

SCOPE AND DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST'S SAVING ACTIVITY *

It is not my task here to give a systematic paper on the topic from the Lutheran point of view. Nor do I want to present a christological treatise which would reflect the present ecumenical debate. I rather intend to focus attention on some historical developments of Christian or "Western" culture. Our Orthodox friends may forgive me if I neglect the developments in the Eastern church, but this is a different perspective altogether. I shall try to interpret the present understanding of reality or the emerging paradigm in a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*, which might shed a new light on the old question of the scope and dimension of Christ's saving activity. In other words, I would like to propose a few notes on the topic in the present cross-cultural and global context created especially by developments in science.

What I am going to suggest here is a study of the concepts of "scope" and dimension in the context of the new emerging paradigms in scientific and philosophical theories.

If we want to speak about the saving activity of Christ in a meaningful way, we have to consider these *prolegomena* since they are the ground for all christological parlance which wants to be contextual.

We, as Orthodox as well as Lutheran theologians, might discover that we are on the same route while engaged in the attempt to describe the *pro-logos*, hopefully in, with and under the inspiration of the *logos*.

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I. The Problem

From the very beginning, the church faced the problem of two dimensions in her self-understanding: the concreteness and the universality of Christ. Christ was a Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. As such, he had to be seen and understood on the basis of the context of the history of Israel. His life was limited in spatio-temporal terms and his saving activity was very much related to the horizon of expectations in the culture of Israel. Needless to say, terms of reference like "Kingdom of God", "Messiah", "Son of God", etc. had a very special context which was not the context of Egyptian, Babylonian and other cultures. The relationship between promise and fulfilment, expectation and realization was solved in different ways. What is of interest here, however, is only the specific relationship which has, by definition, a limiting and particularizing character. The Incarnation took place in Bethlehem and not in Athens. The gospels give continuous reference to limiting circumstances of place, date, etc., in order to establish the truth of the events concerning Jesus. It is in the context of particular time bound circumstances that Jesus was experienced as Saviour. Even the resurrection was ascertained by a pattern of arguments of the same type (cf. Mk 16:9ff).

But in Jesus' person and activity there was an opposite tendency also. He broke with all limitations and cultural patterns (as, for instance, the Jewish law: Mk 7:1ff). He was sent by God as a symbol of God's love for the world, the *kosmos* (John 3:16). He was crucified on Golgotha at a particular time, but this spatio-temporal event was meaningful and of theological significance only insofar as it revealed a totally different dimension. The crucified Christ is the *kyrios tēs doxēs*, the Lord of Glory (1 Cor 2:8) which is the title of the Universal Lord of Creation. He is the "First born of all creation"; in Him does the whole creation persist (Col 1:15-17). He is the unifying ruler of the cosmic process; in Him everything finds its destination and fulfilment *coram Deo* (1 Cor 15:20-28). The consequence is that not only human beings are under the saving activity of Christ, but all creatures - animals, plants, and even the so-called "dead

matter" like stones and water – wait for God's Spirit or transforming power which will reveal their true nature and destiny (Rom 8 : 17).

The problem is how to bring together these two experiences : the concreteness and the universality of Christ. The way in which this is done has tremendous consequences not only for the Christian self-understanding but also for the practice of the church, as will be shown later.

It was the German poet and philosopher Lessing who put the question sharply : How can we overcome the nasty gap between accidental historical truth and the necessary truth of reason ? It was unthinkable that what is limited and historically conditioned can have unlimited and unconditioned consequences and meaning. All western philosophy, and theology in many cases, too, followed a Platonic pattern of thinking in assuming that the truth is eternal, the essence, the being of being. The primordial form or whatsoever is regarded as *principium* had to be conceived as eternally existing in the realm of *ideas* or in a kind of heaven so that the immutability of the truth or the reliability of God could be assumed. The last phrase indicates already that the platonic concept of the *idea* is not just a heuristic principle or a construction for the possibility of perception; it expresses a soteriological desirability which cannot be given up easily. Lessing and the whole of idealism were clever enough to see this point. Again : How can a limited historical event which by definition of historicity is accidental, have a scope which is wider than the context of the event, the context of space, time and meaning ?

II. Development of Scope

There is a history of thinking. This means that thinking is related to circumstances. It can be reflective as well as creative only if it relates to perceptions or contents which change. Whether the very process or pattern of thinking itself changes is another question which does not require an answer here.

If thinking is related to temporal and cultural processes, the history of thinking can be understood as a process. Process means going from one point to another. This implies a change, a change of scope. The history of thinking is made of successive changes of scope.

