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"JESUS | CHRIST" OR "JESUS—CHRIST"?

Robert Funk vis-à-vis Edward Schillebeeckx on the Link Between the Historical "Jesus" and Faith in Him as the "Christ"

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Abstract. This article will examine the validity of the most succinct Christian affirmation of faith expressed in the name "Jesus Christ" (*Hesu-Kristo* in Filipino), which means that "Jesus," the teacher-healer from Nazareth, is trusted to be "the Christ," the chosen messiah of God. We will do this by exploring whether there is a flowing and smooth connection between "Jesus" and "Christ" (to be represented as "Jesus—Christ") or if we should admit to some points of disconnect between the two names (to be expressed as "Jesus | Christ"—with the two terms separated by a vertical bar or "pipe"). We will focus on the work of Edward Schillebeeckx who posits a necessary and logical link between "Jesus" and "Christ," then compare and contrast his approach with that of Robert Funk (founder of the Jesus Seminar) who represents a position that poses an almost insurmountable divide between "Jesus" and "Christ."

Keywords. Edward Schillebeeckx; Robert Funk; Christology; Historical Jesus; Catholic approach to Christology

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the coming of Christianity to the Philippines, this author thought that it would be profitable to review a fundamental affirmation found at the heart of the Christian faith, one expressed simply—at the superficial level—by the name every Filipino is very familiar with: *Hesu-Kristo*. That is the Filipino way of expressing what in English is "Jesus Christ" or *Iesous Christos* in the (*koiné*) Greek of the New Testament. Although every Filipino "on the street" may easily identify those two names as referring to the central being in Christianity, fewer would know that *Hesu-Kristo* is actually the most succinct Christian profession of faith found in the religious tradition brought to the Philippines by the Spanish *conquistadores* 500 years ago, namely, that *Hesus*, the historical person originally from Nazareth, is *the one* Christians believe to be *ang Kristo* (the Christ), the anointed messiah of God who is Lord, Savior, and the very embodiment of God. This *Hesu-Kristo*, it is believed, shares the same divine nature with God, the Father, together with God, the Holy Spirit.

This article will examine the validity of this central Christian affirmation and explore whether there is indeed a flowing and smooth connection between *Hesus* and *Kristo* which we shall symbolize as "Jesus—Christ" or whether we should admit to some—shall we say—"points of disconnect" between the two names, to be expressed as "Jesus | Christ" (with the two names separated by a vertical bar or "pipe").

Detailed Goals and Scope of the Study

There has been a tremendous amount of research done on the historical Jesus ever since the so-called "third search" for the historical Jesus began in the 1980s.[1] A good deal of it has been research that concerns itself more strictly with historical problems and balks at

[1]A good, succinct account could be found in G. Theissen & A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (London: SCM, 1998), 10–12. A relatively recent, excellent, and exhaustive compendium of the historical search for Jesus

treading explicitly on theological ground. This has been good in a way because it significantly advanced the discipline of history concerning Jesus and minimized the practice of pretending to write history while in reality advancing one's theological agenda, something the nineteenth-century writers of "lives of Jesus" have been frequently accused of doing.[2]

However, for the Christian and the Christian theologian, it is, in the final analysis, only with difficulty that one can reflect, research, and write on Jesus while being completely detached from any theological concern for the simple reason that the historical Jesus himself was a profoundly "theological" person—his words and deeds, his identity and ministry, and, yes, his very person are all very theological. Everything about Jesus was radically oriented to the reality Israel and the Christian church call "God" (*theos* in Greek, where "theology" comes from).

Besides, Jesus is at the heart of the Christian-Catholic faith which many of us profess and strive to ground, in as much as it is possible, on reason (with the help of the academic disciplines, particularly historical criticism). Therefore, going from the theme of "Jesus" (taken in its strict historical sense [i.e., Jesus as an historical person]) and proceeding from there to the theme of "Christ" (taken here with its faith overtones [i.e., who Jesus is for believers or—in the words of theologian Edward Schillebeeckx—the "decisive salvation from God"])[3] is not only very

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is T. Holmén & S. Porter, eds., *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

[2]See especially A. Schweitzer, "The 'Liberal' Lives of Jesus," in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [reprinted in] 1998), Chapter xiv.

[3]See E. Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books Jesus & Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 28, hereafter referred to as *IR*. See also E. Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 104–105, hereafter referred to as *CHU*, and J. Crossan, *Who is Jesus?* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1996), 176. For a classic explanation of this distinction between "Jesus" and "Christ," consult M. Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1964). For a view from the renewed new quest, see

much in order but actually a necessary move in systematic theology. Allow this author, then, to state what this study aims to do in light of the reflections above.

This article aims to be, in a broad sense, an exposition of "a" (i.e., one among many) Catholic approach to the person of Jesus Christ in the context of an ongoing interest in our times in the so-called "historical Jesus." To be more specific, it aims to study why the theme "Christ" (that is, how Jesus of Nazareth is acclaimed as "messiah" and "Lord" by the early Christians) is a *sine qua non* (Latin for "without which," i.e., necessary) development of the theme of the historical Jesus in any exposition of a faith that calls itself "Christian and Catholic."

To aid in this quest, this author will focus here on the work of the great Dominican conciliar theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (henceforward ES) and, in particular, on his monumental tome called, in English, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (henceforward *JEC*) because this author thinks that, even after all these years (since the work was originally published in Dutch in 1974), it still deserves to be reflected upon for the many solid contributions it has made and can still make to the field of Christology, particularly in terms of its theological approach and hermeneutical insights.[4] This author will also make constant reference to ES's *Church: The Human Story of God* (henceforward *CHU*) because this work, although it purports to be

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M. Borg, "Seeing Jesus: Sources, Lenses, and Method," in M. Borg & N. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), 6–8.

