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The Cosmic Christ in the Early Fathers

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At the beginning of the Christian era, both in Hellenistic philosophy and in Semitic thought, the concept of Logos or *Dabar* occupied a prominent place in the minds of thinking men. To the former, Logos stood for reason, thought, intelligibility; it gave expression to a philosophical ideal and, not unlike 'Science' in the nineteenth century West, served as a slogan to the intelligentsia. For the latter, and more precisely in O.T. literature, *Dabar* meant a dynamic divine attribute, by which the God of the Covenant intervenes in the history of his chosen people in works and words. In the mind of the Hellenistic philosopher, Logos represented a principle of intelligibility, immanent to the world; to the pious Jew, it carried Yahweh's personal manifestation and revelation. Both, however, were at one in thinking of the Logos as in itself impersonal. Thus, when St. John, in both his Gospel and other writings, thought and wrote of the man Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God, this must have seemed a rather revolutionary innovation. Why he called Christ the Logos is not clear to N.T. exegesis even today; it is likely, however, that St. John meant to emphasize the fact that in Christ's person the revelatory function of the O.T. *Dabar Yahweh* had been fully realized. But that he did so call Christ was an event of immense significance for Christianity, one which was to give a definite orientation to centuries of theological thinking on the Son of God. The Logos of the Christians is a person and is a divine person: this truth became the core of the Christian message, often challenged by outsiders, yet never denied by those who shared the faith of the Church. This is not to suggest that all the implications of John 1:14 were clearly perceived from the start. We all know that it took centuries to bring these out: beyond the economy of the manifestation of the Logos, there is—but this had to be unveiled progressively—the theology of his immanent procession; the eternal generation, if truly declared in the incarnation, must yet be clearly distinguished from it. Long struggles were involved in this process; that they have not been in vain is borne out by the clear formulation arrived at in the Council of Nicaea: the Logos is consubstantial with the Father.

But Christian thinking concerning the dispensation of the Logos could not be put off till decisive formulas were reached as regards his eternal reality. Christianity had to meet the challenge of other doctrines. Today we prefer to say that a dialogue was opened with human wisdom outside the Church. This forced Christianity to define itself in relation to the partners it encountered. In the early centuries, much of this dialogue took the form of a Logos theology. The Logos-idea was in the air; the Christian Logos had to be defined in relation to its counterparts. As a matter of fact, with all the originality of his personal character, the Logos in the mind of the early Fathers did none the less exercise the functions which Hellenism attributed to their impersonal Logos. Was he not God's immanent thought? And, as such, did he not sustain the comparison with the Platonic world of ideas or, again, with the soul of the world? Other questions, too, were asked, which were even more searching. St. Paul had spoken of Christ's cosmic significance; he had conceived his influence as extending through concentric circles beyond the sphere of the Church even to the limits of the universe. His was a theology of the cosmic Christ. How, then, did the Logos exercise this universal cosmic function? And, if one passed from the consideration of the cosmos to that of the universe of man, did the eternal Logos manifest himself to all men, or was knowledge of him confined to the Judaeo-Christian tradition? Did men before and outside this tradition partake of him, or did only those who received him when he came into the world? The sages of old had meditated on a Logos: was *He, the* Logos, however hidden and unknown, the object of their contemplation?

The questions were mighty ones; they raised many problems, to which the Fathers did turn their attention, even though often with an outlook and always with mental categories different from ours. Creation and history, revelation and incarnation, Christianity, religions and philosophy, nature and the supernatural: all these important theological issues were one way or another involved in the Logos-theology. In short, the Logos-theology seems to be the early version of a theology of history. And as such it keeps its significance for us today. Or, should I say that it is taking new significance for us today? Perhaps I should, for two reasons. First, Christian theology today more universally than yesterday centres on the history of salvation and finds there its inner articulation. Secondly, Christianity is once again in a state of dialogue with the world. Once again we are asked to define Christ and Christianity in terms of their meaning for the world at large. To which I should add that the Church today is better prepared than it has been to do this with a broad outlook and an open mind. It should be clear, then, that the value of the Logos-theology is not purely academic; it has practical significance. The question which was asked then is that which even today we

are asked to answer: what does Christ mean to the world? What do you Christians say that you are?

