

RESPONSE TO DIANE LECLERC AND DICK EUGENIO

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First I would like to commend Dr. Leclerc and Dr. Eugenio for their excellent reflections and valuable contribution to this our fourth Global Nazarene Theology Conference. The theme of our conversation, Christology—To know Christ, and this particular session, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ is a challenging but crucial task as we go forward as Christ’s global body.

Most of our contemporary Nazarene theologians acknowledge the centrality of Christology in the theological endeavor. Dr. H. Ray Dunning affirms that “A Wesleyan theology will be uniquely Christological in emphasis: justification, sanctification, and prevenient grace in all its many ramifications must be interpreted from this standpoint” (Grace, Faith & Holiness, 50). More recently, Dr. Tom A. Noble in his book *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, proposes as his fourth axiom of theological method, a Trinitarian, Christocentric shape of Christian Theology (pp. 18-20). He singles out that

Since God’s self-revelation takes place in his Word— by which we mean not only the written word of Scripture, but more fundamentally, the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ— then Christian theology is centered in him and built upon him. In short, this axiom is that Christian theology is Christocentric... Consequently our doctrine of Christian holiness must begin there and find its foundation in him” (pp. 18, 20).

Dr. Leclerc’s response to Jesus’ question, Who do you say that I am?, focusing on Jesus’ humility, is an interesting and unusual way of doing Christology. The author then provides this model to renew the life and mission of the Church of the Nazarene. This is helpful since Christology has traditionally been conveyed as the life and work of Christ with little relationship with the Church.

It was promising that Leclerc begins her exposition affirming that worship rightly understood is today placed “at the center of our identity,” yet she warns us that we need to make

sure we are involved in “true worship” which “is the worship of the true God...whose essential characteristic is love, is also essentially humble, as revealed in the humanity of Jesus the Christ.”

This emphasis on Christ’s humanity expressed in humility as intrinsic to God’s nature and lived out in total submission to God and in radical identification with our humanity is unique. The strength of the humility motif as defining Christ is that it brings Jesus’ humanity and divinity together; paradoxically portraying a more human God makes him even more divine in our eyes. So that humility as Jesus lived it out was not only a human response but the divine outburst of self-giving love. This emphasis resonates with Paul’s Christological hymn in Philippians 2:6-11, Christ’s humiliation and exaltation.

The author renders an excellent theological exposition that takes us through six characteristics of Jesus’ life, all revealing the humility of God. These are the incarnation, his baptism, temptations, recapitulation, the cross and resurrection. I was reaffirmed by this consistency and with the great insights that the author gave in these sections.

But what is rarely mentioned in Christology and regarding Christ’s humility which is brought before us in Leclerc’s presentation is the notion of recapitulation, taken from Irenaeus in the second century (See also Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 144). The author affirms:

“Sin is an aberration of true humanity. Therefore, when Adam sinned, he became “less than” human, less than how humanity was designed originally. Alternatively, Jesus is the model of true humanity, as the new Adam...God had ‘become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.’...it is clear that Irenaeus is calling us to embrace our full humanity in Christ, even as we participate in the divine”.

Although all of Leclerc’s insights are stimulating and provocative her section on A Christological Ecclesiology, from my perspective, is the most significant contribution in this exposition, since it defies us to flesh out God’s humility in the life and mission of the church. Based on these Christological principles, she confronts us as a Church to live them out as a

human-humble community. These six statements should guide our missional agenda as a church and we are challenged theologically and ministerially since, in the author's estimation,

It is time for us to expand our doctrine of sin to include “involuntary transgressions”, sins of omission, and participation in systemic evil, and to make confession especially for the sins of complicity, and for our racism, sexism, classism, consumerism, and other forms of oppression—as individuals and as a denomination.

So I deduce that Leclerc's response to the question Jesus poses to his disciples, Who do you say that I am? might be: The Humble One, The Humble Human God.

Dr. Eugenio's approach to Jesus' Who do you say that I am? is a bit different but somewhat related to Leclerc's presentation. I coincide with Dr. Eugenio's three basic presumptions regarding the personal identity of Jesus. Namely that, His identity “must be located in the matrix of relationships,” that “Jesus' identity must be trinitarianly conceived,” and that “Jesus' personal identity must meet the exigencies of the human life.” This counteracts our common individualistic description of Christ isolated from community, from the trinity itself and from our human reality. So his response to Jesus question related to his identity is that He “is the obedient Son of the Father and the dependent Human on the Holy Spirit.”

