

THE RELEVANCE OF CHRISTOLOGY TODAY

Abstract of Fr. Paul Verghese's Paper

1. Certain schools of contemporary Protestant Christology reveal an inner contradiction precisely because they fail or refuse to relate the divinity and humanity of Christ in an adequate manner, either through not doing justice to the divine hypostasis of the logos who provides the true identity of the man Jesus or through a kerygmatic docetism which seeks to dissociate the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history.
2. The intellectual weakness of these approaches is being revealed within these liberal Protestant Christological schools. They may appear to be very relevant to a contemporary world, but this appearance of relevance is at the cost of ignoring the fact of the divine hypostasis in traditional Christology. Relevance at the expense of truth becomes irrelevant.
3. I submit that both the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Incarnation are the two central mysteries of the Christian faith, and are mysteries precisely because they elude our conceptual grasp. In this sense Chalcedon does not resolve the Christological problem any more than the earlier tradition was able to, or even as much as Severus of Antioch was able to do later. The two mysteries may have been stated by our fathers in terminology that has become archaic, but we have to hold to these early formulae and try to understand them in the sense in which the Fathers intended them. It is a betrayal of the Christian faith to try to resolve them in terms which deny one of the two terms which have to be held in tension with each other within the paradox. Secular Christologies too easily resolve the paradox by ignoring the trans - spatio - temporal aspect.
4. In view of this essentially trans-logical structure of the two central mysteries, any attempt to resolve them in terms of conceptual formulae is bound to fail. The only legitimate way to adhere to the truth of God in Christ is through the Eucharist, which is itself a trans-temporal event, and makes possible the transcendence of space and time in history. A non-Eucharistic Christology is dangerously misleading, for it is in the Eucharist that we experience both the Incarnation and the meeting with the Holy Trinity, and not in our Christological formulations.
5. The intellectual-ethical orientation of western Christianity needs therefore the corrective of a Eucharistic orientation to "doctrine" but the Eucharistic orientation of the Eastern tradition if it is unrelated to the intellectual-ethical can be just as dangerously misleading.
6. If the two-natures Christology of Chalcedon is understood in an asymmetrical sense, it can be regarded as faithful to the tradition of the church. But it still fails to do justice to the mystery of the unity of the person of Christ; it affirms unity primarily at the level of the hypostasis, at which level there is after all only one hypostasis and therefore no question of disunity. The question of unity becomes crucial at the level of the natures, for we do not think in terms of a divine hypostasis and a human hypostasis coming together any way. Unity has to be affirmed at the level of nature for we do talk of divine nature and human nature, but not of divine hypostasis and human hypostasis. At that level the Chalcedonian formula insists on duality, qualified of course by two of the four adverbs. We insist that the unity is in the one hypostasis, as well as in the one

united divine-human nature of that hypostasis. And if our own nature is to be made divine by participation, it is essential that the two natures become one (theosis)

7. The terminological problem has been adduced by certain Greek scholars to insist that *hypostasis* and *physis* are interchangeable terms in St. Cyril, and that when he says one *physis*, he means one *hypostasis*. This has not been demonstrated and cannot be accepted. Cyril and Severus knew as much Greek as most Greeks and cannot be accused of not knowing the languages adequately.

8. We cannot get rid of this terminology without finding adequate substitutes in which to guard the mystery. This we have not yet been able to do.