Not all the Fathers shared the same approach to this question nor did they all give the same answer. There were those who condemned the world to obscurity till the light of the incarnate Word dawned upon it: for them, prior to and outside the Judaeo-Christian fold, divine truth remained hidden from men. There were those who, while admitting that divine truth was found outside the fold, were yet unwilling to ascribe it to any agency other than the historical revelation. Fanciful chronological computations were, if the need arose, resorted to in order better to vindicate the thesis of pagan plagiarism from Christianity. Or else the wise men of Greece were supposed to have borrowed from Jewish tradition; so, for instance, Plato or Socrates. Or again, as a last resort, a primitive tradition was invoked, remnants of which, it was alleged, having been handed down through the ages, could be found among the nations. But there were others still, who approached the problem with a broad mind and laid down the foundation for a true theology of history. They distinguished successive ages of the universe; these they understood to be the successive stages in the self-manifestation of the divine Logos. From the beginning the eternal Son was at work in the cosmos, even though the mystery of his self-disclosure was to pass through various economies before culminating in the incarnation. It is with these theologians whom I believe to be eminently actual that I am concerned here. I will limit myself to the second century, and to its greatest representatives: Justin, the philosopher, the most important of the Greek apologists; Irenaeus who, while very distrustful of what he considered futile speculation, became the founder of the theology of history; and in Alexandria, where systematic theology was born, Clement, the first speculator. All these shared a common outlook. I will, however, treat them separately, so as better to point out their respective contributions.

ST. JUSTIN AND THE LOGOS-SOWER

Being confronted with the philosophies of his time, Justin was led to organize what may well be called the first Christian synthesis of the universe, in which he stresses the cosmological function of the Logos. In fact, in Justin's writings, Logos designates the Son precisely in his cosmological function, viz. in his relation to the cosmos. The divine efficacy from which the world proceeds is concentrated in him. He is the *dynamis* of God, an energetic Word (*λογικη δυναμις*), the creator and organizer of the cosmos. Characteristically Justin refers the term *χριστος*, not to the priestly mission of Christ the man, but more fundamentally to the creative and organizing function of the Logos:

The Son of God, who alone is properly called Son, the Word who was with him and was begotten before all things, when in the beginning he (God the Father) created and arranged (ἐκοσμησε) all things through him, is called Christ, because he was anointed and because God the Father arranged all things of creation through him (2 Apol. 6:3).

One is made to think of the Platonic soul of the world. The difference of course is obvious, for Justin speaks of the person of the divine Word; yet, on the other hand, all the cosmological functions of God, all his interventions in the world, are attributed precisely to the Logos.

The cosmological function of the Logos is, I believe, the foundation for Justin's theology of revelation. The Father acts through the Son; all divine manifestations in the world take place through him. This, which is true of the divine act of creation, remains true where God's personal manifestation to men is concerned:

Christ is the first-begotten of God, his Word of whom all mankind partakes (μετέχειν) (this is what we have been taught and said). Those who have lived by the Word are Christians, even though they have been considered atheists: such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them; and among the foreigners, Abraham, Elias, Ananias, Azarias, Mishael, and many others whose deeds or names we now forbear to enumerate, for we think it would be too long. So also they who lived before Christ and did not live by the Word were useless men, enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who did live by the Word. But those who have lived by the Word and still do are Christians, and are fearless and untroubled (1 Apol. 46:1-4).

A text such as this brings us straight to the heart of the matter. It is not, however, an isolated occurrence in Justin's writings. I will let Justin speak for himself by quoting from the two Apologies:

The followers of the Stoic teaching were praiseworthy in their ethics; so were the poets in some respects, for the seed (σπέρμα) of the Logos is implanted in all mankind (2 Apol. 8:1).

