CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTOLOGY
*Jesus: Symbol of God* by Roger Haight*

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The question “Who do you say that I am?” confronts the Church as insistently today as in the days of its founding. Notwithstanding the risk of polar reactions that similar efforts have been known to engender, Roger Haight, in his masterpiece, *Jesus: Symbol of God*, develops a rejoinder to the question that, while remaining faithful to Christian tradition, engages the plurality of perspectives within contemporary christology. The result is a piece of frontier theology: whose approach is apologetical, in that—taking as its starting point contemporary men and women inhabited by a radical, historical consciousness resistant to the totalizing claims of metanarratives—it sets out to make intelligible and coherent the truth claims of the faith; whose language is symbolical and hermeneutical, in that—through the instrumentality of tensive, dynamic, dialectical, hermeneutically and critically correlated “symbols”—it constructs a “christology”; whose starting point is history, with Jesus of Nazareth as its abiding subject, referent and criterion.¹ As much as the book

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will need to be read from the "inside"—from the standpoint, that is, not of the metaphysical formulations of Nicaea and Chalcedon, but of its own historical-apologetical-symbolical method, categories, language, and presuppositions—it is a book well-deserving of a serious and reflective readership.

The christological criteria of the book presuppose pluralism but, at the same time, define the reasonable limits to what are acceptable and adequate. They are: faithfulness to the tradition, intelligibility in today's world, and empowerment of the Christian life. The first criterion requires a primal fidelity to the Scriptures as both the product and norm of Christian tradition. The point of the first criterion is to ensure the fidelity of the Christian community to its original faith in Jesus Christ, who is both the subject matter and source of christology. Fidelity to tradition also means fidelity to the landmark conciliar interpretations of Jesus Christ, such as the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, which continue to shape christological consciousness after 1500. The second criterion of intelligibility requires that in a world of human experience, which opens up to new questions, new forms, and language, christology must engage in the work of making the Jesus-event relevant and meaningful to earnest seekers of the truth. The third criterion of empowerment, in terms of ethical coherence and integrity, demands that Jesus must be understood in such a way that he moves and inspires a life-vision of justice and compassion in a divided and suffering world.

Epistemological Shifts

Shifts underpin the book's christological method. The language of the book is hermeneutical and symbolical, in contradistinction to objectivist and categorical. Its starting point is not metaphysics but history. Its approach is apologetical, not authoritative. To be able to comprehend its argument, the reader must be prepared to make an epistemological shift, with respect, for example, to the way Scripture is used in christology, i.e., from proof text to historical-hermeneutical; to the way transcendence is known, from directly-referential to
symbolically-mediated; and to the way reality is approached, from metanarrative to pluralism. The shift in the use of Scripture is pivotal in the construction of a christological model since Scripture shapes and governs the mode of christological thinking and imaging. The historical-hermeneutical deployment of Scripture assumes that Scripture is not the source of a direct self-communication of God, but of a human discourse called revelation that mediates that encounter with God. This presupposes the human character of the Scriptural text, its context, presuppositions, limitations, etc. The shift from proof text to the historical-hermeneutical approach shows that the use of an ancient christological model as a norm cannot be apodictic. It has to be reinterpreted and reappropriated.

With regard to the use of Scripture, the historical-hermeneutical approach presupposes the pluralism of interpretations. This is exemplified by the pluralism of christological models in the New Testament. That the Johannine christology was the overarching framework of Nicaea and Chalcedon does not make it the only legitimate scriptural grounding of christology, given the pluralism of the New Testament christologies. However, any shift in a scriptural framework results in a similar shift in one’s christological paradigm. The starting point, mode of thinking and language change. A whole new theoretical framework takes over. This is exemplified in the christology of the book which does not take the Johannine Christ as its governing image. This does not make it unacceptable. It is only new and different and, as such, it must be understood and assessed from within its scriptural paradigm.

Another shift concerns the nature of religious epistemology. All experience of God, because it is tied to the world, is experience that is mediated by the world. All revelation is historically mediated. In the theological framework of Karl Rahner, transcendental revelation is never given as such; it only appears in categorical manifestations.² This is affirmed by the epistemological principle of Thomas Aquinas that whatever is known or received by a knower is according to the “form” or mode or condition of the knower.³ On the grounds of religious epistemology, the apologetical approach of the book is
commendable. For, while remaining faithful to the originating revelation and to the consistent Christian tradition, it seeks to make the christological faith empowering through the deployment of a language that is intelligible to educated people in the present age. This is in keeping with the spirit of inculturation, whose great paradigm was established when the Church proclaimed its faith to the Hellenistic culture in terms that it could understand. The Church was, in turn, shaped by this culture.

If revelation is historically mediated, then it takes on the peculiarity and limitation of its mediation. Access to God is neither direct nor objective, as the divine inner life is not susceptible to direct conceptual knowing. Its metaphorical and symbolic mediation is necessarily finite, calling for a mode of knowing that is able to transcend the apparatus of categories, concepts, objective rationalizations, and direct focus, but which, at the same time, puts us, though non-reflexively, in touch with, and into the presence of, mystery. One, therefore, can only speak of God with an absolutely delicate reverence. Cognizant of the nature of religious epistemology, the book avoids making high categorical claims on the inner life of God. Its christology starts from below and, in keeping with that starting point, offers a modest discourse on the Trinity, keeping its meaning to its kernel of saving truth. The book does not present a unitarian God, only a modest theology of the Trinity.

Setting aside the totalizing claims of metanarratives, the book accommodates the fact and reality of pluralism, specifically religious pluralism. It does not develop a christology as a precondition to dialogue with other religions; for whatever christology is developed must be contextualized in a world and history characterized by a plurality of beliefs and religions. Christology, as such, must take on an aspect of humility if it is to make a rejoinder to the voices of other faiths, respectful of the intrinsic worth and dignity of each one. The book’s language—of Jesus’ mediatorship of salvation as normative and universal, though not constitutive of all grace—is consonant with the call for a humbler christology, for a reversal of that high christocentrism which, because it starts from a position of superior-
ity and is exclusionary in spirit, has not succeeded in bringing healing to a humanity broken up by intractable differences in religious beliefs. The theology of Christ presented in the book, and the spirit which informs it, is a theology that mediates a God whose love is the same for all, although unique in its historical embodiments for particular persons in specific times and cultures. It is a theology that seeks to enter into that much-needed and much-awaited dialogue with men and women of other beliefs, on the basis of their common love of God, in whom, in truth, they are all brothers and sisters.

Jesus: Symbol of God

The title of the book, *Jesus: Symbol of God*, gestures in the direction of its christology. It points to the horizon against which the book’s christological approach needs to be understood, the central framework within which its inner christological logic and coherence need to be discerned. It is the name which can be used to call upon the inspiring and energizing spirit which gives depth and substance to its content.

Christology begins with Jesus of Nazareth. He is the source and ground of christology. Within this focus on Jesus, there is a tension of particularity and universality arising from the very nature of religious symbols. Bearing a meaning that transcends himself, he maintains an autonomous identity, in his own time, place and context. But it is precisely in his historical individuality and particularity that he is universally available. To the degree that he is a human being, he is understood by and related to all other human beings.

Jesus is not regarded simply in himself alone but is approached with a religious question, ultimately a question of salvation. And salvation is always a question of God. As such, he is not approached simply in himself but as the one who is the mediator of God. As a human being, he points to a reality other than himself, namely: God and God’s rule in history. On a descriptive and historical level, therefore, one can portray what Jesus did in terms of symbolic mediation. Because Jesus mediates God, people encounter God in him.
In approaching Jesus as a symbol of God, the dialectics of symbol come to full force. A symbol is that through which something other than itself is known. It is tensive and dynamic, engaging the mind with different levels of meaning. The literalization of a symbol destroys it and causes its emotive force to become impotent; it abets a reductionism that undercuts the dialectical nature of symbols. The transcendental reality that the symbol mediates is reduced to the linear, single-mode limitations of its finite medium.

