

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

CHRIST AND ANXIETY II

BEFORE SKETCHING a positive approach to the problems raised in the previous section of this article, it may be useful to list a few ways I would reject as offering no solution, namely how to think of faith in Christ as a solvent to religious anxiety:

1. In 'Christ and Sexuality' I urged that we should by no means be tempted to look upon Christ as a healer, simply because he heals by his touch. To the woman seeking a cure, who had thought at least to touch his garment, Jesus, as he does in other cases, speaks of her interior faith, a good instance of gospel intelligence being as good as gospel memory (cf Mk 5, 34; cp also Mk 10, 52; Lk 7, 50). The holy touch view, or the doctor fish view as I called it, too easily degenerates into magic, which for us, as for the church of Mark's gospel, would be regressive. It remains true of course that he who gives purity or integrity, is purity and integrity in his humanity. That is to say, he is these things insofar as they are genuinely religious realities.

2. We are also tempted to see in intimacy with Christ the goal we wish to attain, namely the removal of anxiety and the substitution of peace. That we should praise such a state of peace, that we should desire it, and that we should work for it is highly desirable. But the adult believer has to think of it in adult terms. Religious fantasizing is not a substitute for adult religious living, if only because that is not what the gospel invites us to do. How different for example are the approaches to 'peace' in the benedictine rule and successful monastic life compared with the lullaby language of once popular hymnody:

Sweet Sacrament of peace
Dear Home for every heart,
Where restless yearnings cease,
And sorrows all depart;
There in thine ear, all trustfully,
We tell our tale of misery.

Indulgence in that sort of gluey language and its oleaginous tune is self-indulgence. In a culture where Mozart, Mahler or vigorous Pop may be heard to emerge from any motor mechanic's transistor as he works under a vehicle, such self-indulgence is no invitation to faith or to prayer. In other words, the intimacy in faith which is certainly offered us in the Eucharist takes place *in a communion of what he is with what we are*, namely, believing adults.

3. Another tempting but unacceptable method is the imaginative construction of Christ's own human *psyche*. 'Jesus of Nazareth' says Malachi Martin, 'had taught with peace, authority and healing power'.¹ That is an

¹ Martin, Malachi: *Jesus Now* (London, 1975), pp 28-31.

instinctive reaction towards the cult-hero who will bring us what we most desire to relieve anxiety. Such a doctor would do for hearts, what (in Martin's mind) the representatives of Jesus, priests, bishops and theologians, have failed to do by making themselves doctors of doctrine, not carers of the heart. The Jesus who taught with peace would do so because of the inner peace of his own soul which he would radiate. In a sense Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King as well as John XXIII did just that. It all may be true of Jesus also. But, while it is clearly true that he taught with authority and with power, the gospel does go out of its way to make him insist that he brings 'not peace but a sword' and 'to set a man against his father . . .'; and to add that 'he who loses his life for my sake will find it' (Mt 10, 34-9). It is true that a rival case can be made for the gift of divine peace in the believing community in the course of the fourth gospel; but we there have something more akin to the benedictine ideal of *pax* in the life of the community; and our present problem is that of the individual anxiety in today's believing christian. Texts concerning an anxiety condition of belief, such as that of Mt 10 above, go, I think, very deeply into the question of the first impact made by the preaching of Jesus in which his first call to the individual is made. And the circumstances of that call may have to be renewed in the individual believer whenever he faces a new crisis in his life of faith.

4. I would also be suspicious of any interpretation of Jesus in the gospels which consisted in saying that Jesus was, consciously or unconsciously, a skilful psychological manipulator, one who could so effectively play upon the levers of the human *psyche* that the anxious believer now depends upon him. The trust and dependency of the anxious believer upon Jesus is and must be a commitment of the free conscience.

