

A postmodern Christology with Christ but without the Son of God?

D P Veldsman
University of Pretoria

Abstract

In this review article, the revisioned christology developed by the American theologian Mark Kline Taylor in the chapter 'Christ as rough Beast' in his book 'Remembering Esperanza' (1990) is discussed critically. The cultural-political theology developed by Taylor, in which he 'moves' from autobiographical elements to theological reflection in addressing the postmodern trilemma in North America, is explained. It is shown how Taylor, through his cultural-political hermeneutics of tradition, unfolds his christology as a fourfold christology in which Christ designates an intersubjective, socio-historical force for reconciliatory emancipation. Finally, his christological interpretation is critically compared by means of formal similarities with that of the German New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976).

1. INTRODUCTION

The book *Remembering Esperanza* (1990) by the Presbyterian theologian of Yale, Mark Kline Taylor, unleashed an unprecedented American theological storm. His book was taken so seriously, that a full discussion of it was arranged during a session of the annual congress of the America Academy of Religion in 1990. Before taking up the exposition of his christology in the chapter entitled 'Christ as rough Beast', it would be (a) more than just informative to explain the interesting choice of the title of his book, and (b) necessary to glance over the main line(s) of the rigorous and

thought-provoking arguments that precede his christological exposition, but which are an integral part of it.

2.1 More than just tickled by Esperanza

Autobiographical reflection on a childhood experience in South America gave rise to the title of the book. In Taylor's own words, 'Esperanza used to pick me up, hold me tight, and tickle me. She was a fourteen-year-old girl of the Zapotec village of Teotitlan del Valle, in southern Mexico's province of Oaxaca' (Taylor 1990:1). In remembering his experiences as a five-year old with Esperanza and her different world of poverty, customs, oppression and suffering, Taylor moves on to theological reflection, affirming the *communicative praxis* (Calvin Schrag) in which he finds himself moving. Addressing the often-lamented distance between theology and people's religious, cultural, and political experiences (following Johann Baptist Metz), Taylor stresses the importance of interweaving theological reflection with cultural-political contexts, as well as with the writer's own story ('the who' of discourse). For Taylor, this implies the act of 'hermeneutical self-implicature' as interpretation of the character of theology which is consonant with the Augustinian view of theology as *faith seeking understanding* (following critically the North American liberation theologians). From this vantage point, remembering becomes, through critical and imaginative reflection, the act of reconstituting, restoring and re-connecting what is often fragmented. It is through Taylor's 'more than just tickled' experience of remembering Esperanza that we move to his postmodern theological interpretation of the significance of christology.

1.2 The 'forward' of a christopraxis

In the preceding chapters of his book, Taylor, a Christian theologian who is not afraid of risking exposure by 'dancing through a minefield' (Kolodny) and 'keeping the difficulty of life alive' (Caputo) with unsettling magnificence (!), related several forms of systemic oppression while simultaneously trying to preserve their distinctive problematics. This prepared a fourfold structure for the christology and christopraxis of his cultural-political theology. For Taylor (1990:19), Christian theology is not just *logos* about God; it is this as a reflective response to a practice of commitment to the Christ. Theology for Taylor thus begins in christopraxis. His book therefore, is not a labour in the biblical text per se, but in its 'forward', that is, the world in front of texts (Taylor 1990:66, 185). His aim with his christological response is to formulate a christology which is broad enough to address the inter-

connecting of oppressions while also featuring internal distinctions, necessary to preserve christology from becoming yet another monolithic theology making imperialist, universal claims. What problem(s) does he address and how does he structure his arguments in reaching this aim?

2. THE DILEMMA OF THE NORTH AMERICAN TRILEMMA

Served as a stunningly intellectual *hors d'oeuvre* to his exposition of a cultural-political theology, Taylor (1990:23ff) proposed, by 'portraiture' of the situation in North America, that this situation could be interpreted as featuring a postmodern trilemma.

For Taylor, no theological 'meal' can be served without such a portraiture. The preceding exposition (Chapters 1-4) – described as 'moves' – is an integral part of his exposition of christology. He states: 'These basic moves of the first four chapters I acknowledge as elements of a christopraxis. Of course, they are not "christology" as such, nor are they unrelated to the christology that will be proposed here. These moves in relation to christopraxis are "praxis" because they constitute reflection within and about scenes of action in which I am involved and of which I am aware. They are "christic" in that these reflections are inseparable from my various connections to religious communities that invoke the Christ symbol' (Taylor 1990:153). Two other theoretical practices are employed by Taylor, (1990:26ff) namely reflexive analysis and address. The prologue of his book reflects his theoretical practice of reflexivity while his revision of christology reflects his theoretical practice of address.