The dialectical character of symbol allows one to assert contrary things about the symbol, because it is not the symbolized, and yet it makes the symbolized present.⁴

The dialectics between the holy and the worldly, the tensive unity and difference between the sacred and the profane within the symbol itself is the key to formal christology. The dialectics, as an inner logic, defines christological method and content. Is Jesus the object of faith? The answer to this question must be both yes and no. Jesus both is and is not the object of Christian faith. To say simply Jesus is or is not the object of faith relaxes the tension in Jesus as the symbol of God and falsifies the symbol. If Jesus is the object of faith, pressure develops to forget or deny that Jesus was a human being like us. If Jesus is not the object of faith, the notion takes root that one can know God independently of Jesus, effectively removing him from the center of Christian faith. There is a welcome tension, therefore, in Jesus as symbol of God, a tension that is helpful to efforts to meet the challenge of sorting out important issues and questions in christology.

**Reinterpreting the Christological Tradition**

The controversy likely to be provoked by the christology presented in the book is neither unique nor isolated, but is consistent with the long history of christological debates, concerning both the three-stage (pre-existence, hypostatic union, exaltation), descent-ascent christology with a starting point and focus on an already divine Jesus, and the two-stage, indwelling-ascent christology deriving from
the historical Jesus who encounters the divine presence within his integral humanity. It is in the latter tradition that the christology presented in the book is firmly rooted. Its premises and language differ, therefore, from those of Nicaea and Chalcedon. It insists, for one thing, upon a theology of the resurrection from below. It understands what happened to Jesus at the resurrection in terms of the transcendental, of what is totally uncircumscribed by the physicality of the finite world. It cannot, as such, be grasped immediately or directly, only obliquely, in and through the symbolic realm, by means of an inquiry into the human experience that gave rise to the original conviction that Jesus has risen and is alive with God. From the perspective of this inquiry, the witness of the empty tomb, or Jesus’ appearances to the disciples along the way to Emmaus, or on the road to Damascus, are historically inconclusive (insusceptible to historical-critical research), though they point to a reality of mystery and transcendence accessible to an imagination that, quite the reverse of being limited to sensible data, opens up new possibilities of being, and of the construction of meanings capable of empowering Christian life. The one external event that mediated the consciousness and belief of Jesus as risen was Jesus himself. The historical Jesus of Nazareth is not only the sufficient ground for an affirmation of his resurrection, he is its necessary ground. One cannot affirm a resurrection of Jesus without reference to Jesus of Nazareth.

Special interest is taken in the Emmaus account as representative of the emergence of the faith in the risen Christ because it is an appearance story that is told in the context of resurrection faith. While it is not, strictly speaking, a chronicle of unfolding events, it explains in a general way how faith in the resurrection of Jesus came to be generated. The story is broken down into six elements: the situation, the discussion of Jesus, the use of Scriptures, the initiative of God, the recognition of Jesus in the breaking of bread, the concluding confession of the kerygma. The story reflects fairly accurately, though broadly, the historical situation of the disciples after his death. "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel!" (Lk 24:21). In these words is expressed the dismay of those who had placed their ultimate hope in Jesus of Nazareth, "a prophet mighty in deed and
word before God and all the people” (Lk 24:19). In their remembering, through the help of Jesus as the stranger who walked with them on the road to Emmaus, they sought the illumination of the Scriptures upon the events that had transpired. This represents the historical fact that the early Jesus movement and community interpreted Jesus in the light of the Scriptures. In their reflections, the God who withheld the true identity of the stranger from them is the same God who brought them to full awareness of him who was in their midst. “Their eyes were opened” (Lk 24:31).

Recognition of Jesus risen and alive came as a revelation from God and not merely as an inference or conclusion from objective data.5

At the heart of the story is the risen Christ known and recognized in the celebration of the Eucharist as well as in the word-event of the Scriptures. The formula statement of the kerygma: “The Lord has risen indeed” (Lk 24:34), marks the end of the story which is the climax of the gradual conversion of the community, represented by the disciples, to the resurrection faith. The very structure of the story most likely represents the historical route the faith community took to arrive at its affirmation of the resurrection of Christ.

But just how is Jesus the external historical cause that gave rise to the faith-hope in his resurrection? What, in the memory of Jesus, has impelled this hope in his resurrection? There is, first of all, the vivid memory of Jesus’ teaching of God’s love, fidelity and goodness, which the disciples experienced in his friendship, in his compassion for those in distress, in the meals that he shared with sinners. Not even the negative impact of Jesus’ death upon the cross could shake the disciples loose from the hope in the promise of ultimate justice to which Jesus’ whole life had given witness. The belief in the resurrection is impelled by the demand for moral coherence in the tension between sin and salvation. This same belief that comes with hope must have had its genesis in the sheer experience of his person and authority. He had made radical moral claims on people by his word and witness. He was a man like no other. He was raised from the dead on account of the way he had lived, obedient to God’s rule
and therefore deserving of being exalted (Phil 2:8-9). This was not something in the order of a moral reward but the validation on God’s part of a life that mediated his own life and love, especially in the care for every form of human suffering and compassion for sinners. His was a life that represented God’s rule, God’s plan for all of human existence. Because Jesus’ life was such a life, it was raised into eternity.

The interpretation of the resurrection has Jesus as the center of christology, its referent and ground. The original experience that gave rise to the hope of the resurrection is Jesus, not abstracted from his person, but Jesus who lived in history and is now alive and risen, the symbol of God. This reconstructed theology of the resurrection “uncenters the resurrection” in the structure of the Christian faith. This does not minimize the importance of the resurrection, but it repositions it in a way that does not reduce the memory of Jesus’ life into relative insignificance. A theology which holds that Jesus’ whole life was obliterated or voided by his death, and then revalidated, on a new initiative of God, through the singular and discrete event of resurrection, is erroneous because it breaks not only the bond between the exalted Christ and Jesus of Nazareth but also the bond between the life and death of Jesus. The death of Jesus must be construed in its historical dialectics. It was not only done to him but something he did, in the sense that he died because of the way he lived. His cross was the ultimate sign of the seriousness and radicality of his life so utterly given for others, in fidelity to his mission, to the will and cause of God. He died as he lived, for he believed and loved so fully unto death. The theology of the resurrection, constructed from the view of a christology from below, sees the very life of Jesus as truly revelatory and salutary because it is the very life of Jesus, symbol of God. This is the historical genesis of faith in the resurrection. The book’s theology of the resurrection from below is whole and integral, bringing the life and death of Jesus into one final consummation in his resurrection, in which men and women base their final hope and destiny.
New Testament Christologies

Formal christology began with the conviction that Jesus was risen. There is pluralism of christology and soteriology in the New Testament, a development that sprawls over the last two thirds of the first century, in different communities at different times, exemplifying different developments, responding to different historical contexts and situations, and codified in different genres. To gain control over an unwieldy mass of literature, the book chose five types of christology and subjected them to exegetical analysis and hermeneutical generalizations. The book’s deep insight into the New Testament data reveals the dialectical nature of christology as the different types (Jesus Christ as the last Adam, Son of God in Mark, Empowered by the Spirit in Luke, Wisdom of God, and Logos of God) tend either to make Jesus or the exalted Christ as the primary referent, emphasizing either his divinity or his humanity. The christologies are either pre-existent, incarnational descent (three-stage) or an ascent (two-stage) christology, ontological or functional christology. Language, genre and context are key to understanding the christologies. Relative to language and genre, the types and images must be seen as symbolical affirmations of transcendent aspects of Christ conceived from different perspectives and not adequately containing their object. Relative to context, divine titles in the gospels must be understood in the functional sense and not in terms of the metaphysical categories of classical christology.