It may well be that the gospel and religious thinking employ archetypal images of very great force and dynamism for the resolution of anxiety. They may even operate through a collective unconscious.² But revelation and the gift of faith are not constituted by the unconscious, but by the Word of God. 'In Jung's system the unconscious becomes the source of revelation, a symbol for that which in religious language is God himself'.³ The unconscious may indeed dictate something which is from the religious point of view peculiarly apt. But the process cannot make it religious. As Fromm points out, [the] 'unconscious . . . that is, that part of our self which is excluded from the organized ego which we identify with our self . . . contains both the lowest and the highest, the worst and the best'.⁴ So the unconscious cannot constitute the religious, nor perhaps should we hypostatize it as much as is done in the jungian school.

But the idea cannot really help as it stands for two reasons: (a) that which

² Cf Rudolf and Herbert A. Zwergel, *Kontinuität in Jesus* (Freiburg, 1974), in the contribution by Zwergel, 'Die Bedeutung von Leben und Tod Jesu von Nazaret in tiefenpsychologischer Sicht', p 100.

³ Cf Fromm, Erich: *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven/London, 1950), pp 96-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 97.

is genuinely religious is freely and responsibly chosen; and (b) the meaning of what Jesus does for us in faith comes to us through and in virtue of what he did when he suffered 'under Pontius Pilate'. The meaning that comes to us in faith is not merely an eternal meaning, nor even merely the offer of a real relationship with a celestial man, but the meaning of a deed done *in his and for my* historical existence.

While we can give them their place, the danger of adhering too closely to psychological mechanisms, whether freudian or jungian, is that it diminishes and distorts the offer of salvation in faith, and that it diminishes and distorts the *free response*. However our anxiety may be focussed in faith, our response is still in understanding and commitment to him.

V

When we look to Jesus in our anxiety in faith, we for our part are looking further into the humanity and person of the Incarnate Word than did those gospel cases seeking a physical or psycho-physical cure. The pathology of current folklore was simple, and in a world where some magic was the expected way of showing God's power and wisdom, the use of his breath or spittle, the touch of his garments or hands, and the utterance of a word seemed appropriate specifics for the wonder-worker. When Jesus is described as 'perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him' (Mk 5, 30), we are meant to understand something like a bodily sensation which a shaman might feel. A psycho-therapist of today might well find in the command formulae uttered by Jesus more than a trace of cure by 'suggestion'.⁵ It could even be urged that declarations like 'your sins are forgiven' (Mk 2, 8) or 'your faith has made you well' are 'suggestions' in the technical sense, directed not to the sufferer's understanding but to his emotional drives and at the unconscious.⁶

I do not think that any such thoughts in the least militate against our understanding of Jesus who in himself relates us to God. The marvel for us may lie in our being able to appreciate that Jesus in the gospels shows signs of a mastery which runs the gamut from shamanistic techniques to the most interiorized appeal to a faith-belief in God, creator and Father. It is as though we should reverse our ordinary way of thinking of the Incarnation as a sort of contraction of the Godhead to the visible flesh and blood of his humanity. Jesus, the healing wonder-worker, rather shows that 'God himself *is* this power, which is the embodiment of salvation'.⁷ The modern reader should bring himself to see in the gospel Jesus, how theurgy and miracle are

⁵ Thus e.g. 'I will, be clean' (Mk 1, 41); 'stretch out your hand' (Mk 3, 5); 'I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again' (Mk 9, 25-6); 'rise, take up your pallet': where the very appropriateness of the command 'suggestion' is discussed (Mk 2, 11).

⁶ Cf Hans G. Preuss: *Illusion and Wirklichkeit, An den Grenzen von Religion und Psychoanalyse* (Stuttgart, 1971), p 53; and the whole section on the biblical cures.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 53.

an outward invitation to a God-centred relationship in faith through the Incarnate. What has to be grasped is that we are not in front of an abstract truth or offer of love. We are in front of the concrete instances of the withered hand, the leper, the epileptic. How then does Jesus generalize his invitation to cure and heal? Is that not merely by an abstract, generalized invitation: 'come to me . . .' ? On the contrary, I think, we must be sure that the offer to any believer is just as much *concretely instanced* as in the cases detailed in the gospels.

