ineffable mystery which opens up possibilities for a promising East-West dialogue.¹³² Although the framework of Rahner's system is characterized by German traditions, his treatment of human persons' transcendental experience of the mystery has universal appeal. In particular, one finds a special resonance between the idea of the mysterious, all-pervading Tao as Wu and Yu and that of the hidden mystery manifesting itself through the Logos. As the ground and goal of human transcendence, the mystery, like Tao, is both transcendent and immanent through his *self*-communication. There exists a strict unity in distinction between individual human beings and the all-embracing and all-permeating mystery. Consequently our experience of the mystery, like that of Tao, is nondualistic. Such a unitive experience of the ultimate reality is inherent in all oriental thought. Moreover, just as Yu differentiates into the twofold Ch'i of Yin and Yang, God's self-communication is carried out through the "two hands" of Logos and Pneuma. The correspondence between Yin/Yang on the one hand, and Pneuma/Logos on the other invites us to explore the complementarity of the feminine and masculine aspects in God, in human beings, and in the entire creation.

The affinity between Rahner's trinitarian perspective and a Taoist vision of reality is of great significance. Taoism has not only deeply influenced Zen Buddhism, but, together with Confucianism and Buddhism, it actually forms the triad at the basis of the Chinese culture which has had an indelible impact on various cultures of East Asia in general. As a sublime metaphysics, Taoism requires a profound thinker to be an adequate partner in dialogue. Karl Rahner is un-

¹³² In this paper I have pointed out the convergence between Rahner and Taoism. I believe that one may also attempt a dialogue between Rahner's concept of the ineffable mystery and the apophatic tradition of Buddhism.

doubtedly such a thinker. In Rahner one not only encounters a profundity of thought, but one also finds a harmonious blending of rigorous speculation and silent contemplation, of rational and experiential approaches to theology. It is largely due to this happy union of *animus* and *anima* in Rahner that his theological vision lends itself so aptly towards the construction of a bridge from West to East. I am convinced that both the Taoist and Christian traditions will benefit from such a dialogue.

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