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Walter Kasper’s Religious Quest for Jesus Christ

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Walter Kasper brings to light the religious quest for Jesus Christ in a secular, historical world. Taking up the turn towards anthropology and demythologisation, he sets out to rationally articulate the logic of faith in which Jesus is recognized as the Christ. Pursuing this quest, he develops a theological discourse on freedom, redemption, and self-transcendence.

KEYWORDS: Christology, Kasper, Levinas, Rahner, redemption, transcendence

The quest for meaning and truth pierces both our secular and religious worlds. The Christian truth of what gives life to our existence and reality, namely, that Jesus is the Christ, is one that constantly needs to be re-iterated in our increasingly secular and technological world. This article will focus on Walter Kasper’s ‘Religious Quest for Jesus Christ’ as a means of renewing the logic of faith for today. To this end, I will use both a phenomenological and an ontological lens. Accordingly, I will refer, in some instances, to the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas, two philosophers in the twentieth century who have been a major influence on Christian theologians. For the most part, my exposition and analysis of Kasper’s thought is influenced by the ethical metaphysics of

Emmanuel Levinas, which will proffer, if you like, a ‘Levinasian’ reading of Kasper’s ‘Religious Quest for Jesus Christ.’¹

At specific instances, Levinas would direct his writings towards Christianity and theology, so as to draw parallels between his own thinking and Christian life and thought. In his essay, for example, ‘Philosophy, Justice and Love,’ he writes:

When I speak to a Christian, I always quote Matthew 25; the relation to God is presented there as a relation to another person. It is not a metaphor: in the other, there is a real presence of God. In my relation to the other, I hear the Word of God. It is not a metaphor; it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I’m not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the Word of God.

Granted that the way in which ‘God reverberates’² in the Other’s face is an enigmatic phenomenon beyond our knowing, we are nonetheless commanded and ordained to a relation of responsibility for the other.³

¹ See Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Philosophy, Justice, and Love’ in Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous. On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University, 1998), 110.

² Levinas, ‘Philosophy, Justice and Love,’ 110.

³ Levinas writes: ‘The consciousness of responsibility immediately imposed is certainly not in the nominative, it is rather in the accusative It is in that sense that I can say that consciousness, subjectivity, no longer have first place in their relationship to the other.’ We can see here that Levinas gives priority to ethical transcendence or alterity (otherness). In a Levinasian sense, alterity or otherness refers to being made responsible by the Other to such a degree that it overwhelms the intentionality of consciousness. As a result, the self is obliged

Kasper's religious quest for Jesus Christ takes us on a theological journey that penetrates the world of secular reason and rationality. The highpoint in this journey is the affirmation that Jesus is the Christ. This resounding logic, explored in Kasper's *Jesus the Christ*, remains an urgent and defining one for today. *Jesus the Christ* is a classic, not only in the field of Christology, but also in Christian theology as a whole. It stands amongst such classics as Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith* and Urs von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*.⁴

Together, Kasper, von Balthasar, and Rahner have enhanced Christian theology through imagination, creativity, and vision. Whereas, for example, Rahner develops a theological anthropology, and von Balthasar a theo-logical logic, Kasper develops a logic of faith in search of a contemporary critical way of speaking of God. Given that von Balthasar grounds his theology and discourse on truth in theological aesthetics, it might appear that Kasper's discussion is deficient, since he may appear to be forgetful of the important category of the beautiful. Von Balthasar prioritises the philosophical transcendental of beauty so that we might truly have the eyes of faith to see the glorious form of Christ in the paschal mystery and the Trinity. Kasper's contribution, however, is equally appealing. He articulates

to sacrifice itself to the point of expiation for the Other. See Levinas, 'Philosophy, Justice and Love,' 111.

⁴ Indicating and acknowledging the contribution of Rahner and von Balthasar, Kasper writes: 'In German-speaking theology, it was Karl Rahner and Has Urs von Balthasar above all who set the standard for the break-through in our century; and this was so even though their ways were later to part to some degree – or perhaps for that very reason' (Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* [New York: Crossroad, 1989], 1).

the quest for the person of Christ with a logic and rationale that uncovers the inner truth of human existence and freedom.