The reason why this is so seems to me twofold. *First*, the life and death of Jesus are there to define the meaning of the life of any individual. It was a single concrete life and death; and it was irreversibly unique. Above all it had a unique form-giving meaning. In that sense, I think that the life and death of Jesus defines the individual believer's concrete existence. *Secondly*, my life has a unique meaning-definition because it is a Jesus-for-me-meaning. The reach of that meaning happens across socio-cultural boundaries, not because it is an abstraction anyone can grasp, but because its uniqueness is explosive. As a sacramental animal I may feel the need or congruity of his touch, his word; but as an adult destined to self-realization in free acceptance of faith, I accept the Jesus-definition of my life as uniquely *form-giving for me and as mine*. It should not be necessary to say that no-one is, or can be, one hundred per cent adult in this regard.

It is this last point which the remainder of this article is going to try and bring out. We have seen how ambiguity, unclarity, uncertainty, contribute in modern man to his anxiety in faith. We have seen how that anxiety can be said to have a properly religious value.⁸ We now want to see how free commitment to Jesus in anxiety implies that his definition of my faith and grace in its Christiformity gives to my undefinition my positive definition. In the sense in which that question is a central problem in grace, we do not try to answer it here. The question is rather how does his life and death and teaching make us conscious within ourselves of our own destiny and capacity for genuineness, responsibility and certainty in freedom? How can the consciousness of the christian self, which is a consciousness of the Christ-self, still be a consciousness of the individual 'christian-self/self'?

VI

All we can do is to try and sketch a way forward. Two points must now suffice. We shall take an example from the basic teaching of Jesus. In the light of that example, we shall try and draw some conclusions concerning the death of Jesus and the role it must play in the anxiety-conditioned life of faith.

As we are concerned with anxiety, we may begin by asking whether anxiety enters into the life of Jesus in any significant sense. The answer, in the

⁸ It would require another article to discuss how, for Paul Tillich and others, this very anxiety is 'ontological'. See especially Tillich's *The Courage To Be* (London, 1962), especially ch II, 'Being, Non-Being and Anxiety, An Ontology of Anxiety', pp 41-68.

gospel-example we choose, is that it most assuredly does. As a prophetic preacher, whose teaching brought him to his death, he knew very well what anxiety was.⁹ It was in fact entirely bound up with that theme in his preaching which was, and is, so powerful that his life was changed by it, and so now is ours. We have his basic pronouncements about it. We even have his most solemn prayer and invitation to join him in the practical consequences of his preaching. 'Thy kingdom come', he taught us to pray. Like his hearers, we should in a sense be at once troubled and perplexed by this. Was he asking his Father for a future event? Was he speaking of something to come in its entirety? Of something then present, but to be enlarged? If it was to be in the future, then what sort of future, how near, how far? We still cannot answer those questions satisfactorily.

More significant perhaps is the fact that Jesus's teaching about his Father's kingdom took place in a situation of conflict. The kingdom demanded a higher righteousness in comparison with the demands of the religious establishment. And its demands were dangerously revisionary, as we know from the Sermon on the Mount. Not shirking the inevitable opposition, Jesus was prepared to say that the sons of the kingdom would be cast out, that the kingdom would be extended to the child-like, to the poor, and to the lost sheep: all pronouncements likely to provoke the powerful hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees. Of course the challenge was taken up, as he knew it would be, and conflict then centred upon his own person. Thus, and this still touches us, not only was his teaching worryingly ambiguous upon a basic issue, but ambiguity and criticism touched the quite personal framework within which the teaching was couched. And it ended with the greatest ambiguity when a man, whom a popular movement desired to see made a king, was judicially killed after a defence that his kingdom was not of this world. Indeed Jesus had been reluctant to be taken along that road. He knew the historical and religious ambiguity of Palm Sunday. It could only lead, as it did, to the religious conflict with the authorities at the Temple. And Matthew is not afraid to show how provocative the situation had become: 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you' (Mt 21, 31).

