

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS TRUE DISCIPLES

Markus van Alphen

One of the pertinent differences between the Liberal Catholic Church and most other churches is its view on Jesus, Christ and Jesus Christ, which terms elsewhere are often equated to one another and used interchangeably. In our church, these two words individually and in combination with one another have very distinct meanings. In the Shorter Form of the Holy Eucharist, for example, the word Jesus only appears twice, and, on both occasions, in combination with the word Christ. All further references in the Eucharist are to Christ, with or without the title Our Lord. This article attempts to deepen our understanding about these words, amongst others by studying the words uttered before the Communio of the Holy Eucharist.

In the original¹ Shorter Form of the Holy Eucharist, the words Jesus Christ, in this combination with each other, are to be found in two places only. In the Canticle: "...and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone..." (1983-a) and after Communion: "Under the veil of earthly things, now have we communion with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Soon with open face shall we behold him, and rejoicing in his glory shall be made like unto him. Then shall his true disciples be brought by him with exceeding joy, before the presence of his father's glory." (1983-b)

The revision of the Holy Eucharist into the form we use today was largely the work of two of the founding bishops, J.I. Wedgwood and C.W. Leadbeater. This mammoth task was performed in a period of approximately three years, between 1916 and 1919, in the early years of our church (1977). Much background is given in Leadbeater's book *The Science of the Sacraments*, a book well worth reading - even today in the 21st century. The care with which the liturgy was prepared, using Wedgwood's genius of language and Leadbeater's genius in applying scientific precision in observing its effect, is apparent on reading the liturgy or attending one of the services. Each word seems to have been chosen with careful precision as to its poetic value, its clarity, its inner meaning and its inner operation. Each portion of the liturgy can be experienced as a sort of mantra and as focus for a guided meditation leading one from the lowest earth to the highest heaven and back in the space of five quarters of an hour.

The choice of the words *Jesus Christ* in this combination in the two above-mentioned passages is then certainly neither arbitrary nor an accident. The bishops knew why they used these words, in the same manner as they consciously used seeming redundancy in combining the words *true disciples*, also in the passage just before the Communio. Seemingly redundant, as one could argue that a disciple is one who follows the discipline and is therefore by definition true, but a deeper truth is being referred to.

How then do we, as Liberal Catholics, distinguish between these three? A short side step into the Greek texts is enlightening. Three terms have loosely been translated into English, Christes, Chrêstos and Christos, generally into the single word *Christ*. Obviously, the Greek authors did not mean the same thing when using a different term; each term had a very specific meaning. As H.P. Blavatsky explains (quoted by Spierenburg): "The terms Christ and Christians, spelt originally Chrêst and Chrêstians, were borrowed from the Temple vocabulary of the Pagans. Chrêstos meant, in that vocabulary, 'a disciple on probation', a candidate for hierophantship; who, when he had attained it, through Initiation, long trials and suffering, and had been anointed, was changed into Christos - the 'purified' in esoteric or mystery language. In mystic symbology, indeed, Christês or Christos meant that the 'way', the Path, was already trodden and the goal reached; when the fruits of the arduous labor, uniting the personality of evanescent clay with the indestructible INDIVIDUALITY, transformed it thereby into the immortal EGO. 'At the end of the way stands the Christês', the Purifier; and the union once accomplished, the Chrêstos, the 'man of sorrow', became Christos himself." (1987)

In the last sentence of the quotation the essence of the meanings of the three words commonly translated as Christ becomes apparent. Christ as the World Teacher (Christês), the Christ within (Chrêstos) and Christ as life itself (Christos).

So too, some regard the name Jesus as a title, derived from the Hebrew name Jehoshua and meaning the initiate, or the good man.

The Christian tradition is based largely on the scriptures now contained in the Bible. But these were by no means the only exoteric exponents of Christian thought. The stories given, especially in the New Testament, should be read in context with the then reigning traditions, from which they borrowed heavily. They were never meant to be read as accurate descriptions of historical events, which they are not. Any historian studying that period in history is sure to come up with too many anomalies to explain away as mere coincidence.

So then, why was the Bible written and how is it to be read? Certainly, the historic personage of Jesus existed, whether he went by this name or another. Certainly some of the events described actually happened. But, between the lines of the story, partly concocted, partly based on historic events, lies hidden several layers of interpretation. One of these levels is that of the development of the human being. Another is what is generally termed cosmogenesis -this article will not touch on this interpretation- and a third is the story of the World Teacher, who came to bring humankind a new dispensation. These are the three most pertinent layers that can be detected, although there certainly are many more.