1. *Change of Scope in Biblical Understanding of Salvation*

Concerning Western Christian theology, there is definitely an enlargement of scope. It is a quantitative enlargement in any case and it could be argued that it is also a qualitative enlargement. Most probably we have reached a stage where quantitative and qualitative changes are seen in their dialectical interrelation and this is probably the impetus in our theological understanding of *oikoumenē*.

I want to explain my point by taking an example: the biblical understanding of salvation. Christian faith is based on the eucharistic mystery of Christ revealing the Triune God. Faith is not only based on this mystery, but it is an aspect, the existential expression of this mystery. This is an "eternal truth." But what does "eternal" mean in this connection? And is not the existential expression always "coloured" by and embedded—this is the meaning of existential—in the flux of events?

Yet, we can go even further. The mystery itself has a history. In this consists probably the specific biblical insight.

1. Israel's creed starts with a thankful reflection on historical experiences. God's saving activity became manifest in Egypt when he called his people and guided them out of slavery. Then He appeared on Mt. Sinai and revealed His saving will and commandment. Later only was this experience extended into a theological interpretation of Creation. Thus, the interpretative movement goes from the particular to the whole or from the historical to the transhistorical and universal. A similar tendency is evident in the formation of the concept of Messiah. The earlier prophets focus on the salvation of the people of Israel. Later the peoples of the world were called to gather under the throne

of Yahweh (Is 2 : 2ff: Mic 4, etc.) and even the whole creation gets liberated (Is 11) in the new covenant which stands for an *immediate* presence of God in the transformed world (Jer 33 : 31ff).

2. This tendency was continued in the New Testament where it was enlarged by the Greek understanding of *kosmos*. The cosmic forces themselves were reordered and transformed by the power revealed in Christ (Col 1; 1 Cor 15). Salvation was seen more and more in its universal dimensions, not as a special and particular action of God to save a few or the faithful rest only (as in Amos, Zephaniah and other prophets), but as the fulfilment of Creation; salvation comes under the horizon and the scope of creation.

3. The developments in the Western church led to a further explication of the implicit universality of salvation, even if we are acutely aware today of the ambiguity of this process. It has been argued that the church inherited the structures of the Roman empire. Even if the *pax Romana* was something qualitatively different from the peace of Christ, the church integrated its political structures and tried to erect a Christian state which received its legitimation from the fact that it represented the celestial hierarchy. In other words, the social and political structures were included into the scope of the saving activity of Christ. And the whole rationale of the Constantinian age was the belief that christianized politics would represent a certain *prolepsis* of an eschatological order to come.

4. Today we realize that the Constantinian age is breaking down, and therefore a totally new self-understanding of the church is emerging. Our experience is a global and cross-cultural one and implies basically the shock arising from the brokenness of *any* cultural and religious expression. Even more, it is oriented toward the whole but this universal awareness finds itself shattered by the present fragmentation of human situations.

Without going elaborately into a description of the present situation, I shall just make one point. The universal crisis of the present times seem to derive from the gap existing between the universal scope of our experience on the one side, and the fragmented means of interpretation and patterns of behaviour, on the other side. We have to cope with a universal wholeness, but our habits and patterns of relationship are rather close to a tribal attitude. The crisis is a crisis of perception. A reconditioning of the mind is necessary and our reflections on the universal scope of Christ's saving activity could contribute to this venture of reconditioning the human mind if only we can break out of paradigms which were valid in a totally different context.

To do so, we should learn the lesson our own history teaches us. On the four levels of development rapidly outlined above, we can see the danger of demonization of reality, when the particularity as such is mistaken for the universal archetype. In other words: when we miss the point and fail to recognize the symbolic difference, the saving touch turns into a diabolic blow.

This means as regards the first level – the experience of God's salvation in a particular historical event – that an exclusivistic pride covers the right attitude of thankfulness and humbleness. A lot of so-called Christian theology comes under this category.

On the second level – the integration of the cosmic dimension – the problem is that reality as such becomes sanctified without undergoing the spiritual transformation of death and resurrection. Our experience of fragmentation is real and devastating. Only when all things and events are seen in their proper context or when their relative nature is understood, can creation be a cosmos. All kinds of "libertinistic" tendencies – ontologically as well as ethically – warn us to recognize the need for transformation. And transformation is a process never fully achieved under spatio-temporal conditions. Christian realism does not allow of the idea of *jīvanmukta*.

The danger is most evident on the third level – the socio-political structures of human existence. Today nobody will mistake the *ecclesia credenda* for the state-church or a "Christian"

empire, but a subtle tendency to identify salvation with certain social theories or political movements has to be viewed in this context. The important difference between any ideology and *salus* does not mean separation or undifferentiated dualism. *Salus* can be reflected in social movements, but the movements *are* by no means the end, the *plerōma*.