Our teachings are more noble than all human teaching, because in Christ, we have the entire Logos, who has appeared for our sakes, body, logos and soul. Everything that the philosophers and legislators discovered and expressed well, they accomplished through their discovery and contemplation of some part (κατὰ μέρος) of the Logos. But since they did not know the entire Logos who is Christ, they often contradicted themselves (2 Apol. 10:1-3).

The teachings of Plato are not foreign to those of Christ, but they are not in every way similar ; neither are those of other writers, the Stoics, the poets, and the historians. For each one of them, seeing partially what is related to the divine Word and sown by him (τῶν σπερματικῶν θεοῦ λόγου), spoke well ; but, by contradicting themselves in important matters, they show that they did not possess a higher wisdom and an indisputable knowledge (2 Apol. 13:2-3).

Christ, of whom Socrates has had partial (ἀπὸ μέρους) knowledge (for he was and is the Word who is in every person (ὁ ἐν πάντι ὄν) and who predicted things to come first through the prophets and then in person when he assumed our human nature and feelings, and taught us these doctrines), convinced not only the philosophers and scholars, but also workmen and men wholly uneducated, who all scorned glory and fear and death ; for he was the *dynamis* of the ineffable Father, not a product of human reason (λόγος) (2 Apol. 10:8).

Whatever all men have uttered aright is the property of us Christians. For we worship and love next to God the Logos, which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since it was even for us that he became man, that he might be a partaker of our sufferings and bring us healing. For all writers, through the implanted seed (σπερά) of the Logos which was engrafted in them, were able to see the truth darkly (ἀμυδρώς). But the seed of something and its imitation, given in proportion to one's capacity, are one thing ; the thing itself, which is shared and imitated according to his grace, is quite another (2 Apol. 13:4-6).

If we try to put some order in the ideas, Justin's thought may be summarized in four points :

- (1) There exist three degrees of religious knowledge: that proper to the heathen, the Jew and the Christian ;
- (2) Of all religious knowledge in its different degrees, the Logos is the unique source: all truth is Christian, i.e. comes from the Logos ;
- (3) The inequality between the various degrees of religious knowledge corresponds to various degrees of participation in the Logos: extending to the whole cosmos and to all men, the intervention of the Logos in Israel becomes more decisive ; it is complete only in Christ's advent ;
- (4) All men who have known the truth and lived righteously are Christians, for, and in as far as, all have partaken of, and lived according to, the Logos who is all truth.

The key to the whole system is in differentiated participation of the Logos: all men share in him, but while others have received from him partially (ἀπο μέρους), we to whom the Logos

revealed himself in his incarnation have been blessed with his complete manifestation. In all men a seed of the Logos (*σπέρμα του λογου*) may be found, for the Logos-sower (*σπέρμα-τικός λογος*) sows in all; yet to us only the entirety of the Logos has been made manifest. The expressions of Justin must not be emptied of their true meaning. The Logos which he attributes to all men is not our modern natural reason, but a participation in the person of the Word, from whom all truth, however partial and uncertain, is derived: that of which all have partaken is 'the *dynamis* of the ineffable Father, not just a product of human reason' (2 Apol. 10:8). Danielou writes pointedly: 'There is no distinction for him (Justin) between an order of natural truth as object of reason and an order of supernatural truth as object of revelation. But there exist an obscure knowledge and a clear knowledge of the Logos who alone is truth.'¹

The implications of the texts quoted are evident: all possession of religious truth as well as all righteous conduct come to all men through a personal manifestation of the eternal Word. We may ask if this is not, down to the very expression, the theology of 'anonymous Christianity', even eighteen centuries before K. Rahner. Christianity exists beyond its visible boundaries and prior to its historical appearance, but up to the incarnation, it is fragmentary, hidden, even mixed with error, and ambiguous.