[4]Schillebeeckx passed away in 2009. See also E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1979), hereafter referred to as *JEC*. Two important and relatively recent works that should also be consulted about Schillebeeckx's theology are D. Rochford, "The Theological Hermeneutics of Edward Schillebeeckx," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 251–267 and L. Boeve, F. Depoortere, & S. van Erp, eds., *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010). See also Australian theologian O. Rush's tribute to Schillebeeckx's Jesus book: O. Rush, "Schillebeeckx's Piercing Inquiry Brought Jesus Alive," *National Catholic Reporter* (December 19, 2016), available at https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/schillebeeckxs-piercing-inquiry-brought-jesus-alive (accessed November 3, 2021).

an ecclesiology, contains a more updated statement of ES's views on Jesus Christ.

Schillebeeckx, to be noted at the outset, is a systematic theologian and not a biblical exegete. As such, he attempts in the abovementioned works to ground the discipline of Christology as firmly as possible in historical research and the best European biblical scholarship that was available at the time, although he does not stop there. His real concern is to show how the faith, which calls this Jesus of Nazareth "the Christ," is reasonable and can be accepted even by people in the contemporary world. In fact, the biblical scholar B. Viviano suggests that the original stimulus for writing *JEC* was to "save faith in the divinity of Jesus among advanced theological circles in the Netherlands" because many younger theologians at the time of Schillebeeckx's writing were becoming more convinced that, with the advent of modern biblical and historical research, faith in Jesus's divinity was fast becoming intellectually untenable.[5] The situation has not changed at present; we can even say that it has become only more acute, especially in the West, Schillebeeckx's original context.

The order in which this author will proceed in this article will be as follows: Some main principles of a "Catholic approach" to the topic will be delineated. This will be followed by a presentation of an example of research on the topic of the interrelatedness of "Jesus" and "Christ" that is radically different from and diametrically opposed to that of ES. This author refers to the work of the late biblical scholar Robert Funk, who is still a major figure in contemporary historical Jesus studies.[6] The purpose of this is to have a dialogue partner who holds,

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[5]B. Viviano, "Schillebeeckx's *Jesus* and *Christ*—Contributions to Christian Life," *Spirituality Today* 34:2 (1982), available at http://www.domcentral.org/library/spir2day/823424viviano.html.

[6]This is how historical Jesus studies scholar N. Wright categorizes Funk: he was part of the renewed new quest for the historical Jesus as opposed to the "third" quest. The latter is characterized by its emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus, whereas the former presents an image of Jesus apparently detached from the Jewish cultural matrix. For a fuller discussion, see N. Wright, "Chapter 2:

as it were, an antithesis to ES's position. This, in turn, will facilitate a comparison and contrast as well as an evaluation of two diametrically opposed approaches vis-à-vis some principles of a characteristically Catholic approach to the subject. This author has chosen Robert Funk because he represents a very common position among scholars and non-scholars alike who pose an almost insurmountable divide between "Jesus" and "Christ," one we can represent as "Jesus | Christ." After reviewing Funk's position, this author will go on to state the main contours of ES's treatment of the topic. The article will conclude with an evaluation of what has been covered and how it showcases key factors of a characteristically Catholic approach to Christology.

Catholic Principles to Note

What are some essential principles of Catholicism that may have a direct bearing on our theme of the interrelatedness of "Jesus" and "Christ"? Based on the opening chapter of R. McBrien's *Catholicism* appropriately entitled "What is Catholicism?," this author proposes the principles of "communion," "tradition," and "analogy."[7]

One characteristic trait of Catholicism is communion. According to this principle, "even when the divine-human encounter is most personal and individual, it is still communal, in that the encounter is

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Heavy Traffic on the Wredebahn" and "Chapter 3: Back to the Future: The 'Third Quest,'" in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). This author does not completely agree with Wright about his evaluation of Funk, though.

[7]R. McBrien, *Catholicism*, new ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 3–17. For another good and more extensive discussion of the traits of the Catholic Church, see H. Küng, "Part D: The Dimensions of the Church," in *The Church* (New York: Image Books, 1967), 341–461. See also Schillebeeckx's comments on this in *CHU*, 195–198. See as well Schillebeeckx's own take on theological criteria which could illuminate this theme further in "Chapter 4: Theological Criteria," in *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1974).

made possible by the mediation of a community of faith."[8] Applying this to our topic, we can say that knowing Jesus and acquiring the faith that proclaims him as the Christ normally happens through the mediation of a community of believers.

Catholicism also puts much emphasis on "tradition," which hinges actually on the principle of communion mentioned above. Before there were any written texts (with some of these being canonized later on in time), the faith, especially its core of belief that Jesus is the Christ, was handed on (*tradere* in Latin) through proclamation, catechesis, worship, and the personal lives of the community of believers, foremost among whom were the closest collaborators and disciples of Jesus. Hence, tradition also has a lot to do with the concept of "apostolicity," that is, faith as being based on the faith of the "apostles" (in the wider sense).[9]

Another trait of Catholicism this author wants to mention here is "analogy." This concept has been developed extensively by the theologian D. Tracy.[10] According to this principle, Catholicism necessarily involves a way of thinking about God or the divine-human relationship in terms of "similarity-in-difference." In contrast to this, the more typically Protestant way of thinking is dialectical, that is, emphasizing the radical differences and dissimilarities that exist between God and humans. Applying this principle of analogy to Jesus, we can say that Jesus is the "primary analogue" in that we see in him what is divine and human brought significantly into fusion and hence not remaining radically different from us in his humanity.[11]

At this point, one may ask, "Why bother at all viewing the matter according to Catholic principles?" The so-called "Catholic principles"

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[8]McBrien, *Catholicism*, 12.

