

## **CONSIDER JESUS**

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *CONSIDER JESUS* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1990),

Johnson deals with the following 9 areas with Jesus' question "who do you say that I am?" She was very thorough and wrote for lay people to understand. Answer to this question will lead us to a certain kind of faith and direction of life. My answer to this question led me to do homeless ministry.

### **I. A LIVING TRADITION**

#### **1. Biblical Christology (First Century A.D.)**

Who do you say that I am? Some of the key answers include:

- Paul - Jesus is the crucified and risen Christ.
- Mark - Jesus is the suffering Messiah
- Matthew - Jesus is the New Moses, teacher of the new law
- Luke - Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, is Savior for all.
- John - Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.

#### **2. Conciliar Christology (Second through Seventh Centuries)**

325 A.D.- The Council of Nicea (Johnson P. 8)

451 A.D.- The Council of Chalcedon (Johnson P. 9)

#### **3. Medieval Christology (Eleventh through Sixteenth Centuries)**

#### **4. Post-Tridentine Christology (Sixteenth through Twentieth Centuries)**

Karl Rahner

#### **5. At the Brink of Renewal (1951)**

### **II. THE HUMANITY OF JESUS**

Argument on who the Jesus and what is his humanity: human nature, divine nature, one person.

### **III. JESUS' SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

Descending Christology

Ascending Christology

### **IV. THE HISTORY OF JESUS**

## V. JESUS CHRIST AND JUSTICE

According to Karl Rahner's analysis, all Christologies can in the end be characterized as belonging to one of two basic types: a salvation history or ascending type, commonly called Christology from below, and a metaphysical or descending type, commonly called Christology from above. The two are not mutually exclusive, and the Church needs both for the full confession of its faith. They are distinct, however, bringing into play different scriptural and doctrinal emphases and different method of thinking (Johnson P. 68).

To illustrate the unbreakable relation between Jesus Christ and social justice in each of these patterns of thinking, Johnson presents the following two key teachings of Catholic Church leaders (Johnson P. 68).

The first wave of Christological renewal is clearly present in the first encyclical of John Paul II on Jesus Christ as redeemer of the human race. He present a descending type of Christology focused primarily on Jesus' redemptive incarnation and its healing effect on the whole human race. His argument stands on the reality of the genuine humanity of Jesus, for by that humanity Jesus is united to every other human being, gifting each of us with a dignity beyond compare which mandates justice for all (Johnson P. 68).

The second wave of renewal in Christology shapes the pastoral letter on peacemaking and economic justice written by the United States Catholic bishops. In these teaching letters the bishops delineate an ascending type of Christology which draws its inspiration from the ministry of the earthly Jesus, culminating in his death and resurrection (Johnson P. 69).

While following different train of thought, however, both approaches are one in appealing to the intrinsic dynamism of the question "Who do you say that I am? which sets believers to following the way of Jesus Christ in care and commitment for the suffering neighbors, and in critique and change of the system which causes that suffering. Both approaches propel the church in the same direction, from the foundation of confessing faith in Jesus Christ to the challenge of action on behalf of justice (Johnson P. 69).

### Descending Christology

This type of Christology has been the predominant one in the course of the Christian tradition. It begins its thinking in heaven with the doctrine of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word of God preexisting from all eternity in unity with the Father and the Spirit. This Christology traces the descent of the eternal Word into this world,-- incarnation, the Word become flesh (Johnson P. 69)

This type of Christology finds its scriptural paradigm in the gospel of John: " In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.. and the Word was made flesh" (John 1:1, 14). True divinity and true humanity in the unity of the one person of Jesus Christ (Johnson P. 70).

Pope John Paul II assumes this descending pattern of Christological thought. He begins with the affirmation that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became a human being: “God entered the history of humanity and, as a human being, became an actor in that history, one of the thousands of millions of human beings but at the same time unique. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin” . . . . We all, then, Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, indeed the whole world, are made into a new creation (Johnson P. 71).

John Paul argues, the church cannot abandon human beings for each one is unbreakably united Christ and enjoys a dignity that he died to restore. Jesus Christ is the way for the church, and that way, the way of God incarnate, leads to human beings. Thus is a dynamic link forged between belief in the incarnate Redeemer and concern for the public issue which affect the well-being of billions of persons (Johnson P. 72).

John Paul goes on in this encyclical to discuss the military arms race going on at the expense of the poor of the world; nuclear weapons which make possible such a terrible end; burgeoning technology which does not respect human needs; the starvation of millions in the face of the consumerism of others; the need for transformation of structures of economic life; exploitation and pollution of the planet which in the end will leave us with no home at all; torture, terrorism, violation of human rights, and discrimination of all kinds; disrespect for the unborn; imperialism and political domination (Johnson P. 73).

