

ECHOES OF THE THEOLOGICAL CHRISTOLOGY IN PHILOSOPHY AND COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Starting from some of the dogmatic Christology's significations, we are trying to show that the Son of God can be considered, through the idea that supports him, a scope of a Christology that tries to present itself as a philosophy. To sustaining this, we refer to a few excerpts of a philosophical creation born out of Christological meditation, excerpts belonging to Pascal, Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, and Kant.

Keywords: Philosophia Christus, Divine Logos, dogma, transcendental man, Christology

DOGMATIC CHRISTOLOGY: SOME USEFUL MEANINGS FOR COMMUNICATION IN THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

Christianity, within its doctrine, gives an overwhelming importance to *Christ's* figure, a self-explanatory issue: it concerns a revealed religion, founded by God's Son Himself, Jesus Christ, a religion with a name that derives from the One that incarnated himself to be Savior of the world.

According to Christian teachings, God is only one in *being*, but also a indwelling of three *persons* at the same time: the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son, Jesus, is also known as *God's Word*, precisely because "He has the role of revealing God to people"¹. He not only does he speaks the divine word, but he also identifies Himself with it. Through Jesus, the divinity reveals itself, it *communicates itself* to people. Therefore, for a Christian, outside Christ the Trinity

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¹ D.Stăniloae (1993). *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Craiova: Editura Omniscop, p.82.

hypothesis is impossible – concerning God. “My Father is in me and I am the Father” – says Jesus Christ to his Apostles. More, over the Son (the Logos) incarnated from the Holy Spirit and at the same time, He came to prepare on Earth a “receptacle” for receiving the Holy Spirit: Jesus Christ embodied Himself so that man could become “pneumatophore” (Holy Spirit bearer). We have to mention also that Christ incarnated himself, as Church Fathers say, after the divine Word’s *image*. God’s Word in man is precisely man as a *person* (as a unity between spirit and speech, because man has a “communion conscience”), man is capable of determining his own nature, transcending it, in order to unite himself with God. For this “union”, the Son promises people a graceful descent of the Holy Spirit, towards the transformation of man’s face into *likeness to God*, therefore towards deification.

Christian theologians’ *Christ* is, thus, the embodied *Logos*; similarly, for the faithful, He represents *Life* – that appears as a light in men’s souls (John 1,4), but also *Suffering* that saves (redeeming the world), because He becomes death that surpasses the power of death and *Path* of eternal life: the suffering of Logos, born out of unmeasured love and of the heavenly power of erasing the world’s sin (John 1,29). Besides, Christ offers *meaning to humankind’s history*: not only did He make Himself human, but He accepted the historical condition of the people He was born into. As Maximus the Confessor states, without Christ, without the Son of God incarnated, history would’t have gotten God present. And neither humankind would’n’t have had the perspective of reaching the future life, in Him².

In the following section, we will refer shortly to each of these “determinations” specific to the incarnated God. Firstly, the *Divine Word* (λογος), as a transcendental reality that reveals itself for the salvation of man, represents also the origin of all ideas and meanings of our mind, as well the *Truth*: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (John 14,6). The word of every human being, when it is in connection to God, comprises in itself a piece of the truth and realises in its own limited world the truth. Jesus’ word is however the Truth itself. “The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” (John 1,9). Truth in itself, not meaning something of the order of preciseness or certainty (and not necessarily

² D.Stăniloae (1991). *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, p.13.

concerning the logic of question and answer), names, thus, the Spring of Life, the one that justifies everything in absoluteness, Jesus being concerned, “the abiding and eternal wisdom of God” – as Augustine expresses in *De magistro*, §38. Since Christ means *Life*, life that appears as light for men (John 1,4), and Truth, meaning knowledge from the beginning of things, following Him means being on the *Way*. According to the Christian way of religious divine experiention/*experiri* of the *Way*, following Christ means seeing in Him the identity of Truth, Life and Love. Only in *love* the complete divine the knowlegde of Truth is possible. And on the opposite: knowledge of Truth manifests itself as love; the Truth manifested is Love.