This trilemma involves the struggle to appropriate a Christian tradition (Taylor 1990:31-34), to celebrate plurality (Taylor 1990:34-37), and to critique political domination (Taylor 1990:37-40). In this trilemma it is necessary to affirm all three together (Taylor 1990:40ff). Taylor (1990:46ff) then sketches the main lines of a hermeneutical approach to tradition that might be practiced in response to this trilemma, and proposed a cultural-political hermeneutics of tradition – That is, a set of interpretive strategies enabling a renewed sense of Christian tradition while enabling a critical assessment of the diverse political and cultural forces that constitute and mediate that tradition to us.

Hermeneutics is characterised by Taylor (1990:49ff) as a configuration of six salient concerns, namely the focus on texts, the roles of language, and an awareness of pre-understanding, emancipatory interests, plurality and truth.

A basic orientation, a hermeneutical 'understanding' of a cultural-political theology, is thus provided in which a hermeneutical 'privilege of the oppressed' (Taylor

1990:60ff) is put forward and affirmed. To identify this hermeneutical privilege, Taylor (1990:60ff) identified five dynamics of conversational experience, namely:

- The movement of question and answer in conversation between two or more different parties;
- The fact that authentic conversation highlights the particularity of the other;
- Real conversation that highlights difference, entails clash and conflict;
- The 'nurturing of breath in conversation' (Taylor 1990:63);
- The acknowledgement of a privilege for those excluded or absent from the conversation.

However, the hermeneutics of this theology (Taylor 1990:67ff) cannot do without explanatory theories (which strengthen the vision), that is, political and cultural analyses of the political dominations and cultural plurality that challenge us.

He states three criteria (see Taylor 1990:69 for a discussion of the criteria) that must be met by the two groups of theories that he identifies, namely Christian discursive and extradiscursive affairs. He then proposes three groups of theories that meet these criteria, namely literary-critical theories, political theories and anthropological theories of culture.

Taylor (1990:76ff) did this through extensive focus on the political domination named sexism; thereupon he (Taylor 1990:111ff) connected analysis of this form of domination to other interlocking forms: heterosexism, classism, and racism (see Taylor [1990:78ff] for his reasons in choosing these specific theorizable oppressions). The basic argument which is put forward entails the following line of reasoning: maturation (motivated by the underlying matricidal mythos) as abstraction sets up dualities which leads to separation (from body and gender) and subsequently to alienation, producing the infrastructure for oppression/domination/exploitation.

This is the path of reasoning along which Taylor leads us. To conclude in his own words:

We have seen along the way, whether looking at sexism, hetero-realism, classism, or racism, that Christians and Christian symbols have consistently reinforced these exploitative systems. Now we must consider what resources there are, within appropriations of Christian tradition, for supporting resistance instead of reinforcing dominance – for remembering hope for those whose lives are systemically dismembered....The time has come for the discernment of a theological appropriation of Christian traditions, one that might address situations not only of plurality but also of these multifaceted and interrela-

ted oppressions. In what ways can theology participate in remembering Esperanza?

(Taylor 1990:148-149)

We must now focus on the distinctively theological turn of the argument(s) in which Taylor (1990:150ff) revises christology from certain strands of Christian tradition in order to respond to the postmodern trilemma. Oriented by hermeneutical understanding and shaped by the explanatory theories, he now seeks to complete his vision: Appropriating elements of Christian *mythos* (tradition) that favour the needs of the oppressed for emancipation (resisting domination) while celebrating radical differences (affirming plurality). He therefore proposes a christology in which Christ names a sociohistorical dynamic of reconciliatory emancipation.

Taylor (1990:153) proceeds with the formulation of his understanding of christology, taking up the theoretical practice of 'address'. The theoretical practice of address especially aims to present the particularity of the Christ symbol, which articulates the meaning of Christ in and for the situations approached reflexively and portrayed in cultural description and theory. Taylor seeks to answer two questions:

- What is the connection between 'christic' living and the postmodern trilemma of North American discursive and extradiscursive affairs?
- How would christology articulate the Christ symbol in relation to a hermeneutical vision that not only celebrates plurality but also affirms a critical privilege for the voices of those needing emancipation?