[9]See McBrien, *Catholicism*, 14.

[10]D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

[11]See McBrien, *Catholicism*, 15. A fuller discussion is found in Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, in Chapter 6, "The Event and Person of Jesus Christ" and Chapter 10, "A Christian Systematic and Analogical Imagination."

invoked above were traditionally discussed as part of the traditional "marks of the [true] church" (*notae ecclesiae*). They were invoked to identify the "true" church because these "marks" were believed to have stemmed from the earliest strata of the Christian tradition and distinguished the undivided church of the early centuries. In the words of theologian H. Küng, these "dimensions" (Küng's preferred word) are "demanded of the Church by the New Testament."[12] In the final analysis, then, this author's invoking of the Catholic principles is linked to the search for truth which believers still link with the corporate body known as the Catholic Church.

Having elaborated on that, we are now in a position to evaluate different opinions on the connection between "Jesus" and "Christ" to see, as it were, how "catholic" they are in their approach to the topic. We shall now briefly see a representative of contemporary Jesus studies who touches on the interrelatedness of "Jesus" and "Christ" but posits a radical divide between them.

Dialogue Partner 1: Robert Funk

Funk's Rallying Cry: "Give Jesus a Demotion!"

In addition to being a first-rate biblical scholar,[13] Robert Funk was also the founder of the famous (or notorious, depending on one's ideological bent) group known as "The Jesus Seminar." That fact makes him have an undeniable importance in contemporary historical Jesus studies because of the seminar's impact on the field.

[12]Küng, *The Church*, 461.

[13]Although Funk tends to be associated exclusively nowadays with the Jesus Seminar, he has more than enough scholarly and solid works on the Bible to deserve being considered "first rate"; an example is *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

Funk's personal contribution to historical Jesus studies is the book *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (henceforward *HTJ*).[14] The title harks back to the book *Honest to God* by John A. T. Robinson, in which the Anglican bishop calls for a radical questioning of the entire religious framework (in particular, Christian theism) in which Western religion had been offered. Funk seems to suggest by his title that his program in his book is similar to that of Robinson's; in other words, he also calls for a radical rethinking of the whole framework in which Jesus Christ has been hitherto presented. Hence, this work is not only a book on the historical Jesus in the strict sense but also a work with an unabashedly straightforward theological agenda. And one can glean even from a cursory reading of the book that Funk's theological agenda is to "give Jesus a demotion."[15] As a reason for this, he claims that a Jesus clothed with the sublime divinity, which "Nicaea" bestowed on him, is not the real founder of the Christian movement. By this, he refers to the process by which the lowly Galilean, Jesus, went on to be proclaimed as God the Son, co-eternal with the Father, at the council of Nicaea.[16] Rather, this divine figure is only a myth that is very much at odds with the original, flesh and blood Jesus of Nazareth, who was not at all an icon to be worshipped but an iconoclast vis-à-vis the religious institution in his first century Jewish society.[17]

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[14]This author adds "personal" here to distinguish this work from the many other contributions Funk has made to contemporary Jesus studies as head of a corporate body (i.e., the Jesus Seminar). See also R. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), hereafter referred to as *HTJ*. See also a later work by R. Funk, *A Credible Jesus: Fragments of a Vision* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002).

[15]J. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963). See also Funk, *HTJ*, 306.

[16]Remember, however, that what is often imprecisely called the "Nicene Creed" is the creed actually produced by the Council of Constantinople in 381 in which the original Nicene Creed was revised and affirmed.

[17]See, for example, Funk, *HTJ*, 21–23, 300–301.

The Priority of Sayings

Funk is convinced that one must give first importance to Jesus's genuine words or sayings above everything else if one is to find the historical figure lying hidden, as it were, in the dense brush of later Christian interpolations and divinization. The rationale for this fundamental principle is that Funk thinks that authentic sayings (put in traditional Catholic jargon, *ipsissima verba*, or "the very words") are more reliable if one would like to determine what Jesus himself thought about his mission. On the other hand, when scholars try to determine Jesus's authentic deeds, they can rely only on reports of eyewitnesses, who in turn can report only what they *thought they saw*. This makes the report basically unreliable according to this position. Thus, reconstructions of Jesus's deeds can be thought of as not being able to go back reliably to Jesus himself.[18]

For this reason, Funk is concerned in his methodology to tease out authentic sayings (in a special way, parables and aphorisms directly traceable for him to the historical Jesus) from the sea of later Christian additions to the gospels.[19] This prompts his critics to say, cynically, something to the effect that Funk's Jesus (in the words of New Testament scholar B. Witherington III) is "a talking head."[20]

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[18]For a further discussion, see L. McGaughy, "The Search for the Historical Jesus: Why Start with the Sayings?," in R. Hoover, ed., *Profiles of Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002), 121.