The christologies are not the same; they are different. Some cannot be held integrally together because they are in contradiction with one another. Notwithstanding their divergences, however, each type holds a soteriological message or meaning for today. Each mediates Jesus as the bearer of salvation, historically and existentially received in faith. But the New Testament is normative by the very fact that it is pluralistic. Pluralism is necessary in the New Testament because of the very nature of reality tied to history and time. Not only does such a plurality necessarily exist, it is also positively salutary. The christologies are various because they are historical. They are writ-
ten by different authors, in different contexts and situations, addressing different problems and codified in different genres.

Christologies differ because Jesus who is the object of interpretation evokes an unfathomable depth and breadth of human response. Although the New Testament prescribes pluralism in christology, it also provides norms for christology. It makes it clear, first of all, that one christology cannot be held as the norm for all others. In the diversity of the christologies in the New Testament, there is no objective reason to be found within the christologies themselves for one to be preferred over another. All New Testament christologies have this in common: they explain how or why Jesus is the bearer of salvation from God. Even today, no single christology can be the measure of others. It suffices that each christology is faithful to the Jesus who can be known by historical research, that it is consistent with the genetic basis out of which all the New Testament christologies arose, that it is congruent with classical christology, that it is susceptible to being shaped by the classical traditions in the very process of interpreting and appropriating them, that it is consonant with what and how persons come existentially to know and experience Jesus as the mediator of God’s salvation and the object of Christian worship, that it meets the norm of ethical credibility and the ability to empower a moral life.

**Classical Soteriology**

Scripture, as a living document, continues to be a source of meaning through the ages. Christological reflection goes back to its primary memory in Scripture and reinterprets it in a new language. In its return to the past, in order to draw it forward to the present, the christological reflection of the book appeals to Scripture and to its interpretations codified in classical soteriology, that is, the soteriology of the patristic period (Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine), the medieval period (Anselm and Abelard) and the reformation period (Luther and Calvin). The book analyzes the atonement or soteriological themes present in the works of the representative au-
thors, such as the obedience theme of Irenaeus, substitution theme of Athanasius, sacrifice and ransom theme of Augustine, satisfaction theme of Anselm, the love theme of Abelard, the vicarious punishment and justification theme of Luther, and the sanctification theme of Calvin. These different themes are the classical christological interpretations of how and why exactly Jesus died for the salvation of humankind or what God did in and through Jesus.

Moving to a second level of reflection, beyond the analysis of the soteriological themes, the book critically retrieves the experience of salvation codified in them in a way that makes sense today. The language of Jesus suffering in our place, as the only worthy sacrifice to render satisfaction to the God who needs satisfaction or needs to punish, is not only unintelligible but even repulsive to postmodern sensibilities. Moreover, from a historical perspective, the passivity of Jesus, often associated with the obedience theme on the cross, does not appear to intersect with his aggressive prophetic teaching, which became the proximate cause of his crucifixion. Moreover, from a present-day perspective, the tendency to put his death at the center of a theology of Jesus, effectively removing it from the context of his public ministry, blunts the relevance of his life for people’s full and active lives of freedom.

The book aims, precisely, to bridge the gap between the classical soteriologies and contemporary sensibilities by means of an appeal to the experience of salvation reflected in them which may provoke resonance in all human beings and thus have a universal significance. The focal point of this retrieval and reinterpretation is the Jesus of history as the revelation of God who “assumes every aspect of human existence so that it is healed, cleansed, cured, saved... and who has come close and identified with humanity by assuming a human being, and thus the human race as such, as God’s own.” This is the Jesus of history who makes God present in his authoritative teaching, and in the power of his healing and exorcism, and whose voluntary passion and death comprised an act of obedience and fidelity. In retrieving the exorbitant views of the cross, ransom, and sacrifice, the focus is removed from the physical slaughter on the cross and
shifted to the degree of God's love and Jesus' response of obedience to that love. It is not the death, as such, that is salutary but the love of which the death is its ultimate and highest expression.

Jesus who came from God bearing God's presence and power, symbolizes the radical extent of God's self-gift to human beings and from the human side, the equally radical kind of commitment this communication should draw forth as a response.  

Jesus is the final Adam, the embodiment of all that it means to be human, the archetypal human being, in whom men and women encounter no less than God.

Classical Christology

The book's study of the post-New Testament christology in the patristic period, shows the paradigmatic tensions and dilemmas that marked the christological controversies through the centuries that followed until the present. That the tension between the divinity and humanity of Jesus cannot be resolved is the thesis that the book illustrates in presenting the two broad christological traditions in the fourth and fifth centuries. The first is the Word-flesh and incarnational christology associated with the Alexandrian theologians (Athanasius, Appollinaris and Cyril of Alexandria). The second is the Word-human being and indwelling christology associated with the Antiochene theologians (Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius).

The core of the Alexandrian christology lies in the unity of the divine Logos as the subject who is also Jesus of Nazareth. There is only one single subject through the three stages of pre-existence, earthly existence and new glorified existence. The remarkable consistency between soteriology and this christology lies in the fact that salvation can only come from God and, thus, the insistence of the one single divine subject who is also the Jesus of Nazareth. But in doing so, it falls into monophysitic tendencies. In denying that Jesus has a rational soul, it reduces him to a passive instrument. He is not an integral human subject whose freedom and individuality are en-
gaged in his actions. In contrast, the core of the Antiochene christology is the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, who is, from the very beginning, the "assumed human being" in whom God dwells. The indwelling Logos permeates, shapes, informs his entire human nature and, thus, all its actions but without compromising its integrity. The human nature of Jesus is not a passive instrument of the Logos. The soteriology underlying the Antiochene christology conceives Jesus as a savior, through whose real, rational and free actions, divine salvation is at work. It is a descending christology with an integral anthropology. The debate between the Alexandrians and the Antiochenes marked a paradigmatic debate in christological development in the centuries that followed.

The most important christological documents of the patristic period are the creed of the Council of Nicaea and the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon. Normative for the Christian faith, these classical christologies have to be reinterpreted in every age in a language that is positive, intelligible and constructive, while remaining faithful to their truth. One cannot avoid them because the problematic they posed relative to ontological christology is perpetual. To simply repeat them is anachronistic because the context from which their language and meaning arose is not the same as the present context. An adequate christology must enter into a dialogue with the classical christological doctrines and allow itself to be shaped by them in the act of interpreting and appropriating them. The work of reinterpretation that the book undertakes is monumental. Transcending the boundaries of the fourth and fifth centuries, its proposed christological reinterpretation of Nicaea and Chalcedon engages the human questions of the twenty-first century, while remaining faithful to the intentionality of the New Testament.

Reinterpreting Nicaea

Historically, the Nicene doctrine came about as a reaction to Arianism, which claimed that the Son who is Logos is a creature, denying that the true God was present and at work in Jesus. In re-
sponse to Arianism, the central and controlling idea of the Nicene doctrine is the strict divinity of the Son, or Logos, who is begotten not made. The soteriology underlying the christology of Nicaea is posited on the axiom that God alone saves, so that if the Son or the Logos incarnate in Jesus is not God, then there is no salvation.

The book poses a critique of the Nicene Creed which is not limited to its language. It takes into consideration the broad patristic theological culture that shaped it. The intent of the critique is to arrive at an adequate appropriation of the classical doctrine that it may faithfully be reinterpreted. The critique is focused on Nicaea’s use of Scripture. Nicaea appeals to Scripture as a direct source or a proof text of knowledge about transcendent reality. This is an outmoded use of Scripture unacceptable today. It also draws exclusively from John’s gospel for its integrating framework, blunting thereby the pluralism of New Testament christologies, particularly those of the Synoptics, which depict Jesus as an integral human being. A reinterpretation of Nicaea must transcend this exclusively Johannine framework within which it was defined and formulated.

The hypostatization of the Logos which is presupposed by this framework is problematic. The symbol Logos, once it is hypostatized, moves from being a divine personification, that is, a figure of speech, to being a distinct object and individuated mode of being. Its metaphorical character is literalized or reified. Once Logos is hypostatized, one has the problem of a second God and the problem of subordinationism. Also, the Logos as an individual, and the individual being Jesus, cannot be united without compromising one or the other.