From the perspective of the embodiment of God’s Son, *historical time* is divided into two: before and after Christ. What has been made before has foretold about what has followed after; what follows the incarnation of the Son, His death and ressurection, regards the salvation and the redemption of men, the spreading of the faithful into the world and *parusia*, namely what is of another order, absolute and final. Justin the Martyr, in *The first apology*, states that, those before Christ that lived a rational life, in harmony with the Logos, have lived “christianly“, even though they were not aware of this. From this point of view, the Greek philosophy, for example, can be understood as a *revelation* through reason, having the same value as the revelation of the Hebrew profets. Between philosophy and Christianity there is therefore, a continuity. At the same time, after the establishment of Christianity as a universal doctrine in the field of conscience, the revelation of divine Logos‘ incarnation will also represent an opportunity of meditation for philosophical creation.

THE IDEA OF “PHILOSOPHICAL CHRISTOLOGY”

The expression “philosophical christology” is, somehow, recent, being dictated by the works of several authors, like Henri Gouhier, Jean Lacroix, Eugene TeSelle, Xavier Tilliette etc. In a study since 1961 about the “idea” that is represented and displayed through the Son of God, Henri Gouhier is the one that proposes, after our science, the term of “philosophical christology”, identifying in the history of philosophy a few “portraits” of Jesus, exposed by thinkers like Spinoza, Rousseau, Hegel and Bergson. Although this expression is more and more frequent and undertaken today, at least in a first instance, the idea of “philosophical christology” causes even more *disbelief*. We consider that, so far, the most important reception was the following one: if

christology is philosophical, it stops being christology, because it implies a reduction of the christological to rational. If philosophical christology implies a rational reflection, strainedly selective and critical over the theological assertions concerning the significance of Christ's presence in the believers' world, there is a danger of decreasing the significance of some contents of the belief. In the same way, the danger of the signification of christology through gnosis. Radicalizing these objections, one question can be: "what is a philosophical christology good for?" It is known, in this direction, the paradox of Dostoyevsky: "if there's a conflict between Christ and the Truth, I would like more to be on Christ's side". For the great Russian author, prayer and contemplation stands for philosophy, a belief that is shared by many thinkers and which, in fact, ruins any idea of Christian philosophy.

In reality, Christ has something to say to philosophers and this, in a first sense, is christology. Let us not forget that the revelation of the Verb's incarnation made possible the Christian philosophy of which, following E.Gilson, it could be said that it doesn't name only one certain philosophical school, but *philosophia perennis*. Then, the philosophical christology, without usurping theology (it could be considered, at least in some versions it implies, a reverberation of the theological Christology, not a replacement for it), only approaches religious contents under the conditions and the language that it's specific for it, and especially in the manner of a hermeneutics dictated by its specific object. Of course, as Xavier Tilliette specifies, whom we follow in this issue, not needing a "Dieu en idée" in order to exist, or a "reversed man", "the atheist Christ" of Feuerbach, philosophical christology concerns Christ – the one from the Gospel and from theology, the one in connection with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's God. In a way, this is the price that has to be paid for a philosophical Christology that would not mean the secularization of christology. What's more, what the philosophers asserted in their works in which the Son of God is invoked and "thematized", concerns specifically the way in which "Christ enlightens and reveals the concepts" – with a cardinal role in humane philosophy, "concepts for which He is symbol and key: subjectivity and intersubjectivity, transcendental, temporality, corporeality, conscience, death etc."³

³ Xavier Tilliette (1990). *Le Christ de la Philosophie*, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, p.29.