3. IN THE LIGHT OF BETHLEHEM ALONE (OR: BEYOND JESUS TO CHRIST)

'Strategically, I do mean to trouble any who think the central concerns of Christian faith and practice grow simply from truth and history, especially if they are thought to be free from creative and imaginative activity' (Taylor 1990:166).

With the exposition of christology, Taylor (1990:153ff) takes up the theoretical practice of 'address' in which he seeks (a) to identify and mine the richness of the Christian *mythos*, and (b) to disclose the distinctiveness of a cultural-political theology's address if it is to have its own distinctive resources for empowering speech and action in cultures and politics, if it is to bring to speech and action something new!

To ease and to aid in the understanding of the following exposition, the main line of Taylor's argument can be summarized as follows: Reconciliatory emancipation designates a revised christology in which Christ is taken as an intersubjective, sociohistorical force, driving towards an empowering Christian *mythos*. This

Christian mythos not only arises from the figure of Jesus himself, but also from contemporary appropriations of the Jesus movements. The particularity of the Christ who meets us in this way, is an ecclesial praxis named 'reconciliatory emancipation'. By means of this notion, Taylor seeks to appropriate Christian tradition in a way intended to navigate our period's struggle with both political domination and difference. In this navigation, Taylor gives primacy to emancipation from domination as a structuring freedom that begins with an emancipation of those oppressed by the *patria potestas* and extends ultimately to all who suffer the ill effects of other interlocking oppressions. The reconciliatory element, though secondary to emancipation in significance for Taylor, is necessary to emancipation and constitutes a Christian response to difference and plurality.

3.1 In his theological approach, Taylor links up with theological approaches that keep christology inseparably connected with soteriology. For Taylor (1990:154), 'christology is salvifically interested discourse'. Quoting Paul Tillich's maxim, 'Christology is a function of soteriology', Taylor (1990:155) supports this conviction but immediately emphasizes that two essential qualifications should be kept in mind:

- * This may not mean that christology is a mere reflection of soteriology,
- * The question of whose salvific interests christology is a function must be asked specifically.

If the first qualification is not formulated sufficiently, the distinctiveness of christology as a contribution to soteriology is lacking; if the second qualification is not developed, various 'universal' visions of 'human existence' that christology allegedly addresses are formulated (e.g. Paul Tillich and Wolfhart Pannenberg).

3.2 Within the context of christopraxis, and inseparably related to soteriology, Taylor (1990:155ff) portrays his christology as a *mythos* of deliverance. In Taylor's exposition, the term *mythos* (compare 3.3) is used as an expanded term, encompassing not only the kerygma or distinctive features of the Christian proclamation but also the scriptural narratives, the ritual, and the liturgy of Christian communities. As a *mythos* of deliverance, the question immediately arises: Deliverance from what? For Taylor (1990:156-62), it is a deliverance from:

- * *Specific and concrete oppressions.* This does not mean that Taylor is seeking to replace the concerns of the classic traditions (deliverance 'from sin', 'from death'); he only wants to develop them more concretely, and explore sin as a corporate or systemic phenomenon (Schleiermacher). Taylor (1990:156) writes:

'We here in North America do not struggle simply with sin – whether we identify this as pride or as sloth, as self-exaltation or as self-abnegation – we struggle with sin in the form of operative patterns and systems of distortion that warrant recognizing and naming'. In this regard, Taylor (1990:157) identifies, selects and refers to as theorizable oppressions from which we need deliverance and which he seeks to address christologically: sexism, hetero-realism, classism, racism and lastly ethnocentrism (as the repression and devaluation of difference) which pervades all four;

- *Itself*, that is from major elements and pervasive orientations in it's traditions that have reinforced and even intensified the corporate and personal pain worked by these systemic oppressions. These major elements/orientations, with regard to
 - (i) Sexism, include androcentric orientation of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, reinforcing male supremacy and the domination of our Christian traditions by male-coded Christ- and God-language. Taylor (1990:158) raises the question of whether our gender identities really have such a powerful role in the linguistic and ritual process of experiencing sacral power. His answer is affirmative, stating that gender is everywhere, not only as a designation of sex, but as a whole system, affecting almost every aspect of individual and cultural practice;
 - (ii) Heterosexism, include hetero-realism that involves alienation from intimate companionship with one's own gender and from full sensual experience of one's own and other bodies. Taylor (1990:115ff) quotes Janice Raymond's notion of hetero-realism as referring to 'the worldview that women exist always in relation to man', perceiving even 'women together' as 'women alone';
 - (iii) Classism, include the conviction of 'being a Christian' (apolitical spirituality) without an active solidarity with the underclass;
 - (iv) White racism, include the conviction of the 'evil of blackness', nestled within the daily conversations and everyday practices of the Christian communities;
 - (v) Ethnocentrism, include a generalized defamation of aliens (No-to-the-Other).