We might ask what drives Kasper to develop a logic of faith and salvation that touches the heart of human history, freedom, and existence. It is faith and hope in the word of salvation that Jesus is the Christ. Whereas von Balthasar underlines, dramatically, the sense of Christ's mission being one with his person in God and as God, Kasper reflects upon the quest for Jesus the Christ with a contemporary, historical, and personal urgency that underscores a salvific and kerygmatic concern for our present human condition.

Kasper diagnoses a critical crisis in secular society. Having fallen into relativism and an understanding of the world that is centred on subjectivity, society has created egoistically an idol, namely, its self as the measure of all things. Experience, freedom, and history are but modes of being-for-oneself. Wary of the enlightenment's self-certainty and its ultimate fall into irrationality, Kasper brings to light the very truth that Jesus is the Christ. To this end, he connects Christology to soteriology. He utilises, furthermore, the language of ontology and phenomenology, adding to them aspects of existentialism. Such an approach, in some respects, bears a resemblance to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Kasper, however, inverts or revises Heidegger's search for the meaning of being by translating it from a secular context into one of faith. Whereas Heidegger may be read as secularizing theology in *Being and Time*, Kasper is concerned with not reducing theology to a particular philosophical system, but in raising philosophical and theological discourse to a new search for truth, that takes the secularised world as his point of departure.

Kasper's 'Religious Quest of Jesus Christ' is a journey towards the wisdom of faith. In wholly different terms, Levinas searches for an idea of God beyond being and thematization, that is, for the possibility of pronouncing the word God beyond, what he sees as, the betrayal that accompanies ontological statement. Levinas emphasises also that

‘philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love.’⁵ At this juncture Kasper and Levinas may be together at a crossroads. Given that the movement from philosophy to theology is borne by understanding and faith, we can affirm that for Kasper ‘theology is the wisdom of love at the service of love.’ In a statement, for example, that appears to draw upon the locus of alterity, Kasper states: ‘The Christian freedom which perfects human freedom can even less be individualistically interpreted. It is freedom which proves itself in love (Gal 5.13), a freedom which does not consist in being-in-itself or being-for-itself, but in being-for-others.’⁶

Kasper’s philosophical-theological writings express a faith in search of wisdom, love, and service. Moreover, his message testifies to an unveiling of the human person before God: that our being (existence) and our experience (consciousness, emotions, perceptions, and desires) find fulfilment in self-transcendence, a state in which we find hope and ultimate meaning in Jesus the Christ. In mapping out his quest, Kasper considers the logic of faith with respect to four areas of the modern world’s own quest for meaning: a secularised world, demythologisation, anthropology, and finally history.

The Challenge from a Secularised world

Kasper’s theology of ‘the Religious Quest for Jesus Christ’ begins with a programmatic and compelling statement of faith: ‘The confession that “Jesus is the Christ” is the answer to the question of salvation and redemption.’⁷ This is the whole theological logic

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University, 1999), 162.

⁶ See Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 69-70.

⁷ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, trans. V. Green (London: Burns & Oates, 1977), 41.

that underlines the religious quest for Jesus Christ in a secularised world. Immediately, we note a kerygmatic concern that takes to heart the fundamental question from Matthew's gospel: 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' (Matt 11:3).

Underlying Kasper's approach is a challenge to Rahner's anthropological turn to the subject, and particularly, to his emphasis on an implicit assent of faith in the idea of 'anonymous Christianity.' We can see Kasper's concern that such an embryonic assent of faith might not only be reductive, but also skewed in its anthropology. If God is indeed personal, then it is a personal 'yes' in faith that is the only appropriate response to him.

The aim of Kasper's philosophical-theological work is to present a logic of faith that is not only comprehensible to the modern secular mindset, but acts as a bridge to the world of self-transcendence and to life in Christ.⁸ Hence, it is not surprising that he presents his position with a framework that is typical of the enlightenment mind-set, namely, that of question and answer: 'The confession that "Jesus is the Christ" is the answer to the question of salvation and redemption.'⁹ This framework does, however, raise the issue of whether Kasper himself runs the risk of falling into an enlightenment reduction. Furthermore, from a

⁸ For Levinas the thought of God ought to be included in philosophical discourse.

'Philosophical discourse ... should be able to include God – of whom the Bible speaks – if this God does have a meaning ... the God of the Bible signifies the beyond being, transcendence' (Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi [Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996], 130). For Levinas, the God of the Bible has a meaning for philosophy, namely, transcendence.

⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 41.

post-metaphysical perspective, the challenge is to ensure that 'being' is not forgetful of the theological modes of truth, such as peace, justice, mercy, kenosis, expiation, and humility.¹⁰

We may, no doubt, discover limitations in Kasper's quest, but let us first examine what he has to offer. We will find that he sets out to re-think the enlightenment, and in doing so demythologise its very limitations. Whilst he may share some of the concerns of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory with its project of testing the principles of the enlightenment, Kasper is, nonetheless, concerned primarily with the quest of witnessing to Christ today. This concern reflects experience in the sense of being a journey and a progressive learning. In Kasper's writing experience is constantly directed by theological truth.

Kasper's concern is first and foremost theo-logical. He analyses and challenges the secular world to be more mindful of 'a Christian and religious emphasis.'¹¹ He constructs, to borrow von Balthasar's terminology, a 'theo-logic,' that is, an articulation of his own perspective, which is to rationally testify to the Word/word of God in a secular world.

Man wants to assess the world and treat it in a worldly way. He wants to reach a rational insight into the immanent objective structures of politics, economics, science, and so on, and to orientate his activity accordingly. The 'absolute' and ultimate questions which cannot be solved in this way are largely counted as meaningless and

¹⁰ I am taking here a Levinasian perspective, in which to have a sense in being one is required to be otherwise than being. For a description of Levinas' complex and ambiguous understanding of 'having a sense,' see Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 64, 122-123 and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University, 1999), 16, 49, 108, 144-162.

¹¹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 41.

as best set aside in favour of the soluble problems which – so it is claimed – accord with actual needs.¹²

Kasper's critique of society defines the concerns of our post-modern condition in which we so easily lose ourselves both in relativism and in a naïve and reductive rationalism. In such a context the search for the transcendent has been more or less abandoned in favour of other more 'meaningful' this-worldly (secular) pursuits, such as those of economics and science. Kasper's concern is to awaken, or even surprise, the secularised world, through rational argument, to its real meaning and truth (the very Logos of God). When humanity assesses and treats the world from within its own parameters, the tyranny and 'bad faith' of public opinion clouds the religious quest. We can, as a result, become forgetful of one another's needs and fears, and subservient to both a depersonalised existence and a reality that has become absurd for us.

In Levinasian terms this could be characterised as an 'existence without existents.'¹³ In describing being in terms of fear and horror, as an anonymous and depersonalised state of existence, Levinas' phrase, *there is (il y a)*, connotes this 'existence without existents.'¹⁴ As the horror that strips consciousness of its subjectivity, the *there is* depicts a frightening ambiguity: the inability to ascertain the presence or absence of anything.¹⁵ Metaphorically, he

¹² Ibid., 41.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic, 1995), 57. 'Existence without existents' refers also to the experience of existence before taking up any position in life.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 64.

aply describes the experience of the *there is* as the horror of the night.¹⁶ Appropriating Levinas' analysis of the *there is*, we could suggest that Kasper's quest is a religious one that ultimately demands that we be vigilant against the tendency to ground human freedom in positions (such as secularism, ideology, utopian ideals, etc) that will ultimately alienate the human person from existence.

Kasper diagnoses the world's fundamental problem by means of the category of subjectivity, or more accurately, egoistical subjectivity: 'Subjectivity means that man posits himself as the starting-point and measure for understanding reality as a whole.'¹⁷ This, for Kasper, represents a reduction of divine being to human being. In general, he observes, there is a tendency in society to reduce the other (person) to one's own perceptions, desires, and needs, without reference to any transcendent truth. To avoid the vicious circle of egoism is the hope that is offered by salvation. For Kasper such exclusive subjectivity leads ultimately to an objectivity (knowledge) in which science and technology are the dominant voices. This is to leave reason without the support of faith, and a series of unsolved problems without an appreciation of the legitimate place of mystery.

To present the world as a problem to be completely solved is already to deny the place, and importance, of mystery. 'Man believes that he is in the process of increasingly understanding the real causes of things, and that he is coming more and more to master and control them.'¹⁸ We can see that Kasper is wary of humanity's arrogance in presuming absolute power over the world and things. The paradox is that the more powerful we become, the more powerless we actually are, as we refrain from defining ourselves in terms of

¹⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁸ Ibid.

mystery. Thus, we can begin to understand and appreciate Kasper's critique of subjectivity and its accompanying reductionism.