ST. IRENAEUS AND THE WORD OF REVELATION

'Down to the theologians of the "redemptive history" school in the nineteenth century . . .—so writes O. Cullmann in *Christ and Time*—'there has scarcely been another theologian who has recognized so clearly as did Irenaeus that the Christian proclamation stands or falls with the redemptive history, that this historical work of Jesus Christ as Redeemer forms the mid-point of a line which leads from the O.T. to the return of Christ.'² It is true: Irenaeus is the founder of the theology of history. As a matter of fact, not only did he bring out the historical significance of the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, but he also integrated the pre-Mosaic dispensation in the history of salvation, thus making room for a salvific value of pre-Biblical religions. For this theology, Justin had laid the foundation; Irenaeus would organize it systematically. This he did with his theology of the Logos-revelation:

Since he who works all in all is God, although in his greatness and nature invisible and indescribable for his own creatures, he is by no means unknown. For, all his creatures learn through his Word that there is one God the

¹ J. Danielou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, p. 46.

² O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, pp. 56-57.

Father who contains all things and gives them their existence. As it is written in the Gospel: No one has ever seen God; but God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made him known. And the Son of the Father declares him from the beginning, since he has been with the Father from the beginning, and has given the visions of prophecy, the different gifts and his own ministrations, and all that makes for the Father's glory, in a logical and methodological manner, to the human race at the proper time and for their profit . . . And therefore the Word was made the steward of paternal grace for the advantage of men, on whose account he made such great dispensations, revealing God to men and presenting men to God. He also preserved the invisibility of the Father lest man should ever come to despise God, and in order that he should always have a goal for his progress. But he made God visible to man by many methods lest man, entirely falling away from God, should cease to exist. For, a living man is the glory of God; but the vision of God is the life of man. And if God's manifestation through creation gives life to all living creatures, how much more does the manifestation of the Father through the Word give life to those who see God? (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20, 6-7).

This is a truly admirable text, where the whole theology of Irenaeus is contained in compact form: the divine philanthropy which creates man, that he may live; the economy of the divine manifestations through the Logos who, present to creation from the beginning, reveals the Father progressively. The fundamental principle of this theology is: *Visibile Patris Filius*. The Son is that which is visible of the Father. Understand not precisely the visible sacramental sign—for Irenaeus is not thinking only of the incarnate Logos—but more generally the manifestation, visible or invisible, the revelation, the knowability of the Father. In himself, the Father is and remains through all economies the unknown; but he is manifested in the Son: *Invisibile etenim Filii Pater, visibile autem Patris Filius* (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 6, 6). Irenaeus, never tired of commenting on John 1:18 and on the 'Johannine' logion of Matthew (11:27) (*see, for instance, Adv. Haer.*, IV, 6-7), explained that all divine manifestations take place through the Logos:

Through the Son who is in the Father and has in him the Father, God-he-who-is manifested himself, the Father giving witness to the Son and the Son announcing the Father (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 6, 2).

What are those divine manifestations? The first is creation itself. Justin had explained the cosmological function of the Logos; Irenaeus draws the conclusions. The knowledge of God which men can reach through the cosmos is already on his part a response to a revelation of the Logos, for creation is itself a

divine manifestation: *per conditionem ostensio Dei* (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20, 7), and all divine manifestations are Logos-manifestations:

The Son administers all things, from the beginning to the end, in service of the Father, and without him nobody can know the Father. For knowledge of the Father is the Son (*agnitio enim Patris Filius*), and knowledge of the Son comes from the Father and is revealed through the Son. Therefore the Lord said: No one knows the Son but the Father, nor the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son reveals him (*revelaverit*). This form *revelaverit* does not refer only to the future—as if the Word had only then begun to manifest the Father, when he was born from Mary—but it refers to all times. For, from the beginning is the Son with his creatures and reveals the Father to all those the Father wills, and when he wills and how he wills. And for this reason there is in all things and through all things one God, the Father, and one Word, and one Son, and one Spirit, and one salvation for all those who believe in him (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 6, 7).

