

10. Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 156.
11. The phrase "image of God" is used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to the divine wisdom (Wisd. 7:26). See also S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion in a Changing World* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 107.
12. D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Third Series (London: Rider and Co., 1958), p. 254.
13. Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 232.
14. See Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 99.
15. *Tao te ching*, trans. by R. S. Blakney (New York: New American Library, 1955), ch. 48.
16. *Ibid.*, ch. 40.
17. *Ta chuan*, sec. 1, ch. 2.
18. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 12.
19. R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 137.
20. J. Y. Lee, "The Yin-Yang of Thinking," *International Review of Mission*, July 1971, p. 370.
21. J. Y. Lee, *The I: A Christian Concept of Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), p. 71.
22. Norman Pittenger, *God in Process* (London: SCM, 1967), p. 70.
23. Osiris in Egypt, Tammuz in Babylon, and Attis in Asia Minor exemplify ancient Near Eastern beliefs in resurrection. Even though the manner of resurrection differs in different traditions, we can say that the idea of resurrection was widely held in the New Testament time. There is some truth in what Moltmann said: "Christianity differs from the Hellenistic view for it participates not in perfect resurrection but in the present or the future hope" (Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, New York: Harper and Row, 1967, p. 161).
24. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 165.

Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context

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CHRIST OF THE INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

I have been asked to present a paper in the form of a testimony on "Confessing Christ in an Islamic Context". The topic does assume that confession of Christ may differ in its modes, methods, expressions, phraseology, etc. from context to context; and this is quite Scriptural. For example, Matthew, writing his Gospel especially for Jews, mostly uses Jewish terminology, and even Jewish Scriptures; whereas John, writing for Hellenistic Jews, uses mostly Greek terminology to express the same Christ. For Matthew, to prove Jesus is the Christ seems to be most important; whereas John expresses the same Christ in more Greek philosophical terms like 'Logos,' 'Life' 'Light' etc. Thus we see that the context has colored the confession of Christ in different contexts. As a matter of fact, St. Paul also adopts the same strategy' if we can use that word, to confess Christ, he says, "for the Jews, I became a Jew. . . ." Therefore the same Christ can be confessed in different terms in Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, or Marxist contexts. When we talk about 'confessing Christ in an Islamic Context' it is with particular reference to Pakistan. This paper has been divided into two sections; section one deals with the difficulties in confessing Christ in an Islamic context, and section two explores different guidelines on which Christ could be confessed in an Islamic context.

SECTION ONE

While confessing Christ in an Islamic context, a Christian is faced with at least three basic difficulties. One, he is faced with a reductionist form

of Christology of the *Qur'an*; second, the authority and authenticity of the Christian Scriptures is minimised by a belief that they have been corrupted and abrogated; and third, that the prophet of Islam has been gradually turned into the 'Muslim Christ'. One can easily see a development of the doctrine of 'Muhamadology' over against 'Christology'. Faced with these basic, and other, difficulties, we have to see how Christians continue to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Saviour, in an Islamic context.

Christ in an Islamic context is not an unknown person. He is known to a Muslim through his scriptures — the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* perhaps are the only scriptures which mention Christ besides the Bible. There is no mention of Jesus Christ in Hindu, or Buddhist or Confucian scriptures. Jesus Christ is mentioned 93 times in the *Qur'an*. There is a long Surah about the Annunciation and Birth of Jesus Christ². It gives beautiful names and titles to Jesus which have not been given to any other Prophet in the *Qur'an*. For example, he has been called '*Tbni-Maryam*' (Son of Mary); '*Al-Masih*' (The Messiah); '*Abid*, '*Nabi*, and '*Rasul*' (Servant); Prophet, and Apostle; '*Kalimat-Ullah*' (the word of God); and '*Ruh-Kallimat-Ullah*' (The Spirit of God)³. It has some Surahs about his teaching, works, and finally his ascension to heaven without having died on the cross⁴. All of these are there in the *Qur'an*, and on the surface there seem similarities with New Testament Christology. But when one looks more closely, the *Qur'an* denies very emphatically the basic characteristics of Christian Christology. All through history, the Church has taught that Jesus Christ was very God, and very man in respect to his person. And as regards his work, the threefold office of prophet, priest and king, has been ascribed to him. None of these are there in the *Qur'an*. Rather these truths are emphatically denied. Therefore, it is not so much what the *Qur'an* asserts about Jesus Christ, but rather what it denies, which is important for confessing Christ in an Islamic context.