Here, then, is one example of a descending Christology which issues in action on behalf of justice as a constitutive element of faith itself. It begins in heaven, traces descent of the eternal Son of God into the world, realizes the redemptive effect this has had on the dignity of each person and on all of the human race together, and then follows the Redeemer along the way of crucified love in working out the fulfillment of this redemption in the concrete circumstances of our communal life. As John Paul II put it:

*The redemption of the world –this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed – is at its deepest root the fullness of justice in a human heart, the heart of the first-born Son, in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings – called to grace, called to love”* (Johnson P. 73)

### **Ascending Christology**

This type of Christology, actually the earliest to develop, has recently been rediscovered in the church. It begins its thinking on earth, with the memory of Jesus of Nazareth who lived a genuinely free, historical life. It tells the story of his compassionate ministry and of his impact on the women and men who followed him. This Christology traces the ascent of Jesus to the One he called Abba, fascinated with the dialectical mystery of death and resurrection –ugly, abandoned, human death and God’s sheer gift of new, transformed life. . . . As crucified Lord of history, he reveals the compassion and victory of God ad, through the power of his Spirit, continued to free human beings from bondage to the powers of this age, chief among them sin and death.

Thus, the genuine ascent of the ministering-crucified-risen Jesus into the life of God is a redemptive event par excellence. Jesus Christ's historical life which issued in our redemption is the abiding basis and necessary criterion for all proclamations of his ultimate identity. This pattern of Christology finds its scriptural paradigm in the synoptic gospel of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. It is usually developed in theology with much attention to the historical circumstances of the ministry and destiny of Jesus, to his relation with his *Abba* revealed therein, and to the presence of his Spirit in the world (Johnson P. 74).

In their pastoral letters on peace and on economic justice, the Catholic bishops of the United States make attractive use of this ascending pattern of Christology in working out a theology of social justice. They begin in each case by remembering telling characteristics of the historical person and ministry of Jesus. .. At the center of the story is the symbol of the reign of God. This extraordinary biblical symbol evokes the final age when the Spirit will be poured out, when creation will be made whole, when the Spirit filled servant of God will appear to bring forth justice to the nations, when justice will dwell in the land, when there will no more war, when the lion will lie down with the lamb, when justice and peace shall kiss – in other words, when God's will is finally done on earth as it is in heaven and the well-being and salvation of every human person and of all creation is secured (Johnson P. 74-75).

The story of Jesus is situated within the context of the Jewish tradition's tenacious hope for the coming of this reign of God. His prophetic ministry began with an announcement of the good news that was near: "The reign of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). In this new reality, as Jesus saw it, the longings of the "little ones" of the world are especially fulfilled; the poor are included; mourners are comforted; those who hunger and thirst for justice are satisfied; the merciful, the pure in heart, those who have been persecuted are blessed of God, the peacemakers are called children of God (Mt. 5:3-10) (Johnson P. 75).

The story picks up tempo as the bishops remember that Jesus' words did not remain an abstract ideal, but in his own behavior he powerfully enacted the values of the reign of God. He welcomed all who came to him, excluding no one on the basis of their status or previous behavior. He healed people's bodies and spirits, releasing them from the demons which possessed them to life in community. He forgave sins, restoring people to peace with themselves, with one another and with God. "In doing these things," according to the bishop's interpretation, "he made the tender mercy of God present in a world which knew violence, oppression and injustice." Jesus himself was the person in whom the reign of God was dawning (Johnson P. 75-76).

The bishops are very clear about the fact that the death of Jesus historically was no accident. His preaching and enacting of the coming reign of God posed a threat to the established givens of religious and civil power. In love and fidelity to the compassionate will of his *Abba*, Jesus would not desist.

The price he paid was his life: “Jesus message and his actions were dangerous ones in his time, and they led to his death – a cruel and viciously inflicted death, a criminal’s death (Gal. 3:13)”. He lived out fidelity to the reign of God to the end, forgiving even those who were killing him (Johnson P. 76).

Resurrection: As Jesus had proclaimed, the loving power of God is stronger even than death. God raised the crucified Jesus to life. The resurrection is the strongest possible sign that God really can be trusted to have the last word, which is life (Johnson P. 76).