As a means of articulating the Christ event, Kasper favours the category of emancipation as opposed to subjectivity. Over against Bernard Lonergan's observation that 'genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity,'¹⁹ Kasper's perspective on subjectivity appears rather negative. Presently, moreover, many Christian theologians find Emmanuel Levinas' emphasis on ethical subjectivity to be of significant import, in that it releases the subject from being defined by means of an anonymous and depersonalising objectivity (in the form of knowledge and self-interest). Levinas aims at an ethical subjectivity that is beyond any form of philosophical objectivity. Truth does not depend on objectivity and the meaning of being in general, since it is now much more a testimony of responsibility for the other, which goes beyond the *conatus* (effort) of philosophical intelligence.²⁰ Nonetheless, Kasper's logic is important since it takes us along his quest from (egoistic) subjectivity towards emancipation, so that we might take the next important step, namely, to the category of redemption.

Kasper observes that 'it is a fundamental question for modern Christology to decide the relation between redemption understood in a Christian perspective and emancipation understood as the modern age understands it.'²¹ We are faced with two competing categories: the theological category of redemption and the historico-philosophical category of emancipation. The question then is how we can make the religious category of redemption comprehensible, given the historical, political, economic and social conditioning that is

¹⁹ See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996), 292.

²⁰ See Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 102-103.

²¹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 43.

associated with the category of emancipation. In contrast to Bultmann's and Rahner's previous attempts, Kasper sets out to transpose the category of emancipation for theology, and hence give it a religious foundation for a secularised world.

The Demythologization of Belief in Christ

According to Kasper, secular thought tends to demythologise Christian faith and its mysteries in a destructive way by presenting the content of faith as mythological and uninspiring for today. In effect, secular thought severs Christian faith from the discourse on truth in the name of purifying human reason from 'mythic' conceptions.

When human freedom and maturity become the dominant midpoint and criterion of thought, traditional religious ideas and convictions must appear mythological. The traditional faith in Jesus Christ has also incurred the suspicion of being mythological. ... Surely, out of intellectual honesty and for the sake of a more genuine idea of God, we have to demythologise the whole thing?²²

Deconstructing and inverting the secular position, Kasper demythologises such secular logic so as to create a complementary discourse on meaning, in which faith in Jesus the Christ is articulated in the name of reason. If secular society's intent is to portray the Christian God as 'primitive,' 'out-of-date,' and as a cosmic 'gap-filler,' we might well understand Kasper's concern in re-orientating Christian hermeneutics so that it is attentive to the danger of such

²² Ibid.

negative demythologising, that interprets Christianity exclusively from within the categories of myth and mythology.²³

The governing idea behind the demythologisation project, however, is not one of elimination, but of interpretation. The aim is to discover the meaning of the objective core of the event — ‘to reveal the lasting content and intention in a way appropriate to the modern mind.’²⁴ But how ‘appropriate’ is this process, when a negative rationalization accompanies it? Given this problem, Kasper broadens the picture, observing that the roots of the demythologisation process are to be found in the context of humanity renewing its understanding of being (in the modes of existence and reality).

The Meaning of Being

Although Kasper does not deal specifically with the issue, we can see a development in the modern mind in its understanding of the meaning of being. By means of existentialism, anthropology, and ontological phenomenology, the modern mind has acquired the tools to

²³ Kasper defines myth as ‘the form of understanding proper to an out-of-date epoch of human history: the primitive era, or childhood, or mankind. In that epoch, man was not aware of the real causes of things, and therefore he saw supramundane and divine powers at work everywhere in the world and in history.’ Furthermore, according to Kasper, mythology is ‘the mode of thought and imagination which understands the divine in a worldly form, and the worldly in a divine form. God is the gap-filler, the *dues ex machine*, who replaces natural causes with miraculous and supernatural interventions. . . . The divine . . . can be experienced everywhere and directly in everything’ (Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 44).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

comprehend in new categories being's modality of existence. This creates, additionally, a useful lens for interpreting various Christological developments since the enlightenment.

