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Book Review

Christ in Evolution

by Ilia Delio

New York: Maryknoll, 2012

This book is a challenging read and a fascinating one. If you do not believe in evolution then there is no need to read this book. Christ in Evolution views Christology within the framework of evolution. Christology is evolving and is continually being refashioned just as all Creation is evolving. Human history is divided into two axial periods using the thinking of Carl Jaspers. The first axial period is the rise of Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates and Plato, the prophets in Judaism. The time period is from 800 BCE to 200 CE and stretches across the globe. Jesus is a crucial part of the first axial period. For Jaspers, humanity in this first axial period, becomes aware of its individuality, its sense of limitation, ideals and desire for truth and ethics. The human as a conscious self emerges out of collective consciousness seeking transcendence. The second axial period began to emerge with the Enlightenment and accelerated in the twentieth century through science. There is a shift in consciousness. The second axial period is a result of human creativity and inventiveness especially through the rise of technology. Through developments in space research and global communication, the world and universe arrives on our home computer. Technology helps humans to be more aware of the variety in the world including world religions. There is growing consciousness which includes intercultural awareness and dialogue. Evolutionary development especially in the brain including consciousness has opened new vistas. This has occurred and is occurring through scientific research.



Ilia Delio, OSF, is the professor and chair of Spirituality Studies at Washington Theological Union. She is also director of the Franciscan Center and the winner of the 2000 Templeton Course Award in Science and Religion. Her writing is about the interface of religion and science especially about its impact on Christology. Her book has nine chapters with an additional introduction and conclusion. Delio draws on a number of theologians including those from the Scriptures like Paul and John, the Patristics and medieval theologians like Bonaventure and Duns Scotus and modern and post-modern thinkers. She focuses on their understanding of Christology especially God and Christ in Creation. Then she devotes chapters to a discussion of more contemporary theologians and their understandings of the evolving Christ: Teilhard de Chardin, Raimon Panikkar, Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths. Each of these adds to the discussion of contemporary Christology. First, these men focus on the Christ of faith and less on the historical Jesus. Second, they see Christ as the basis of Creation: Creation and humans are part of Creation are both made in God's image. God's image is Christ. Christ is also the guiding force in the evolution of Creation and humankind. As Creation evolves, so does our understanding of Christ. Chardin sees the universe expanding from the big bang and moving in a direction. The expanding universe is teleological. The direction of evolution and the expanding universe ultimately is to Christ, the Omega point. Third, these four theologians are also mystics and believe that Christology cannot be reduced to dogmatic formulation. Rather, Christology need to be experienced in prayer and meditation. Panikkar a Hindu and

Christian theologian, is strong on this point. Chardin mixes science with spirituality and is often poetic. Fourth, Christology like evolution moves from simple forms to more complexity. The world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism have something to offer in the area of Christology. Christology previously was thought to be of concern only for Christians. However, when one works from the standpoint that Christ is the basis and goal of Creation, then the world religions are influenced by this movement and have something to offer here. Dialogue and respect are key and the contributions of the non-Christians religions underlie an evolving Christology. Fifth, these thinkers wish to include scientific discoveries into an evolving Christology. In particular, Delio raises the issue of the possibility of life on other planets especially intelligent life. What does that say about Christology? Can incarnation take place in other planets? Could there be multiple Christologies based on the appearance of the Christ on different planets? Also technology has begun to explore and create artificial intelligence. How does this impact on Christology? Could these machines be created in God's image? These authors believe that human creativity manifested in technology is a sign of Christology evolving. The authors that Delio cites assume that just as the universe is changing and expanding so is the Divine.

I see many strengths in this book. The dialogue between Christology and evolutionary sciences is exhilarating. Second, there is a section on Panikkar where he discusses moving the evolutionary complexity with its many parts into the psyche and the many parts of the soul. As a therapist, thinking of the inner dynamics and forms of soul as part of Christology is very helpful. His insight is brilliant. Third, emphasizing prayer and mysticism as key moves the reader from thinking to wanting to experience Christology. A few times as I read Delio, I was overtaken by the insight and spent some time in meditation. Fourth, I liked the connection to some medieval theologians especially Bonaventure and Scotus and their view of Christology centred in Creation. The evolving Christ is not just a contemporary thought. Fifth the discussion of Christology in light of Eastern thought especially Hinduism and Buddhism was helpful. Finally, one of the authors notes that Jesus is the Big Bang of Christology. That metaphor led me to a writing a poem. There are some weaknesses. Some of the writing was hard to understand especially some of the writing of Chardin. He develops his own terms and language which is scientific, poetic and mystical. Second, many of the writers are Catholic theologians. Exceptions are some Scripture scholars and Paul Tillich. I would have liked other theologians. Third, there is no connection to the practice of ministry. As a practical theologian, I wanted more connection to ministry. What are the implications of Christ in evolution for the practices of ministry? As noted above, Panikkar's multiple and complex Christology living in the psyche is helpful. However, his insight needs more explanation.

I recommend this book.

Thomas St. James O'Connor, ThD