So, from this perspective, let us attempt to explain –albeit partially– the usage of the word Jesus in the Liberal Catholic tradition. Many members, whether clergy or laity, do not want to be confronted with this word, as it brings back too many uncomfortable memories of the orthodox view of Jesus hanging from the cross as an act of vicarious atonement. Just because something is confrontational, does not mean we should not look at it or pretend it is not there. Jesus is a pivotal personage in the scriptures and without him the scriptural story in this form simply would not exist.

Historically seen, the story is largely conjecture. The most plausible story can be paraphrased into a few sentences: Jesus was born naturally, in the Essene community, arguably the holders of the Divine Wisdom and the operatives of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Essenes were known for their asceticism, their strict discipline and purity. Jesus would have been initiated in all the Temple rites and probably was also initiated in the Egyptian Mysteries, a close liaison between these two traditions being very probable. A man of advanced development, but despite his purity was nonetheless still human. As an enlightened and advanced human being, he was prepared to allow his personality to be used as a vehicle for the World Teacher, of which more anon. On preaching the new dispensation, Jesus was accused of divulging the Temple secrets, a sacrilege punishable by death. This was the cause of his untimely death by stoning.

Jesus literally means "the good man" and this is borne out by the story above. This good man is found, now no longer only in strict historical sense, as the leading character in the drama unfolded in the New Testament. On reading the story in the context of the development of the human being, Jesus stands for the personality of every human being who treads the path of purification.

Christ, on the other hand, is a distinctly different concept, for lack of a better way of putting it. Let us begin with the concept of Christ as indwelling within us. Our way of looking at the human being is that each and every human is truly a monad, a spark of the divine, from which it came. This life principle is a common factor held by all humans, nay, by everything in the universe and even the universe itself: This life principle is the One Life.

Even though all is present in the human being, it is latent and needs to be unfolded, or evolved, by experience in the world of form. Each of us is then also the custodian of the Christ within, sometimes referred to as the Christ principle, by which we mean that portion of our constitution that is the carrier, the vehicle, of this life. It is the bringing to fruition of these latent possibilities that makes of the Chrêstos the Christos. This is but another way of saying, that if you believe in (the name of) Christ, you will have eternal life (cf. John 6:47).

Our Act of Faith teaches that all *shall one day reach his feet*, which, in short, indicates that all human endeavor serves to perfect our individual grip on the various levels of

consciousness. When this level of perfection is reached, this is not *The End*, but the beginning of a new vista of possibilities of unfoldment. All life eventually passes through the human kingdom and continues in higher realms. This leads us to the aspect of Christ as the World Teacher, which is, in general, what we mean when we add the title "Our Lord" to the word Christ.

So, *Christ Our Lord*, or *Christ as the World Teacher*, or the *World Teacher*, or *The Christ*, are synonymous ways of expressing the same. This exalted being, is one that has also passed through the human stages of development, has perfected these, and has chosen to remain connected to our earth to assist hisⁱⁱ brothers –still struggling here below- to reach the same height of development.

Subsequent to reaching human perfection, he continued his path of development, until he was ready to assume the office of the World Teacher. We are told that his predecessor, from whom he took over this function, was none other than the Lord Gautama Buddha, who in his turn continues his development on a yet higher scale.

The office of the World Teacher is responsible for the religious development of the human race. He it is who from time to time brings humanity a different exposition of the Truth, each exposition tailored to suit the temperament, level of development and the culture into which it is brought.

To bring a new exposition, or dispensation, it is necessary that the World Teacher undertake some form of incarnation, not for the purpose of his own development –as he has already broken the wheel of birth and death-, but for the helping of humanity. As the time taken to come to grips with a new body and bring it under the control of the incarnating individuality requires a fair amount of time, a disciple will sometimes undertake this task for him and allow his body to be "taken over" at an appropriate moment in time. In the Christian tradition, seen from the point of view of the story of the World Teacher, the Baptism of Jesus by John symbolizes this.

When we combine Jesus with Christ, we have the World Teacher expressing himself through the personality of his beloved disciple, Jesus: Physically seen, one sees Jesus, but the one expressing himself through that body is Christ, the World Teacher, thus Jesus Christ. The relationship is similar to the relationship between the actor and the role: The actor in this case is the World Teacher, and the role in which he disguises himself is Jesus.