Discipleship: The bishops make a move crucial for understanding the mission of the church to be inclusive of the concerns of social justice. They characterize the church as the community of believers, founded on the call to follow Jesus, which means imitating the pattern of his life, continuing the proclamation and enactment of the reign of God. As with John Paul II, but in a different context, the operative category for the identity of the Church is that of discipleship, or following the way of Jesus. .. To be disciple, means to put one’s feet in the footsteps of Jesus and, in the power of his Spirit, to continue in one’s own historical time and place his mission of announcing and singing the coming of the reign of God. Together as church, the community of disciples is in a unique way called to be instruments of the reign of God in history. *Since peace and justice are among the most powerful signs of the reign of God present in this world, it belongs to the essential mission of the church to make these realities more visible in our time, so marked by oppression, violence, injustice, and threat of total destruction.* Following Jesus on this way may well cost disciples their lives. But the community of disciples must go on witnessing throughout the conflicts of history, drawing courage from their memory of Jesus, from their experience of his coming presence in the Spirit, and from the hope in the final victory of the coming reign of God. *The bishops declared the following: Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is an requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus. The content and context of our peacemaking is set not by some political agenda or ideological program, but by the teaching of his Church (Johnson P. 77).*

Johnson asserts that if we are truly following our risen Lord, we are compelled to be involved in critical peacemaking and economic issues where the *shalom* and well-being of all peoples, and of the whole earth, are at stake. Here, then, are examples of a **Christology from below** which issue in the realization that action on behalf of justice is a constitute dimension of faith. It begins its thinking on earth with the gospel memory of the life Jesus, and finds there the basis for the discernment of how the risen Christ is operative in the world today. **The paradigmatic role of Jesus on earth becomes a source of light and energy fueling the church’s own mission in the world** (Johnson P. 78).

### **Outcome: Justice**

While descending Christology is more philosophical in character and ascending Christology more historically oriented, not only are they not mutually exclusive, but both are needed for the fullness of the church’s faith confession. In both, however, the bottom line is the insight that the church is gifted with the Spirit of Christ and called to discipleship with a mission patterned on the way of Jesus.

In both types of Christology, the final moral imperative is the same: action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are constitutive dimensions of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race (Johnson P. 79).

Johnson comments that studies show that many Catholics in the United States are resisting the leadership of the pope and bishops in this direction, it may well be that the Christological emphasis in preaching, religious education, and adult formation programs needs to be revitalized so that the intrinsic and dynamic link between Christology and social justice can emerge and grasp the hearts of believers (Johnson P. 80).

I would say that the trend of the protestant Christians seems to be same as Catholics. Perhaps the reason for it might be same as Johnson described.

## VI. LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY

### Characteristics

1). The context of liberation theology is the **recognition of the suffering** of a particular oppressed group. While frequently intertwined, oppressions differ – poverty, political disfranchisement, patriarchy, apartheid, etc. – so that not all liberation theology is the same. Individuals suffer, but liberation theology is generated when community is formed. Coming together in faith, people become conscious of their situation, pray, study the scriptures, and seek actions with will begin to change things for the better. It is basically a people's theology coming from the grass roots (Johnson P. 84).

The bishops of Latin America, at the Medellin conference in 1968, wrote: "The misery that besets large masses of human beings in all our countries is described in many studies. that misery, as a collective fact, expresses itself as injustice which cried to the heavens." The lack of food, shelter, education, and medical care, especially for untold numbers of children, contrasts with what is necessary for a decent human life and creates a climate of collective anguish which makes us genuinely scandalized. This sense of outrage is a religious experience. Impelling, the judgment is that the situation is against the will of the living God, it awakens a strong moral imperative in the Christian conscience to resist. Letting it go on is to have complicity in the wrongness (Johnson P. 85).

2). Critical action done reflectively: When people who are engaged in action on behalf of justice come together to pray and talk about their situation and reflected on God in relation to what is going on, what emerges is liberation theology. Thought and action mutually feed each other (Johnson P. 85).

3). Liberation theology is highly conscious of the social nature of human existence. Relatedness to one another is very important concept. Liberation theologians think of sin as individual act and also think of it collectively, socially, in structural terms. Similarly, the grace of God forgives individual sin and unites each person with God; but it not only transforms us one by one but also social, embedded in structures, and able to transform them. There is a great consciousness of this sociality of human existence in liberation theology (Johnson P. 85 -86).

4). Liberation theology makes extensive use of social analysis. This approach utilizes social, political, economic, and anthropological studies which lay bare the structures of the social situation. The situation is analyzed to identify the forces that are causing the suffering. What are the dynamics of a system of privilege for the few which causes misery for the many? Who is benefiting from the way things are arranged? Who benefits from any particular theological interpretation? Being done in a social situation of oppression, it names evils and perceives that structures must change. This means it is a conflictual theology, for the powerful are fiercely protective of their own privileges (Johnson P. 86).

5). The goal of liberation theology includes the change of unjust situation and release of captives and lifting of misery for actual people here and now (Johnson P. 86-87).

6). The vision of liberation theology is that the reign of God, already arriving. We do not have to wait until the last day for God to wipe all tears away from people's faces. The new heaven and new earth should already be beginning here and now (Johnson P. 87)).