To summarize my point: Incarnation does not sanctify history but *transforms* it qualitatively in each and every particular dimension.

From what we have said so far it is obvious that the question concerning the scope and dimension of Christ's saving activity is not a quantitative one only. It is the search for a different *quality* in every realm which can be determined quantitatively.

This means that, if we want to reflect on the scope of salvation in Christ, we must not take a world map or even a model of the solar system and try to extend the lines a little further than our ancestors did in accordance with their empirical knowledge of geography. Nor would we be well advised to rely on some kind of chronographical map which might allow us today to trace Christ's activity back to the original big bang and down to the big bang to come. All this would be a quantitative search, a "bad eternity" as Hegel would say.

We have rather to be aware of the salvation which is the basic dimension underlying every actual as well as possible event. It is the latent creative ground which is "in, with and under" every conditioned event. The dimension of this creative ground is what we are in search for.

The reason is quite simple: Because God is one, reality is one. The mystery revealed in Christ points towards *one* Trinitarian *perichoresis* which sets forth and implies the *holon*, i.e. any possible dimension. The trinity is the very essence of holistic thinking. I do not want to elaborate here on these theological implications because I have done so extensively elsewhere.¹

1. Cf. M. von Brück, *Advaita und Trinität. Indische und Christliche Gotteserfahrung im Dialog der Religionen* (unpublished Habilitation Thesis, Rostock University, 1980); "Advaita and Trinity", in *Indian Theo-*

2. *The History of Western Thought*

I would like now to tackle the problem of understanding and development of scope from a second perspective, the development of thinking in the West. We can divide European history into three stages, and the fourth one seems to be just round the corner today.

1. The Graeco Roman outlook prevailed up to the 4th century A.D. It was basically an anthropocentric view, summarized in Protagoras' famous sentence: Man is the measure of all things. First, it has to be noted that this sentence implies the measurability of things. The emphasis on measurement was and is indeed the underlying presupposition of Western culture, including all rational Christian theology. The *metron*, measure, was an inherent structure giving all things their proper form. It had an aesthetic quality, because the right measure guaranteed the *kalon*, the beauty, harmony and health of things. Health, wholeness, holiness, *salus*, was basically the state of the right measure. Later, the measurement became an external enterprise, measuring things according to a standardized scale which functioned according to human convention and not according to an innate harmony: *man* was the measure, and this is actually the beginning of science.

Other cultures, such as that of India, have quite a different attitude towards the measurable. Reality, *brahman*, God is experienced in such a way that man's measuring capability breaks into pieces. The Ultimate is beyond any dimensionality, beyond measurement and definability, it is *anirvacanīya*, explosion of being, the overflowing ecstatic dance of Siva. The indo-germanic root "*mā*" (which we have in *metron* as well as in *māyā*) means: to measure. *Māyā* is that which is measurable, but that is precisely why it has less reality than *brahman* and cannot be ultimate. We meet with this problem also in the history of Greek religion,

logical Studies XX (1983), pp. 37ff.; "Trinitarian Theology: Hegelian vis-a-vis Advaitic", in *Journal of Dharma VIII* (1983), pp. 283ff; "Sunyata in Mādhyamika Philosophy and the Christian Concept of God", in *Jeevadhara*, Nov. 1983, pp. 385ff.

but *Appollo*, the moderate, has always dominated *Dionysos*, the immoderate, at least in the history of thinking. This explains sufficiently for our purpose the Graeco-Roman anthropocentric view.

2. This outlook was replaced by the Christian theism of the 4th century. All through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, we have a theocentric view which focuses on God and God alone. The culture was somehow intoxicated by a God-awareness penetrating all the layers of the cosmological, sociological and psychological awareness. Everything was under the continuous surveillance of a personal God whose unlimited power was in perfect control of the history of salvation. Life was meaningful because God gave meaning. Creation was there, because God had spoken.

Man could not know the secrets of God, but God had revealed what was necessary to comfort man and show him his place and duty. Huston Smith summarizes the basic assumptions of this view saying that "they held that reality is focused in a person, that the mechanics of the physical world exceed our comprehension, and that the way to our salvation lies not in conquering nature but in following the commandments which God has revealed to us."²

3. The modern outlook was formed in the 16th and 17th centuries and led to the expansion of Western civilization in all its dimensions. It constitutes the basis for science, technology and the social structures known as democracy. It is based on the assumption that reality follows a set order and that the human mind can know the principles of this order. That reality is personal is less certain and of no basic importance. Human fulfillment and destination are not expected to be found in a trans-historical realm but consist primarily in discovering the laws of nature and utilizing them for the improvement of man's condition.