This doctrine seems to upset our theological categories and we might be tempted to dismiss it lightly. For, where we prefer to distinguish two orders of divine manifestations, call them cosmic and historical, Irenaeus finds in the order of creation itself a historical and personal manifestation of the Logos. In his view, man's knowledge of God is already a response to a personal divine initiative. This, I think, means that for Irenaeus to know God is to know him as a person on a very existential level. The knowledge of God which he considers does not consist in proving, by a scientific process in which I am not personally involved, the existence of a first principle of being, but in acknowledging God as the infinite person who graciously addresses himself to me. In this sense knowledge of God always supposes a personal encounter with him. In Irenaeus' view, such an encounter, which in every event is an encounter with the Logos, is made possible through creation; for, through it the Logos speaks to man. In other words, the order of creation itself is part of God's historical and personal manifestation.

At this first stage of the divine dispensation, the universality of the Word's revealing function is manifest:

Since the Father is invisible, it is his Son, who leans upon his breast, that reveals him to all. Therefore he is known (only) by those who receive this revelation from the Son (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 11, 6).

We, with our theological habits, might suppose that the knowledge of the Father which is intended here is distinct from that which we call natural knowledge. Not so, it seems, for Irenaeus, for precisely the only knowledge of God he seems to know of is this knowledge of the Father through the Son:

The Father revealed himself to everybody, since he made his Word visible to all. And, inversely, the Word showed to everybody the Father and the Son, since he was seen by all. Just therefore is the divine judgement upon those who, though they had equally seen, did not equally believe. For, indeed, through the work of creation the Word reveals God the Creator; and through the orderly universe (*mundus*, for *κοσμος*) he reveals the Lord, disposer of the universe; and through that which is moulded, the artisan who moulded it; and through the Son, the Father who generated the Son (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 6, 5-6).

On this issue, the latest study on Irenaeus' theology of revelation concludes that 'according to Irenaeus' thought the knowledge of God achieved through the contemplation of the universe cannot be dissociated from the personal revealing activity of the divine Word'.³ One text in particular, if rightly understood, seems to support this interpretation. Speaking of the master and Lord of creation, Irenaeus explains that knowledge of him has been granted to all; this knowledge, however, he explicitly identifies with the knowledge of the Father through the Logos. I quote:

So it was necessary that they recognize their master and know that their creator is the Lord of all. Since his invisible nature is powerful, he grants to all creatures a vivid understanding and comprehension of his most powerful and omnipotent superiority. Hence, though no one knows the Father but the Son, and the Son but the Father, and those to whom the Son reveals (Luke 10:22), they all know this, however, when the Word inherent in the mind (*ratio mentibus infixas*, for *λογος mentibus infixus*) moves them and reveals to them that there is one God, the Lord of all things (*Adv. Haer.*, II, 6, 1).

The order of creation was only the first stage of God's manifestation through the Logos. According to the scheme already developed by St. Justin, the Jewish and Christian dispensations follow after it. Thus, after considering creation, Irenaeus goes on to write:

In a similar way, through the law and the prophets, the Word revealed himself and the Father . . . And through the Word himself made visible and tangible, the Father was shown . . . All saw the Father in the Son (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 6, 6).

Irenaeus is definite in attributing to the Logos God's self-disclosure in the old dispensation. He gives here a theological

³ J. Ochagavía, *Visible Patris Filius. A study of Irenaeus' teaching on revelation and tradition*, p. 77. I owe much to this study in my exposition of Irenaeus' thought.

interpretation which, after him, will become common property of the Fathers. All the O.T. theophanies are applied to the Word: they are theophanies in so far, as they are Logo-phanies. In Irenaeus' own expressions, the Word, or even Jesus Christ, was 'present in', 'descended in', or 'passed through' the O.T. economies; in the theophanies, he was present rehearsing his future coming in the flesh. Again, the words of the prophets are not merely words about Christ, but the words of Christ, and in like manner their actions are 'typological events', types of the things to come.

Here are a few examples. The Word manifested himself already to Adam in the garden:

He would walk round and talk with the man, prefiguring what was to come to pass in the future, how he would become man's fellow, and talk with him, and come among mankind, teaching them justice (*Demonst. Apost. Praed.*, 12).