[19]For a further discussion, see Funk, "Part Two: The Gospel of Jesus," in *HTJ*, esp. chapters 8–11. See also Funk, *A Credible Jesus*, 1–18; R. Funk, "Jesus: A Voice Print," in Hoover, ed., *Profiles of Jesus*, 9–13; and R. Funk, A. Dewey, & the Jesus Seminar, *The Gospel of Jesus according to the Jesus Seminar*, 2nd ed. (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2015), 1–12.

[20]B. Witherington III, "Chapter 2: Jesus the Talking Head: The Jesus of the Jesus Seminar," in *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

Funk's Jesus

The results of such a methodology and research make Funk conclude that Jesus was "a subversive sage."[21] Vis-à-vis the religious-political order of his time, Jesus "may be said to have been *irreligious, irreverent*, and *impious*."[22] Funk claims that Jesus was not really concerned with the formal practice of religion; that makes him a "secular sage." Instead, he even profaned the temple and the Sabbath; he breached purity laws deemed sacred at the time, and, "most of all, he spoke of the kingdom of God in profane terms—that is, nonreligiously."[23]

This author would make the following demurrer about this: Funk seems to be making an unwarranted and anachronistic distinction between the sacred and the secular unknown in Jesus's day. For this author, it was more a question of different interpretations, emphases, and styles of living on the part of Jesus, on the one hand, and of some (perhaps even the majority) of the more recognized religious authorities on the other, but always about a life lived through, with, and in God and in light of the covenant between God and Israel. It must be remembered firmly that there was no real "secular" sphere in the Israel of Jesus's day.

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[21]Funk, *HTJ*, 302.

[22]Emphasis in the original. See also Funk, *HTJ*, 302. Recall that religion and politics could never be separated in an ancient society such as the one of Jesus.

[23]About Jesus "breaching purity laws," one must temper this traditional Christian (and also common liberal scholarly) claim with more recent scholarly demurrers that see the matter of Jesus vis-à-vis the purity regulations not so much as a "breaching" but more as a different way of interpreting the meaning of purity in theory and practice while fundamentally accepting the importance of the value of purity itself. See, for example, A. Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 17–52 and M. Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020), 9–41. See also Funk, *HTJ*, 302.

Funk's Process "From 'Jesus' to 'Christ'"

Funk expresses the theme which concerns us here in terms of geographical and "iconic" categories: "From Nazareth to Nicaea: How the Iconoclast Became the Icon," which is actually the title of the second chapter of *HTJ*. So, at this point, we can ask: How does Funk conceive of the process by which the Galilean iconoclast from Nazareth was transformed into an icon at Nicaea?

As mentioned above, there is for Funk a radical divide between the historical "Jesus" and the church's "Christ." He comes to this conclusion by comparing the blatant contrast he sees between the "gospel" which the historical Jesus preached and the figure of the divine co-eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity found in the church's creeds. Funk thinks that the Nicene Christ is a product of a long historical process. In the final analysis, however, it "obscures, to some extent, who Jesus was and what he said."[24] Therefore, the main goals of historical Jesus scholarship are to disentangle Jesus from this "tangle of Christian overlay" in order to see Jesus as the "robust, real, larger-than-life figure in his own right" and to recover the religion *of* Jesus and distinguish it from the religion *about* Jesus (Christianity).[25]

In short, Christianity with its "Christ" as we know it (by this, he means presumably post-Nicene Christianity) did not originate with the historical Jesus. There lies the great divide! Instead, Funk traces the development of Christianity from the confessions of Peter and Paul in the first century to the creedal formulations of the fourth and later centuries, all the while emphasizing, as mentioned above, that it is basically an "obscuring" of the real man from Nazareth. Let us go to the fine print of Funk's efforts at tracing this historical development.

Funk begins with the rivalry between Peter and Paul in the early church. Philosopher and religious studies scholar T. Sheehan's hypothesis states that Christianity cannot be traced to the historical

[24]Funk, *HTJ*, 31.

[25]Funk, *HTJ*, 31, 300, and 31, respectively.

Jesus, only to Simon Peter's faith.[26] This reflects the Catholic tradition, so Funk adds the Protestant tradition and says that, in an analogous sense, Paul's faith (which reflects a more Protestant-like tradition) was the other major influence on the early church.[27] Whereas Peter's faith represents the link with the historical Jesus, Paul's, on the other hand, focuses more on a nonhistorical image of Jesus as Christ centered on the concept of resurrection as well as on a "downward and upward trajectory," that is, Jesus as Christ descending into the tomb but then ascending from the grave to the right-hand of the Father.[28] This trajectory is even extended later on to the birth of Jesus Christ, the savior, which in turn lays the foundation for what is reflected in the first chapter of John, that is, the eternal Logos descending to earth, living, dying ignominiously, but then rising and being exalted at God's right hand. Funk reminds us that this encompassing downward and upward trajectory forms, in fact, the basic content of the creed found at the heart of Christianity.[29]

While an image of a divine Christ was gaining prominence through the "gospel" of Paul and later of John, there were also the older traditions, which better reflected the historical Jesus circulating among Christians (e.g., the Q source, an account composed mainly of Jesus's sayings).[30] At a later stage, these two strands of tradition merged with the production of the narrative gospels that we know and that have found their way into the canon. By means of this, the tension between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith was somewhat alleviated in

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[26]T. Sheehan, *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), esp. "Part 2, Chapter 4: The Denial of Jesus."

[27]Funk, *HTJ*, 35–36.

[28]Funk, *HTJ*, 39.

[29]See Funk, *HTJ*, 36–40.