The *Qur'an* denies the *Deity* and the Sonship of Jesus Christ. He is a creature like Adam:

"Verily, Jesus is an Adam in the sight of God. He created him of dust. He then said to him 'be' and he was". (Surah 3:52).

Those who assert that Jesus Christ is more than human are infidels:

"The Christians say that the Messiah is the Son of God. God fight them! How they lie!" (Surah 9:30)

Not only is Jesus Christ a mere creature, but he is not essential to God nor to God's plan in the world:

"Who can obtain anything from God, if He chose to destroy the Messiah, the Son of Mary, and his mother, and all who are on the earth together?" (Surah 5:19)

Whenever Muslims talk about Jesus Christ, they begin with an assertion that he was only a man among men:

"Jesus is no more than a servant whom we pardoned, and proposed as an instance of divine power to the children of Israel, and, if we pleased, we could from yourself, bring forth angels to succeed you on earth". (Surah 43: 59)

Christ's Sonship is emphatically denied:

"They say the Merciful has taken to Himself a Son — Ye have brought a monstrous thing! The heavens well nigh burst as under threat, and the earth is risen and the mountains fall down broken, that they attribute to the Merciful a Son. But it becomes not the Merciful to take to Himself a Son". (Surah 19:91-93)

"Praise belongs to God, who has not taken to Himself a Son and has not had a partner in His Kingdom, nor had a patron against such abasement". (Surah 17:112)

Though the *Qur'an* has some very distinguished names and lofty titles for Jesus Christ, his dignity, his sinlessness or his power to work miracles, does not distinguish him in any way, as to his nature, from the other prophets who came before him. The pre-existence of Christ is everywhere denied. Any incarnational notion is abhorrent both to the *Qur'an* and to the Muslim. Similarly, is the case with regard to his work and teaching. His death on the cross is denied⁵. The atoning work of Christ is simply not there in the *Qur'an*. He is only a messenger, a message bearer. He brought the *Injil* which later on has been corrupted by His followers.⁶ Thus his person, work and teaching are reduced to insignificance, or at the most, a prophet among many more prophets mentioned in the *Qur'an*: 'We make no distinction between them (between the prophets)' (Surah 2:130. 285), are the famous ones quoted in this regard.

"Say, we believe in God and what He has sent down to us, and what has come down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob; and what came down to Moses and to Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between them". (Surah 3.78)

Jesus is sinless like all other prophets are sinless. He wrought great miracles. But all of these do not put him in any superior position over against other prophets. The object of his coming was to announce the coming of Prophet Muhammad and as such his main role was of a fore-runner to Prophet Muhammad:

"And remember when Jesus the Son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel! Of a truth, I am God's Apostle to you to confirm the law which was given before me, and to announce an apostle that shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmed'." (Surah 61:6)⁷

Faced with these denials of Christ by the *Qur'an*, a Christian has two options in the confessing of Christ. One is that what he confesses about Christ is according to his own scriptures, the Bible, and he has to confess and believe what his scriptures tell him to believe. Here, a Muslim very conveniently leaves out the first option by saying that the Christian Scriptures have been corrupted and abrogated. Even though the *Qur'an* enjoins every Muslim to believe in the previously revealed scriptures, that is, *Tawrat* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms), *Injil* (Gospel)⁸, there is a common belief among Muslims that the Christian Scriptures have been corrupted and are unreliable. Modern Muslim scholars take full advantage of the critical approach to the Bible, common in the West, to prove their point of view. Moreover, the *Qur'an* is the final revelation according to the Muslim and as such, it abrogates the previous scriptures.