Although he expresses his distaste and distrust of the Christian religious tradition on the ground of the above nurtured atrocities, Taylor (1990:163-164) does not reject the Christian mythos on two accounts: His familiarity with many religious communi-

ties whose struggles against the systemic distortions are sustained by key elements of the Christian mythos and, secondly, became the power of the Christian mythos itself is too vital a resource to give up. Therefore, Taylor (1990:164) commits himself to a remythologizing – that is, he addresses the need for an empowering mythos that serves an emancipatory christopraxis. To this we must now turn, focusing on the following two questions: Why myth? (3.3), and how are we to proceed with remythologizing when it is christology with which we deal (3.4)?

3.3 Taylor (1990:164-168), supporting especially the anthropologist's William Lessa understanding of myth, elaborates on the value of myth and subsequently indicates how this understanding contributes to the Christian mythos. Mythos, as in the phrase Christian mythos, refers to the distinctive complex of traits constituting the Christian religious 'address' to and amid contemporary situations.

Taylor (1990:164) acknowledges the diverse manner in which the term myth has been employed in theology as well as in other fields. For Taylor, this diversity poses both an opportunity (the flexibility of the term) and a limitation (the hoary problems of interpreting the nature of myth). Because of the abuse of the term myth, Taylor (1990:166) prefers the term mythos.

The *features and contribution of myth* (Taylor 1990:164ff) can be summarized as follows:

Features of myth

- (a) It includes narratives and other literary forms;
- (b) It has a marked etiological character;
- (c) Myths are about the universe and the supernatural worlds (holistic orientation and totalizing function);
- (d) Myth, as knowledge has the status of assumed knowledge ('aura of facticity');
- (e) Myth is a kind of heuristic device ('myth is a scholar's construct'). Taylor (1990:166) however, does not claim that myth is only a construct, on the other hand, myth is not free from the interests and constructive concerns of the scholars of myth.

Contribution to christian mythos (in reverse order)

- (e) Does not refer to a description of the Christian tradition, but tries to be a creative reinterpretation of Christian tradition, in order to respond to the challenges posed by systemic distortions. The Christian mythos weaves creativity into truth and history!
- (d) Myth is a reshaping of Christians' assumed knowledge for purposes of a transformative engagement with the systemic distortions of our period;

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- (c) Myth is a way to say what a Christian vision is of humanity in the totality of all creation, that is, provides a holistic orientation;
 - (b) Myth is concerned with an interpretation of the Christian movement (that is the relation between Jesus and the rise of the Christian movements);
 - (a) In addressing its situation, Christian mythos draws from the salient features of that narrative world as situated in its historical contexts, ritual contexts, and present-day social locations.

Thus, in sum, myth has an empowering function for humans that should not be underestimated. The way of respecting this power is to take up the task of remythologization.

3.4 For Taylor (1990:168-170), the Christian mythos, which is the heart of christology and provides the central meanings for a Christian address, and which engages contemporary situations, needs to be derived not from the individual man Jesus, but from Jesus' life-praxis. Taylor refers to this life-praxis, as a 'sociohistorical dynamic'. The Christian mythos is a mythos of this sociohistorical matrix, the whole life-praxis within which Jesus was a historical part, a necessary participant and contributor, but not the only necessary one. In the words of Taylor (1990:169): 'The empowering mythos we need is not only a mythos displaying, telling, and retelling the story of an individual hero, Jesus. It needs to become, more than the tradition has allowed it to become, a mythos of Jesus and other lives touching and contributing to his as he touches and contributes to theirs'.

Thus, the Christian mythos will be primarily a mythos of a movement, constituted by images and symbols that nurture awareness, practice, and thought of the new transformative life constitutive of that movement. Put differently, Taylor relocates the Christian mythos away from the individual Jesus and applies it to the whole transformative matrix. The question now arises: Wherein then lies the particularity of Christ?