A Nicaean reinterpretation today must presuppose a critical theory of religious experience, knowledge, theology and doctrine, given the symbolical and metaphorical character of revelation. This goes against and beyond simply quoting Scripture as a revealed authority. Nicaea should be understood within the dynamics of religious symbolic knowledge. It must be reinterpreted today within the framework of a christology from below and within the dynamics of religious symbolic knowledge. This takes a self-conscious effort to shift
from the descending christology of the Johannine framework to the other ascending christologies of the New Testament with Jesus of Nazareth as their referent.

The christological shift approaches the question of the relationship between God and Jesus within a religious epistemology distinct from that underlying Nicaea. The movement of thought is not from the nature of God to the divine character of Jesus but, rather, toward understanding Jesus Christ and the nature of God on the basis of God being encountered in Jesus. This means that from the historical mediation of Jesus, and the encounter of this mediation, arises the human reflection on the nature of God. A reinterpreted Nicene Creed from an ascending christology points to the status of Jesus as divine because no less than God is encountered in and through him for salvation. This Nicaean reinterpretation preserves its historical meaning, that is, its anti-Arian intentionality. Rejecting the Arian doctrine—that less than God, i.e., a creature Logos, was incarnate, present, and at work in Jesus—the reinterpretation affirms that no less than God is at work in Jesus.

Reinterpreting Chalcedon

The doctrine of Chalcedon is the outcome of attempts to resolve in a delicate, middle position the contrary christologies of Cyril and Nestorius, representing the debate between the divine subject christology of the Alexandrians and the two-nature christology of the Antiochenes. Preserving the strengths of the two sides of the christological debate, the fundamental affirmations of Chalcedon are the following: First, the metaphysical identity of Jesus Christ lies in the eternal, divine Son, the Logos. Jesus Christ is not a human person but a divine person, and his human nature is the human nature of the Logos, a divine being. Second, while teaching that Jesus Christ is one person, a divine person, Chalcedon also affirms his duality in his two natures, divine and human. These two natures are united in one person without confusion, without change, without division. This means that the integrity of both natures is preserved in one prosopon and
hypostasis; the integral humanity of Christ and his consubstantiality with all other human beings is affirmed.

The Chalcedonian formula brought together successfully the Alexandrian one divine subject christology, which holds that the Logos and Jesus are one and the same, and the Antiochene christology centered on the view that Jesus Christ is a union of two distinct but integral natures. The book’s critique of Chalcedon, as a faithful commentary of Nicaea, is premised on the same issues raised relative to Nicaea: an exclusive Johannine perspective, outmoded argument from Scripture, hypostatization of biblical symbols, christology descending from above in method and content. On top of these is a critique of the Chalcedonian language, necessary for a faithful retrieval of it in a language more suited to contemporary times. Its metaphysical language of nature, person, substance and being, diminishes and compromises the vital, existential and historical image of Jesus in the synoptic gospels.

The more pervasive and comprehensive critique, however, of the Chalcedonian formula and language originates from the postmodern situation or context of christology. There has been a shift of mode of thinking and starting point, resulting in a shift of problematic in the new intellectual milieu of postmodernism. This is largely due to the extensive impact of the data of the Jesus research. The point of departure is no longer the Logos and its incarnation but the historical Jesus. The mode of thinking is no longer, in the first instance, metaphysical but historical. Once the shifts of starting point, mode of thinking and problematic are understood, and the whole new approach and framework are recognized, the classical christological language and categories are brought under pressure that causes them to simply break down. Contemporary theologians searching for an explanatory language that remains close to the Chalcedonian one person and two natures, but that at the same time is consistent with a christology from below, propose an alternative language in the tradition of the Antiochenes. They propose that the statement “Jesus is a divine person with two natures” be changed to “Jesus is a human person with two natures.” This preserves the one person, two na-
tures language, but in a reverse way. The starting point and the premise is the integral humanity of Jesus.

The principal criticism of Chalcedon is not leveled against its content, but against the theoretical context of its framework, suppositions, premises and method. The reinterpretation of Chalcedon offered by the book is a christology of unity in diversity, in the spirit and tradition of Chalcedon, but with the historical Jesus as its primary referent and starting point, within the dialectical structure of symbol. It is through the fully human existence of the Jesus of Nazareth that no less than God is present and active for human salvation. Jesus is the human symbol who makes God present. Whoever encounters the man Jesus, encounters no less than God. Jesus, symbol of God, the primary christological language of the book, preserves the authoritative and normative symbolic meaning of Chalcedon and Nicaea but from within a different framework, starting point and premise.

**Constructive Christology**

The book brings the whole christological tradition, reinterpreted from a christology from below, to bear on its proposed constructive christology. Given the theoretical necessity and possibility of pluralism of christologies, it presents two christologies, a reinterpreted Logos christology and Spirit christology, as viable christologies in a postmodern context. They are seen as working models open to further development and to continuing discussion within the theological academic community. The tense and dialectical structure of the book’s foundational concept, Jesus as symbol of God, is the general framework within which these two christologies are subsumed. Jesus, symbol of God, is the framework and structure; Logos and Spirit christologies “explain” how God was present to Jesus in such a way that one can say he was symbol of God. They describe or analyze in traditional Christian language how God was present to Jesus in a way that Jesus made God present. The constructive christology of the book also responds to the experience of religious pluralism.
The appreciation of how deep and lasting it is, is part of the postmodern experience that makes a reinterpretation of Jesus necessary.

**Jesus and the Other Religions**

Religious pluralism, which is the result of historicity, is part of the human existential condition. Thus, christology cannot be pursued as a narrow question apart from or outside of the reality of religious pluralism. Rather, this reality is the very context which defines and shapes the premise and method of christology. Religious pluralism may be a negative weight on the contemporary christological project, insofar as it puts pressure on classical christology, demands accommodation and change, and thus becomes a threat. It is, however, also a positive force inspired by a greater sensitivity to and appreciation of other religions, beyond mere tolerance or co-existence. This positive, pluralist consciousness in a global context tends towards interaction and dialogue beyond sectarianism and isolationism.

Christology vis-à-vis religious pluralism addresses questions regarding the Christian disposition towards Jesus consistent with the Christian faith tradition but, at the same time, sensitive to and coherent with the pluralist world where there are other voices of faith. The question raised relative to Jesus and other religions is intrinsically tied to the question of salvation. Four positions marking the relation of Jesus Christ to human salvation range from a conservative position to a more open stance: 1) exclusivism which holds that there is no salvation outside of an explicit historical contact with and faith in Jesus; 2) constitutive inclusivism which speaks of salvation for all, in and through Jesus as its constitutive cause. Those who are saved without an explicit historical connection with Christ are called anonymous Christians; 3) normative non-constitutive position, which is more historically than metaphysically grounded, holds that Jesus is normative of salvation, as he is universally recognized as the bearer of salvation, but he is not the constitutive cause of salvation of those without any historical connection to him; 4) posi-
tion of pluralism which accepts the multiplicity of religions and mediators of salvation other than Jesus who are or can be "on a par" with him.

In its approach to the question of Jesus' place among religions, the book resorts to the device of common or analogous meanings in which the understanding of the communicator and that of the recipient of the communication are partly the same and partly different. This analogical appropriation is necessary because what is known is historically mediated in and through the specific and individual context of the knower. On the basis of this epistemological premise, the book explains its stance on the relation of Jesus with other religions. Jesus is normative for Christians insofar as he is the mediator of the truth of God and salvation. He is the medium and focus of the Christian faith in God. The normativity of Jesus extends to others insofar as the truth that he mediates is appropriated by them by way of analogy in their own historical circumstances.