With Noah he inaugurated the first covenant given to mankind. Let us observe in passing that Irenaeus distinguishes four covenants: *quattuor data sunt testamenta humano generi*, one through Noah, one through Abraham, one through Moses, one through Christ (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 11, 8), but in each the Logos is operative. When Abraham received the divine calling and left everything behind, it was in order to follow the Word of God: *sequebatur Verbum Dei* (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 5, 3); at Mambre, he 'saw what was to come to pass in the future, the Son of God in human form' (*Demonst.*, 44). For Irenaeus, there is no doubt that at Mambre Jesus Christ appeared to Abraham. Of Moses he writes that the Logos 'talked to him, appearing in his presence, as one who talks to his friend' (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20, 9): what in Num. 12:8 and Ex. 33:11 is said of the Lord is here applied to the Logos, who is 'the one who spoke with Moses' (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 15, 3; IV, 5, 2 . . .), the same who 'came into Judaea begotten by God through the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary' (*Demonst.*, 40). Furthermore, not only did the Word speak to Moses, but in the salvific event of Exodus, he was actively present, descending upon us, rehearsing future events:

For in these things our affairs were being rehearsed, the Word of God at the time prefiguring what was to be (*Demonst.*, 46).

In like manner, Moses did not only write about Christ (as John (5:46) states: for it was about me that he wrote), but his words are the very words of Christ: *suos esse sermones, sermones ipsius sunt* (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 2, 3). Uniting in one breath both prophetic words and typological events, Irenaeus sees in each one the action of the Logos:

(The Word of God) was seen by the prophets not only through visions and discourses, but also in certain actions, in order to form beforehand and show anticipatedly through them the future realities (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20, 12).

In both works and words, not only the Logos but Christ, the incarnate Word, was at work in anticipation:

Through his patriarchs and prophets, Christ prefigured and foretold the things to come. He did ahead of time his part in the divine economies, making his heritage get accustomed to obey God, live like pilgrims in the world, follow his Word and express in signs the future realities (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 21, 3).

Mark well the words: 'he did ahead of time his part in the divine economies'. For, this point raises an important problem. The problem is this: the theology of the universal revelatory function of the cosmic Christ, so brilliantly organized by Irenaeus, does it show sufficient awareness of the unique and irreplaceable value of his coming in the flesh? If the history of Israel is already full with the personal interventions of Christ, what comes of the *ἐφ'απαξ*-character of the Christ-event? A theology of history must be judged on how felicitously it combines cosmic revelation with the singularity of the revealer, how it succeeds in harmonizing the universality of God's gracious initiative with the apparent scandal of the once-for-all historical fact. But, precisely, if, in Irenaeus' view, Jesus Christ anticipates in some way his incarnation in the typological events of the O.T., is not the newness of the new dispensation greatly reduced, that very newness which otherwise Irenaeus himself stresses with enthusiasm: *omnem novitatem attulit seipsum afferens* (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 34, 1)? Irenaeus has indeed no doubt that his universal revelatory function makes the Logos present to mankind from the beginning; again, the O.T. logo-phanies are for him authentic anticipations of the Christophany; yet, the human manifestation of Christ which took place once for all in space and in time is in his mind ample guarantee of the newness of historical Christianity. For, if in the old dispensation the Logos in a certain sense was already made visible—visible to the mind, in as far as he is the revelation, the manifestation of the Father: *visibile Patris*—to the eyes of the flesh he became visible only by his advent in the flesh. Irenaeus distinguishes two degrees in the visibility of the Word. Of these, Orbe writes: 'The Word's visibility according to the flesh corresponds to his essential visibility or cognoscibility according to the mind. Both generations, the one *ex Patre Deo* and the other *ex Maria Virgine*, correspond to each other in this respect.'⁴ They correspond to each other in this sense that he, to whose nature it belongs to manifest the Father to the minds of men, once incarnate, demonstrates him to their eyes. Yet, they remain essentially distinct. For, if the Logos from the beginning reveals the Father, he becomes—to use a recent idiom—the sacrament of the encounter with God by his incarnation. The historical Christ is a sacramental logo-phany. The assumption of human flesh constitutes