From this premise, Dr. Eugenio shows us how these two motifs, of obedient son of the Father and dependent human on the Holy Spirit, are crucial to Jesus' identity. Through this Trinitarian identity of Christ His divinity and humanity, transcendence and immanency, are brought together, as well as “our own Christian identity and calling.”

The author keenly places Christ's kenotic experience at the core, of both relationships, that of the obedient Son and dependency of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' kenotic obedience is a self-imposed emptying. His filial obedience to the Father goes along with His positive intention to glorify the Father... The human weaknesses of Jesus is met by the strength of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' total and humble obedience to the Father is through His absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit. This is Jesus' trinitarian identity and life-mission. His obedience to the Father is impossible without His

dependence on the Holy Spirit and His dependent relationship with the Holy Spirit does not make sense apart from His obedience to the Father.

I appreciated the quote Dr. Eugenio presents from Bruce McCormack,

...that kenosis should be understood as addition, instead of subtraction... Jesus did not experience a reduction of divinity in the incarnation. Instead of deprivation of divine qualities, the Son of God added to Himself finite human nature, along with its weaknesses. He assumed our limitations. He emptied Himself by adding to Himself our human frailties.

The author goes on to highlight these two relationships through the different key moments of Jesus' life, similar to Leclerc: the incarnation, baptism, temptation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Leclerc includes the theology of recapitulation, as we have seen, and Eugenio alludes to Christ's ministry.

Regarding Christlikeness, Leclerc declares that "Only in Christ, are we renewed in the image of God, regaining our humanness, and set on the path of Christlikeness." Yet Eugenio sees it necessary that we realize that "...our understanding of Christ-likeness needs to be made faithful to the Trinitarian identity of Jesus Christ". So it is indispensable that we are constantly aware that Christ's identity should only be understood in His relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Both authors omit addressing Christ's ascension and second coming as reigning king. I believe that these missing elements are vital characteristics of His obedience and humility, of His identity. These two dimensions would be quite significant in our Latin American context and global reality, the Christ Victor motif. The fact that it is "...the exalted Lord who sends down the Holy Spirit to continue His redemptive work in and through us until He returns in glory" (Greathouse, *Love Made Perfect*, 55-62).

I realize that these papers were not meant to be exegetical expositions but I was a bit surprised that neither author directly connected their response to Peter's revealed response of

Jesus' question, Who do you say that I am?: You are *the Christ* (Mt. 16:13-20= Mk. 8:27/30=Lc. 9:18-21). Although in Dr. Eugenio's exposition there are some glimpses of this notion. Citing Leopoldo Sanchez he states, "Jesus is the Christos, whose life and ministry are permeated through and through by the Spirit". Also "Jesus is Christos in His life and death...Paul's crucicentric theology and his favorite designation of Jesus the Anointed One are inseparable (Rom 1:4, 6-8; 3:24; 5:1, 6, 8; 6:23; 9:5; 15:3, 7, 19)." New Testament scholars like George Elton Ladd and Donald Guthrie have given preeminence in their reflection of Christ to the title and concept of The Christ (Messiah) as the most important of all the concepts¹ and as the starting point of Christology.²

In addition, I am convinced that as Nazarenes, Christ's global faith community, we need to address the issue of Contextual Christology, neither presenter touches this theme. Maybe it was not within the scope of their expositions. Dr. Eugenio alludes to this theme in a negative way, motivating us to avoid "multiple Christologies that sound semantically accurate—using jargons popular and acceptable to the church—but are erroneous in elucidation." Yet, this responds to the extreme of undressing Christ of His biblical and theological attire to make Him more culturally relevant. Donald Guthrie is more on target as he remarks that "[n]o objection could be raised relating the NT presentation of Christ to contemporary culture provided the resultant conception of Christ is recognized as the same as the NT Christ" (New Testament Theology, 407). The need of doing contextual theology as Nazarenes, which would include Christology, is not a new challenge for us, this issue was brought to the table at our first Global Theology Conference in Johannesburg 2000. But little work has been done in this regard.

¹ George Elton Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 135.

² Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 236.

Most revealing is Christ's question about His identity to the Pharisees on the way to the cross: "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" (Mt. 22:42). After they respond that the Christ is David's son, his rebuttal is but if David called Him Lord he must be greater than Him and left it at that. After this, nobody asked any more questions.

May the Lord help us to live—be transformed—by Christ and share—bring others to The Christ who reflects God's humility and His Trinitarian inner community and leave it at that!