[30]Cf. M. Borg, M. Powelson, & R. Riegert, eds., *The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus* (Berkeley, CA: Seastone, 1999), 23–30.

that "the historical Jesus [had] been given a more encompassing role as the Christ of faith."[31]

However, the two figures who contributed most to Christianity's becoming dominant in the Mediterranean world were, in the final analysis, Paul and the emperor Constantine. The latter made Christianity licit in 313 CE. By this act of favoring Christianity, he paved the way for the edict of a later emperor (Theodosius) which made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire in 381 CE. In this process, the Christ of faith "overpowered" the Jesus of history.[32] This is most clearly seen in the official creeds of the church in which there is an "empty center" in between Jesus Christ's being born of the Virgin Mary and his suffering under Pontius Pilate.[33] By this, Funk means that there is nothing stated in the creeds about what happened between the birth of Jesus and his death and resurrection, thus, the "empty center." In this way, one can say that if the structure of the creed is given supreme importance, the most important things that Christians should believe actually have nothing or little to do with the sayings and deeds of the flesh and blood man from Nazareth.

Funk concludes, from this review of the process from "Nazareth to Nicaea," that Nicaea is "a world away if we are thinking … of the relation of Jesus as Jewish teacher and sage [who lived in Israel] to the theological debates and political intrigue that took place at Nicaea" (concerning the Christ of faith).[34] Thus, it is important for biblical scholars and everyone interested in the Jesus of history to make an about-face, that is, retrace their steps from Nicaea back to Nazareth in order to understand and get a glimpse of the real, flesh and blood subversive sage which the Christ of Nicaea has made practically obscure.

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[31]Funk, *HTJ*, 42.

[32]Funk, *HTJ*, 43.

[33]Funk, *HTJ*, 43.

[34]Funk, *HTJ*, 45.

Evaluation of Funk's Position

Granted that it is not Funk's main intention to give a detailed portrayal of the development from the historical Jesus to the Christ of faith (hence, the very broad strokes he uses in painting this process), we can still say that the overall impression one gets, in reviewing his treatment of the theme, is that *there is a radical, almost unbridgeable divide between "Jesus" and "Christ"* (Jesus | Christ), so much so that one may even be tempted to conclude that Christianity is, essentially (perhaps even completely), inimical to Jesus![35] Funk is only a representative of many others—scholars and non-scholars alike—who present the relation of "Jesus" and "Christ" in this way, that is, in a negative, discontinuity-as-paradigm way. But is that all there is to "Jesus" and "Christ"? Are there no positive, continuity-as-paradigm ways of looking at the matter? We will see that Schillebeeckx's work is still very relevant today because he is a representative of a paradigm of continuity between "Jesus" and "Christ."

Of course, Funk never had in mind the use of a Catholic approach, although it would also be helpful to evaluate his position from the point of view of Catholic principles to see how he stands vis-à-vis an analysis from an explicitly Catholic-Christian perspective. We can deduce from the divide that Funk posits between the historical Jesus and the early Christians' faith in him as the Christ that the principles of communion, tradition, and analogy were not at play in the process. First, according to this depiction of the development from Jesus to the early church's Christological faith, the early communities were a corruptor of Jesus's vision. Second, the tradition got it wrong—somewhere along the way, key elements of the historical Jesus's vision were forgotten, misunderstood, or consciously changed in order to give priority to elements which were foreign to Jesus's program or even inimical to it.

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[35]Offensive as it may sound to traditional Christian ears, this author thinks that this statement is not completely false. There are indeed elements in Christianity which are inimical to Jesus. See, for example, the following works: J. Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, PN: Trinity Press, 2001) and R. Hagenston, *Fabricating Faith: How Christianity Became a Religion Jesus would have Rejected* (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2014).

Third, similarity between the historical Jesus and the early church is not only absent but vigorously rejected. In its place, Funk emphasizes the radical difference between the two visions.

This author does not mean to say that Funk's treatment of the matter is without value because of that; on the contrary, *there are a lot of valid insights in it*. We need to listen carefully to voices like Funk's in order to avoid a glib and uncritical stance which too readily claims a problem-free connection between "Jesus" and "Christ," most especially when we are dealing with how the vision of the historical Jesus is reflected in confessional and ecclesial Christianity's presentation of him. When one thinks of that, one cannot help but admit that there is indeed a great need to go back to the original vision of the prophet-rabbi from Nazareth. This author also thinks that there was significant corruption of Jesus's vision in the shift from the historical Jesus to the early church's Christological faith, most especially when the church was assimilated into the structure of the Roman empire.[36]

In the end, though, the nagging question remains: Is discontinuity all there is in the relation between "Jesus" and "Christ"? Let us now look for an alternative vision from Edward Schillebeeckx.

Dialogue Partner 2: Edward Schillebeeckx

Past, Present, and Future Dimensions

We start, as it were, by asking Schillebeeckx to give us insights on our topic of concern: How is the historical "Jesus" related to the "Christ" of the early Christians' faith? To this query, he would start, no doubt, by saying that no person can be understood

1. apart from the course of past events that have affected them and elicit their critical reaction (the "past" dimension);

[36]See, for example, A. Kee, *Constantine versus Christ: The Triumph of Ideology* (London: SCM Press, 1982).