⁴ A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología de la procesión del Verbo*, p. 407.

the decisive mission of the Son, the climax of the Father's manifestation through the visibility of the Logos.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE COVENANT OF PHILOSOPHY

The first feature which distinguishes Clement's theology of the Word is the emphasis it lays on the term Logos. With his predecessors, Christ was primarily called Son, as he had been in the N.T. itself. In Clement's writings, the term Logos occupies the first place. The basic principle of his Christology remains that of Irenaeus. All personal manifestation of the Father takes place through the Logos:

It is through the Word who proceeds from him that the unknown can be known (*Strom.*, V, 12).

More exactly Clement distinguishes in the Father that which is entirely unknowable, called by the Gnostics the abyss, and that which can be known once manifested in the Son (see *Excerpta*, 23, 5). A significant difference must, however, be mentioned. While Justin and Irenaeus seemed to attribute all knowledge of God to the action of the divine Word, Clement distinguishes two distinct levels. A common, elementary knowledge of God can be acquired through the use of reason (*λογος*, which means here human reason); it is accessible to all men and is called natural:

There always was a natural (*φυσικη*) manifestation of the one almighty God among all right-thinking men (*Strom.*, V, 13).

At another level, the personal action of the Logos introduces man into God's secrets otherwise inaccessible. Clement thus makes distinctions, unknown to his predecessors, which bring him closer to our own theological categories.

Whereto does the influence of the Logos extend? Beyond the boundaries of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, for the pagan world has had its own prophets. Some among the Greeks, under the action of the Logos, have truly prophesied:

The Greeks have spoken under divine motion (*κινουμενοι*) (*Strom.*, VI, 7).

Their philosophy—to be understood in Clement's rich acceptance of the term, for which Christian philosophy stands for Christian truth and practice—and therefore their achievements in human wisdom and their religion witness to a special divine assistance granted them. Philosophers—in the sense just explained—have among the nations a divine mission. They are:

The leaders and masters through whom the working of Providence becomes most manifest, whenever God wants to benefit men by means of culture or of some disposition (*Strom.*, VI, 17).

Philosophy comes from God ; it constitutes for the Greek world a divine economy, parallel, if not in all things equal, to the Jewish economy of the law. Both were designed by God to lead men to Christ :

To the ones, he (the Lord) gave the commandments, to the others philosophy, that the unbeliever may have no excuse. For, by two different processes of advancement, either the Greek or the Jewish, he leads men to the perfection of faith (*Strom.*, VII, 2).

And again :

The *kerygma* has come now in the time appointed. In like manner, the law and the prophets have formally been given to the Jews, and to the Greeks philosophy, that their ears might grow familiar to the *kerygma* (*Strom.*, VI, 6).

More clearly still, philosophy has been to the Greeks a means of salvation given them by God :

Before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for justification . . . For, God is the cause of all good things, of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testaments ; and of others by consequence, as philosophy. Indeed, one can say that philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call them. For, this was a schoolmaster (*ἐπαιδαγωγός*) to bring the Hellenic mind, as the law the Hebrews, to Christ (*Strom.*, I, 5).

Clement has no hesitation to call philosophy a covenant (*διαθήκη*) made by God with men, a stepping-stone (*ὑποβάθρα*) to the philosophy of Christ :

If, as a general rule, all things necessary and profitable to life come to us from God, philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks as a covenant peculiar to them—being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ (*Strom.*, VI, 8).

But, as is the case for the Jewish law itself, the function of philosophy is a passing one. Having prepared men for Christ's coming, it must finally disappear to make room for him : as a lamp loses its *raison d'être* once the sun is up, so, too, philosophy in Christ's advent (*Strom.*, V, 5). Philosophy is a partial knowledge, Christ alone is the whole truth.