The second option is to talk to the Muslim on his own terms—that is, on the basis of the *Qur'an*. Thus, a Christian picks up all the references in the *Qur'an* and expresses the Christian point of view. Here he tries his best to prove that what the *Qur'an* denies about the person and work of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with Christian 'Christology'. This has encouraged a whole lot of literature in the form of Christian apologetics. Persons like Pfander, Bevan-Jones, W. Bijfeld, have tried to interpret the *Qur'an* from a Christian point of view. But these interpretations and apologetics have not gone very far, except to give a little confidence to Christians that their religion is not as bad as the Muslim depicts. But the real situation as far as confession of Christ is concerned remains unchanged.

The third difficulty is that even though Muslims condemn Christian Christology on the basis that Christians have turned a human into God, they themselves use such honorific names and titles which have turned the prophet of Islam into some sort of 'divine' person. At least, this is true of the popular Islam in Pakistan. It is believed that Muhammad's words had creative power. Things obey him because he is king and lord over them; His kingdom is in all the universe; being earthly as well as heavenly. His name is written in paradise on all things—trees, on all the doors and even in the eyes of *Huris*.⁹ The name Muhammad has miraculous power, recitation of it relieves one from pain and suffering. A point to note in this new trend to venerate the prophet is that it is supported by the means of *Hadith* and not so much from the *Qur'an*. Actually, the *Qur'an* does not support the ascription of supernatural powers to Muhammad. The early biographies leave us in no doubt that he was thoroughly human.

When the person of Muhammad in popular preaching is compared with the person of Christ in Christian doctrine, one can find two different move-

ments in Islam and Christianity. But the result has certain formal similarities. In Islam, it is an upward movement, whereas in Christianity it is a downward movement. In Islam, the prophet Muhammad is exalted, whereas in Christianity, Christ who was in the form of God, empties and humbles himself. In Islam, man becomes increasingly "divine", whereas in Christianity, God becomes man. In Islam, man is exalted and becomes a mediator, whereas in Christianity, God becomes man in Christ Jesus and becomes the Mediator.

Thus the confessing of Christ is hindered and hampered not only to "reductionist *Qur'anic* Christology", but also that Muslims have their own 'Christ' in the person of prophet, Muhammad.

SECTION TWO

Confessing of Christ in an Islamic context means our Christology ought to be developed within an Islamic religio-socio-cultural situation and addressed to it. This does not mean that such a Christology is already developed or formulated, but there is a need to do so. Thus, in this section, we will attempt to underline ideas around which such a 'Christology' can be developed. This does not mean that these ideas are mutually exclusive; they can be inclusive as well.

One of the simplest ideas is to remove all those terms and phrases which offend the Muslims, e.g.: 'Son of God', Divinity of Christ, and death of Christ on the Cross, etc. Why quarrel about Christ? God is important. Let us leave both Christ and Muhammad and talk only about God. There is only one God of Christians and Muslims, and we need to live honest and righteous lives according to our own codes of morality and ethics. After all, the end of all religions is to live decent lives. Of course, such an idea has no room for a Saviour, and salvation is on righteous living. But the question is, is it that simple?

The second idea is that we need to rediscover biblical Christology. That we ourselves do not know the biblical Christ. Most of the creeds which express faith in Christ are the result of centuries of debate on his person. In a way, the real Christ is hidden behind the terms and expressions of Greek philosophy and we have to unveil Christ from these terms and expressions. One could argue that one could not do that as all of this is part of our history and no one can take history back to the first century. This may be true, and yet we have to go back to the Bible to find the real Christ. That means we have to know the Hebraic thought forms expressed in Greek by the early writers of the New Testament. It has to be a Bible-based Christology rather than Greek Fathers or Latin Fathers, or Eastern or Western Christology. This does not mean that their (Fathers) struggle is in vain, rather that we should learn lessons from them. Having discovered the Christ of the Bible, it has to be expressed in the thought form of Islamic religio-socio-culture.

What are the thought forms of Islamic religio-socio-culture? The central thought of Islam is the "*Tawhid*" (Unity) and the Greatness (*Allah-O-Akbar*) of God. God is one and he is the greatest. Confessing of Christ in an Islamic context has to begin with the unity and "greatness" of God.