2. apart from people who are in relationships with them (the relational and present dimension); [and]

3. apart from the effect that this person has had on subsequent history (the future dimension).[37]

Applying this to the theme of "Jesus—Christ," we perceive that if we seek to know the central element of the Christian faith (Jesus) in a fuller sense, it is not enough to do studies on Jesus exclusively as an historical figure—that would deal only with the past dimension. We also need to take stock carefully of how the people who were in relationships with him experienced, saw, and thought about him. We would also have to consider seriously the impact that Jesus had on his world's subsequent history, which, in the words of theologian M. Hellwig explaining ES's thinking on the matter, is that "long-term, far-flung, complex, and ever unfolding legacy" which Jesus left. Notice here that ES is making a caveat, right at the very start, about the illusion and dangers of doing a purely historical study.[38] He emphasizes that in discovering who Jesus was, the element of "tradition" (particularly how the early Christians experienced, saw, and thought about Jesus) is *as important* as the effort at recovering particular *ipsissima verba et facta* (the very words and facts related with the historical Jesus).

On the other hand, although he admits that there is some truth in German New Testament scholar R. Bultmann's positing of a not-so-

[37]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 44. A more recent historical Jesus scholar who put particular value on the "impact of Jesus" as an important historical category was the late J. Dunn. See J. Dunn, "Remembering Jesus: How the Historical Jesus Quest Lost Its Way," in J. Beilby & P. Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 203–207 (the whole chapter spans pp. 199–225). See also J. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 881–884. This author thinks that Dunn's work on the historical Jesus is particularly important for comparative purposes because there are some striking resonances between it and Schillebeeckx's work on Jesus.

[38]M. Hellwig, "Historical Jesus Research: Its Relevance to Thoughtful Christians and to Systematic Theologians," in B. Le Beau, L. Greenspoon, & D. Hamm, eds., *The Historical Jesus through Catholic and Jewish Eyes* (Harrisburg, PN: Trinity Press, 2000), 91.

smooth continuity between "Jesus" and "Christ," ES basically rejects the typical Bultmannian view that the only thing we can recover from the New Testament is the *kerygma* (proclamation) of the early Christians and not the historical Jesus.[39] For ES, if anyone loses sight of how the historical Jesus actually lived—his person, message, way of life, and death—in trying to explain the mystery that is Jesus Christ, they will risk turning the *kerygma* into a pure myth without any historical grounding or true incarnational meaning.[40]

The best way for ES to proceed, therefore, is through "a historical and critical approach, set within an intention of faith."[41] This is an approach which does point to and find its uniting factor in the person of Jesus (i.e., his person, message, way of life, death, and resurrection). At the same time, it also takes into account how the different communities in the early church (the "impact of Jesus on subsequent history" dimension) experienced and expressed their relationship with him whom they believed to be risen and continuously present and saving them.[42]

Therefore, the first main point about the interrelatedness of "Jesus" and "Christ" is this: it is important to quest not only for *ipsissima verba et facta* (the authentic words and deeds of Jesus) but also for the impact of the historical Jesus on those around him and on subsequent history. And since these people later came to acclaim the eschatological prophet from Galilee as the "Christ" due to several factors we will discuss in more detail below, it is logical to deduce that "Christ" has an intimate link with the historical Jesus.

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[39]Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 106. Cf. particularly R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner's, 1958) and R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner's, 1958).

[40]See Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 52.

[41]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 56.

[42]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 56–57. See also J. Bowden's enlightening summary and commentary on ES's thinking: J. Bowden, *Edward Schillebeeckx: In Search of the Kingdom of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 60–61.

Roots of "Christ" in the Historical Jesus

Part Two of *JEC* (entitled "The Gospel of Jesus Christ") is the place where ES deals directly with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is good, therefore, to delve into this second part of *JEC* to look for some interrelatedness between "Jesus" and "Christ." Let us focus on three things which seem to have great import for the theme that concerns us here: 1) Jesus's summons to discipleship; 2) Jesus's *abba* experience; and 3) Jesus's unshaken assurance of salvation continuing in the face of death. This author wishes to see, above all, what these three aspects of the historical Jesus's life show about how Jesus saw himself vis-à-vis his main concern, "the kingdom of God," and how early Christ-followers appropriated and expressed that in their post-easter faith in Jesus.

At the very start of Part 2, ES states, along with the majority of scholars, that "the basic impulse behind the message and preaching of Jesus" was the kingdom of God, "with the emphasis at once on its coming and on its coming close."[43] ES defines the "Kingdom of God" as "the expression of God's being: unconditional and liberating sovereign love, in so far as this comes into being and reveals itself in the life of men and women who do God's will."[44]

What was Jesus's relation to this kingdom? Jesus basically did not proclaim himself. He was concerned not so much with himself but with the coming kingdom of God.[45] In his person and way of life, which was characterized by "persistent care for and attention to those about him," many experienced the salvation that the kingdom of God realizes, and thus came to understand Jesus as the messenger of God's kingdom.[46] In fact, "living contact with him (Jesus) was experienced as God-given salvation."[47]

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[43]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 140.

[44]Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 111.

[45]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 307.

[46]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 219.

[47]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 545.