Certainly, philosophical christology cannot be reduced to theology (in which dogmatic Christology is elaborated starting from belief's data). Similarly, philosophical christology cannot be identified neither with metaphysics (for which the object is the Absolute, as a Being in itself), nor with *religion's philosophy* (that thematizes the relation between man, in general, and God – in general, searching to identify in the religious experience a specific form of rationality), and not even with the *Christian philosophy* (that does not comprise only a speech on Christianity and on the manner in which this speech is revealed, but also implies elements of apologetics and patristics, as a whole literature concerning Christian metaphysics). However, to detect the specifics of philosophical christology, we must start from the symbolic economy that is proper to Christian philosophy; philosophical christology appears in a climate of Christian philosophy, receiving its armour and information for the elaborate theological Christology (detaching itself, as much as possible, from the narrow religious context of this elaboration); its accent falls upon Christ, firstly understood as the *Verbum*, the Truth, the “Moral Personality”, or as “a prototype of man in God”. The philosophical approach of Christ is made by starting from the historical-revealing and transhistorical event of kenosis, of death and resurrection, and after from the theological, exegetic, hermeneutical and millenary reflection and finally, from the experience gathered in centuries of spiritual life. All is in connection with an intrinsic universe of philosophical thinking.

Without bearing upon the mystery of kenosis, virgin conception or hypostatic union etc., the philosophical christology establishes as its main focus to think about some determinations of the divine logos, such as embodiment and everything that derives from it, not only from the perspective of faith, but also according to reasoning capacity. Man-God, or the Incarnated Verb, which is the authentic “metaphysical truth in man” (X.Tilliette) is capable of rewriting himself in ways proper to philosophy. The Incarnated logos gets, therefore, to be named “absolute maximum contracted” (N.Cusanus), “the Verb – as a place and light for intelligence” (Malebranche), “the Revelator of the Reign of Grace” (Leibniz), “the perfect Man beloved by God” (Kant), “the logic of the cross”, “Historical absolute” or “Universal Singularity” (Hegel), “the paradox” or “the individual by excellence” (Kierkegaard), “the Savior” (Rahner), “the Master of virtues” (Kant), “the necessary person” (Fichte), etc.

The insertion of christology in philosophy can be understood either as considering the philosophical creation as being born from a christological meditation (the case of Pascal, Kierkegaard or even Berdyaev or, in other regime, the philosophy of Cusanus and Teilhard de Chardin) or from the perspective of the considerable contribution that the thematizations concerning the divine logos bring to the enrichment of philosophy (Hegel and Malebranche, for example). There are also cases in which the philosophical christology was understood as an “authentic philosophical creation emanated from the very person of Christ”, because, as Teilhard de Chardin says, “the Christ of theologians is the God of philosophers; the embodied God generates and rises the thinking of man”⁴.

In terms of a christological conscience, for which the events revealed in the Gospel and in Christ’s teaching must be assumed, at the level of an experience of thinking and through an existential commitment, there are developing in a good measure the philosophical speeches of thinkers like Pascal, Kierkegaard and Berdyaev.

For Pascal, a true knowledge is not possible “without Christ”; knowledge concerning God, the world and the man can only be enlightened through the “knowledge of Christ”, on the condition of a re-centering into Him. “Christ is the purpose of everything and the centre to which we all tend to.”⁵ After the famous “night of fire” of 19 December 1654, Pascal’s concerns are triggered. These concerns are of a metaphysical, religious and mystical nature and they aim at the apology of Christianity, forming a *philosophical christology* with an original physiognomy, centered around the idea that “a true knowledge is not possible without Christ”. According to the author of *Pensées*, “Jesus Christ is the reason of everything and the centre to which all of us tend to. He who knows Him, knows the reason of everything.”⁶ Carrying on, Pascal says that “Not only we know God through Jesus Christ, but we know ourselves through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not know what is our life, nor our death”⁷. Three metaphysical objects namely: God, the world and man “are only enlightened through the knowledge of Christ, by the condition of a re-centering into Him (...). The God of knowledge, without Christ, is ‘deism’ (...); also, without Christ, the world does not subsist; it would

⁴ See Xavier Tilliette, *op.cit.*, p.53.