2. H. Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, New York: Crossroad, 1982. p. 6.

There is no need to go into details, because it is this outlook which led to the secularization we are all experiencing today. It led also to the basic fragmentation of our life and its disastrous consequences. It led also to the great achievements in science and technology which provided a basis for all the benefits of modern societies, such as democracy.

4. A post-modern view is emerging today which is already portended by the fact that more and more people refuse to accept the presuppositions of "modernity". New-Age scientists, ecologist, feminists, meditation groups, etc. are in search of a holistic paradigm. One of the main supporters of this change is science itself, because it has discovered its own limits.

What Kant wrote two centuries ago is now the basis for the new physics: that we do not perceive reality "as it is" but project our own categories onto it. Perception depends on the perceiving subject. Even more, the clear discrimination between subject and object is an abstraction which does not reflect any more the real process in modern science. This is basically the experience of the mystics of all ages and a new awareness of the relationship between "mysticism and the new science" is emerging.

Whatever may be the case, a new holistic paradigm is in the process of development which regards reality as a "holomovement" (David Bohm), as an integrated interrelatedness of relationships, so that our usual dichotomies between spirit and matter, eternal and temporal, space and time, vanish. Altered states of consciousness are being discovered, not by chance through the meditation of psychedelic experiences, but in the context of a meeting and dialogue with Eastern religions. We do not yet know what this paradigm will finally look like; but one thing is sure: our world-view, our epistemology, our theology will never be the same as it was fifty years ago. Theologians had better take notice of these basic changes, especially in their

attempt to reflect anew on the scope and dimensions of the saving activity of Christ.

3. *A New Paradigm*

I have to be a little more explicit on the interpretation or presentation of the new holistic paradigm. It seems to me that we have to see three dimensions of holistic thinking in connection with the contemporary discussions.

1. The "Hierarchy" is being rediscovered as an epistemological principle in sciences of basic importance. "Hierarchy" means that we have to recognize different levels of reality which are interrelated in a hierarchical structure. There are different models. I will briefly discuss a very simple one here, the one that distinguishes between physical-biological-psychological (mental) - spiritual levels.

Each level has its own structure. On each level new qualities occur which cannot be explained on the basis of the previous level. Thus, the laws of physics are valid on the physical level and should explain all observable phenomena on this level. On the biological level, too, the laws of physics are totally valid. But they do not explain *all* phenomena on this level. Certain things—such as biofeedback—are implicit maybe on the physical level, but only in biological systems are they explicit and governing principles of the system.

Therefore we have to conclude that the higher level (hierarchy) is qualitatively more than the previous one. It is more comprehensive. Conclusion: Only the higher level can explain the lower one because it "contains" it, not vice versa. The relationship is not reciprocal. If we assume that the most subtle qualitative explication of reality occurs on the spiritual level, we have to realize that the spiritual realm implies all the others, but the other realms cannot explain or "contain" the spiritual explication. All levels might have a common ground (the transcendent

ground of evolution), but this is another question which will be considered under (3).

The lesser is permeated by the more. Theology has expressed this in terms of transcended immanence or immanent transcendence or *advaita*: God is the very being of everything. He is the is-ness (Eckart's *istichkeit*) or suchness (*tathatā* of the Buddhists), the creative in the flux, etc.

"The divisions between the levels of reality are like one-way mirrors. Looking up, we see only reflections of the level we are on; looking down, the mirrors become plate glass and cease to exist. On the highest plane even the glass is removed, and immanence reigns. . . looking up from planes that are lower, God is radically transcendent (*ganz Anders*; wholly other); looking down, from heights that human vision (too) can to varying degrees attain, God is absolutely immanent."³

2. It was the discovery that organic systems are self-governing wholes exercising cybernetical functions, biofeedback etc. which led to the certainty that everything is interrelated. Modern scientific theory has been forced to the viewpoint that there cannot be a "thing" which would be a reality in itself, independent and stimulated only by external mechanical forces. If we had a hierarchy concerning the different levels, we have also a hologarchy on each level.⁴ What has been discovered in Einstein's relativity theory, in quantum physics, bootstrap and other theories, has its place here. Every event on a given level has consequences for the whole level. If we do not see it, it is only because our perception is not sharp enough or our theories prevent us from seeing things as they are. This kind of wholeness is the successor of a mechanistic world-view which has prevailed in the West for the last say 300 years and still influences very much our thinking, even our concepts about a creation, etc. The

3. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

4. Cf. the instructive article by Ken Wilber, "Physics, Mysticism and the Holographic Paradigm," in *The Holographic Paradigm*, ed. by Ken Wilber, Boulder & London: Shambala, 1982, esp. pp. 164ff.

most common example we can give here to make the point clear is psychosomatic medicine which is quite different from the doctor who believes only in the injection-needle.

