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The Anonymous Christ: Jesus as Savior in Modern Theology

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still lives in the West, as do gnostics, Montanists, and Marcionites, and it's instructive to observe their original manifestations.

But, of course, one book can't do everything, and this one, if not used as a textbook, would serve as a gift you might give yourself for bedtime reading (I'd take it over ugh! Stephen King any day) or for a program of study that puts "all that ancient stuff" together in an orderly, not overwhelming, way.

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The Anonymous Christ: Jesus as Saviour in Modern Theology

Lee E. Snook

Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986
191 pp.

The rising tidal wave of contemporary Christology has begun the process of charting a new course for theology. Professor Lee Snook, who teaches systematic theology at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, has published a helpful (but at the same time problematic) introduction to the contemporary Christological scene. This is an introduction addressed to a very particular audience. Snook is speaking to "all those who have difficulty taking the traditional churchly confessions of Jesus as their starting point" (7).

According to Snook, soteriology is the ultimate measuring-stick that determines the authenticity of any Christology today. An authentic Christology must demonstrate how Jesus saves humankind from the multidimensional forms of lostness. Lostness refers to: idolatrous unbelief, hopelessness, anxiety and alienation, oppression, ecological disaster, isolation, false and distorted consciousness.

For Snook, there is no one, absolute, definitive Christology. Every Christology has its bias, whether or not its proponents are conscious of it. An authentic faith in Jesus as Saviour today will review reality as: openness, multidimensional, dialogue, complex, and pluralistic.

Snook employs two major methodological categories to interpret contemporary Christologies. First, he borrows, in a modified form, the categories of George Lindbeck. Snook presents the Christologies of Karl Barth, Hans Frei, Paul Tillich, the liberation theologians, and Thomas J.J. Altizer as "Cultural-Linguistic". The Christologies of Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Cobb, Edward Schillebeeckx, John Hick, Karl Rahner, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith are presented by Snook as "Experiential-Historical". The

problematic nature of Lindbeck's categories becomes quite pronounced, especially in light of Snook's definition of "experienced fact" in footnote 16, at the end of chapter 1—which is diametrically opposed to Lindbeck's categorical distinctions. Second, Snook employs the categories of relation and/or disrelation (Snook's term) of God and self, God and world, world and self. Lostness, as articulated in contemporary Christologies, is a disrelation with any or all of the three polarities. There is also a series of aggregates within the framework of Snook's methodological categories.

The Christologies of Barth, Frei, and Pannenberg form the first aggregate. They all begin with the same question: "Who is Jesus Christ?" It was Barth who insisted that Christianity cannot be held captive by or identified with worldviews from any period of history. Christ as God's Word is the basis of salvation and theology is always the servant of the Word. Pannenberg, unlike Barth, begins with a "Christology from below" and is critical of a universal-absolutist view of history. He insists that the historicity of Christ's resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith. Revelation and salvation are equated with human beings knowing their ultimate destiny, i.e., they are saved from hopelessness.

The Christologies of Tillich and Cobb form the second aggregate. Tillich almost totally disagreed with Barth on how theology should be the servant of the proclaimed Word. Tillich and Cobb employ contemporary worldviews in order that the biblical worldview become intelligible to 20th century human beings. In the case of Tillich, an existential philosophy of being is employed to explain the structures of ontological reality. Salvation is realized when Jesus the New Being heals the brokenness-estrangement between God and humanity, humanity and the world, humans in their relationships with one another. For Tillich, soteriology is the presupposition of all Christologies. In the case of Cobb, a process theologian, a philosophy of becoming is employed to establish a bridge between Christianity and contemporary secular culture. The Christ departs from the old, challenges the status-quo, and leads us into an open, hopeful and transformed future. The Christ has relativized everything to make all things new through creative transformation.

The Christologies of the liberation theologians (particularly the Latin Americans) and Schillebeeckx form the third aggregate. Many liberation theologians employ Marxist philosophy in their critical analysis of historical worldviews. Theological praxis works toward making the world a more friendly and just place to live for everyone, especially the poor and oppressed. Liberation theology is rooted in concrete human experiences of brokenness-sin in the world and not abstract reason or logic. The Christologies of liberation theologians view Jesus as Liberator of the oppressed as a sign of God's coming eschatological kingdom. For Schillebeeckx, the crisis of contemporary Christianity is the gap between faith and experience. His Christology is based on critical-historical exegesis of the New Testament and experience as salvific. Experience is an all-encompassing term which includes: emotions, subjectivity, thought, interpretation, revelation, faith,

divine truth and salvation. According to Schillebeeckx, the Gospels are soteriologies rather than Christologies, in that they are not so much concerned with Jesus' identity as they are with how people have experienced what Jesus has done for them and others—these experiences are presented as salvific.

The Christologies of Altizer, Hick, Rahner, and Cantwell Smith form the final aggregate. For Altizer, salvation is viewed as universal consciousness after history comes to an end and Jesus' Word over all other words, transforms-negates unique-individual consciousness. In the case of Hick, Rahner and Cantwell Smith, Christology must be reformulated in light of dialogue with other world religions, leading to a more universal, inclusive Christ. According to Snook, this requires more faith in the Christ than remaining in the security blanket of an insular, exclusive Christology. Its goal may lead religiously to a "universal humanity".

In his final chapter, Snook wrestles with the dilemma and paradox of Christ's saving significance and postmodern religious pluralism. He concludes by favoring the unique and superior claims of Jesus as Saviour. However, he arrives at this conclusion in humility, giving his readers this very important admonition: "There is much in Scripture to warn believers to be everlastingly alert to the ambiguity of their own belief" (147). His discussion on the anonymous Christ (not to be confused with Rahner's "anonymous Christian") is remarkably brief. Considering the book's title one would expect the motif to be articulated more explicitly. Among other things, Snook employs the term to refer to the mysterious, ominous, vague, hidden, adventurous and challenging aspects of the Christ.

There are two very noticeable lacunae in Snook's theological presentation. First, he tends to shy away from the Christologies of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Dorothee Soelle, Patricia Wilson-Kastner and other feminist theologians. Second, it is very difficult to make a convincing case for the saving significance of Jesus Christ without an explicit *theologia crucis*.

However, all things considered, Snook should be recommended reading for those theologians, seminary students and pastors who take the theological task seriously enough to communicate the Christian faith intelligently to postmodern 20th century humankind.

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