Different interpretations of Jesus, Christ and Jesus Christ		
Term	Development of the human being	Story of the World Teacher
Jesus	The personality on the path of purification	The disciple
Jesus Christ	The personality under full sway of the soul	The World Teacher expressing himself through the personality of his disciple
Christ	The soul, or the immanent Christ principle	The World Teacher

When we say Jesus Christ is *our chief cornerstone*, we are affirming that we commence our ritual work in the physical world and use as basic point of departure the principles brought to us by the World Teacher through the body of Jesus. Remember that the chief cornerstone is the first stone laid for a new temple, or cathedral, by the masons. This stone is the most Northeastern stone in the building, the Northeast where the sun appears in its symbolical journey from the midnight sun –wisdom concealed- to the meridian – wisdom revealed-. Through Jesus Christ the wisdom that was concealed becomes revealed and this is the basis of our ritual work.

Similarly, at the end of the Eucharist, when we say that *under the veil of earthly things, now have we communion with Our Lord Jesus Christ*, we are again referring to the intimate connection we have established with the World Teacher by the performance of the ritual handed down by him to us.

It is the words following this statement that are of extreme importance. *Soon with open face shall we behold him*: How often do we realize how soon this will be? Within a few minutes, the service will end and we come face to face with our fellow human being - soon with open face shall we behold him – in the eyes of our brothers and sisters. Here we again link up with the connotation of Christ as the indwelling life, the Christ principle within each and every human being.

What a wonderful modulation from the gift of the World Teacher into the gift innate in each and every one of us! In fact, what we come face to face with is the Christ within ourselves –the hope of glory-, which we see reflected in our fellow human being: *And rejoicing in his glory be made like unto him*.

In this respect it is interesting to consider the similarity of these words with that given in I I Corinthians 3:16-18, to wit: “Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Two interesting

points ensue: Firstly, the middle verse is a reference to Pentecost, and is used as such in the special Gradual for that day, thereby creating a link –albeit tenuous- between this stage of the Eucharist and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost at that occasion. Secondly, the curious additional words *as in a glass*; probably glass is intended as in looking glass, or mirror, thereby also linking back to the Confiteor, where we say "...and become the unspotted mirror of thy power, and an image of thy goodness."

Then shall his true disciples be brought by him with exceeding joy: Looking back at the biblical story, we find that many of the supposedly historical personages may or may not have existed. In the layer of interpretation of the development of the human being, these personages stand –symbolically- for aspects within our constitution. This is especially evident in the story of the passion, where, in the garden of Gethsemane, the disciples are repeatedly found sleeping, indicating that the final step through the abyss mystically known as the dark night of the soul is to be made alone.

Just as some aspects are mortal –those we use whilst in incarnation-, thereby temporary, others are aspects of the soul, which is immortal. True disciples can then be interpreted as the fruit of these immortal aspects, which fruit is immortal, therefore real, and therefore true. Our true disciples depict the wisdom gleaned by experience in the cyclic sojourns in the flesh over an immense period now behind us. When we are able to look back and see the fruit of our entire endeavor in the light of this Christ life within, it truly will be a culmination that is experienced with exceeding joy.

Before the presence of his father's glory: The mission has been completed. When we identify ourselves entirely with the Christ life within, the stage of "I and my Father are one" is reached. We become a perfect expression of the divine life and we truly make contact with the highest self – Our Father, who art in heaven.

Of course, we are not yet in a stage of development that we can hold onto such a momentary experience of unity. Even reaching the highest height is almost impossible and hardly a repeatable exercise. That is why we keep practicing! The importance of the Eucharist is primarily to shed positive, helpful influences over the world at large and secondarily to train ourselves to become better instruments in the hand of our highest self, which of course isn't really ours, but is the Self that we feebly call God...

Bibliography

- 1977, Wicks, C.C., The Liberal Catholic Church and some facets of its doctrine, St Alban Press, I SBN 0-9500963-8-5, pp. 170-171
- 1983, Liturgy of The Liberal Catholic Church, St. Alban Press, I SBN 0-946867-00-3, a-p. 224; b-p. 239
- 1987, Spierenburg, H.J., The New Testament Commentaries of H.P. Blavatsky, Point Loma, I SBN 0-913004-51-0, pp. 164-165

ⁱ Apparently the word "Jesus" was scrapped in the text preceding the Commonio by the GES 2000, I have not been able to confirm this, however. In this article, the text of the 5th edition (1983-b) of the Liturgy is used.

ⁱⁱ We use the masculine for convenience only, in keeping with the biblical story. Strictly speaking, the human individuality is male and female, yet neither male nor female. The individuality expresses itself for a period of time in a male or a female personality, whilst in incarnation. Albeit the World Teacher happened to use a male body, this does not make of "him" a male! The same principle applies in this case to the word *brothers*.