So our healer's basic teaching surrounds him with conflict, doubt and anxiety. Yet the teaching is a success. For here is a new religious attitude, a new feeling about God which rejects an older attitude, which liberates from that attitude, and which experience shows it is easy to share in. Its do's

⁹ Jesus had spoken to his disciples of his coming death in a more or less veiled manner. See Mt 23, 37 (Jerusalem kills its prophets); Lk 12, 50 (a baptism to be baptized with); 13, 31 (Herod wants to kill you); Mk 2, 19 (can the wedding guests fast?); 10, 35-9 (the cup that I drink . . . baptism with which I am baptized). It is tempting to add Mk 10, 4, but post-Easter theology is at work there (cf 1 Tim 2, 6). The disciples were engaged in the *open* preaching of the kingdom, and Lk 10, 1-24 shows them going to 'proclaim the kingdom of God', a process involving the disciple *to the point of rejection* as well as in an eschatological *kairos*.

and don'ts, its *theo-praxy* rather than its *theo-logy*, are programmatic and reasonably clear. Its doctrinal content is not.

Here even the gospel-maker is himself conscious of trouble. He knows that the kingdom is a matter of basic doctrine. But he is caught off guard when trying to treat it. 'To you has been given the secret (*mysterion*) of the kingdom of God' (Mk 4, 11).¹⁰ Yet it seems that there is already some confusion and misunderstanding about it. 'Outsiders', we are told, cannot expect more than a 'parable' to help them to 'see'. The 'insider' is allowed into a 'secret' so as to 'perceive'. This goes against all our instincts from elsewhere in the New Testament. Surely the Healer's secret is an open one. This is the point of his mission. We need not pursue that now; but it is quite possible that the original conflict and ambiguity, which certainly belonged to the kingdom pronouncements, have simply muddled the gospel tradition. The 'secret' explanation is in fact a poor one. But it has a value, especially for us. It reflects two things: (a) that already the New Testament communities had not quite got the point, however good their memory was, and (b) the communities bring in aid the explanation which they owe to Isaiah, namely that the kingdom will eventually be that of a predestined remnant.¹¹ Both factors may well be an indication of the unclarity and anxiety which the kingdom doctrine had generated. Surprisingly, until one thinks about it, it had done so with success.

Such exegetical matters do bring out an important point, namely that Jesus as prophet and apocalyptic seer did nothing, when he spoke of the kingdom, to dispel the anxiety factor.¹² Yet in this, Jesus was, as ever, being very lucid in his own mind. He knew that the open invitation to the kingdom, albeit a liberating and God-centred revolution, was nevertheless more than tinged with anxiety. And necessarily so. The master and the disciple were to be caught up in a risk for their existence.

Origen, who has a feeling for the value of the *theologia crucis*, provides us with a well-known, and later much used, way of looking at the doctrine. Christ and the kingdom, the *basileia*, are not separate realities. Jesus is in himself, in his person, the kingdom; he is *autobasileia*. From the angle of faith that is helpful. We can say that Jesus so lived the *basileia* of tension that it became incorporated in him. He lived it, and lives it, in the unconditioned claims which make him loved and at the same time feared. He was put on the cross. He was God put on the cross. As God and as *autobasileia* he is to us partly obscure, not 'seen'; yet he is 'perceived' in hope. There Mark was right. We may say of the *autobasileia* of Jesus that, because of the decisiveness of the cross, it determines and it transcends the believer's individual history. It owes its determining force in our anxiety to nothing less than the anxiety-derelec-

¹⁰ And see the parallels Mt 13, 11, and Lk 8, 10; in addition Mk 4, 33-4.

¹¹ Cf Isai 6, 9: 'And he said, Go and say to the people: Hear and hear; but do not understand; see and see but do not perceive . . . The holy seed is its stump' (v 13).

¹² Cf Mt 13, 33 (the leaven is hidden); 13, 44 (the treasure covered up); Lk 17, 20 (not with signs to be observed).

tion of Jesus. It is thus that it can give to the individual his Christiformity. But as an *autobasileia* it also transcends. In its transcending force it makes us individuals part of the Christiform community, which now is the *autobasileia*, in the tensions and anxieties of the subsequent history of his body.