A Christian has to assure a Muslim that in confessing Christ as divine, he is not confessing another God besides God. He is not committing the sin of *Shirk* (associating other gods with God). And here, there are a number of verses in the Bible to state that very belief¹⁰. One can also quote the Nicene Creed which begins with the words "I believe in *one* God . . ."

If God is one, then how is Christ divine—and here one can show a Muslim that Christ Jesus is divine in the self-revelation of God. Muslims regard the *Qur'an* as revealed by God, and as such, divine. Thus phenomenologically speaking, both Jesus Christ and the *Qur'an* can be compared as 'revelations' of or from God and as such divine—one is personal, and the other is verbal. One can find an interesting parallel of eternal 'relationship' between God and the preserved tablet (*Loho Mahfooz*) in the Muslim *Kalam* (theology); and God and the 'eternal Sonship' of Christ in the Christian theology. If the *Qur'an* is revealed from the preserved tablet (*Loho Mahfooz* how does the preserved tablet stand in 'relation' to God? Is it 'in' God or 'outside' God? If 'outside' of God, then are there two eternal— that is, one God; and second, preserved tablet? Of course, Muslims being strict monotheists, cannot and do not believe in two eternal. The second possibility is that it is 'in' God, and if it is 'in' God, then the 'in' of God has got to be a 'personal' revelation, and as such, divine. It is on these lines that we confess Christ Jesus as the perfect revelation of God, and divine. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, in part, says, 'God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the Word of His power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3). St. John, in his prologue, also says the same thing. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). In Jesus Christ the 'in' of God has taken a human form—God incarnate, and so, divine.

Another aspect of Christology which has to be confessed is the Sonship of Christ. By this confession, Muslims think that Christians make Mary God's wife and commit the sin of *Shirk* by associating Christ with God, but this is exactly what a Christian does not believe. Christians neither believe that Mary is God's wife nor that Christ is God besides God. If Mary is not God's wife, how is Christ God's Son? There is ample room here for a Christian to discover how Christ is God's Son. The lines on which the Christian confesses this are, that the word 'Son' does not mean 'generation'

in a physical sense. Both in Urdu and Arabic languages the word 'Son' is used metaphorically also which does not mean physical 'generation' e.g.: "*Sher Ka Baccha*" (son of a lion), or "*Ibn-ul-waqat*" (son of time). Now, by 'son of a lion' or by 'son of time' does not mean that either lion or time has 'generated' a person. Another common phrase used in the Islamic circles in Pakistan is "*Farzandan-e-Tawhid*" (Son of Tawhid). This *Tawhid* is commonly referred to as God and it could mean 'Sons of God' or 'Children of God'. The point I am making is that the word 'Son' does not mean 'generation' in the physical sense. Therefore, when Christians confess Jesus Christ as 'Son of God', it does not mean that God has "generated" Him in the physical sense. In this sense the *Qur'an* rejects the title "Son of God" for Jesus Christ.¹¹ Then how does a Christian believe Jesus Christ to be 'Son of God'? I personally have used the story of Gotama Buddha to explain this to Muslims. That Gotama Buddha left his royal throne and went to a jungle to meditate under the banyan tree. Now, whosoever saw Buddha under a banyan tree in the jungle thought he was a *swami*, *faqir* or *Sadhu*, but in fact, Buddha was a King. He belonged to a royal family. He had royal blood in his veins. Now "Christ, who was in the form of God . . . emptied himself and became a servant and took human form" (Phil. 2:6, 7). When Jesus Christ was in his earthly life, people confessed him as "Son of God" as there was no better word to address him. Otherwise, in his person, he was God—he was divine. *La-Ilaha-Illa-Allah* (*There is no God but God*). God is one and there is no God besides Him. In confessing Jesus Christ as 'Son of God'—God incarnate—Christians do not, in any way, mutilate the Unity (*Tawhid*, *Wahdat*), of God or even raise another God besides God. Jesus Christ is God in self-revelation. In the New Testament words, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself".