3.5 In his christology Taylor (1990:170-171) shifts our understanding of the particularity of Jesus Christ away from exclusive preoccupation with the man Jesus toward the center of the Christ event, in the full complexity of the ongoing process of experiencing and predicating Christ of Jesus. Taylor (1990:170) states:

Many Christians, and theologians among them, when thinking and writing about Christ, have written and spoken as if Christ were merely the last name of the man Jesus, making little if any distinction between the words Jesus and Christ....The christology I propose here will not only make this distinction; it will also reconnect Christ with Jesus

only through attention to the communal, sociohistorical matrix within which transformative power was experienced in relation to Jesus.

Taylor (1990:171), here following Peter Hodgson's *God in history: Shapes of freedom* (1989), questions the relationship of the person of Jesus to the Gestalt (the dynamic movement of God in history) in Hodgson's exposition. He nevertheless states that his notion of Christ as a sociohistorical movement in history is not far from Hodgson's notion of incarnational presence as gestalt. Taylor refers to this Christ event as an intersubjective, communal dynamic and develops it specifically as reconciliatory emancipation. This calls not only for a knowledge of the context of the early Christian movement but also for a knowledge of the contemporary contexts within and in relation to which christological predication may still occur. Taylor (1990:171-172) proposes the metaphor – Jesus as leaven – in characterizing the relationship of Jesus to the Christ event. In his own words:

Jesus is necessary to the sociohistorical, Christ dynamic...as a leaven is to a set of other necessary ingredients in a whole rising, expanding mixture. To identify the whole configuring, transformative mixture with the leaven would be to make too little of the mixture and too much of the leaven. So also, to identify the Christ dynamic or movement with Jesus both makes too little of that dynamic and too much of Jesus.

(Taylor 1990:172)

Thus, insisting that christology begins with Jesus Christ as intersubjective communal dynamic is to locate its particularity. Taylor (1990:172-175) is more interested in crafting a Christian mythos for cultural-political theology's address of contemporary challenges than in assuaging concerns about what becomes of many traditional notions indebted to formulations at Nicea, Chalcedon, and elsewhere. He nevertheless makes some comments in this regard, indicating the basic transformations of the notions of the person, work and divinity of Christ in a christological revisioning of the Christian mythos. This entails respectively (a) with regard to his person to speak less of the person of Christ and more of Christ as interpersonal; (b) with regard to his work, to see Jesus as a part of a disclosure or transformation more encompassing than the specifics dramatized in his own individual agency, consciousness, or historical activity; (c) with regard to his divinity, to understand divine presence to be operative in a distinctive interpersonal communal praxis and in persons as participants in that communal praxis. This is for Taylor (1990:175) christology's proper subject matter. Next the special character of this dynamic is to be identified.

To this identification of the special character of the Christ dynamic we must now turn.

3.6 In his attempt to formulate a cultural-political theology that addresses the post-modern trilemma from a narrative and ecclesial tradition that is itself implicated in this trilemma, Taylor (1990:175) names the special character of this Christ dynamic 'reconciliatory emancipation'. That is, a dynamic as a freedom-making force that also unifies (emancipation that is reconciliatory). Taylor (1990:175) remarks: 'Freedom making...entails conflict, strife, at times even division, but ultimately the Christ dynamic is one that unifies in the wake that freedom has made'. For Taylor (1990:175-181), both reconciliatory and emancipative elements belong inextricably together in any understanding of the meaning of Christian faith and practice. He states that 'The two elements in reconciliatory emancipation work together to structure the salvific communal dynamic of Christ toward an address of difference and of oppressive forms of domination' (Taylor 1990:176). Referring to the special character of the Christ dynamic as both reconciliatory and emancipative enables the structuring of the tradition's Christ dynamic as addressing the two important prongs of the postmodern trilemma: difference (affirming plurality) and domination (resisting oppression).

In the phrase reconciliatory emancipation, however, Taylor (1990:176) gives primacy (i.e. the basic, most pervasive christological concern and effect) to the emancipative (liberative) element. For Taylor, this primacy is signalled in his casting this element as the substantive noun when naming the Christ dynamic's special character; the reconciliatory element's adjectival status, which signals its secondary significance, does not however deny that it is essential to the special character of the Christ dynamic. Why? Taylor (1990:177-181) identifies several kinds of arguments, drawing from each of them but especially from the last, to support his conviction:

- * Interpretations of Jesus' person and work (especially the notion thereof developed by Peter Hodgson in *New birth of freedom*);
- * The interests of those claiming to be disciples of Jesus, past and present. This kind of argument acknowledges the role played by our own present emancipative interests in privileging a christology of liberation from traditional materials. Thus the emphasis here is not so much on the person and work of Jesus, but on those who interpret him as the Christ. Taylor (1990:178) formulates the crucial point as follows: 'Any christology...is a labour of interpretation, making an existential point';
- * The early movements coalescing around Jesus and his followers in culture and history. The notion of the cultural-political, intersubjective movement is crucial

here. Taylor (1990:179-180) discusses the christologies of two scholars, Edward Schillebeeckx and especially Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who construct their christologies out of a study of these movements. This represents the complex source for a christology of emancipation. Taylor's intention here is not to provide a 'biblical foundation' for a christology of emancipation, but to provide readers of biblical texts with at least some sense that the privileged interest in freedom and emancipation is not simply a projection into the texts, but also, in some meaningful sense, a trait of the texts themselves. Is there however, a place for a biblical reading that supports such a christology?

3.7 Taylor (1990:182-185) argues that the biblical writings themselves manifest a primary interest in the emancipation of the culturally and politically oppressed. Taylor (1990:182ff) develops in this exposition the main lines of the approach that is informed by Severino Croatto's book, *Biblical hermeneutics: Toward a theory of reading as the production of meaning*. The Bible's own privileging of the emancipation of oppressed groups emerges out of analyses of three dimensions of the biblical text, namely historical, structural, and thematic – which suffuses the former two. We must take a closer but cursory look at these three dimensions.

- Historical. The Bible has its origin in the liberation process in which Israel's history is so emphatically embedded. The political overtones of Israel's deliverance cannot be ignored. Furthermore, much of the thematic content of the Hebrew scriptures reflects this origin in the Exodus liberation (for example, The Israelites' notion of Yahweh as the God who delivered them from Egypt, and the introduction to the decalogue);
- Structural. Drawing from semiotics, semantic axes can be identified, that is, recurring themes or motifs structuring a text. Following Croatto, Taylor (1990: 184ff) distinguishes a semantic axis (a constellation of meaning characterized by the recurring motif of God's historic activity of liberating the oppressed) and a kerygmatic axis (the semantic analysis discernible on the level of the text becomes, on the level of the message, a kerygmatic axis, a recurring motif to be proclaimed and acted out). Such action is not only consonant with an emancipatory reading, but invites it!

3.8 Since the emancipative action of Christ comprises a sociohistorical dynamic, Taylor (1990:185-189) sketches some additional distinctive structures through commentary on the term emancipation, understood in the sense of the liberation theologies. Although his christology of reconciliatory emancipation may depart from major methods and claims of certain liberation theologies, Taylor (1990:186) wants

his work to be consonant with the central claims and reorientations demanded by these theologies. For Taylor (1990:186), there are no meanings of the word emancipation (as freedom from and freedom towards, as structured and structuring freedom) that prohibit it from including all the main concerns usually carried by the term liberation. He states: 'Emancipation links the salvific praxis of Christ to action and thought that seeks liberation as not only release from oppressive structures but also a restoration of freedom that weaves together revolution and duration for the creating and sustaining of liberation' (Taylor 1990:189).

There is however a connotation of the term emancipation that may cause concern, namely as freedom for oppressed people that is bestowed by established powers. This connotation need not discourage the use of the term, especially given its other valuable meanings. Taylor (1990:187-189) suggests two important meanings which can be developed further:

- As a people's release from the *patria potestas*, from the powers of the *pater familias*;
- The official or juridical senses of emancipation which can give the term a concrete, sociopolitical character.

3.9 In conclusion, Taylor (1990:189-193) addresses the question of the unavoidable role of ideology. Giving structure to emancipation involves Christian faith and practice in ideological movements and commitments. The real question for a christology of emancipation that structures freedom in particular ways is not whether it is ideological, but the kind of ideologies it chooses to develop for Christian praxis. The willingness to recognize diversity amid one's commitments to emancipation is a mark of what Taylor (1990:190) terms the 'reconciliatory proviso' which qualifies and contributes to emancipation in three ways:

- Its valuation of difference and variety in ever-new communities fosters an openness to a diversity of oppressions;
- The reconciliatory posture that continually celebrates difference, also keeps theologies of emancipation aware of the role of diverse social locations and cultural contexts (in short, it helps to avoid crude generalizations);
- The reconciliatory posture includes an openness toward and communion with 'the other', who is in fact the enemy.

3.10 In sum, reconciliatory emancipation is the name proposed for a revised christology. 'Christ', as an intersubjective, sociohistorical force with this special character, may seem, in the words of Ihab Hassan, a 'rough beast' (Taylor 1990:150),

especially when compared with tradition's allegedly clear and distinct figure of Jesus.