I have spoken of philosophy in the Greek world, and yet for Clement the Greek philosophers are not the truly great men whose God-given inspiration served to orientate the nations to Christ. In fact, many among the Greek philosophers have borrowed from others. The authentic guides of mankind are the ancient philosophers who, truly inspired by God, acted upon by the Logos, have taught the nations divine truths. Clement mentions along with others :

The Indian gymnosophists, and other non-Greek philosophers, of whom there are two classes, the Sarmanae and the Brahmins . . . Some, too, of the Indians obey the precepts of Buddha (*Strom.*, I, 15).

This amounts to affirming in so many words, together with the presence of partial Christian truth in Hindu religion, its positive significance in the history of salvation.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

It is time to conclude. I hope to have shown that the second century Logos and cosmic Christ theology is the first version of a recently-discovered dimension of theology which we call theology of history. Characteristically, the attention of the believing Church in the early centuries was turned to this problem long before any attempt was made at declaring the ontological constitution of Christ. The impact which Christ made on the cosmos had first to be expressed; only later would it be justified by a reflection on the mystery of his person.

I have exposed the views of the early representatives of this theology. The same views will be found and further developed, more than two centuries later, in the mature thought of St. Augustine. In his *de Civitate Dei* and elsewhere in the late period of his literary production, Augustine stresses the universal influence of Christ. He proceeds further to the affirmation that the Church itself existed before Christ's coming in the flesh, in fact, from the beginning: *Ecclesia a iusto Abel*. Abel, supposedly the first just man (*primus iustus*), and every just man after him, whatever his historical situation, belongs to Christ and to his Church:

Abel initium fuit civitatis Dei (*Enar. in Ps. 142:3*).

Ecclesia . . . terris non defuit ab initio generis humani, cuius primitiae Abel sanctus est (*Enar. in Ps. 118, Sermo 29:9*).

Congar has shown that a possible shortcoming of this, as of every theology of history, would be to reduce the truly historical, and therefore temporally conditioned and progressive character of God's salvific dispensation.⁵ Two spiritual cities may well have co-existed from the start, yet it must not be forgotten that the city of God has passed through various economies. But precisely, long before Augustine, Irenaeus had distinguished the Word's visibility to the mind from his visibility to the eyes; after him Origen would speak of a 'spiritual descent' (*πνευματικὴ ἐπιδημία*) of the Logos, prior to his coming in the flesh. These expressions and others witness to the Father's awareness of the

⁵ Y. Congar, *Ecclesia ab Abel*, in: *Abhandlungen über Theologie und Kirche*. Festschrift für Karl Adam, p. 86.

fact that Christ's universal influence had all along depended upon and presupposed the historical event of the incarnation. They knew that, even though from the beginning of time the Father, according to his own dispensation, could be reached through the Son, never had the encounter of God with man been so true, so authentic, and finally so human, as since it has passed through and taken place in the flesh of the incarnate Word. Yet, in their mind—and in their terminology—it remained true that Christ, and in a sense Christianity itself, had existed from the beginning. A celebrated passage of Augustine's *Retractationes* affirms it:

The very thing which is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, nor was it absent at the beginning of the human race, until the coming of Christ in the flesh when the true religion which had already existed began to be called Christian. Therefore if I have written: this is the religion which exists in our days, the Christian religion, the meaning is not that it had not existed previously, but that it took the name Christian only later (*Retract.*, I, 13, 3).

Editorial

This number of the *Journal* contains four of the papers read on the theme, 'The Cosmic Christ', at a joint Roman Catholic-Protestant Colloquium, held at Serampore College in December 1965. Two further papers will be published in the October-December number: 'The Cosmic Christ and Other Religions' by J. Bayart, S.J., and 'The Cosmic Christ and the Asian Revolution' by P. Fallon, S.J.

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We welcome as the new Chairman of the Editorial Board of this *Journal* the Rev. S. J. Samartha, Ph.D., Principal of Serampore College.