The more integrated vision proposed by Vatican II and strongly adopted by liberation theology sees that this world also matters, for it mediates to us in a sacramental way the goodness of God. **Our ultimate salvation can be tasted in advance** in the blessings of this world. God's saving will is violated when oppressive situations grind people down; but God's saving will appears wherever justice and peace gain a foothold. As the last American bishops said at Medellin: "All liberation is an anticipation of the complete redemption brought by Christ." Therefore, **no act of lifting oppression, however small, is divorced from the final redemption** (Johnson P. 87).

### **Method ( P. 88).**

#### **Jesus Christ**

**First step: "Who do you say that I am?"** In Latin American liberation theology the question begins to be answered by bringing into **focus the poverty of millions of people**. The question arises: Is it God's will that these people be deprived of livelihood, that they be malnourished, that children die, that there be inadequate education, no medical benefits, no shelter for millions of people? **Is this what God desires?** No it is wrong. At this point, social analysis starts to uncover economic and political structures wherein the majority of people are landless while a small minority of people own all the land. The land itself is worked by the many for the benefit of the few. This in itself is a controversial analysis as Brazilian Bishop Dom Helder Camara commented, **"When I ask people for bread to feed the poor, they think I am a saint; when I ask them why the poor are hungry, they think I am a Communist."** But it is that asking of the question **why** gets to the root causes.

Then it becomes possible to envision something beside just emergency measures and endless patching up; a radical, creative quest for better structure ensures (Johnson P. 88-89).

The second step is asking “[what is there in the tradition of Christology that has supported this situation of injustice?](#)” Two things have been named: [The first is the mysticism](#) of the dead Christ in Latin American piety, symbolized in graphic crucifixes and in Holy Week processions in which the dead Christ is carried and pious folk mourn as if he had just died. This is coupled with an interior spiritual identification with Christ as a model. [Emphasis on dead Christ](#) works to legitimate suffering as the will of God. It is preached that Jesus Christ suffered quietly and passively; he went to the cross like a sheep to the slaughter and opened no his mouth. [To be a good Christian you should suffer quietly](#); you should go to the cross and not open your mouth; you should bear your cross in this world and after death God will give you your eternal reward. When embraced in a situation of injustice, this pattern of piety promotes acceptance of the status of victim. Anyone who could challenge their suffering would be seen to go against the example of Christ. This obviously works to the advantage of the oppressor (Johnson P. 89).

The second difficulty that has been identified in [the tradition is the glorification](#) of the imperial Christ. In heaven the risen Christ rules. It is preached that he sets up on earth human authorities to rule in his name, both in the civil and ecclesiastical spheres. Human authorities represent Christ and are to be obeyed as one would obey him. In a situation of injustice, [this puts Christ in league with the dominating powers](#). The ethics which flow from it would lead one to think that anyone who challenges temporal or ecclesiastical rulers, all too often allies in the past history of Latin America, was disobeying the will of God. [This emphasis on the heavenly Christ ruling as Lord in league with the earthly lords](#) has been used to keep people passive in the face of their own oppression (Johnson P. 89-90).

The third step starts with the question what in [the tradition of Christology has been overlooked](#) and, [in the light of the experience of the poor, might be used to shape a Christology that would liberate?](#) Liberation theologians look primarily to the Jesus of the gospel. Is he really a passive victim whose example legitimates passive suffering? Is he really dominated Lord whose will legitimate oppressive rule? What did he stand for in his ministry? What about the fact that his ministry to the outcast and sinners led to his death in an intrinsic and profound way? Is the resurrection not God’s victory over oppressive forces? [Reading the scriptures from the perspective of the poor makes it very clear](#) (and this comes as a surprise, perhaps, to those who have not been suffering, but to the oppressed it becomes as a great revelation of good news) [that Jesus is on the side of the downtrodden and calls oppressors to conversion](#). A key text is the scene in the Luke where, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus goes to his home synagogue in Nazareth and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. Imagine how these words sound to people within a situation of oppression: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”* Sitting down Jesus says, “Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21). (Johnson P. 90).

This prophecy [sets the agenda for Jesus’ ministry](#), as we see from everything that follows in the gospel.



His preaching that **reign of God is near**; his singling out the poor and those who hunger after justice for **beatitude**; the way **he feeds and heals** and welcomes outcasts – all of this reveals a choice, a preference for those who have not. Obviously, then, **this is God's agenda for the poor**; that they be released and set at liberty from grinding poverty and oppression. This is special **good news for victims**.

It means that their present situation is not the last word about their lives, but that God has another design in mind. Touching structures as well as hearts, God is opening up a new future for the poor (Johnson P. 90-91).

One of the most powerful expression of this gospel truth is the Magnificat, the song of Mary. After praising God for all the great things He has done for her, a poor peasant woman, she goes on to sing about the great things God will do for everyone else, perceiving this in very startling words: “He has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 2:46-55). How does that sound to the hearts of those oppressed? There is a clear message enunciated here that rings all the way through the gospels: Jesus opts for the poor, for the cause of the poor, as the embodiment of God who does the same (Johnson P. 91).