Jesus's Calls to Discipleship

It is also equally true that Jesus assembled around himself "a very intimate coterie of disciples, along with a wider circle."[48] For these companions, to associate with Jesus meant to be put unconditionally at the service of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is characterized by its soteriological character, that is, the realizing of salvation. The fact of being associated with Jesus is, therefore, first and foremost, a soteriological fact. However, what concerns us more here is that, as ES remarks so insightfully, *it is a Christological fact as well*. How? It shows that "one's relation to the coming rule of God is *dependent or conditional upon a relationship to Jesus*."[49]

Another facet of Jesus's summons to discipleship is that the many stories of calling in the Gospels make it clear beyond any doubt that following Jesus is more important than the hitherto most serious obligation of fulfilling the Law in Jesus's world. The episode of the man who wants to bury his father is a case in point (Matt. 8:19, 21–22 and Luke 9:57–60). In response to the request to bury his dead father, Jesus answers him thus: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:22).[50] This statement has several decisive implications. Jesus's call is as it were "a matter of life or death." It deliberately overrides the claims of a sacred obligation stipulated by the Torah which Pharisaic interpretation even considered as providing exemption from any other duty.[51] In short, Jesus's summons took precedence over all other things. Expressed with reference to the all-important Jewish Law, Schillebeeckx thinks that such call stories make it clear that the fulfillment of the Law is no longer enough for salvation. What mediates salvation now above everything is one's relationship with Jesus.[52]

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[48]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 219.

[49]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 222 (emphasis added).

[50]All quotes from the Bible are from the NRSV.

[51]See Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 221.

[52]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 226; also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 116–118.

As mentioned above, here we find not only a soteriological implication but also a Christological one. One, therefore, is prompted to ask: Who is this Jesus who can make such an authoritative, hitherto almost unknown powerful summons to discipleship?

Jesus's Relationship with His *Abba*

Jesus was someone who had a special relationship with the being he called *abba*. Titles like "Son of God" or "the Son" were expressions of the early Christians' identification of Jesus with the promised messiah, although the historical Jesus most probably never spoke of himself in those terms. However, in Jesus's calling the God of Israel *abba*, the disciples had a glimpse of how Jesus thought of himself with regard to Yahweh.[53] The action of addressing God as *abba* connotes an unconventional relationship characterized by love, familiarity, and an "unaffected and natural simplicity" not completely absent in the Judaism of Jesus's day but certainly rare.[54]

This *abba* filled Jesus completely. We know that because "he broached the subject of God in and through his message of the coming rule of God."[55] In the context of the "calamitous and pain-ridden history within which Jesus stood," we can see that in addressing God as *abba*, Jesus expressed that he was continuously in a deep relationship of trust and familiarity with a benevolent God who does not allow all the evil in the world to have the last word. This was what spurred Jesus to proclaim the "coming" but at the same time "already present" kingdom of God.[56]

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[53]See Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 258.

[54]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 261 and 260, respectively; also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 121. Also cf. H. Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1999), 67–74.

[55]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 266.

[56]See Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 267.

Continuing Trust in the Face of Death

This trust in his *abba* was shown concretely in how Jesus faced his death. In discussing Jesus's death, ES brings to the fore the event of the Last Supper and states that the service which characterized Jesus's whole life and ministry was firmly rooted in the tradition of the meal. That, in turn, is shown concretely in Jesus's action of gathering his disciples for a last supper.[57]

With regard to the Last Supper, ES puts special emphasis on the implications of two passages, Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:15–18, reproduced below in that order:

> Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.
>
> From now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. (v. 18)

These verses show that during the Last Supper, there was an emphatic announcement by Jesus of his imminent death, a farewell to his disciples as it were. However, Jesus also stated clearly that that farewell is offered with the assurance of renewed fellowship in the coming kingdom of God.

For ES, these two passages are pregnant with meaning. They show us that in the face of impending death (which was a result of a rejection of Jesus's offer of salvation), Jesus was still trusting that salvation would come, and, in fact, through his very death. And this death was not to be the end of the fellowship he had with those who did accept the kingdom.[58] Finally, it is also important to note that in all of this, Jesus considered his disciples' fellowship with him as something that would not be completely shattered with his death but would continue until the kingdom of God comes in a fuller way.[59]

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[57]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 305.

[58]See Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 308–310, which are among the most powerful and moving pages in the book.

[59]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 310; also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 119–120.

This attitude also makes it clear that Jesus considered his death not a break from but a part, maybe even the culmination, of his life's program—that of loving service. Hence, ES is adamant in insisting not to separate Jesus's death from his ministry, declaring that "Jesus' whole life is the hermeneusis of his death."[60]

We are now in a position to express briefly a second point on the interrelatedness of "Jesus" and "Christ": The root of the early Christians' confession of Jesus as the Christ lies in the very person and ministry of the historical Jesus who exhibited a special authority grounded apparently in an intimate, one-of-a-kind, trusting relationship with God whom he called *abba*. This trust remained to the end, even when Jesus was faced with death. These factors, when recalled by the early Christians in the light of the Easter experience, led them to identify Jesus as "Christ."

The Kingdom of God Takes on the Appearance of Jesus Christ

Resurrection

The nature of Jesus's resurrection and how ES treats it is beyond the scope of this article. What concerns us is what the nature of the early church's resurrection faith was.[61] According to ES, in believing and proclaiming that God had raised Jesus from the dead, the early Christians were affirming one of the key beliefs that has since characterized Christianity: God did not forget Jesus. God remembered him and the result of this remembrance of Jesus on the part of God takes the forms of resurrection and *Christology*: "God identifies the kingdom of God with Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified One." The kingdom of God proclaimed did indeed come in Jesus who was

[60]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 311; also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 120, 124.

[61]See Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 127–132.

crucified and risen! Thus, the proclaimer who did not think of himself was turned into the proclaimed, the center of the Christian faith.[62]

Here we are dealing with what ES calls "first-order" and "second-order" assertions. The first-order assertion is "In Jesus God saves human beings" (the focus is on God through the mediating action of Jesus). The second-order assertion is "Jesus is the one in whom God's definitive saving action has become a reality" (the focus is on the person and identity of Jesus).