The intrinsic logic and intelligibility of the truth, at the level of ultimacy, is recognized by any earnest searcher of the truth. What is true binds all at a level where they recognize the humanity that they share in common. What is true has, as such, a dynamism towards universal relevance, and universal relevance constitutes normativity. The distinction between positive and negative functions of norm also leads to an understanding of how the normativity of Jesus extends to others. A positive norm exclusively asserts its envisioned truth and denies alternatives. A negative norm rules out only those alternatives that contradict it; all that affirm it, it accepts. Jesus as a negative norm inspires Christians to find that truth about God and salvation which Jesus mediates beyond the Christian sphere: God who is personal and whose love is creative and unconditional. Furthermore, given the historicity of the human mediations of truth, normativity is understood in terms of relational truth. The normative truth of Jesus operatively becomes normative in a new context and situation by way of analogy and appropriation in other construals of reality.

Jesus is normative but not the inclusive constitutive grace of
salvation for all. By pointing to the context, within the early Church, of that discourse concerning salvation “only through Jesus,” the book underscores the need to reinterpret this discourse in the new historical context of postmodern culture. To hold that this New Testament language carries a definitive answer to the contemporary question regarding the relation of Christianity to other religions, amounts to fundamentalism. The book further points out that the New Testament witness runs in a direction quite contrary to inclusivism. There is little support to be gleaned from Jesus’ preaching that he presented himself to his listeners as the constitutive cause of salvation for all human beings. Quite the contrary, exegetes maintain that Jesus did not so much preach himself but the rule of God. The message of Jesus is theocentric rather than christocentric. Jesus is the symbol and mediator of God’s salvation within the Church as the instrument and sacrament of God’s self-manifestation. The belief that he is the constitutive cause of salvation—even for those who had no historical contact with him, such as those who lived and died before he came into the world, or adherents of other religions with no knowledge or experience of him—is rooted in speculative and metaphysical considerations.

Speculative reason in the postmodern intellectual milieu possesses neither the credibility nor the intelligibility that it had in the classical philosophical milieu. Affirming the normativity of Jesus not only for Christians but also for all human beings does not diminish the validity and truth claims of other religions. Likewise, affirming the validity of other religions does not undermine the normativity of Christ. The fact of religious pluralism is salutary for it is fundamentally premised on God as gracious and unconditional love drawing humankind unto Godself. The sure sign of this immanence of divine love is the historical salvific mediation of Jesus of Nazareth.

The presence of other religions confirms more explicitly, rather than weakens, the mediation of salvation in Jesus. The fear that the truth claim—that Jesus is the final, definitive and unsurpassable mediation of salvation—would be diminished by the presence of other mediators of salvation, is based on the premise of competition.
between and among religions. Once this premise is overcome, it will be clearly seen that no less than God is present in other religions insofar as they authentically mediate salvation. When God is present, he is present—the same God, the same gracious love, the same unconditional mercy. Because the saving God is present in other religions, their mediators of salvation can be normatively universal, as Jesus is normative for all. Normativity is taken to mean here that any truth—from whatever source it comes—is recognized by all genuine seekers of the truth. Beyond the question of normativity is the question of the constitutive cause of salvation. The book argues that in the absence of all historical connection between Jesus and people of other faiths, to hold that Jesus is the constitutive cause of all salvation is inferential, speculative and tenuous; it appears not necessary. God's saving and gracious love is effective in the lives of all human beings, through the actual agency of the institutions and situations that shape their lives. This love is the same for all but unique in its historical embodiments. At the kernel of religious pluralism is God who wills that all be saved and who reaches out to all in their particular historical and social locations.

Logos Christology

The book constructs its christology in the context of religious pluralism. That is, it retrieves Logos christology and its proposed Spirit christology in a way that responds to the reality of religious pluralism in a postmodern context. But first, it develops a critique of Rahner's Logos christology which, while not a thoroughgoing christology from above, manifests in many aspects of its method and vision an imaging and reasoning from above. Rahner retrieves the christologies of Nicaea and Chalcedon but in a manner which raises questions about Jesus' consubstantiality with us. God is present to Jesus as Logos, in Rahner's view, in a manner qualitatively different from the manner of his presence to us as Spirit. Ontologically defined by the presence of God to him as Logos, Jesus is radically unlike us. Although Rahner refers to Jesus' humanity as an integral
human nature, he paints a picture of Jesus as borne up and sustained by the divine being of the Logos himself, and to that extent as radically different from other human beings. No human being is related to the Logos as he is. The anthropological intent of Rahner’s Logos christology to show the continuity between Jesus and us is not sustained on account of the constraints placed upon it by his own descent christology.

There is, as well, a thematic inconsistency between Rahner’s language of universal grace, that of the supernatural existential, and the language of Jesus of Nazareth, a particular event in history, being the constitutive cause of grace. If, indeed, God’s gracious and saving love is concomitant with God’s creating—such that human nature is graced from the beginning, in its intrinsic openness to the transcendence—how does this cohere with the Jesus-event, a recent event relative to the beginnings of creation, as the constitutive cause of grace? There appears to be a dissonance between the consistent unity of grace and nature from the very beginning and the Jesus-event as the constitutive cause of grace. In Rahner’s theology, all saving grace proceeds from the Father and the Son, and, thus, all grace is the grace of Christ. Rahner does not deny that there are other savior figures and that there is salvation in other religions. He holds, however, that all realities or events of salvation have Christ’s grace as their source and end. Christ is at the center of Rahner’s metanarrative and vision. In the historical consciousness of the current intellectual milieu, however, there is no metanarrative under which all are subsumed. There are other narratives and visions of salvation for different peoples in different contexts. Whatever is learned or comes to be known is appreciated according to the social-historical form of the community who learns it.

Corollary to the point just developed, the book poses a critique of Rahner’s view that God can be incarnate only once. This view is not indigenous to Logos christology because others with a Logos christology take a contrary position. Rahner’s reasoning for a “once and for all” incarnation is not based on the general nature of revelation but on his christological view that, in Christ, the revelation of
God has entered a definitive and irrevocable finality and that all revelation before and after has him as the constitutive cause. The massive evidence across the Bible, however, shows God drawing close to all in a universal love, even to those who have had no historical contact with Jesus. This casts doubt on him as the constitutive cause of revelation for all. Rahner, in principle, holds the universality of divine love but he strongly insists that this love is sacramentally-constituted in the one-time hypostatic union in Christ. The book, on the other hand, holds that there is no compelling reason for God not to approach humankind in various ways and depths, and in more than one medium. Such a restriction predicated of God appears to deny the freedom and historicity of his revelation.

Following its critique of Rahner’s Logos christology, the book attempts a retrieval of it in the postmodern context. The Rahnerian themes are recast from a christology from below and within a historical consciousness of reality. The necessity of retrieval is premised on the fact that classical Logos christology today, without qualifications and modifications, cannot hold out under the critical scrutiny of contemporary theological methods. Some modifications of Rahner’s Logos christology, thus, are proposed. First, its method and point of departure. The transcendental theology of Rahner embodies a critical hermeneutical method of correlation in its anthropology, including a phenomenological archaeology of the religious question. Jesus as God’s Word meets the religious search and inquiry that arises from the basic human longing for meaning and purpose. The anthropology underlying Rahner’s theology opens the possibility of modifying the point of departure of his christology. With the perspective of a christology from below, his Logos christology can begin with a consideration of the historical Jesus and an account of the historical origin of the symbol Logos and how the two correlate. Rahner’s approach from above, and the Alexandrian tradition which has influenced his theology, places a strain on the depiction of Jesus as fully integral in his humanity. This problem would be overcome if his christology were to adopt an Antiochene framework in the context of his theology of symbol. A reinterpreted Rahnerian christology within this framework would have the historical Jesus of Nazareth
as its starting point and referent.

