Letter to the Editor

This letter reflects on a couple of matters addressed in *SW* 30, after briefly reviewing the writer's article in *SW* 29, with a partial correction. The latter article, entitled '*Esse & Evangel*: Metaphysical Order in Evangelical Doctrine', is structured as a metaphysical interpretation of a Scriptural schema recounting 'who Jesus Christ is', from His engagement as Logos in the creation to His Incarnation as a man, His Crucifixion and Resurrection, Ascension and Return. This evangelical schema is interpreted in terms of perennial metaphysics, which in turn are somewhat reinterpreted by Scripture. All of this, barely stated, the writer stands behind, and has indeed developed further over the past year. However an additional proposal was introduced, on pages 114f and 117f, to consider the Personal (hypostatic) union as defined at the Council of Chalcedon, as a metaphysical analogy (*analogia*) to be employed speculatively in several ways. This proposal is hereby repudiated, as the notion of analogy has proven too complex in associations and implications to be used in the manner envisioned. What is proposed instead is a hypostatic *principle*, the point of which being that in the Chalcedonian understanding of the Second Person the *uncreated* nature (*ousia*) of God is united inseparably, yet without confusion, to a *created* human nature, in the very Person of the Son of God. It is this metaphysical aspect of the Second Person that can be considered as an intellectual *principle* from which the whole metaphysical order can be 'derived'. In its unmixed and unconfused union of the uncreated and created natures, this *principle* illustrates a Christocentric view of nonduality (*advaita*), parallel or perhaps orthogonal to the Trinitarian

advaita of the *ousia* and the Persons that Wolfgang Smith has outlined in these pages, and has developed with greater amplitude in his book *Christian Gnosis*.

Which brings us to the two letters in *SW* 30, by Patrick Moore and Gustavo Polit, addressing themselves to Dr Smith's letter in *SW* 29 (157-161), which relate to the very 'touchy' topic of whether there is indeed something 'new' or 'different' about Christian metaphysics, leaving aside the question of 'superior'. Patrick Moore writes from a solidly orthodox Christian perspective, and demonstrates a profound understanding of Faith and the Sacraments, but is troubled by the notion that Christ brought anything really new to the history of religions, and specifically to their metaphysical foundations. 'And the crux of the matter is that it seems necessarily untrue that Christianity should bring anything essentially different or new or superior to that offered by the other revelations.' (191) Moreover, says Moore, 'If Christ brought "change" He would not be worth listening to, *quod absit*! Christ came to restore!' (196) Wolfgang Smith to the contrary, observed that 'Patristic metaphysics broke away from the Platonist mold at its very inception. … It appears that with the advent of Christ everything on earth has changed; even the metaphysical landscape is no longer the same: not for the Christian!' (*SW* 29:159) This echoes his earlier account in *SW* 28 (183), 'that the savants of Christianity, after centuries of endeavor—and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as we believe—broke through to a new metaphyics…' Moore's concern is that if metaphysical Truth is one and eternal, it can never become other than itself nor be changed by a temporal event. Yet as Smith points out, 'the ultimate gnosis … is no longer doctrinal, no longer conceptual, no longer *mediated*: "For now we see through a glass darkly..."' (*SW* 29: 161) In other words the concepts of metaphysical doctrine symbolize the one eternal Truth, but do not share its eternal immutability nor formally reproduce its unity. Thus when the universal Logos known to Platonism and, by other names, to ancient India, Persia and Egypt, was born to a virgin and raised from the dead as a man personally united with God, a new way of understanding the metaphysical order became possible. It is not necessary to deny the divine revelation of non-Christian traditions, nor to deny that these other revelations can be means of salvation, in order to affirm that the Logos revealed in all of them walked the earth as Jesus Christ, and that He is

the ultimate Savior whatever the means. Perhaps there can be 'different kinds of non-dualism' so far as the *difference* is *ultimately non-different*.