Where the rich stands? What is good news for the rich? Here I need to write the article I wrote about the good news to the rich (Jean's comment)

**Cross:** If this is the way the ministry of Jesus is read in liberation theology, then it flows logically into an interpretation of the cross as a liberating event. It is not that Jesus came to die; he was not masochistic. He came to live and to bring life abundantly to everyone else. Doing so faithfully, however, put him at odds with the religious and civic powers not tuned into God's ways. In one real sense the crucified Jesus is a victim arrested, unjustly tried, executed. But he is far from passive. His death results from a very active ministry in which love and compassion for the dispossessed led him into conflict with the powerful. Even in the custody he still had the choice of what attitude to adopted toward who were torturing and killing him. His words, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34) show that his choice was still for love and compassion. In the end, the cross reveals that God identifies with the one unjustly executed rather than with the rulers. Far from legitimizing suffering, the cross in a liberation perspective shows victims that God is in powerful solidarity with them in their suffering, and opens the possibility of their own active engagement, both interioly and exterioly, against the forces of oppression (Johnson P. 92).

The fact that he is a victim proved from Jesus' outcry on the cross “ Father, why have you forsaken me?” If he wasn't the victim he wouldn't feel this way (Jean's comment).

**Resurrection:** Coherent with this reading, **resurrection appears as the sign of God's liberation** breaking into this world. It reveals that ultimately the loving power of God is stronger than death and evil. The risen Christ embodies God's intention on behalf of everyone who is oppressed; in the end, the murderer will not triumph over his victim.

In this light, the ruling Christ is seen to be in league not with dominating powers who cause so much suffering, but with those who suffer, as ground of their hope. **He is the Lord as the crucified one who liberates** (Johnson P. 92).

**Christ the liberator:** Out of this reading of the story of Jesus from the perspective of the poor and oppressed has come a new and potent Christological title: **Jesus Christ, Liberator**. Some leaders of movement for national independence in various countries have been called “Liberator,” showing the role they played in freeing their people from dominating colonial nations. Giving this title to Jesus, **liberation theology confesses his identification with the oppressed** as well as the power of his name and Spirit to overturn that oppression. He is liberator not just for one group, but especially for the poor as sign of inclusion of all. Through him God’s will for the justice and well-being of the whole world, through lifting up of the lowliest, comes into play. Again he is Liberator not in a violent or military way, but through active ministry, boldness in speaking, steadfastness in conflict, suffering love, and ultimate reliance on God (Johnson P. 93).

**Jesus Christ, Liberator, is a Christological theme that evokes a new image of God, who is on the side of the oppressed with the aim to free them. It also lifts up a new image of the oppressed, of great worth, the privileged focus of God’s own care. Finally it give us a new image of discipleship, entering into the way of Jesus with the poor. It carries a new answer to the question, “Who do you say I am?” Neither passive victim nor dominating Lord, Jesus is the liberating Word of God in solidarity with the poor (Johnson P. 93).**

**Conversion:** Such a Christology calls the church to discipleship to participation with God in the work of overturning oppression. In order for Christians who are not involved directly with a particular situation of oppression to hear this call, what is needed is **conversion**. The cry of the poor must be heeded and their perspective entered into. Ultimately, however, liberation theology has made it plain that none of us uninvolved, like it or not. The network of oppressive structure is an interlinked reality around the world, with local manifestations. Neutrality is not possible. We may ignore the situation and implicitly opt for the status quo with its damaging effect on millions of people. Or we can name Jesus Christ “Liberator,” thereby committing ourselves personally and ecclesially to enter with Christ into the struggle for justice (Johnson P. 94).

## VII. FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY

### Types

### Characteristics

### Analysis of tradition

### Critique of Christology

After introducing history of tradition that discriminates women in church and society, Johnson went to describe God in feminine terms as follows:

In Genesis Chapter 1, when **God creates the human couple, male and female, in the divine image**, no such discrimination is made; neither male nor female is more divine image than the other. In fact, both taken together in the divine image. Feminist theology reasons that since both male and female are created in God's image, then presumably God can be imaged wither as male or as female, always aware of the limitation of our metaphors (). Elizabeth A. Johnson, *CONSIDER JESUS* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1990), 104-105.