In the light of the Antiochene indwelling christology, that which dwells within Jesus from the first moment of his existence and which defines him, is God as revealing presence and Word. Rahner’s theology of symbol facilitates a dialectical understanding of Jesus as symbol of God as Logos: he is and is more than a human reality, both is and is not, because he is other than the reality of God. Rahner’s three-stage descent christology, and the hypostatization of the Logos at the center of his christology, leaves many unresolved tensions. If his christology, however, shifts from the Alexandrian paradigm of hypostatic union to the Antiochene paradigm of divine indwelling, the unresolved tensions are addressed. The Antiochene divine indwelling with its integral anthropology begins with the historical Jesus. His consubstantiality with us is presupposed from the outset and throughout. The unity of Jesus Christ is the unity of the human person in whom the fullness of divinity, God as Word, dwells. The soteriology underlying a reinterpreted Logos christology of Rahner is based on the retrieval of the meaning of salvation effected by God through Jesus as symbol of God. Jesus of Nazareth, as the symbol of God, is the revealer of God.

The intelligibility and credibility of Rahner’s Logos christology lies in its underlying anthropology. His christology points to Christ as the completion of the human against an extrinsicism which proposes no intrinsic connection between the Jesus Christ event and the inner nature and aspirations of human existence. An apologetic Logos christology predicates of Jesus a universal relevance. This means that he has a bearing on human longing and aspiration for ultimate meaning. Jesus, as the symbol of God, meets and unites with all that is good, true and noble, in what is human, and brings them to unsurpassable heights in his person.

Is this vision unintelligible in a postmodern context distrustful of all totalizing and exclusionary meta-narratives? On the contrary, the appeal of Rahner’s Logos christology to the utopian dimension of human yearning in all human beings forbids a totalizing metanarrative exclusionary of those who cannot appropriate the nar-
rative in their particular context. Faith and hope, goal and meaning, in Christ, touch what is fundamentally human and, thus, what is universal. Christ cannot, ultimately, be a savior and reconciler at all, unless he is significant for all. The intrinsic relation between incarnation or hypostatic union of God as Logos with Jesus and the general human condition is what is empowering in Rahner’s christology. Within such an intrinsic relation, what is human is raised to unimaginable dignity and importance because God has made all that is human his own. The theology of the incarnation grounds Christian anthropocentrism and humanism. Human freedom is ratified, for when God draws close and near, freedom is brought to flourish. The more God is present, the more a person becomes free, for God, who is the source of freedom, is also its sustainer and source of empowerment.

Spirit Christology

The book also presents Spirit christology which is not proposed in opposition to the Logos christology of Rahner but in contrast to it. Spirit christology “explains” the divinity of Jesus on the basis of God as Spirit and not on the basis of the symbol Logos. It is characterized as proceeding from below because it begins with a historical consideration of Jesus of Nazareth. The symbol of God as Spirit is not a personification of God but is God present in Jesus. Thus, no less than God acted in and through him. While the underlying metaphor of the Logos christology is that of the incarnation—which involves a three-stage narrative and a hypostatized Logos and a hypostatic union—the underlying metaphor in Spirit christology is that of empowerment.

Can Spirit christology live up to the standard set by the classic christological councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon? A critical point stressed is that the incarnation of Jesus, however it is interpreted, must not undermine his integral humanity. The three-stage Logos christology, following the Alexandrian “Logos-sarx” or the “hypostatic union” christology, begins with the pre-existence of Jesus. The
book's critique of the three-stage narrative is founded on the following points: First, the notion of pre-existence is incompatible with the doctrine of Chalcedon that Jesus is consubstantial with us, unless the understanding is such that we too were pre-existent. Second, the hypostatization of the Logos creates the problem of two Gods and the problem of the hypostatic union of the Logos with the man Jesus, with one or both compromised. Third, using the formula of one person with two natures, Jesus is a divine person with a real and truly human nature apart from personhood. The Logos, as subject, assumes a human nature and acts through it as his instrument. This whole doctrinal concept breaks down in the face of research (into the Synoptics) that shows Jesus as a concrete autonomous person, one who acts with a self-conscious reflection and freedom.

Spirit christology attempts an appropriation of classical christological language. First, by deploying its foundational metaphor of empowerment:

Jesus was empowered by God's Spirit. The Spirit of God is God present, a personal presence, a power, a force, an energy, so that Jesus is an embodiment of God as Spirit. This is not an impersonal power that takes over and controls, but precisely God who works within human freedom, not from the outside and dominating, nor from inside and taking over, but actualizing freedom to its full capacity.

In light of this, the fundamental point of the doctrine of pre-existence—that salvation in and through Jesus comes from God—is sustained by the fact that no less than God is acting in and through him, but not taking him merely as an instrument. Second, Spirit christology, in contrast to the hypostatized Logos christology, is seen as an Indwelling Spirit christology. In this light, the presence of God as Spirit to Jesus as inspiration is contrasted with what is depicted in Logos christology as a real incarnation.

There is, however, no intrinsic reason for the antithesis. While the Spirit in Jesus may be called inspiration, it is inspiration in very strong terms, as strong as a real ontological incarnation, as long as it does not deny Jesus' consubstantiality with us. Moreover, the divinity of
Jesus can be asserted in the same manner as in the doctrine of Chalcedon, keeping the dialectical language of one person and two natures.

Given the historical consciousness and the christological problematic today, people spontaneously accept Jesus as a human person. Therefore, as long as these natures are not conceived in a static and abstract way, one can say that Jesus was one human person with an integral human nature in whom not less than God and thus a divine nature, is at work. 9

This avoids monophysitism which results from the inattentiveness of abstract metaphysical christologies to the concrete person of the historical Jesus.

One cannot say undialectically that Jesus is God, nor that he is merely human being, because the doctrine is that Jesus is both truly human and divine. When one asserts the divinity of Jesus with a dynamic Spirit christology, God, and not less than God, is really present to and at work in Jesus, and that this is so in such a manner that Jesus is a manifestation and embodiment of the reality of God. The transition of interpretation moves along a line from static and abstract ontology of God conceived in terms of a divine nature and hypostasis to a conception of God as personal and dynamic activity who is personally present as Spirit. 10

A thoroughgoing Spirit christology is faithful to the christological criteria set forth by the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, keeping the dialectics of the divinity and humanity of Jesus in an appropriated language.

Given the strong position made for the integral humanity of Jesus by Spirit christology, a critical point is raised concerning the uniqueness of Christ relative to us. The Alexandrian incarnational Logos christology preserves explicitly the uniqueness of Jesus in the sense of his “qualitative uniqueness or difference” from us all. On the basis of Spirit christology, “qualitative” difference in the sense of “substantial” or “essential” is seen as directly contradictory to the doctrine of the consubstantiality of Jesus with other human beings. It is argued that in the current age of discovery, by means of empirical and quantitative devices, it is becoming more and more difficult to
make a sharp and clear-cut distinction between a qualitative and quantitative difference between things, even in terms of their level of being.

It is not impossible that qualitative differences may be understood quantitatively, and in that in some cases, differences of quantity of degree or intensity may constitute a qualitative difference.\textsuperscript{11}

The uniqueness of Jesus, however, can and should be retained in the very measure that he is the true embodiment of God and the exemplar of what is to be human. In this light, one may say that the

...Spirit of God, which is God, is present to Jesus in a complete way, or in a fully effective way, in a most intense manner. In short, one may understand that God as Spirit was present to Jesus in a superlative degree, and this is sufficient to convey all that was intended by a quantitative difference.\textsuperscript{12}

Secondly, the uniqueness of Jesus may also be understood in terms of his vocation and mission to be the firstborn of many, he who was anointed with God as Spirit, as the bringer of the rule of God. These are not merely extrinsic terms but are congruent with the inner identity of Jesus. These and the unsurpassable degree of God’s active presence in his person and life are sufficient to define his uniqueness and explain its necessity, without endangering his true humanity and his consubstantiality with us.

