

7) Jesus Christ, Part 1

In this first of three parts on the theme of Jesus Christ, I offer some basic introductory reflections that are important starting points to a deeper understanding of what we as Christians confess to believe about Jesus Christ.

1. Knowledge of Jesus Christ is historical, linguistic and academic knowledge. But it is also faith knowledge. We know a lot about the historical person named Jesus from the town of Nazareth in Galilee through the gospels, through the testimony of witnesses and through historical information about the world of Palestine under the domination of the Roman Empire. We also know about the Jewish world and how Jesus was a part of all that. Jesus lived, breathed and dreamed in such a world.

But beyond historical information about Jesus, and beyond a careful reading of the gospels and the testimony of those who encountered Jesus the human, to know Jesus is to have a relationship with Jesus and all he represents and reflects in his being. It's a connection of heart and spirit. It's about deep values, convictions and inner stirrings that flow through us when we read about him, pray in his name and allow his recorded words to come alive in us. Knowledge of Jesus Christ is first and foremost faith, heart, spirit knowledge, even as it is also historical knowledge.

2. Jesus Christ cannot be known fully apart from:

a) The particularity of his humanity and identity as a Jew among Jews and the Jewish people with their history as the people of God under a covenant with God made at Mount Sinai. Through patriarchs and matriarchs beginning with Abraham and Sarah, a history of enslavement in Egypt, the experience of freedom under the leadership of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, the experience of trying to establish a home in a land where threats from outsiders challenged the people to care for one another before God with local leaders, prophets and priests, the experiment and failed experiment of a monarchy, and the hope of freedom after repeated colonization, exile and enslavement... This is all in the heart and spirit of Jesus as he builds his identity as the Messiah of God with a dream of God's kingdom come to earth as it is in heaven some day in some way. Jesus not only dreams, but he also inaugurates this kingdom through the formation of communities who are inflamed by his Spirit and begin to embody his ongoing presence of compassion and care in the world.

b) At the same time, Jesus' identity as Jewish Messiah, Christ and Saviour is universal, transcending his own people the Jews. And this shift is recognized within the first generation of Christians who read into Jesus vision this universal thrust beyond the Jewish people into the wider world. Through Israel to the whole world is the dream of God proclaimed by prophets and inaugurated in the kingdom movement Jesus begins with his crucifixion and resurrection.

This can also mean that Jesus and his Spirit can be revealed in ways beyond even the human being from Nazareth. Could Jesus' Spirit be embodied in the kind of compassion, healing and transforming love found in other religious and faith traditions and spiritualities beyond the officially Christian ones? Could Jesus be found by other names in other sacred writings because of the substance of the teaching and the values evoked by him? This is an open question, but it is small-minded of any of us Christians to foreclose the ways Jesus the Christ may be revealed and embodied in the world beyond any one set of beliefs, creeds or confessions.

And this leads to our final point:

3. While we make confessions of faith about Jesus through the historical creeds and confessions of the church and we profess our faith in Jesus through our personal experiences and the stirrings within our hearts, Jesus Christ is the living Word of God (John 1) who transcends all things written, confessed or experienced about him. This means Jesus keeps revealing himself to us and we can never fully contain all that he can mean as the revelation and embodiment of divine love. Even as he lived in the flesh 2000 years ago, Jesus is alive now and we can encounter him as powerfully today as those who first encountered him then. Each person can meet Jesus in ways that transcend any one person's experience. His love, which is God's love, is so rich and expansive that all the world's experience of it cannot fully contain it. Isn't this both humbling and wonderful?!

What do you think?

Questions and comments welcome!

Hathan1964@hotmail.com