In fact, in the Jewish scriptures, **God is imaged in female form** by some of the prophets in very moving and beautiful ways – a mother, as midwife, as nurse, as a mother bird spreading her wings over her chicks, as Sophia (Wisdom). Jesus, too, spun out female images in his preaching. The reign of God is like the yeast that a woman kneads into dough so that the whole loaf rises: this is an image of God as baker woman, kneading the yeast of the new creation into the world and working over it until the whole world rises. The parable of the woman searching for her lost coin appears together with the parable of the good shepherd in Luke chapter (15:1-10). They both tell the same story of God's active search for the sinner. In one, a man loses a sheep and leaves his ninety-nine others to seek for it vigorously; when he finds it, he calls upon his neighbors to rejoice. This marvelous image of God the Redeemer has worked its way into the Christian imagination. But the same drama is played out in the other story, a woman loses one of her ten coins and drops everything to search the whole house until she finds it; when she does, she calls her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. Here we have another image of God the Redeemer. Jesus is saying that we are precious to God, even when we sin, as money is to a woman who cares very much for it. The same message is being proclaimed in both stories, one in terms of male work and the other in terms of female work. Both reflect the active, consuming love of God the Redeemer (Johnson P. 105).

Jesus even referred to himself in female imagery, wishing, he could gather the people of Jerusalem within his arms as a mother hen gathers chicks under her wings (Mt. 23:37-39).

At various times in the Christian tradition, female metaphor for God did come into use details in p. 106).

### **Feminist Liberation Christology**

**1. Jesus' preaching proclaims justice and peace for all people, inclusive of women.** The vision of the reign of God is precisely a vision of community where every human person is valued and all interrelate in a mutually respectful way. Feminist theologians note that in Jesus' preaching it is precisely those on the periphery of established structures who are counted first in the reign of God, not in order to reverse discrimination but to break the old pattern of discrimination and set up a new pattern of relating; the prostitute will enter the kingdom of heaven before the Pharisees. Tables are turned as the sacred male religious leaders receive no priority over a woman who engages in prostitution, but the opposite happens. Jesus' preaching of the reign of God is a powerful liberating force (Johnson P. 108).

2. Jesus' naming God *Abba* is also liberating, because in Jesus' understanding, *Abba* is the very opposite of a dominating patriarch. Rather, this compassionate, intimate, and close *Abba* releases everyone from patterns of domination and calls for another kind of community:

Matt. 23:9-12:

The one *Abba* creates a human community of mutuality. The one *Abba* subverts the legitimacy of patriarchy and setting up in its place a community of brothers and sisters (Johnson P. 108).

3. Jesus included women. Treating women with a grace and respect commensurate with their dignity, Jesus healed, exorcised, forgave, and restored women to *shalom*. His table community was inclusive, and women, both sinners and those who were part of "his own" as Luke called the band of followers, shared in the joy of the approach of the reign of God. One feminist theologian remarked that the problem is not that Jesus is a male, but that more males are not like Jesus (Johnson P. 109).

4. Jesus called women to be disciples. They formed part of his company in Galilee, leaving their families and homes to follow him. The wealthy among them bankrolled the ministry, providing for the needs of the community out of their own pocket (Luke 8:1-3). Mary Magdalene, the "apostle to the apostles" as Augustine called her, usually heads the list but is accompanied by Johanna, Susanna, Salome, Mary the wife of Clopas, and others. Even the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) is important for her preaching which brought a whole town to Jesus: "Many Samaritans from the city believed in him because of the women's testimony" (John 4:39). "Testimony" is a technical word signifying the word of apostolic witness. What is buried in this story is the memory of successful missionary to the Samaritans, one who happens to be a woman with a checkered past (Johnson P. 109).

5. Besides moving around with him in Galilee, the women disciples also followed Jesus up to Jerusalem. Every gospel makes it clear that they did not run and hide but stood by him in his hour of suffering. In fact, the only person named by all four gospels as having stood by the cross is Mary Magdalene. Some women disciples knew where the tomb was, since they had helped to anoint the dead body of Jesus and to bury him. Every gospel recounts the fact that it was women disciples who discovered the tomb empty and first received the news of the resurrection. In one gospel the message is proclaimed by an angel, but in the other three it is the risen Lord himself who appears. Thus women were the first recipients of a resurrection appearance. All four gospels show that the women were commanded to "Go and tell" – that is, they received the apostolic commission to preach in witness to the risen Lord. All four gospels show that women do so. The testimony of the scripture is that both in his earthly life and risen life Jesus Christ included women in his community, not as subordinates to males, but as equal sisters to

their brothers and, in the case of resurrection stories, even as those first entrusted (Johnson P. 110).

6. In the early decades of the church there is strong evidence for a vigorous ministry of women as colleagues with men. From the Acts of the Apostles and letters of Paul, we get the picture of women as missionaries, preachers, teachers, prophets, apostles, healers, speakers in tongues, leaders of house churches. They are co-workers with Paul and the others, gifted with all of the charisms which were given for the building up of the church.