Another question that needs to be addressed is the bearing of Spirit christology on the doctrine of the Trinity. Starkly put: Can one still have a doctrine of the Trinity if one adopts a thoroughgoing Spirit christology? Does Spirit christology reduce God to a unitarian God? The chapter on the Trinity addresses the question from a critical epistemological and a critical apologetical point of view, while focusing on the soteriological point of the doctrine. From a critical epistemological point of view, the book holds that the Trinity cannot be the point of departure for theological reflection. The movement of all theological thought from below toward God proceeds from the basis of religious experience and symbolic language. All religious experience is historically mediated. The doctrine of the Trinity is not isolated and autonomous,
providing an extrinsic norm for christology. In fact, from a historical development perspective, the doctrine arose out of the experience of salvation in and through Christ and God’s Spirit, and was shaped by the New Testament christologies and soteriologies that developed.

There is an obvious correlation between Logos christology and the doctrine of the Trinity, because Logos language controlled the christology out of which the doctrine of the Trinity developed.¹³

Given the pluralism of christologies, however, should one christology dominate the doctrine of the Trinity? If a viable alternative to the Logos christology should ever come to shape the doctrine of the Trinity, would its retrieval in another model or language be valid? From a critical-apologetical point of view with a focus on soteriology, the theology and doctrine of the Trinity have intrinsic problems of intelligibility and credibility. There is a need

...to reform the analogical base or model for envisioning the Trinity, so that the doctrine uses a language that runs more closely parallel with structures of human existence and bears analogy with human life on a foundational level.¹⁴

One point pursued is the shift of focus from the immanent to economic Trinity. There is a real danger that trinitarian theology gets completely absorbed in defining the distinctions and differentiations within God’s inner life, that it will miss the point of the Trinity. Not that these differentiations are to be denied, but the doctrine should be salvific for life and the focus should be there. Avoiding modalism or tritheism, the saving point of the doctrine of the Trinity is stated as: “God is absolutely and uniquely one, that God’s saving action in Jesus and the Spirit are real, and that therefore God as such is a saving God.”¹⁵ The book does not present a unitarian God, only a modest theology of the Trinity.

What is the basis of the credibility of Spirit christology? To what does it appeal to make the case for its intelligibility? Spirit christology takes seriously the anthropological “roots” and context of theology. It draws from the convergence between the biblical language of God
as Spirit and the theology of grace of Karl Rahner. Grace is God’s person-being-present to human beings in love and goodness. Grace is the Spirit present in the arena of human life, where men and women slug it out, in the banality of it all, in their struggle for meaning, in their desire for truth and goodness, in their resistance to all forces of destruction and death, and in the final validation of their lives. It is a critical and apologetical christology that attends to the correlation between traditional, doctrinal language and existential, human life. It is sensitive to “what makes sense” to human intelligibility in one’s faith in Jesus, that we may be able to see in our lives analogies of how God was at work in him as an integral and free human being. It is resolutely focused on Jesus, as the symbol of God, who is alive in God, and present as personal and absolute meaning to human existence. It is a christology that is contextualized in a postmodern world, where there is a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs and religions. In this context, christology must be humbler, if it is to speak to the other voices, and if it is to respect the fact and necessity of pluralism.

Spirit christology empowers Christian life on the basis of the continuity between Jesus and us. He is imitable, because he is consubstantial with us. He is the ground and goal of authentic human existence. We can identify with him and follow him. We find hope in him, for he is the self presence and gift of God to human existence, history and the world, and the exemplar of authentic human existence. It is a christology that gives a sense of Jesus Christ’s uniqueness, that binds all Christian men and women, and gives a distinctive sense of their own lives as members of a faith community. And yet at the same time, it reveals God as Spirit, who is universally present and active in the world, and whose love is the same for all, although unique in its historical embodiments. Jesus, empowered by God as Spirit, offers a salvation that is true, relevant and, thus, normative. Any earnest seeker after truth and meaning can recognize in Jesus, his person and message, the logic of authentic human existence and destiny.
A Continuing Critical Christological Discourse

Chalcedon does not offer a solution to the christological problem. It only indicates the criteria that must be unconditionally observed in every christological theory. The criteria are: that God alone effects salvation and that the dialectics of the divinity and humanity of Jesus be preserved. No christology, not even Nicaea nor Chalcedon, has kept the dialectics perfectly at the center. Even in its dialectical language, the doctrine of Chalcedon, in exalting the divinity of Jesus to assert that God alone saves, has reduced his humanity to mere instrument of the Logos, one without its own esse and individuality and, thus, is not an integral free human being. It is good once again to be reminded of what Rahner pointed out that even though we have the doctrine of two natures, we are really monophysites in practice because we understand the doctrine such that the human nature of Jesus has become a mitigated reality. It does not define integrally his person or ontological reality.16

The book’s foundational concept, Jesus as symbol of God, realizes the Chalcedonian criteria in a new language, from a different premise and within a different framework. Deploying the tensive and dialectical nature of symbol, it states that “Jesus is and is not God and he is and is not human.” A lack of an understanding and appreciation of the tensive and dialectical nature of symbols and, thus, of Jesus as symbol of God, may lead one to conclude that the book has traces of Arianism because it seems to present Jesus as merely human. It is true, however, that in stressing and protecting the integral humanity of Jesus, the book does not lift the reader to the unsurpassable heights of Jesus as divine in the spirit and language of the Johannine Gospel. The divine is hidden within the human and is manifested through what is human. In Jesus, in his integral humanity, no less than God is present and is made present.

For a continuing critical discourse on the constructive christology that the book proposes, the following points are raised for consideration. First, the language of consubstantiality with God and with us, which seems to be a refrain in the book, should be completely re-
placed with the language of Jesus, symbol of God. If Jesus were only a concept, it is possible to study him in segments. The book explains on two levels the constitution of Jesus’ person: his consubstantiality with God on one level, and on another, his consubstantiality with us. Jesus is not a concept. He is a person. So while it is possible to study a concept in fragments, we can only encounter a person all at once as one integral human being. Also, at the very mention of the point that Jesus is consubstantial with God, it is already a contradiction in terms to say that he is consubstantial with us and vice versa. The language of Jesus as symbol of God does not compartmentalize Jesus. The dialectics of the symbol is intrinsic in his person; the tension of “is” and “is not” is immediately grasped as that which constitutes him as a person.

Second, the book points out the hypostatization of the Logos as the problematic of a christology within a three-stage scheme. In the hypostatization of the Logos, what used to be a personification of God is reified and becomes a being other than God, a lesser God. This raised the problem of subordinationism which the Nicene doctrine sought to resolve. The logic of the book’s argument, regarding the problematic of the hypostatization of the Logos, is premised on a christology from below, which asserts the integral humanity of Jesus and his consubstantiality with us, without denying his divinity. The hypostatization of the Logos in the traditional three-stage scheme christology, in which a pre-existent Jesus becomes incarnate, causes a conceptual dilemma. The dilemma is expressed in the critical question raised in relation to the Nicene doctrine: If it was unthinkable that the Father be incarnate in the world of finitude and matter, how is it that the Son, who is of the same nature as the Father, can be so incarnate? And also, how can a pre-existent Jesus be consubstantial with us, unless we too are pre-existent? The whole framework of the three-stage hypostatic christology was abstracted from the historical Jesus, so that at a certain level when it is confronted by the concrete Jesus as ignorant, weak, vulnerable to suffering, its framework breaks down.

The book proposes an indwelling or empowering christology, with
its integral anthropology, which begins with the historical Jesus. In this christology, his consubstantiality with us is presupposed from the outset and consistently throughout. The unity of Jesus Christ is the unity of the human person in whom the fullness of divinity, God as Word, dwells. In the man Jesus, no less than God is present, no less than God saves. This shift from the hypostatic union paradigm to the indwelling paradigm keeps the dialectical nature of Jesus as divine and human, but without the conceptual dilemma that results from the hypostatization of the Logos. This dialectic in Jesus, however, is understood from a different premise, starting point and language. The indwelling christology of the book requires a paradigmatic shift from the traditional understanding and, thus, is a matter for a continuing critical christological discourse.