Gustavo Polit, who confesses no traditional attachment in his letter, admirably summarizes the views of Frithjof Schuon on the metaphysics of the Holy Trinity. Polit emphasizes the distinction between metaphysics and theology: 'Confessional, formal orthodoxy is one thing, and necessarily varies from one tradition to another, while intrinsic, metaphysical orthodoxy is another, and is universal and invariable.' (199) He insists, moreover, that the boundary thus defined be respected, so that 'what could not be acceptable metaphysically is an intrusion of confessional theological bias characterized as a unique metaphysics…' (201) Yet it appears this boundary is to be inviolate in one direction only, since the Schuonian dissections of Trinitarian doctrine presented by Polit quite clearly seek to *correct* Christian dogma from the standpoint of 'intrinsic metaphysical orthodoxy', to *deny* the revealed status of the 'theology of the Trinity' (202), and to *reproach* 'Christian opinion' as being 'anti-metaphysical' for denying that the Persons are either modes of the Essence or independent substances. This theology, which in truth comprises metaphysical dimensions including gnosis, is dismissed as a matter of 'exoteric' devotional sentiment. The ancient ecumenical understanding of the Persons is repeatedly misrepresented as purely relational, whereas the Creeds characterize each Person symbolically, in addition to sketching their mutual relations. When Polit writes 'There is nothing specifically Vedantic in the fundamental metaphysical distinction between the Absolute and the relative, nor in the further insight that the root of the relative is necessarily within the very nature of the Absolute as Infinite' (206), one can agree. But in Christian metaphysics the fundamental distinction is between the Uncreated and the created, and the whole Trinity stands on the Uncreated side. And further, the roots of all created relativities are indeed understood evangelically as resident eternally in the Uncreated Logos; yet this Logos is understood as uniting the created nature of a specific creature in Personal union with the Essence (*ousia*) of the Trinity. These teachings are intended ontologically, not as affairs of devotional sentiment, however much of the latter may be implicated. (See Jean Borella, *Guenonian Esoterism and Christian Mystery)*

But here we have touched on another 'touchy' subject. With sincere respect to the honored sage (may God bless and be pleased with him) to

whom so many, this writer included, owe so much, it is saddening to find the dogmatics of Christian tradition contradicted from a philosophical perspective that professes to assure and to protect the integrity of each unique, revealed confessional form; and this after having undergone the withering attack of secular modernity over several centuries – for make no mistake, it is Christianity which has thus far borne the brunt of this spiritually corrosive activity.

Perhaps the chief point in all this is that the confessional orthodoxies of the distinct traditions, including but not only Christianity, are not to be distorted in the process of being fitted to a certain doctrinal understanding of the universal order of Reality. As Charles Upton puts it, "the super-formal, metaphysical point-of-view" does not and cannot "go against" an orthodox theological perspective in the sense of contradicting it…' (*SW* 28:172) In the last several issues of *Sacred Web*, the present writer, along with Wolfgang Smith and Stratford Caldecott (*SW* 28: 185f) have shown that a case can be made (although every case can be disputed indefinitely) for a kind of uniqueness of the Christian revelation that does not perfectly square with the classical perennialist analysis. But we have also seen that this does not mean Christians are bound to consider Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews as lacking means of salvation. It does mean that Christians would like to explain the evangelical doctrine and to have it understood in its own terms, by the other religious groups just mentioned. One hears, for example, that the Dalai Lama finds the Christian claim of uniqueness to be 'unhelpful' in our time: but this claim is enshrined in the revelation itself, and the Dalai Lama (may the Peace of the Lord be with him) is not the incarnate Logos who died 'for the sin of the world' and then rose again.

In the end, our spiritual solidarity overrides our differences of doctrine, whether theological or metaphysical: Common Word, Common Ground, love of God and compassion for neighbor, in the face of a systematic atheism and cultural nihilism that are ever more dominant. M.Ali Lakhani's lapidary editorial (one would like to say, sermon) reflects beautifully the underlying metaphysical orientation, away from sensory transience and toward spiritual intellect and the will of God, that is common to all spiritual practice, and as intelligible to a Christian of Lutheran order, for example, as to Mr. Lakhani who is Muslim. It is here, in the spiritual struggle both with our own lower drives and with the

activist secular order which is inimical to all true spiritual faith, that our true solidarity stands. And in the End, when the 'enigmatic glass' of doctrine disappears, God will make known to us the reasons for our differences, if so He will, and show us everything.

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