7. In the feminist perspective, his inclusion of women coequally in the reign of God was part of the offense he gave. **On the cross Jesus symbolizes the exact opposite of male dominating power.** Rather, on the cross power is poured out in self-sacrificing love. The cross is the *kenosis of patriarchy*. Looking at the cross, some feminists have reflected that sociologically it was probably better that the incarnation happened in a male human being; for if woman had preached and enacted compassion and given the gift of self-even unto death, the world would have shrugged – is not this what women are supposed to do anyway? But for a man to live and die this way in a world of male privilege is to challenge the patriarchal ideal of dominating male at its root (Johnson P. 111).

8. **In the resurrection**, the Spirit of God fills Jesus with new life and, present in the community in a new way, he becomes the cornerstone of the coming reign of God. His Spirit is poured out on all who believe, women equally with men. Baptism of the first century church was inclusive as Paul said, “there is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). All divisions based on race, or class, or even gender are transcended in the oneness of the body of Christ (Johnson P. 111).

9. One of the figures of the Jewish scriptures with which **they identified him** very early on was “**Sophia**,” or “Wisdom.” This figure is a female personification of God in outreach to the world. **Sophia creates, redeems, establishes justice, protects the poor,** teaches the mysteries of the world, and most especially **gives life.** From Paul, who calls Jesus the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24), to John who models Jesus and his long discourse upon Sophia, wisdom Christology offers the possibility of affirming the significance of Jesus Christ and of confessing even his divinity in a nonandrocentric framework. As Sophia incarnate Jesus can be discerned as a coincidence of opposite in every respect; crucified yet glorified; God’s own being yet made flesh; a man yet the prophet and very presence of Sophia herself (Johnson P. 111-112).

**In conclusion**, feminist liberation Christology has discovered Jesus as Liberator. He brings salvation through his life and Spirit, restoring women to full personal dignity in the reign of God, and inspiring their liberation from structures of domination and subordination. This is challenging Christology, as is every form of liberation theology. It is revolution placing patriarchy in favor of a community or genuine mutuality. It is good news to the oppressed. The call is for conversion of hearts, minds, and structures, so that the reign of God may take firmer hold in this world (Johnson P. 112).

## VIII. GOD AND THE CROSS

### Background

From the point of view of God's transcendence, suffering cannot touch the divine being, for the Creator and Ruler of all things is supremely beyond its reach.

On the other hand, **God is present in creation and dwells at the heart of all creatures** – this is divine immanence in creation – this is divine immanence in creation. When the **Hebrews are enslaved in Egypt** God calls upon Moses to lead the struggle for their release. **“I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry; I know well what they are suffering ; therefore I have come down to deliver them (Ex. 3:7-8).** Another example comes from **Hosea** where God said about sinful people, **“My heart turns over within me, my compassion grows warm and tender” (Hosea 11:8)** (Johnson P. 116-117).

When Christianity in its missionary effort moved out into the **Hellenistic world**, it met a very different idea of God in classical Greek philosophy. God was characterized according to an ideal of **immutable perfection beyond the world**. The divine was thought of as an absolute, world-transcending, self-subsistent Being; an incomprehensible essence, with the attribute of impassibility, which means not being capable of suffering. To prevent God from being dependent on the world, any real relation between God and the world was denied. God cannot suffer. The suffering of Jesus belongs to God insofar as God has a human nature, but God's own being is not suffering. If God suffers, it will diminish God's divinity. This creates impression that God is far away from people who suffer and somehow does not feel for them. This means God cannot feel all the suffering and starvation and victims of wars and holocaust (Johnson P. 119).

In response to this perspective, Alfred North Whitehead had worked out a theory of God as our great companion, “the fellow-sufferer who understands.” From Bonhoeffer's statement “only a suffering God can help” he developed insight that God was in fact suffering in the suffering of the people in the war (Johnson P. 119).

### God Suffers

**Jurgen Moltmann presents a God who literally suffers on the cross, thereby identifying with the suffering of the whole world. He rejects both options as deficient; on the one hand, to say that God does not suffer is to make of God an unfeeling monster in the face of so much suffering today. On the other hand, it is not right to say that God suffers without any choice in the matter. This is the human, finite way of suffering – it overtakes us and holds us in its grip. It is part of our creatureliness that we cannot escape. But such a condition would not do justice to God who is supreme over all the earth (Johnson P. 120).**

**There is a third option, however, and this would be to say that out of love God freely chooses to be affected by what affects others, so that when people sin and suffer this**

influences the divine being. In this view, God suffers not out of a deficiency of weakness in the divine nature, but out of fullness of love. Moltmann argues very strongly that if God could not suffer in this way, then God would not be love.

For it is of the essence of love to be affected by what is happening to the one you love, and to suffer or rejoice as a result (Johnson P. 120).

**Cross:** Moltmann judges that the traditional interpretation that the Son suffers in his human nature but not in divine nature is inadequate. Instead, he proposes thinking through the cross in relation to the whole Trinity. The world is in sin, and the Father in his great mercy wishes to save us.