We have, for example, a new framework for understanding the debate over the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. This debate may be seen as situated within a movement of understanding the meaning of being in terms of reality (the Jesus of history) and in terms of existence (the Christ of faith). The search for the meaning of being, carried through by thinkers such as D.F. Strauss and Albert Schweitzer, embraced the significance of reality (as we find in the eighteenth and nineteenth century quest for the historical Jesus). On the one hand, the search continued and evolved towards another aspect of being, namely, existence. Twentieth century theologians like Bultmann embraced the significance of existence so as to free the Christ of faith from false kerygmatic realities, which mythologise the Jesus of history. For Bultmann, the redemptive event was not a supernatural event, but a purely historical one.

Against this framework of Christological development since the enlightenment in the search for the meaning of being, we may ask about the significance of Kasper's Christology. Even though he points out, acknowledging Bultmann's contribution, that 'the demythologisation programme tries to accord with man's changed understanding of reality',²⁵ he also insists that a major concern of the demythologisation programme is that of understanding existence. Hence, it is not surprising that Kasper finds himself part of the very movement from reality to existence, as he reflects on Jesus Christ's definitive interplay within human existence:

Demythologisation is also acceptable in its positive aspect, as, that is to say, existential or anthropological interpretation. Revelation uses human language, which

²⁵ Ibid.

only reveals something when it reaches the hearer: when, that is, he understands it. Furthermore, in Jesus Christ human existence as a whole becomes the ‘grammar’ of God’s self-expression.²⁶

Whilst Bultmann minimizes Christ’s historical kerygma and presence, for Kasper, God communicates the truth of revelation through the life, death, and risen presence of Jesus Christ. It is interesting that Kasper acknowledges the problem of language and touches on the post-modern concern of meaning and language. ‘We have to ask whether and how far theological discourse and discussion are really possible and meaningful.’²⁷ Since the late twentieth century, the demythologisation program has begun to revise the category of being, as we find eminent Christian theologians such as David Ford, Michael Barnes, and Michael Purcell taking an interest in Emmanuel Levinas’ conception of ‘otherwise than Being or beyond essence.’²⁸ In many respects, the philosophical writings of Emmanuel Levinas attempt to demythologise the Heideggerian conception of being. Levinas writes at the beginning of his work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, ‘to hear a God not contaminated by Being is a human possibility no less important and no less precarious than to bring Being out of the oblivion in which it is said to have fallen in metaphysics and in onto-theology.’²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 46.

²⁷ Ibid., 46.

²⁸ David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999); Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1998).

²⁹ See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, xlvi.

Kasper's theology is situated at a turning point between the enlightenment and a new post-modern era that pushes metaphysics toward a new understanding of the logos (the truth of being), where existence is understood primarily from the ethical point of view. The post-modern ethic suggests that the more responsibility a person undertakes, paradoxically, the more is required of that person. Ultimately, we are called to be like God, that is, to take on a 'difficult freedom,' where we are responsible for everything and everyone. In Levinasian terms, this difficult freedom is one of *superindividuation* and of a hyperbolic responsibility. Through this 'individuation or superindividuation' the self undergoes a certain fusion of identity with the suffering reality of the other. Levinas states cryptically: 'I am an Other.'³⁰

Kasper's theology of the quest for Jesus Christ is a necessary stepping stone and reminder for post-modern theology to keep to the truth that Jesus is the Christ. He underlines the urgency of the task of appropriate demythologization: 'The biblical and church doctrine that Jesus was a true and complete man with a human intellect and human freedom, does not seem to prevail in the average Christian head.'³¹ We find him, thus stating, that 'demythologisation is not only permissible but necessary; precisely in order to disclose the authentic meaning of belief in Christ.'³² Accordingly, for Kasper, the task of preaching, teaching, and witnessing to the truth of Jesus Christ to the world is of prime importance for post-modern theology.

Examining Kasper's reflection on demythologisation, we see the importance of the positive 'existential or anthropological interpretation.' In more manageable terms, he touches on von Balthasar's idea of Jesus Christ as the analogy of being par excellence, that is, Christ as the defining archetype in discovering our similarity with, and ever greater dissimilarity

³⁰ Ibid., 118.

³¹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 46.