3. The vertical wholeness which we describe under (1) and the horizontal wholeness indicated under (2) should be based on one principle. Contemporary philosophy offers different models which we cannot discuss here. One of the most comprehensive and plausible models is the holographic paradigm developed by the physicist David Bohm and the neurophysiologist Karl Pribram or Bohm's understanding of the implicate order which points to the last reality as *holomovement*.

If we discuss scopes and dimensions in the present context we have to understand what holomovement is. It is an "understanding of the nature of reality in general and of consciousness in particular as a coherent whole, which is never static or complete, but which is an unending process of movement and unfoldment."⁵ Science itself is demanding a new non-fragmentary world-view. The problem is that our perception and thinking are fragmented due to habits formed during the last few centuries.

The mechanistic approach, which is basically a fragmented one, led to tremendous discoveries and was extremely successful. This success led to the assumption that everything could be explained in mechanistic terms. Science became caught up in its own limited presuppositions and extended means. Successful in one dimension, it remained unable to find a proper justification in other fields. This is the dilemma and today science itself has to question its own presuppositions in order to be successful or really scientific. This does not imply an un- or pre-scientific approach. Rather science itself is changing, opening up towards a wider scope of epistemology.

This is of utmost importance not only in the theoretical field of knowing, but in society, politics, etc. Bohm sees clearly, that these

5. D. Bohm, *Wholeness and Implicate Order*, London : Routledge & Kegan, 1981, p. IX.

“widespread and pervasive distinctions between people (race, nation, family, profession, etc., etc.) which are now preventing mankind from working together for the common good and indeed, even for survival, have one of the key factors of their origin in a kind of thought that treats *things* as inherently divided, disconnected, and ‘broken up’ into yet smaller constituent parts. Each part is considered to be essentially independent and self-existent . . . What I am proposing here is that man’s general way of thinking of the totality, i. e. his general world view, is crucial for the overall order of the human mind itself. If he thinks of the totality as constituted of independent fragments, then that is how his mind will tend to operate, but if he can include everything coherently and harmoniously in an overall whole that is undivided, unbroken, and without a border (for every border is a division or break), then his mind will tend to move in a similar way, and from this will flow an orderly action within the whole.”⁶

Now, it is extremely important what we realize the connection between our basic model of thinking and even of perception (which we take for granted but is actually a habit formed under historical conditions) and the particular way we think and act in day to day life. Our theological patterns are under the same influence and the very fragmentation of the church is only the most obvious result.

We are only at the initial stage of a change in the overall paradigm.

To link it up with our philosophical tradition, we have to go back to Aristotle’s distinction of four causes: material, efficient, formal, final. In the new sciences, the *formal* cause, previously overlooked, gets greater attention. The form is the forming activity which is the cause for the growth and development of structures. The formative cause, according to Bohm as

6. Bohm, *op. cit.*, p. XI.

7. R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life. The Hypothesis of Formative Causation*, Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1981.

well as to the biologist Sheldrake,⁷ is “an ordered and structured inner movement that is essential to what things are.”⁸

There is nothing else than this movement. Solid “matter” is an abstraction, as we know from the physics of elementary particles. Such orderly patterns which develop in time are “enfolded” in the whole. This movement can be “carried” not only in electromagnetic waves but also in other ways (by electron beams, sound and in other countless forms of movement). “To generalize the point so as to emphasize undivided wholeness, we shall say that what ‘carries’ an implicate order is *the holomovement*, which is an unbroken and undivided totality. In certain cases, we can abstract particular aspects of the holomovement (e. g. light, electrons, sound, etc.) but, more generally, all forms of the holomovement merge and are inseparable. Thus, in its totality, the holomovement is not limited in any specifiable way at all. It is not required to conform to any particular order, or to be bounded by any particular measure. Thus, *the holomovement is undefinable and immeasurable.*”⁹

Reality is an invisible flux which is not comprised of parts; it is perfect interrelatedness.

The psychologist Itzhak Bentov has tried to explain the non-duality of “oneness” and “individuation” in a diagram.¹⁰ The inseparable unity is the absolute, transcendent state; it is infinite interrelatedness. All further individuation on the line of the hierarchy of reality is contained in potential form or is implicate.