Does the revisioning Christ for reconciliatory emancipation sound all too Utopian? In the words of Taylor (1990:188): 'The real challenge to a christology is not whether it might be labelled Utopian. That is a charge we Christians will always have with us. The real challenge is whether what we aim for is complex and large enough to resist dismissal by a humanity that suffers a complex and enormous need.'

4. THE TICKLE OF ESPERANZA AND THE ROUGH BEAST (OR: BEYOND BETHLEHEM!)

On reading Taylor's book, I was stopped in my theological tracks. My first reaction was that these 'different thoughts are good for me' (Tanita Tikarim), but can they – no, how can they – work for the Christian tradition? To 'move' beyond Bethlehem, I can share with Taylor in the act of 'hermeneutical self-implicature'. But as to the 'how' of the move, we must, in my opinion, linger a moment and not be misled by the inviting tickle of Esperanza!

Taylor stated clearly that Christian theology is not just *logos* about God, but a reflective response to a practice of commitment to the Christ. Taylor's interest is not in the biblical text *per se*, but in its 'forward'. Theology, for Taylor, begins in christopraxis. Furthermore, Taylor convincingly forces us to consider – in the light of the Christian symbols that have consistently reinforced exploitative systems – what resources there are within the appropriation of Christian tradition for supporting resistance rather than dominance. Thus, thought-provokingly, Taylor is implicitly stating that the Bible is the problem! The Bible which, in its own historic development, has legitimated different forms of systemic oppression and domination. Must we then get rid of the Bible? In my opinion, Taylor would have answered this question emphatically in the affirmative, but at the same time, half-heartedly in the negative. In my criticism of Taylor, I would like to concentrate on this question.

Taylor has convincingly shown that certain Christian symbols have reinforced oppression and domination. He therefore expresses his distaste and distrust of the Christian religious tradition, but he does not reject the Christian myths! This is on two accounts. First, he is familiar with many religious communities whose struggles against the system are sustained by key elements of the Christian myths, and, secondly, the power of the Christian myths itself is too vital a resource to give up! This, surely, is not enough! Why and in what sense is the Christian myths too vital a resource to give up? What, then, is the nature of the aforementioned commitment

to Christ? How can the need for an empowering mythos spring only from this feeble excuse for not rejecting the Christian mythos. Is there not something lacking in addressing the postmodern trilemma in which Taylor endeavours to appropriate a Christian tradition, to celebrate plurality and to critique political domination? In my opinion, the problem does not lie in the celebration of plurality or the critique of political domination – which Taylor sees sharply – but with the appropriation of Christian tradition. Furthermore, how can the question ‘Who was Jesus?’ be bracketed? Is this question not fundamental to a commitment to the life-praxis of Jesus? Why Jesus, because from a historical-critical approach to his history, not much remains to be said (cf eg Vorster 1991a, 1991b)? Why specifically Jesus (or not) as leaven. Does this metaphor only mean that we must make more of the interpersonal, intersubjective Christ as a socio-historic dynamic. Does this not also mean that we must make more of the relationship of Jesus to God as the ‘power behind’ the ‘risen leaven’. Is it not true too, that tradition is the ongoing historical endeavour in the ‘forword’ of the text and that the questions posed in earlier ages cannot simply be wiped from the table as ‘metatwaddle’ because the ‘own age’ has become normative over against a previous one (cf Ricoeur 1980). One such question is the question posed by Nicea and Chalcedon – in which Taylor is not very interested – to the person of Jesus Christ and his relationship to God. Without entering this specific debate, I would like to pose a more general question from this angle, namely the question of the ‘more’ of history. In the words of Bryant (1989: 159), ‘To be sure, God is a human symbol. That is not the issue. The issue is whether this symbol mediates something more than our own efforts to make ourselves at home in the universe. And, if so, what that something more is’. What is this something more – which has already been addressed by Nicea and Chalcedon – in one’s commitment to the Christian mythos. Why be committed to this religious mythos and not to another? Would it have made a difference to Taylor’s viewpoint had he not been familiar with this specific mythos? Bryant asks if the Christian mythos mediates something more than our own efforts to make ourselves at home in the universe, or if it criticises the way that others have made themselves ideologically at home in this universe. How can one retain the dimension of the ‘more’, that is, the element of transcendence which (in some way or another) constitutes the religious experience (Proudfoot) of the ‘unseen Reality’ (William James)? It is from this angle that I would like to pose my question to Taylor: Is your revisioned christology ultimately not a postmodern christology – with Christ, but without the ‘son of God’? (That is, the question of transcendence.)