Today, as in gospel times, the *autobasileia* of Christ is a risk as well as an invitation. It involves us in a new or renewed society with its readiness for undifferentiation ('the people of God') on the one hand, while on the other it contains a call to individual development, till Christ be formed in each one (cf Gal 4, 19). But with the risk comes power in the Spirit, once fear, defiance and suspicion are, as it were, 'transferred'. An example of this successful 'transference' at work is to be found in the form-giving meditation of the ignatian spiritual Exercises. The meditation on the Kingdom comes in exactly the right place to perform this operation. In the preceding 'week', resistance and painful repentance with its anxieties are brought to the fore; and now the hinge and form-giving meditation on the Kingdom proposes the *autobasileia* of Christ. Here a new inner relationship takes place. It does so because of the decision and the commitment freely entered upon. I take it that the reader agrees with me that this movement of mind and will is indeed a free one. It would be another matter to show how this is so. But to what is the decision and free commitment now made? Clearly to the *autobasileia* of Christ, now the heavenly King. The relevance of this commitment for us who are considering the question of anxiety in faith is precisely this: that the *autobasileia* is accepted *not* for its order, security, certainty or intimacy, though a certain peace and tranquillity appear. But anxiety is sympathized with and it is shared. An undifferentiated community of followers is proposed. They are prepared to share 'wrongs', 'abuse', 'poverty'. There is a mark of near psychological genius here. At this stage, order, authority, social roles and pressures are simply idealized. The here-and-now is concerned with undifferentiation and its privations. The prayer which concludes the meditation places order, authority and pressure in heaven ('the presence . . . of thy glorious mother and of all the saints of the heavenly court').¹³ The point is that a response in anxiety must still make way for anxiety. Psychologically speaking, the 'wrongs', 'abuses', 'poverty' and the like are things the subject cannot do without. Theologically speaking, and for us that is more important, these factors are the condition of Christiformity into which the believer now freely plunges. Being co-operative, submissive, or even conformist is now his

¹³ From the psychological point of view it is right to keep heaven and earth separate here. The 'exercitant' is not yet half-way through the Exercises. von Balthasar puts the complete theological view very well, partly following F  ret, who 'correctly sees that the Saint who at every moment follows the Lamb in heaven, can still be someone who lives very much on earth. On the other hand someone at home in heaven, because he has died on earth, can still be active here' (cf von Balthasar, *Man in History*, pp 146-7). We should add that the Saint's death is the death which is more completely identified with that of Christ. That identification is with the form-giving death/resurrection of Christ, and in saying that I pick up again my conclusion to 'Christ and Sexuality' (cf the last paragraph, p 224).

choice; and because it is a choice in grace it is creative. If the terms co-operative and the like hint at a mere suggestible infantilism, that is wrong. They are now part of a new resolution in grace; they have passed into an adult resolution of anxiety which has become creative. That the situation can, and has been, abused to perpetuate infantilism of a religious kind is regrettable. But basically the situation is an adult one, and it is creative because of a creativity which, theologically speaking, now comes from the present identification with Christ, the crucified *autobasileia*. It is the adult *cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo* (I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ).

VII

The last thing is thus the cross and its outworking. 'No one', says von Balthasar, 'has ever dared to work out a 'logic' of the passion: to face the fact that Logos . . . descends into darkness, into fear, into non-feeling and non-knowledge, into the inescapable, into the abyss, into the absence of any relation to the Father . . .'¹⁴ It is this dereliction of God by God, an anxiety-state of which the very negativity is creative, which seems to me to be the key. Again we must say it, Christ cures not by being like us, but by being 'of us', by being the same. He is the same, identified with us, in the descent and the dereliction; and we are the same, identified with him, in his rising and ascent which becomes ours.