The second central theme in Islam is the greatness of God (*Allah-O-Akbar*). God's greatness is revealed in creation, particularly in the creation of man whom He had created as crown of creation. Christian theology expresses this through the fact that man is created in the 'image of God'. What is the exact meaning of God's image? Interpretations may differ, but one main strand in these interpretations would be that there is something 'divine' in man—a divine spark which compels man to have fellowship or right relationship with God. For a Muslim, this right relationship is kept by observing the *Shariah* (Law). Though Muslims may not accept the Christian doctrine of 'original sin', they would readily concede the idea that man has failed miserably in observing the *Shariah* (Law). St. Paul discusses this in the Letter to the Romans—the frustration of keeping the Law (*Shariah*), and how man stands in need of grace. As a matter of fact, man as he is, stands in need of a change of heart and mind, and there is a recurring theme in the *Qur'an* that peoples' hearts are hardened and that is why they do not listen to the Word of God, and follow the *Shariah*. To change this—the hardening of the heart—the "Greatness" of God is to remake, or recreate or regenerate man. For God, this is not impossible because He is

Allah-O-Akbar—the Greatest. Now the confessing of Christ is very meaningful here, that this recreating or regenerating or new birth is effected in man by faith in Christ. God has inaugurated a sort of new or second creation in the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus is compared with Adam in the *Qur'an* (Surah 3:45). Adam and Christ are, then, so to speak, the representatives of two orders of creation: the first creation and the second creation. Adam belongs to the first or old creation, and Jesus Christ belongs to the second or new creation. We may call Adam the first Adam, and Christ Jesus, the second Adam. Actually the New Testament uses the title, second or new Adam, for Christ, though such a title is not used for Christ in the *Qur'an*.

The first Adam was created out of dust and then God's creative word was operative on dust (Surah: 3:9). The Bible says, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The second Adam (Jesus Christ) was created by casting God's Word (the creative command, *Kur*) into Mary and hence Jesus Christ is called the Word of God. (See note 6.) For the first Adam, God's creative word was operative on dust, whereas for the second Adam, God's Word itself took "human flesh" in the person of Jesus Christ: The Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary and a Spirit from Him" (Surah 4:169). In the words of the New Testament, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:1-14). This first Adam was from the earth, a man of dust; the second Adam is from heaven, a Spirit from God (*ruh minhu*). The first Adam through the creative word of God became a living being; the second Adam (God's word in flesh in the person of Jesus Christ) became the life-giving Spirit. Jesus says, "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will create for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of God. I will also heal the blind and the leper, and bring to life the dead, by the leave of God" (Surah 3:43).

The first Adam, according to the *Qur'an* was a prophet; the Second Adam (Christ Jesus) was a prophet, a Spirit proceeding from God, a (or the) Word of God. The new creation which God has inaugurated through the birth of Jesus Christ supersedes the old or first creation.

Now we live in two orders of creation; one by our natural birth and the second by our acceptance of Christ Jesus as God's Word in the flesh. In the New Testament, we find the concept of the new or second birth very prominent. "Unless", says Jesus, "one is born anew (or from above), he cannot see the Kingdom of God. . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit" (John 3:3, 6).

Again, says St. John, "To all who receive him (Christ Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of