Third, in the hypostatic union christology, the Logos incarnated in Jesus takes over the humanity of Jesus insofar as his humanity is a passive instrument of the Logos, while in Spirit christology, the Spirit indwells in Jesus and acts in and through his freedom without supplanting it, thus his integral humanity is not mitigated. The presence of the Spirit in Jesus is in the superlative degree, and this can already mean an ontological incarnation, but with the integral humanity of Jesus protected. The logic of this christological construction is clear, that is, to preserve the integral humanity of Jesus and avoid monophysitism. On the other hand, however, it must reckon with the fact, that it may cast suspicions that Jesus is graced, like we are all graced, but that he is not divine even if he is graced to the superlative degree. This point should be clarified further. To avoid problems or misunderstandings of this sort, the foundational concept of the book, Jesus: Symbol of God, with its dialectical nature and structure, should be the thoroughgoing image or concept throughout the book.

Fourth, and corollary to the third point, the plurality of incarnation (see p. 136, par. 2, of this article) and its relation to the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Christ opens a critical area of discussion. Spirit christology has defined Jesus' uniqueness and its necessity. The Spirit of God, which is God, is present to Jesus in a complete way, or in a fully effective and most intense way, in a superlative degree. It
states that the uniqueness of Jesus can and should be retained in the very measure that he who is the firstborn of many, he who was anointed with God as Spirit, as the bringer of the rule of God, is the true embodiment of God and the exemplar of what it is to be human. How does this language of uniqueness cohere with the language of plurality without emptying the words “highest” and “superlative” of their meaning? One may say that if “highest” and “superlative degree” are taken in a comparative way in which there can only be one which is highest and best, then the language of uniqueness and the language of plurality do not cohere. If, however, the context is not comparative and relational within the group but simply objective, quantitative and set against the background of an absolute norm, then the highest and superlative can be shared by many. For example, if one student succeeds in answering all one hundred mathematical questions correctly, and in that way gets the highest and superlative grade of 100 percent, this does not mean that another student, and even the whole class, could not also get the highest possible and perfect score. From a theological view, it may be held that the possibility of plurality is premised on the very revelation of God through Jesus that God is unconditional love and equally close to all human beings. There are other views to the question and, thus, it is another matter for a continuing critical discourse in christology.

Fifth, the book’s constructive christology responds to the experience of religious pluralism and claims that such an experience is deep and lasting and makes a reinterpretation of Jesus necessary. The book makes a valid point that we do not develop a christology first and then dialogue with the other religions, but that rather, the christology we develop must immediately be contextualized in a world and history where there is pluralism of beliefs and religions. Its appeal for a humbler christology—in contrast to high christocentrism amidst many other voices of faith and in the context of a humanity divided by differences of belief—touches a chord in the heart. The language of Jesus as normative and universal but not the constitutive cause of all grace is the language of a humbler christology, which is congruent with the religious epistemology of Thomas Aquinas;
and which resonates with what is intelligible for a thinking faith in a postmodern context. There is a need for a serious and sober consideration of this new language of the relation of Jesus to other religions.

Conclusion

This paper ends as it began, with the question, “Who do you say that I am?” The book, Jesus: Symbol of God, has attempted an answer grounded in an erudite historical-apologetical-symbolical retrieval of the christological tradition of scripture and of the conciliar teachings. Consistent with the Chalcedonian criteria, Jesus as symbol of God, in the tension of “is” and “is not” relative to being divine and human, mediates an image of God who has drawn so close to our humanity, making it truly his own, so that he is imitable and so that faith in him is empowering. In the end, however, all christological language must reckon with the poverty of all human language in the face of the mystery that Christ is. There is no christology that can make so high a claim as to be the final and definitive language of this mystery. St. Augustine is instructive here:

Theology seeks in order that it may understand, but it understands that it may seek still more. If we so understood that we no longer had to seek, it would not be the God of revelation that we had found.17

Notes

1In the logic of the overall plan and structure of the book—16 chapters divided into four major sections: Questions of Method, Biblical Sources, Classical Tradition, Constructive Christology—the groundwork of the final section on “constructive christology,” is laid out in the first three. In the first section, Haight addresses such issues as the specificity of theology as a discipline, the centrality of christology within Christian theology, the situation in contemporary christology, the major and plural movements within it, the bearing
upon them of the so-called “postmodern consciousness,” the christological questions that derive from these and provide the principal content of the book. In the second section, on Biblical Sources, Haight makes explicit avowal of the historical-hermeneutical approach—drawn from research into the historical Jesus and appropriated for contemporary Christian life—which he will apply to christology’s Scriptural sources, such as “the God of Jesus,” “Jesus’ resurrection,” New Testament “soteriologies” and “christologies.” In the third section, on Classical Tradition, he proposes a theoretical horizon for understanding the paradigmatic tensions, shifts and dilemmas which marked the christological debates and controversies of the patristic age, particularly the normative doctrines Nicea and Chalcedon. In the fourth and last section, he presents a “constructive Christology,” developing, in this connection, a concept of “salvation in Jesus” that he has good reason to think will be intelligible within the postmodern context, an analysis of liberation christology, an understanding of Jesus Christ and the practice of Christian spirituality sensitive to the exigencies of religious pluralism.

3 See Karl Rahner, “History of the World and Salvation History,” Theological Investigations 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966) 97-100. Religious epistemology presupposes an engaged participation of the knower. This means an existential and experiential consciousness of that which is mediated through the categorical manifestations. Only through this engaged participation can the mind reach the transcendent meaning beyond the sensible, and yet through it. Religious epistemology is engaged in theology as a symbolic discipline which deals with transcendent reality. See Avery Dulles, “The Symbolic Structure of Revelation,” Theological Studies 41 (1980) 60-61.

3 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, q.1, a.2. Thomas’ epistemological principle has implications on religious experience. The awareness of God’s transcendent presence is mediated through the specificity of the situation within which it is experienced. The religious forms, expressions and language in a culture become the very mode of the divine presence. Religion, thus, is wedded with the cultural contexts of faith communities. “Religion is the substance of culture: culture is the form of religion.” Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) 42.

4 Roger Haight, S.J., Jesus: Symbol of God (New York: Orbis Books, 1999) 201. Disclosure and concealment, unity and tension, immanence and transcendence are in creative dynamics in a symbol. Symbols do not provide objective information about God but they draw the human consciousness to a realm where transcendent reality is deeply encountered. For a discussion of symbol, metaphor, literal speech and analogy, see Michael L. Cook, Christology as Narrative Quest (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997) 32-39.
5Ibid., 138.

6Ibid., 239. Jesus is the radical availability of God to what is human. In the words of Karl Rahner, "Jesus as man is precisely the self-expression of God in his self-emptying, because God expresses himself if he empties himself, if he discloses himself as love, if he conceals the majesty of his love and manifests himself in the ordinariness of man." Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Ideal of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 224.

7Ibid., 242.

8Ibid., 459. Haight argues that Jesus' experience of the Spirit was analogous to our experience of the Spirit in grace. The whole theology of grace illumines the paradoxical tension between God as Spirit and human freedom. Grace is experienced from within what is ordinarily human and not outside of it, not supplanting what is human but only empowering it. Ultimately what is paradoxical is that one becomes more oneself, more autonomous, more self-possessed, the more one is within the possession of God.

9Ibid., 461.

10Ibid., 462.

11Ibid., 463.

12Ibid., 463-64.

13Ibid., 468.

14Ibid., 469.

15Ibid., 489.

16Karl Rahner, "The Position of Christology in the Church Between Exegesis and Dogmatics," *Theological Investigations* 11 (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) 198. Rahner states that "every conception of the Incarnation in which the humanity of Jesus would only be the livery of God which he uses to signal that he is present and speaking is a heretical conception. And it is basically this heresy which was rejected by the church itself in its struggle against docetism, appollinarism, monophysitism, and monothelitism, which is perceived today as mythological and is rejected as mythology, and not a really orthodox Christology." Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 226.