⁵ Blaise Pascal (1998). *Cugetări*, Oradea: Editura Aion, p.383.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Ibidem, p.366.

become some sort of hell. Christ provides *consistency* to the world (...). The contradictions that make man an impenetrable enigma are taken on, sublimated, and resolved in Him. In Him, all the contradictions are harmonized because of His double nature, of his meditative role, through which we are revealed that in us there can be found both God and our own misery.”⁸ The Christian apologetics of Pascal implies, in its nucleus, an imperative-idea: everything must be expresses in relation to Christ! Especially, the human destiny. We can only know ourselves through Christ: a knowledge that is simultaneously a cure. He revealed the corruption of our nature, but also the cure of redemption. Knowledge without Christ is useless and fruitless; it means the weakness of reason.

Loyal to this *philosophia Christus*, Pascal adopt himself in a critical point of view regarding the metaphysics of the medieval scholasticism and in relation to Descartes, considering that without Christ any knowledge, even the one concerning the notional reason, is useless and fruitless, only naming the “weakness” of reason. The “dispute” with Descartes concerns the “Cartesian apologetics of reason”, but also the deism used by it: “I cannot forgive Descartes. In all his philosophy, he would have been quite willing to dispense with God. But he had make Him give a fillip set the world in motion; beyond this, he has no further need of God”⁹. The christologist Pascal states: “The metaphysical proofs of God are so remote from the reasoning of man and so complicated, that they make little impression; and if they should be of service to some, it would be only during the moment that they see such demonstration; but an hour afterwards the fear they have been mistaken. «Quod curiositate cognoverunt superbiامي serunt («What they knew by searching they have lost by pride». St. Augustin)». This is the result of the knowledge of God obtained without Jesus Christ; it is communion without a mediator with the God whom they have known without a mediator. Where as those who have known God by a mediator know their own wretchedness.”¹⁰

What does it mean to know God, by knowing Christ? It means relating ourselves to Christ as a Person, in which Truth and Life as Love are the same. For the Christian the face of love and that is the reason why we “know truth not only by the reason, but also by the

⁸ Xavier Tilliette, *op.cit.*, pp.37-38.

⁹ Blaise Pascal (2012). *Pensees*, translated by W.F.Trotter, Forgotten Books (originally published 1910), section II, p.77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, section VII, p.543.

heart”¹¹. It is famous the wording of Pascal: “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know (...); It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason (...). For the knowledge of first principles, as space, time, movement, number, is as sure as any of those which we get from reasoning. And reason must trust these intuitions of the heart, and must base on them every argument. (We have intuitive knowledge of the tri-dimensional nature of space, and of the infinity of number and reason them shows that there are no two square numbers on of which is double of the other. Principles are intuited, proposition are infered, all certainly, though in different ways”¹².

The meditations signed by Kierkegaard reveal a passionate love for Christ; he named himself a “lover of the cross” and a follower of the “quake-belief”. Preoccupied with the problem of the ethical and religious choice, Kierkegaard comes to support a “teleological stop of ethics” in favor of the faith in Christ. He says that the work of Christian existence implies the knowledge of Christ that can only be got through faith, but can be “revised in reflection”. The entire work of Søren Kierkegaard is marked by extraordinary intuitions on the singularity of Christ and on the subjective need for Him. In the *New Testament*, the Word embodied is identical to the Truth and we are in the Truth according to how much we come close to the model of the live truth, of Christ. The whole perspective of the Danish thinker on the “essential truth” (that is not a product of logical and formal thinking), that *wakes up* the conscience and forms, instead of informs, is in relation to this Christian perspective on truth, to which the true teacher is the Divine Logos’ Truth.

To underline the nature of the “essential truth”, in *Religious Discourses*, Kierkegaard compares the role played by Socrates for his students with the one played by Christ for his disciples. As a teacher, Socrates (“an obsolete seduction”) was for his students the opportunity of discovering the truth, while Christ was the God that makes up the *essence* itself of this discovery. Truth is the God that must be found, to be able to live with Him, and we are in Truth according to how much we come close to the model of the live truth (Christ).

Another thinker, considering himself a figure of “expressionistic philosophy” - a “philosophy that tried to express the *existentiality* of the one that knows” -, belonging to the same

¹¹ Ibid., section IV, p.282.