God" (John 1:12-13). Christians can rightly proclaim with their Muslim brethren *Allah-O-Akbar* (God is great), who recreates "fallen" man—man who is unable to observe *Shariah* (Law) in the person of Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"The greatness of God" is defended to the extent that Christ's death on the cross is denied by the Muslims. Christ's death on the cross would be against the "greatness" of God and His being almighty. How could God allow His servant, Christ, to die such a shameful death? Though one could defend Christ's death on the cross within the *Qur'an* it would not take one very far. Christians should follow the Islamic thought pattern to confess Christ's death and resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection then could be confessed within the "greatness" of God. The *Qur'an* mentions that prophets suffered at the hands of their people¹². Previous prophets and apostles have been suffering at the hands of the ungodly people. So also, Christ suffered at the hands of His own people—the Jews. And when the opposition culminated in the Cross, He (Christ) did not run away from the Cross, rather He was faithful to God (*Islama, Islam*) in the face of death. In the New Testament words, "He was faithful unto death . . ." (Phil 2:5 ff.). God's Greatness is most convincingly exhibited in not rescuing Christ from the Cross but resurrecting Him from the dead. God allowed Man to do whatever he (Man) could do to His servant Christ. At the most, Man could kill; and this is exactly what He (Man) did with Christ. But God showed His "Greatness", that he raised the same Christ whom the Jews had killed. Thus the death of Christ on the Cross does not nullify the "Greatness" of God, rather it showed Him the "Greatest" by conquering death. In the New Testament words, "Death is swallowed up in victory"¹³. While discussing with a Muslim friend the death of Christ, the writer of this paper was struck by a beautiful sentence uttered by his friend. "*Masih ki maut, maut ki maut hai*" (Christ's death is the death of death).

The fourth idea is that the biblical Christ—Emmanuel, 'God with us'; God-Man—may be a folly to the Greeks (philosophers) and a stumbling block to the Muslims; but he is our Saviour through the power of his resurrection. And here the "greatness" of God in becoming man in the life of Jesus Christ has to be communicated in all circumstances through the *resurrected lives of the believers*. One has to stick to the essentials of the biblical Christology. One should not be ashamed of the Gospel. In the present Islamic world, when there is so much emphasis on revival of *Shariah*. Christology has a real relevance. It is on these lines that we confess and we continue to confess Jesus Christ our Lord, God and Saviour. This confession is to be expressed in the Church's preaching (*Kerygma*), fellowship (*Koinonia*), witness (*Martyria*) and service (*Diakonia*).

NOTES

1. 1 Cor. 9:19ff.
2. Surah 3 and 19.

3. Surah 5:79; Surah 3:40; Surah 4:169; Surah 19:17; Surah 21:91.
4. Surah 3:47-48; Surah 4:155-156; Surah 19:34; Surah 5:117.
5. Surah 3:48.
6. Surah 2:89.
7. In order to supplement this idea, a number of verses are quoted from the Bible, e.g.: John 16:7; Deuteronomy 32:2; Isaiah 21:6; the Parable in Matthew and John 4:21; and 1 John 4:1-3.
8. Surah 5:68; Surah 2:41-44; Surah 5:43, 47.
9. Muhammad Yusuf Aslahi, *Qur'ani Taleemat*, vol. 1 (Lahore: Islamic Publishers Limited, 1968), p. 153.
10. Exodus 20:2, 3 (Mark 12:29; James 2:19).
11. Surah 6:102; Surah 9:30; Surah 112:14.
12. Surah 4:155; Surah 5:170.
13. 1 Cor. 15:54.

The Pluralism of Religions and the Significance of Christ

MICHAEL AMALADOSS

A growing positive attitude to the possibility of salvation in and through other religions seems to undermine traditional faith in Christ as the unique and universal savior. If we are helping Hindus and Muslims to grow in their own faith, are we not being disloyal to our mission to proclaim Jesus Christ as their savior? Who is Christ for us? How do we understand him and his role in salvation, particularly in relation to the other religions? We are asking these questions not in the abstract, a priori, but in the context of our experience of other religions in India. We are living in a situation of religious pluralism.¹ There is a wide acceptance today of the idea that people are saved not only in spite of, but in and through their religions, because God has reached out to them in the context of their life, community, and history. This realization is not so much the conclusion of an argument as born out of a living experience of other believers. The question is how we are to reconcile this universal salvific will of God with an individual act of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I shall try to answer this question in four stages. I shall, first of all, outline rather schematically and critically the present stage of discussion on the question. Then I shall specify my own method of approach. Thirdly, I shall present some new perspectives that must guide our search for an answer. Finally I shall indicate my response to the question. I shall then point out in the conclusion some implications for action. I am aware that this is a difficult question and I do not claim to have found *the* answer to it. I will be satisfied if I have clarified the question a little more and localized more precisely the mystery.