³² Ibid.

from, God or divine being. For Kasper, Christological statements tell us about human existence. But such theological statements always run the risk of falling into impersonal representations, proofs, and debates.

The Risks of Theological Discourse

Kasper sets out on a religious-theological quest to discover how God relates to humanity, and how the world might reveal God. In this a fundamental question is raised on the viability of theological discourse. ‘We have to ask whether and how far theological discourse and discussion are really possible and meaningful.’³³ This is a vital question for which there is no ultimate answer – it is the same as asking: ‘What is the meaning of being?’ At once, Kasper’s religious quest is a search for a rational way of articulating God, whilst acknowledging the importance of transcendence and mystery.³⁴

In the quest for a logic of faith, Kasper describes the problems encountered by the ‘emancipation, enlightenment and demythologisation movement of recent years,’³⁵ such as

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Levinas seeks also to explore the logos of God without thematizing God’s divinity. He speaks of the rather enigmatic idea of *illeity* to express how God commands the self in order to testify to his glory. In this sense theological language could be described as the gift of self for the other, that is in Levinasian terms, the un-thematizable sign of God’s trace (*illeity*), which orders and commands the self to a life of responsibility for the other. In such ethical transcendence, the self does not succumb to the temptation of consciousness to betray the divine word. This is because the gift of one’s soul (marked by God’s trace) coincides with sacrifice for the other. See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 79, 147, 151, 162.

³⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 47.

the realization of the Frankfurt School that the enlightenment itself ‘ran the risk of succumbing to irrationalism by itself becoming irrational.’³⁶ This too is a risk in Kasper’s theology, as he continues with his question and answer methodology. It is more accentuated in particular areas of his theology.

Kasper falls into such a philosophising reductionism, when, for example, he emphasises that, ‘this “sym-pathetic” God as he reveals himself in Jesus Christ is the definitive answer to the question of theodicy.’³⁷ For Kasper, God redeems suffering, removes its weakness, and transforms it into hope. Kenosis and suffering are not the last words; it is Christ’s Easter exaltation and transfiguration, which is effected in the world through the work of the Spirit. There is a danger here of reducing theology to objective categories, which fall ultimately into the irrationality of being forgetful of mystery—in the sense of maintaining that passivity of letting-oneself-be-encountered-by-mystery.

In response to Kasper, I would suggest that it is a personal relationship of faithfulness to Christ amidst suffering that offers what is more a resolution than an answer to the question of theodicy. We cannot ultimately put our faith in answers, but rather in the divine person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the person of Christ is more than an answer; Christ is a divine person who is beyond proofs, demonstrations, and explanations. We need to question any theodicy that is founded merely on logical proofs. Levinas has commented that ‘the disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with a glaring, obvious clarity.’³⁸ Beyond any answers to the question of human suffering and the existence of God, Levinas observes: ‘Auschwitz would paradoxically entail a revelation from the very God who

³⁶ Ibid., 47.

³⁷ See Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (London: SCM, 1984), 197.

³⁸ Levinas, ‘Useless Suffering,’ in Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 97.

nevertheless was silent at Auschwitz: a commandment of faithfulness.³⁹ In a programmatic work reflecting on ‘The Time of Redemption and the Time of Justice,’ and bringing together the mysteries of time and the other, he writes:

What produces the thrust of hope is the gravity of the instant in which it occurs. The irreparable is its natural atmosphere. There is hope only when hope is longer permissible. What is irreparable in the instant of hope is that that instant is a present. The future can bring consolation or compensation to a subject who suffers in the present, but the very suffering of the present remains like a cry whose echo will resound forever in the eternity of spaces.⁴⁰

Levinas wrote this not long after the Second World War. This language of hope is a commanding response of faith not only to his time of captivity in a German stalag,⁴¹ but also

³⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁰ Levinas. *Existence and Existents*, 89-90.