On the first level below unity, interrelatedness is dominant, but “nuclei of individuals” are evident. On the next level, individuals become aware of themselves but are also aware of their interrelatedness. On the last level, the awareness of interrelatedness is lost by a process of abstraction producing the illusion of discrete individuality. This is the level of reality given to us normally by our senses :

8. Bohm, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

9. Bohm, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

10. I. Bentov, comments on the Holographic View of Reality, in *The Holographic Paradigm, op. cit.*, n. 4, pp. 136ff.

State of Unity
The ABSOLUTE

Potential for individuation _____ The basis for the field

Individuation starts  diffuse image

Individuals aware of themselves and also of their interconnectedness  fuzzy focus

Individuals unaware of their interconnectedness  sharp focus

III. The Trinitarian Holomovement

The previous section has set forth the present discussion on the scope of reality. If we want to interpret reality theologically, i.e. to clarify the scope and dimension of salvation in Christ, we ought to have a clear image of what we mean when speaking about scope, reality, dimension, consciousness, etc. Any theological statement implies a world view, and we should not rely unconsciously on thought patterns which are no longer adequate to depict reality as we perceive it.

The question is: How can we relate the truth of revelation to our thinking and speaking? How can we express the great intuitions of the faith of our tradition in terms of this new paradigm? My basic hypothesis is that we need an intuition of a Trinitarian Holomovement which is able to integrate *any* experience in *any* of the hierarchic or hologrammatic dimensions of reality.

I do not think that it would be possible or even desirable to work on a *system* which can integrate all the aspects described above. The reason is that a system is static, it is limited by definition, has a "border". And this would contradict the very essence of the holomovement.

A basic *intuition*, however, is open to different interpretations, is changeable and not necessarily limited in its scope. It has to fulfil one condition : it should shed light on creativity. It is obvious that new things occur in the holomovement. How can this newness be understood, and what is its function in the “undivided wholeness” ?

Most of our metaphysical structures of thinking are dependent on Plato. This involves a problem. It is Plato’s concept of *ideas* which has been most fruitful but it is also misleading, especially if it becomes the pattern of understanding the Trinity. The problem is that *ideas* are eternally existent. They are unchanging structures, that may be understood in terms of potentiality non-manifest forms or whatsoever, but which finally depend on a concept which excludes *creativity*. The *ideas* are what they are, *definite* structures which somehow pre-programme the holomovement. If the holomovement as such were *the idea*, the problem of pre-fabricated models would not occur and creativity would be possible. But, as far as I can see, this is not Plato’s understanding.

Holomovement seems, however, to express precisely what the Trinity is all about : the Trinitarian structure is *the idea*, the very expression of the holomovement: undivided interrelatedness creating continuously *one* movement. I have argued elsewhere¹¹ that this is expressed most profoundly by the term *perichōrēsis* (John of Damascus), the “rhythmic dance of the whole.”

I do not want to go into details here. My point is only to indicate some possible patterns of thinking. We have already noted that *creativity* is one of the crucial points in the concept of undivided wholeness. If we want to conceive creativity as a particular aspect of the saving action of Christ — and what has been said earlier concerning the biblical understanding of creation and of Christ as mediator of creation, definitely suggests to do so — we have to be careful to find the *specific* model for the creativity revealed in Christ. It is not a quantitative model, so

11. Cf. “Advaita and Trinity”, *art. cit.*,

that creation would mean adding things to others, a cosmic stock-piling, as it were. It is a qualitative model which gets its form in the symbolic expression of *kenōsis*.¹² This has been misinterpreted quite often by limiting the scope of *kenōsis* to the moral level. But if the New Testament is taken as a whole it is unavoidable to interpret *kenōsis* as a key to an ontological understanding. We may obtain a deeper understanding in the light of the following text :

“It is not the nature of (mystical intuition) to remain in a state of . . . (the world) absolutely motionless. It demands of itself that it differentiates itself unlimitedly, and at the same time it desires to remain in itself. This is why . . . (the void) is said to be a reservoir of infinite possibilities and not just a state of mere emptiness. Differentiating itself and yet remaining in itself undifferentiated, and thus to go on eternally in the work of creation . . . we can say that it is creation out of nothing . . . (The void) is not to be conceived statically but dynamically, or better, as at once static and dynamic.”

I could not imagine a better and more profound interpretation of the Trinity in philosophical terms. But actually, and this should be a creative surprise with regard to our discussion on the scope and dimension of Christ, this quotation is from D. T. Suzuki, the greatest interpreter of Zen-Buddhism to the West.¹³ He wants to say what *sūnyatā* is. I have only omitted the Sanskrit terms and substituted them in brackets by Suzuki's own English terms.

The Trinity is this reservoir of infinite possibilities, differentiating itself eternally in three persons and yet remaining the undifferentiated oneness. Our terms and notions are static and

12. Cf. esp. Phil 2:7 but also the whole Christian emphasis on the cross, the hiddenness of Christ's messiahship in the Synoptic Gospels, Paul's experience of "weakness", Luther's experience of God "*sub contrario*", etc.