Therefore, he freely hands his Son over to be crucified, which will accomplish this salvation. This is a theme in the scriptural letters of Paul: God deliver him up for our sins. The Son willingly obeys his Father and allows himself to be handed over: "Not my will but thine be done." The cross, then, is an event between God and God; between the Father giving up his Son and the Son willingly being given up. While Jesus suffers on the cross, both Father and Son are suffering, through in different ways. The father is suffering the grief of the loss of his Son. The Son is suffering the loss of his own life, and even more deeply the abandonment by his Father: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The two of them are deep in suffering, and this penetrates the very being of God. In a very literal sense, God is suffering (Johnson P. 121).

Yet while each is suffering the loss of the other, they have never been so deeply untied in one love. In their common loving will to save the world, regardless of the cost, what is revealed is the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and Son. At Jesus' death his Spirit, God's love, is let loose on the world. The love between Father and Son is released into creation and begins to bring about redemption (Johnson P. 121).

Hegel's pattern of thinking.

**Thesis:** There is suffering on the cross and in the world.

**Antithesis:** This suffering affects God and even appears to overcome him (Jesus dies).

**Synthesis:** God transforms the suffering into life (the resurrection in the Spirit).

Moltmann presents a shattering example of this theology of the cross and the suffering of God by quoting a passage from Eli Wiesel's novel *Night* (Johnson P. 122).

Where is God? He is there on the cross, there on the gallows, there where anyone suffers. God is there, suffering with the beloved creature (Johnson P. 122).

### **God is Compassionately Present**

Schillebeeckx disagrees with Moltmann on God's suffering. According to him, Father does not hand Jesus over or deliver him to suffering. This makes God into a kind of sadist. What sort of human father would hand his child over to such torture? To say that God willed Jesus to suffer makes God less good than a normal human being would be. Historically speaking, Jesus was condemned to death unjustly, a victim of human sinfulness and rejection. God wills life and not death, joy and not suffering, both for Jesus and for everyone else (Johnson P. 124).

Cross is not an event between God and God, a tearing apart between the Father and the Son. Rather, the cross reveals instead the tension between God and sinful humanity; it is the index of what is opposed to God in the world.

Nor does the Father suffer the loss of his Son. In Schillebeeckx's interpretation of the cross, God as pure positively enters into compassionate solidarity with Jesus on the cross, keeping faith with him, not abandoning him. God is present in the most of absence. He keeps vigil until human freedom has played itself out and Jesus is destroyed. Then God overcomes the evil of death through the eschatological act of resurrection, conquering and undoing the negativity wrought by human sinfulness. Then it can be confessed that God was present all along – under the condition of finitude and history.

So vital is the resurrection as a sign of God's fidelity to Jesus that Schillbeeckx insists the cross by itself cannot save. In itself it is evil in its destruction of Jesus. It is sinful, and only Jesus' love and fidelity, along with God's overcoming the negativity of the cross in the resurrection, effect our salvation (Johnson P. 124)

What happens at the cross and consequently at all other suffering moments is that God, who is the absolute foe of evil, enters into compassionate solidarity with the suffering one in order to save. God is with him in the midst of his suffering, near but silent, bending over him to gift him with life. The evil of this world, with all its power, is weaker than God, the compassionate One who enters into solidarity with the sufferer and, ultimately, saves (Johnson P. 125). God's compassionate presence is mediated through the human presence and action of believers, who resist injustice as sacrament of God's won saving will (Johnson P. 125).

### **Outcome**

Both, Moltmann and Schillbeeckx present a God who is much more involved in the pain of history than the God of classical Christian theism. They are both interested in showing that the victims of history, those who suffer excessively, are in the end lifted up by the living God (Johnson P. 126).

Out of this kind of reflection has come yet another new title for Jesus Christ. He may be called Jesus, the Compassion of God. In our time, with our awareness of the compassionate nature of his ministry, and with our reading of the cross as the event where God's solidarity with those who suffer came to an unsurpassed focus, we can say of Jesus that the divine quality of the Compassion of God became incarnate in him (Johnson P. 126).

Call: This way of thinking about God also makes clear the call to the community of disciples: We are united with God in Jesus by being in compassionate solidarity with those who suffer. If God is there, resisting evil and willing life wherever people are being damaged, then the followers of Jesus must enter into the same solidarity. There is a call to the Christian conscience here not to hide our face from evil, not to walk around it, or pretend it is not there; but to face its massiveness in spite of our feelings of powerlessness or insignificance and to become involved in transforming it. Suffering people are the privileged place where the God of compassion is to be found (Johnson P.126).

## **IX. SALVATION OF THE WHOLE WORLD**



**People**

**Whole Cosmos**