¹² Ibid., pp.277, 278, 282.

philosophers family as Kierkegaard and Jaspers, Nikolai Berdyaev chooses as main subject to debate what he calls “the spiritual experience of the interior man”, of the “transcendental man” (“the spiritual man, that does not belong to the earth, but also to the sky”). For the Russian philosopher, the religious experience is not possible in the absence of an “*a priori* of the spirit”, that actually names “what is divine in man”¹³. The divine in man corresponds to the “authentic humanity of God”: “Not only man was created in the image and likeness of God, but God Himself permanently created in the image and likeness of man”¹⁴.

Any institutional hardening of the Christian spirituality and also the human psychologism and relativism in knowledge can be surpassed – according to this author – only by understanding man as a “participant being to the Logos”. Philosophy is not, like religion, a revelation of God: “it is a revelation of man, but of the participant man to the Logos, to the Absolute-Man, to the whole Man, and not a closed individual being”¹⁵. Because it cannot be subordinated to religion, or theology (that is “strongly socialized and objectivized”), philosophy (that gets the Existence as freedom, individuality and a direction for the act of creation) “cannot be separated from the deepest origins of being, from the vital and religious sap”¹⁶. In fact, philosophy is oriented towards the religious revelation.

Concerning a philosophy of the “transcendental man”, creatively open to its recognition and spiritualization, Berdyaev’s thinking is guided by the idea that “only in the christological conscience (in Christ – Logos) Man is saved and affirmed”¹⁷. The events revealed in the *Gospel*, that require the presence of the embodied Logos, “can only be conceived if they are, at the same time, events of my own spiritual experience and belong to my advancement on the path of the Logos”¹⁸. Such a road implies the “sacrifice of the passive, intellectual, abstract ‘truth’ (...). The passive captivity in this ‘truth’ is an enormous block in the way of knowing the authentic Truth. Dostoyevsky has some staggering words about the fact that, if on one side there would be the truth and on the other side there would

¹³ N.Berdiaev (1993). *Adevăr și revelație*, Timisoara: Editura de Vest, pp.19, 55, 57.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.62.

¹⁵ N.Berdiaev (1992). *Sensul creației*, Bucharest: Humanitas, p.63.

¹⁶ Idem

¹⁷ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁸ N.Berdiaev, *Adevăr și revelație*, p.54.

be Christ, it would be better to give up the truth and go to Christ, meaning sacrificing the dead truth of the passive intellectual in the name of the living truth of the whole spirit. The whole philosophy must pass now through this heroic act of abnegation of truth. Then, philosophy will become a creator art of knowledge, that is it will become active knowledge (...). Knowledge of Truth is the creator *realization* of the meaning of existence”¹⁹. And the meaning of existence reveals itself, on the footprints of the embodied Logos, through the free sinking of man to divine, through the revelation of divine to human.

The insertion of Christology in philosophy can be viewed as a transcription of the “Christological principles” (Xavier Tilliette) offered by theology, a transcription acquired in relation to the fundamental data of a philosophical system, a doctrine etc., or as a critical exam of these. In the symbolic economy of the “classical German philosophy”, among others (see Maine de Biran in the “Christology of the interior man” that he proposes), “Salvation”, “Sacrifice”, “Resurrection”, “Judgement”, etc, are discussed as being susceptible of a christological-philosophical treatment. This means that we are dealing, at the same time, with a critical lecture of the theological texts of Christology, but also with an acceptance (in the specialized terms of a doctrine) of “Christ” – from the perspective of the idea that supports Him (“Logos”, “Verb”, “Moral personality”, etc.). Thus, we consider that elements of christology can be discovered in Kant’s transcendental-critical approach of religion, in the Fichtean (transcendental) doctrine of “science” and, of course, in the speculative Hegelian philosophy. Here we take into consideration only the position of the philosopher from Königsberg.