13. D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in East-West Philosophy*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p. 181.

that is why we cannot think the two together but have to create a paradox. John of Damascus' image of the dance may help us to see more clearly: the dance is dance only insofar as it retains the same structure and pattern; yet it is differentiated in a oneness which creates itself eternally in an ongoing and perfectly inter-related movement. In other words, each movement of the dance has its meaning and form only in the perspective of the whole, of the *holomovement*, and the whole exists only insofar as it realizes itself in the continuous succession of different "steps".

We cannot go into a subtle explanation of all the different aspects of our conceptual interrelation of

Trinity – *sūnyatā* – *holomovement*.¹⁴

This is a cross-cultural synthesis (quite different from an eclectic syncretism) which itself might be a "step" of the *perichōrēsis* of the *holomovement*.

I want only to focus the attention on one consequence for our topic here: reality is not something that is; it is rather a field of *becoming* or *growing*. According to Christian faith—expressed in the unique experience of the Triune God—God Himself is in movement, in becoming. There is no way to speak about Christ's saving activity without seeing Christ as the second person of the Trinity and, according to an old dogma which expresses a great insight: *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*. There is no way to speak about Christ's saving activity without speaking about the Father and the Holy Spirit. No doubt, the Trinitarian "holomovement" is mediated to us historically in the person and activity of Christ. But this does not justify a conscious or unconscious "Christomonism" which seems to penetrate much of our contemporary Protestant theology. This is not a virtue but theological carelessness.

We have to keep this in mind when we raise the important question of the scope and dimension of the saving activity of Christ. As everything in reality, scope and dimension are aspects of the *holomovement*. They belong to the Trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, to a structure in becoming. And Christ's activity

14. Cf. "Sūnyatā in Madhyamika Philosophy", *art. cit.*

as such is one aspect of the Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* which has to be seen in close connection with the "activities" we appropriate to the Father and the Holy Spirit, i.e., in traditional terms, with creation and sanctification as new creation.

IV. Unlimited Salvation - Limited Church?

I would like to add a few remarks on the crux of the problem, at least in so far as practical ecumenism is concerned. To do so, I have to come back to the initial question of concreteness and universality. After and on the basis of the remarks on the Trinitarian holomovement, we can see more clearly how and why concreteness and universality form an eternal polarity which can be expressed in language only as a paradox but may be lived and actualized in symbols. One is in the other, and, being *in* the other, it constitutes itself as well as the other, as well also as the *being* of the two. Neither is the subject of the other, but both constitute a subject/object-interrelatedness. This seems to be a more or less suitable description of reality. It is certainly a meaningful attempt to interpret the symbol of the Trinity in rational terms which are related to our contextual world-view. It is also a description of the polarity of concreteness and universality which is the horizon of interpretation for what we call the scope of the saving activity of Christ.

What would be the ecclesiological consequence of the whole argument? I deliberately resist the attempt to give an answer to this question for a simple reason: no theological "*locus*" is nowadays so unclear and unreflected as ecclesiology. The difference between pious repetitions of statements and a totally unhomogeneous practice (which could be called with some justification mere helplessness) is nowhere else so devastating and even destructive. I am afraid to add to the confusion. But since the problem has at least one cause in the careless theological analysis of such terms as "scope" and "dimension", our discussion might contribute also to some clarification.

This clarification could focus around four problems which follow necessarily from the reflections of this paper, though

I guess that they may not be so new after all. Due to our historical situation they have, however, a certain urgency.

1. What is the relationship between the *ecclesia credens* and the church as an institution which actually occurs always and only in the plural since it is historically conditioned? My suggestion is to find an answer again and again in realizing that the church is a process, a *kenotic* process may be, in which all actual forms are interrelated. This process makes the implicit order (the invisible church) explicit, but the explication may hide the wholeness if we live and argue and believe only on the level of disconnected individualities. (We need not repeat what was said above about the polarity of concreteness and universality.) The very process of finding a historical answer to the question again and again might be the "happening of the church", of a church which is a static and dynamic totality at the same time.

2. If Christ is the second person of the Trinity, can He be claimed by the church alone, trying to enshrine Him *intra muros* in a possessive and undevout attitude?

My suggestion to find an answer implies two steps. First, we have to be aware that many people are inspired by Jesus Christ's person and teachings but do not (want to) belong to the institutional church. This is especially the case in India, but increasingly also in Europe and America. They are standing in the direct historical tradition coming from Jesus through the Scriptures. Since they develop a consciousness founded in Christ (to a different degree, of course) and even try to find their own way of discipleship, it is phenomenologically evident that the power and activity of Christ is at work. The theological interpretation of this phenomenon is another question, but it cannot ignore the facts.