First-order assertions are naturally the starting point for all reflection on Jesus Christ since "God" (first of all, then secondly "as mediated by the historical Jesus") is the focus of such assertions. But through the experience of salvation, first in the historical Jesus and then through the faith born out of the resurrection and on to the subsequent identification of the kingdom of God with Jesus and the development of a strictly Christological faith, Christology—with its focus on "Christ"—was born. However, it should never be forgotten that there is a strict connection between the historical Jesus and the faith of the church supported by Christological dogmas.[63]

ES clearly states that Christological dogmas lie on the plane of second-order affirmations. The object of Christology is the identity of Jesus. This quest is found, in the first instance, in the New Testament where we can already see the identification of God's rule with the person of Jesus. Christology in the New Testament and its subsequent history in the life and teaching of the Christian church eventually gave birth to the Nicene dogma of Jesus as one in being with God the Father, to be balanced later on by Chalcedon's proclamation that Jesus is also truly human.[64]

Thus, we have been brought back to Nicaea not with a sense of a great divide between "Jesus" and "Christ" but with a clear idea of

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[62]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 402, 531, 542–543. See also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 112.

[63]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 548–549.

[64]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 549–550.

the reason why Christians sought to know better the identity of Jesus and define it more precisely, the culminating point of which was the formulation of the Christological dogmas.

Note on Jesus's Deeds and Words

We saw in our discussion of Funk's position that he gives priority to Jesus's sayings over deeds. In contrast, Schillebeeckx's approach is decidedly characterized by an overwhelming emphasis on Jesus's deeds or, shall we say, Jesus's patterns of acting and lifestyle. Even a cursory survey of Part Two of *JEC*, where he deals with the historical Jesus's life, shows that the bulk of the material is devoted to Jesus's "manner of life" which made those who came in contact with him experience salvation in a concrete way.[65] In fact, one of the key expressions not only of *JEC* but of ES's whole theology is "the *praxis* of the Kingdom of God."[66]

The reason for ES's emphasis on deeds is, apparently, the weight he gives the Jewish ontology of being (which sheds more light on the milieu of Jesus) as opposed to the Greek one. The former maintains a unity between the being of a person and his or her deeds—or, to use another category, between the nature and the function of a person—while the latter tends to dichotomize the two aspects. ES also calls this Jewish ontology "salvation-history ontology." He considers a separation of function and being to be "outside New Testament categories" and thus unjustifiable. In the ultimate analysis, "Jesus' being *is* itself salvation from God."[67]

In fact, ES clearly states that "the kingdom of God has to be defined further in terms of the life of Jesus." As proof of this, he mentions the incident where disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus

[65]See Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 179.

[66]Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 154; also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 116–118. Emphasis added.

[67]Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 23 (emphasis in original). See also Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 21–23.

whether he is the Messiah. Jesus's answer is simple: he merely mentions what he is doing to care for and help others (see Luke 7:22–23).[68]

Evaluation of Schillebeeckx's Treatment of "Jesus—Christ"

Alfred Loisy is famous for the pithy remark, "Jesus preached the kingdom of God, but out came the Church!"[69] This positing of a great divide between the kingdom of God and the church, or, to express that in a similar expression, between "Jesus" and "Christ," has never gone away. It continues to influence many, scholar and non-scholar alike. It comes back in every age, clothed in new attires, proposed by new names, yet at its core is the idea that there is a basic discontinuity between the historical Jesus who preached the kingdom and the church who deified this Jesus and made him into "Christ," corrupting him in the process into an icon more reminiscent of the imperial Byzantine courts than of the "subversive iconoclast" from Galilee who was against all imperial trappings. Latent in such a view is an admiration of "Jesus" but distrust of "Christ" as a mere machination of a power-addicted, dysfunctional ecclesiastical institution.

It is clear that Funk's book exemplifies that position. Recall, though, this author's earlier demurrer: it is also important to listen to—what this author would go so far as to call—"prophetic suggestions" that, in a way, are also contained therein. In fact, in speaking about Bultmann's position of denying a smooth continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the church's faith, ES himself says, "Bultmann continues in a renewed way to fulfill a critical role in respect of the church's faith."[70] This author thinks that the paradigm of discontinuity between "Jesus" and "Christ" should also be balanced out with a

[68]See also Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 112–113.

[69]Quoted in Schillebeeckx, *JEC*, 402.

[70]Schillebeeckx, *CHU*, 106.

paradigm such as that of Schillebeeckx that takes the continuity between "Jesus" and "Christ" seriously.

At the end of our examination of Funk's position, we asked: Is discontinuity all there is between "Jesus" and "Christ"? Schillebeeckx has given us a contrasting view of the matter that invites us to see that there might indeed be a firm continuity between "Jesus" and "Christ" which cannot be easily dismissed.

ES's approach shows in a salient way the Catholic principles enunciated at the beginning of this article. In insisting that we approach the person of Jesus with an eye both for the historical flesh and blood person from Nazareth and the people who followed him, lived with him, and were profoundly affected by him to the extent of proclaiming him as the "Christ," Schillebeeckx demonstrates the pivotal role that communion and tradition play in understanding who Jesus really was and continues to be for us today.

In painstakingly showing how the earthly Jesus can still be held as similar in a way to the creedal Christ and that there is an essential interrelatedness between them—that is, "Christ" is deeply rooted in the experience of salvation people had in "Jesus" (not "Jesus | Christ" but "Jesus—Christ")—ES shows the principle of analogy at work, which seeks to see similarity more than difference and otherness.

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