The theme of the cross has now taken on an unexpected swing of the theological pendulum. Interest on both sides of the catholic and protestant divide is bringing theologians together in an ecumenism which can only terminate in the heart of the divine.¹⁵ In addition to ecumenical reasons, the pain of the world and human anxieties demand it.¹⁶ The cross to be again interrogated is the *locus* where alone the goodness of God to man can finally become intelligible. We must seek that intelligibility in the very dereliction of Christ. In that dereliction he can come anew to the christian in his faith-anxiety. Why is this new? From within we may say, we have been at fault. We have tried to reduce the cross and dereliction of Christ to a convenient and bearable size and shape, as though we could somehow bear it too. The world's hells have shown that this is not so.

¹⁴ Cf von Balthasar, *Man in History*, p 279.

¹⁵ 'The death on the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth is once more a *Thema*, an extraordinary phenomenon, and one that a few years ago we would hardly have expected'; cf Heinz Schurmann, *Jesu ureigener Tod* (Freiburg, 1975). English-speaking catholics have reason to be grateful to the late Hilda Graef for her translation of Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross, a Study of St John of the Cross* (London, 1960), a work deserving renewed attention in the light of the fresh theological interest just mentioned.

¹⁶ While preparing these pages for *The Way*, I have been listening to news bulletins covering the joint Soyuz-Apollo space mission (July 1975). In the media it is clearly being considered as a success for *détente* between the two world super-powers. Not at all coincidentally a spokesman in Washington warns us against being deceived. Outer space is in fact most successfully being turned into a militarized zone of such aggressive potential that our planet can now more easily be destroyed from outer space itself.

Moltmann's *The Crucified God* insists on the point.¹⁷ Constructively, however, Moltmann shows that a *theologia crucis* must also be an *eschatologia crucis*. How can we put that in our own terms and for our purpose here? I think we should say this. We are accustomed to think of the dynamics of the cross as of a certain stage-one in a process, and of the resurrection as of a certain stage-two. With limited logic, we then remember that the resurrection has happened; and all from then on is well. In fact neither theologically nor in any other way are we justified in leaving matters so. We have missed in our thinking something very vital about the mystery of the cross, namely that it is an *initiating* movement that takes place there. It is a movement which through the resurrection, the *resurrection-of-now* and the *resurrection-to-be*, in continuing dialectic with the *death-of-then* on the cross, comes to a final consummation of all in God. There is, so to speak, a perpetually engulfing wave which in its undertow, where the historic cross is to be found, is forever advancing forward and its final curl down again on the beach is bringing within it the eschatology of all things. In this sense the cross of God gives God himself a future.¹⁸ In our faith-anxiety, painful as it is, we are sharing in the whole movement from the undertow to the final advance of the incoming tide. It is that incoming tide which justifies our looking forward to a future that is nothing less than divine.

I said above that anxiety was relational. Faith-anxiety is supremely relational. A renewed theology of the cross will mean that we can now see ourselves marked *not just by any* abandonment or dereliction, but by the abandonment by the Father of his Son on the cross. That *theologoumenon* shows us anxiety at its greatest distension, as well as tension; and yet it is supremely reassuring. For only by sharing in that divine anxiety, can we share in the greatest divine disclosure for faith and for hope. The rest by comparison will be *placebos*. It is only there that the disclosure of God as triune in the intensest relationship of Father and of Son and of Spirit can come to us. There is a common late medieval and renaissance theme in painting and carving called *Not Gottes*, the dereliction of God. The Son, now supported by the Father, sometimes with eyes closed in death, sometimes at the point of death, is a figure of divine pity. Even the Father sometimes has a gaze of anguish. But the impalpable Spirit is present; a peaceful dove's eye seems to contain all. Only by our acceptance in courage of this divine relational life can we accept him whom we fear. Faith-anxiety is not cured by attempts to deny its presence, only by its absorption into God. The alternative is more terrible. Not only do we fail to exist; but God fails to exist.¹⁹

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¹⁷ Cf Moltmann, Jürgen: *The Crucified God* (London, 1974).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 187-96.

¹⁹ The first part of this article appeared in the April issue of *The Way* (1976), pp 136-145; the editors wish to apologise for inadvertently omitting Fr Bruno Brinkman's name at the end of it.