In his philosophy of religion, Immanuel Kant interprets what results from the record of “ecclesiastic belief”, into the record of rational belief and of moral progress. The problem that appears is that of settling the idea of the “perfect man, beloved by God” (naming *the Verb* through which all things were created, the noumenal archetype, the human archetype in God, but also what is “present from origins in humanity”, “coming from Him”) with the one of the “descent” of the Son of God: “This union with us may therefore be regarded as a state of abasement Son of God, if we conceive of that divinely minded human being-an archetype for us-in the way in which he, although himself holy

¹⁹ N.Berdiaev, *Sensul creației*, op.cit., p.56.

and as such not bound to endure sufferings, nonetheless takes these upon himself to the greatest extent in order to further the world's greatest good"²⁰.

Kant names the moral Christian religion as "a disposition of the heart to respect all the humanly duties" – from the perspective of the relation with God -, refusing its understanding as a religion with doctrines and prescriptions. It is affirmed here, unequivocally, the separation of his position from the dogmatic theology. "In the moral religion (and from all the known religions, only the Christian one deserves this name), there is a fundamental principle that each of us must do everything in our power to become better and only when man has used, to become better, the primitive disposition towards good, he is allowed to hope that a superior cooperation will fulfill what does not rest in his power (...). It is no essential for us, and thus not necessary, to know what God can do or what He has done for our salvation, but to know ourselves what we have to do to deserve His help"²¹.

How does the Son of God appear from the perspective of this "moral religion"? In the above-mentioned work, Kant proceeds by reasoning in two different directions that are not easy to settle. On the one hand, the *Ideea Christi* is underlined, and has its base exclusively in reason (what Kant underlines repeatedly): the personified idea of Good, the idea of the perfect man, liked by God. This "archetype" is represented or symbolised in expressions of the religious language, like: the Only Son of God, the Verb (from the prologue of evangelist John), *the eternal Son*; all being "monograms of reason" (Xavier Tilliette). We are dealing here, in fact, with a moral reinterpretation of the religious speculation. The *Verb* descends from the sky; He "took the face of humanity", descending "into the point of suffering and death" and showing through this that perfection within Good asks efforts and any possible sacrifices. This symbolic-rational lecture sets aside the historical side of Christ's embodiment. On the other hand, "the Lord of the Gospel", "the wise founder of christianity", is also named „hero of an illuminating history“: He appeared at a certain point in history, only that, for Kant, this historical point must be submitted to the universal criteria of morality, not to history's trial.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant (2009). *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, translated by Werner S.Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, pp.67-68.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

In harmony with John the evangelist, Kant underlines that Christ, is in God for eternity. „This human being alone pleasing to God, «is in God from eternity»; the idea of him emanates from God`s essence, he is to that extent not a created thing but God`s only begotten Son, «the Word through which all other things are, and without which nothing exists that has been made» (Since for its sake, i.e., for that of the rational being in the word, as this being can be brought according to its moral vocation, everything has been made)²². Besides, "in Him, God loved the world and only in Him and by adopting his attitudes can we hope «to become the sons of God»(..)“. The Son of God, "this man with divine intentions“, wanted to serve as a model for us, "descended from the sky to us, enveloping humankind“ with all His true holiness.

Many considerations of Kant refer to the patristical discourse regarding the "human face of God“, the "human archetype of the Son, from God“, or what Gregory of Nyssa understood by Christ – as "prototype for humanity“, humanity being considered itself a "Son of God“. Immanuel Kant insisted in liberating from the mystical shell the representation of the Son of God and to see in Him only the "ideal of the humanity liked by God“. For the philosopher of Königsberg, the noumenal archetype is placed, in the beginning, in humanity; and Jesus, as a messenger of God, "a person that came from heaven“, has the mission of reminding man exactly this thing: the archetype within "God-Himself“ is actually the archetype within us "that forms a single practical idea“. This archetype functions, thus, as "an *a priori* from where, if we start, we can deduce transcendently the destinies of man as a moral being“²³.

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²² Ibid., pp.66-67.

²³ Xavier Tilliette, op.cit., p.216.

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