Secondly, there are people and whole movements and traditions which do not explicitly reflect the light and life of the historical Jesus Christ, but live in an implicit way with and in Him. Those people do not stand in any historical line with Christ, but they may have a transhistorical connection in the

Spirit with Him; theirs is a spiritual connection. They do not call His name, but "do" Him (Mt 25 : 31ff., Mt 7 : 21). On the basis of our reflections on the Trinitarian understanding of salvation, of the *perichōrēsis* of reality and the relationship between creation and salvation, it is difficult to exclude this realm from the saving activity of Christ.

This has implications for the understanding of the church. If the sentence *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est* is to have any meaning, we have to reconsider the scope of *ecclesia* in this connection. It cannot be one or the other form of denominational institution; it cannot be an abstract institution such as a "world-church" which does not exist either. It can only be a *communio sanctorum* which is the expression of the eschatological dimension of reality and is, as such, *in becoming*. Since, eschatological fulfilment is concerned with the realization of the true nature of (or the divine will in) creation, this *communio sanctorum* pertains to the scope of the creational order which is, as we have seen, in a creative process of becoming. This *communio* is the child of the Triune God. It has to be viewed within the dimensions of creation, under the promise and work of salvation and in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, after all, does not recognize our human institutional boundaries and limits. It is the *communio* of the *anthrōpoi eudokias* (Lk 2 : 14), of "the men who receive God's good will," and this divine "good will", this *eudokia* is manifest in different religious as well as secular communities, to some extent probably in every human heart, and definitely also in every aspect of the magnificent mystery of creation.

3. Jesus Christ, or Jesus as Christ, as the *Messiah*, is certainly the fulfilment of all the promises and expectations of the Jewish religion. The historical phenomenon of "Jesus the Christ" has to be seen in connection with this background, and this is the orthodox teaching of the church *contra Marcionem*. But in so far as the incarnation is not just a historical event but also history with universal significance having a cosmic scope (Jn 3 : 16), the universal dimension cannot be limited to

the particular manifestation. Jesus is embedded into the history of Israel, but the history of Israel is not the universal model of history as such or of the transhistorical nature of reality.

This means that we might have to consider other manifestations of the Christ-event flowing out of the divine grace in its Trinitarian dimensions, manifestations which represent a different "form" of fulfilment (such as Buddha, e.g.). This model of thinking suggests that the Universal Christ in the perichoretic process of the Trinity reflects Himself not only as the *Messiah* but also as the *Tathāgata*.¹⁵ There is no historical connection between the two, but a transhistorical interrelatedness.

For Christian theology, it should not be too difficult to be able to relate those other manifestations to Jesus Christ, because of a simple theological insight: God is one, and as such he does not contradict Himself. Therefore, what does not contradict the historical experience of Jesus Christ may be considered as coming under the scope and dimension of the saving activity of the Triune God. Even the New Testament, with its limited historical horizon, reflects already such an experience: *hos gar ouk estin kath' hemōn hyper hēmonestin* ("Who is not against us is for us") (Mk 9:40). How much more should we reflect such an experience in our cross-cultural context!

4. Hence, the question about the scope and dimension of Christ's activity is not so much whether Christ is here or there but how or whether we recognize Him.

The continuing process of finding an answer to this problem of our recognition is itself part of the process of divine salvation. Since we are said to partake in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), we partake in the Trinitarian process in all its dimensions. Since "we have been set free to share in the liberty of the children of God" in the divine heritage (Rom 8:14.17.21), we are not bound totally by historical conditions,

15. *Tathāgata*, "the-thus-gone" the one who is free and has emerged into the Truth.

but share in the Triune transhistorical spirituality. This means also that our life reflects divine creativity: through our relation to all other forms or manifestations of the divine life (i.e. all creatures), we enlarge, concretize and realize the creativity of the One God or Christ's body of glory.

I want to conclude with an actual example. If we proclaim Christ the life of the world, we can, according to the previous argument, be sure to find true life. It is up to us to acknowledge His universal presence and show, therefore, the necessary reverence for life. On this basis the fundamental question has to be put in a slightly different way: What is the genuine life which we can recognise as Christ-life? A lot of ecumenical debate and especially of actual experience in the struggle for genuine life will be necessary to find an answer to this question. But one theological presupposition will enable us to see the answer in a certain direction: Genuine life is the image, the "materialization" of the Trinity. It is, as it were, the creative goodness of and in the multidimensional reality.

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