Even if we honestly have to admit that we ‘theorize within a shadow’ (Taylor), seeing only ‘a dim image in a mirror’ (1 Cor 13:12) and consequently contributing to

'keeping the difficulty to live (a Christian life) alive' (Caputo), this surely does not imply that we can part from our inevitable conversation with the constitutive question of the 'more'. Taylor's work and the challenges that address us therein, call, inter alia, for a revisioning of revelation – revelation as a sociohistoric dynamic, and simultaneously as gift and mystery, indicative and imperative, and powerfully embedded in the struggles of our time. If a revisioning of christology (of the 'risen leaven' and the ongoing 'rising leaven!') is not addressed in conjunction with a revisioning of revelation, the constitutive dimension of transcendence for the act of remembering (faith) and imagination (reinterpretation of the Christian mythos) becomes more than just suspicious (cf Veldsman 1992). Put differently, in addressing the postmodern North American trilemma, Taylor creatively addresses the celebration of plurality and criticism of political domination; he convincingly develops the experience of those who confess Jesus as the Christ, but unconvincingly appropriates the Christian tradition (sum of historical remembrance). To join the remembrance celebration of the Esperanzian Christ of a cultural-political theology 'without wedding clothes' (Matthew 22:11-2; omitted in Luke 14:15ff!), might just be premature!

In conclusion, this fascinating and penetrating book echoes a 'bygone' controversial era in the German theological history. It was a controversial era which centred around the figure of the New Testament scholar of Marburg, namely Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). I am emphatically not suggesting – the differences are too enormous! – that Taylor follows Bultmann in addressing the situation in North America. What I would like to suggest, however, is – although Taylor and Bultmann have their respective styles and content – their basic convictions with regard to the understanding and role of a christology compare more than favourably. Compare, for example, the introduction by Rudolf Bultmann (1984:1-2) to his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, in which he made the following 'controversial' statement as far back as in 1948:

Die Verkündigung Jesu gehört zu den Voraussetzungen der Theologie des Neuen Testaments und ist nicht ein Teil dieser selbst. Denn die Theologie des Neuen Testaments besteht in der Entfaltung der Gedanken, in denen der christliche Glaube sich seines Gegenstandes, seines Grundes und seiner Konsequenzen versichert. Christlichen Glaube aber gibt es erst, seit es ein christliches Kerygma gibt, d.h. ein Kerygma, das Jesus Christus als Gottes eschatologische Heilstat verkündigt, und zwar Jesus Christus, den Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen. Das geschieht erst im Kerygma der Urgemeinde, nicht schon in der Verkündigung des geschichtlichen Jesus, wengleich die

Gemeinde in den Bericht über diese vielfach Motive ihres eigenen Kerygmas eingetragen hat.

With regard to the relationship of Jesus to Christ, Taylor shares Bultmann's fundamental conviction. Both Bultmann and Taylor addressed from their respective christologies the 'forward' of their respective historical situations, formulated as an existential 'cry' against disillusioned existence (thus Bultmann, making use of Heideggerian terminology and following especially Wilhelm Herrmann) and as an existential 'protest' against domination and oppression (thus Taylor, making use of cultural-political theories). However, whereas Bultmann tries to keep the transcendent 'Begründung' of his christology clearly intact ('Eingreifung Gottes, Gottes Heilstat in Christus'), Taylor shrouds his 'Begründung'. Whereas Bultmann accentuates the *Entscheidung* character (commitment) as constitutive of 'being a Christian', Taylor (1990:163-164) merely confesses to his familiarity with religious communities and the power of the Christian mythos. Apart from other criticisms which can be directed at Bultmann from Taylor's cultural-political theology, Taylor's 'shrouding' of the *Begründung* which constitutes the sum of remembrance in history, in my opinion, is not enough!

Only by a revisioning of revelation and the implied (critical) commitment to the Christian tradition, constituted by the history of Israel, the history of Jesus Christ and the movements variously bound up with the figure of Jesus that gave birth to the Christian church, can we address the thought-provoking challenges of the Esperanzian Christ of a cultural-political theology and its implications. These challenges are to appropriate a Christian tradition, to celebrate plurality and to critique political domination; only then can we continue to write and to live as 'Mensen als verhaal van God' (Schillebeeckx) in critical commemorative commitment to the 'rough beast' – he who once said: 'this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor 11:24).

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