⁴¹ Against his experience of being regarded as a name-less non-existent while in captivity, Levinas laments: ‘In horror a subject is stripped of his subjectivity, of his power to have private existence. The subject is depersonalised. ‘Nausea,’ as a feeling for existence, is not yet a depersonalisation; but horror turns the subjectivity of the subject, his particularity *quasi-entirely*, inside out. It is a participation in the *there is* which returns in the heart of every negation, in the *there is* that has ‘no exits.’ It is, if we may say so, the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation’ (Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 61). See also Levinas’ essay, ‘The Name of A Dog, or Natural Rights’ in Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. by Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University, 1990), 151-153.

to Heidegger's stance in the face of National Socialism.⁴² Ultimately it reflects Levinas's intention of waiting on the good (salvation, mercy, and justice) in the face of evil of suffering.⁴³

Perhaps Kasper is not so far removed from Levinas' attempt to forge a language of hope and faith in so far as he too is determined to wait on the good amidst an increasingly secularised world.⁴⁴ For Kasper, the enlightenment principle that human reason is the

⁴² Levinas writes: 'We know what Heidegger was in 1933, even if he was so during a brief period, and even if his disciples – many of who are estimable – forget about it. For me, it is unforgettable. One could have been everything except Hitlerian, even if it was inadvertent' (Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins [Stanford CA: Stanford University, 2001], 94). Caputo, who uses Levinas' writings to demythologise Heidegger' thought, points out: 'What Heidegger regards as the inner truth of the spiritual relationship of Greek and German, which in 1933 is Heidegger's attempt both to elevate Nazi mythology to the level of metaphysics and to give a deeper, spiritual mooring to the revolution, is a "truth" that Heidegger never renounced' (John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1993), 5).

⁴³ See Levinas, 'Useless Suffering,' 93.

⁴⁴ Reflecting a biblical sense of hope, Kasper writes, in a later exposition that deals with theodicy: 'Theodicy and anthropodicy require that the conflict between truth and falsehood, justice and injustice be resolved and that absolute justice be established. In a word: there must be an end to all nonsense. It is the fulfilment of this very basic hope that is meant when scripture talks in apocalyptic language about the Lord in the end destroying his adversary, who refuses to acknowledge God's holiness and shows nothing but contempt for human dignity' (Walter Kasper, 'Individual Salvation and Eschatological Consummation,' in

measure of all things ultimately ends in abandoning ‘the idea of a specific history of salvation.’⁴⁵ As a result, Christology is reduced to anthropology. The danger here affects all theology as it can become a victim of its own logic and language. Kasper’s contribution is more telling in his transposition of the enlightenment-inspired conception of emancipation to the theological context of redemption. The enlightenment gave ultimate value to human dignity and freedom. Kasper challenges such a notion of freedom: ‘But surely then the enlightenment tradition, which denies God in the name of liberty, contradicts itself in the end. How can we conceive reality as existing under the primacy of freedom without a universal guarantee of divine freedom?’⁴⁶ So we see how enlightenment logic can end in the irrational, when it denies the possibility of the logic of faith. Even though Kasper can also fall victim to this irrationality, as we have seen, he is correct in suggesting that there is a need for a second enlightenment, a phenomenon that is in its birth pangs today.

Kasper’s religious quest for Jesus Christ has warned us of the temptation of reducing Jesus of Nazareth to a man mythologised. Just as von Balthasar carefully distinguished between a theological aesthetics and an aesthetical theology, Kasper, in a perhaps more confrontational tone warns of an anthropological Christology. Let us now examine how he discusses Christology in relation to anthropology.

Christology with an Anthropological Emphasis

Surprisingly, Kasper begins by praising Rahner’s ‘Christology from below’:

Raymond Brown, S.S., Walter Kasper and Gerald O’Collins, S.J., *Faith and the Future: Studies in Christian Eschatology* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 17-18.

⁴⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

Karl Rahner has done us an immense service in showing how Christology can be pursued in a new way on the presuppositions (not the conditions) of the modern movement. He has opened a new road to Christian belief for a great number of people and has established a bridgehead between Catholic theology and the hermeneutical discussion of recent years.⁴⁷

This 'new way' engages the subject (in its autonomy), whilst at the same time advocating 'a non-mythological understanding of Christ.'⁴⁸ Jesus' humanity is presented as both the revelation of God and of the human condition. Although Kasper seems to complement Rahner's analysis, one ought to be careful in taking such praise at face value.

The fact is that Kasper engages in quite a sophisticated deconstruction of Rahner's transcendental Christology. To this end, he critiques Rahner in three areas: (i) the experience of the infinite as the ground of finite freedom and existence; (ii) the experience of fulfilment as mediated through history and, in particular, through the salvific-historical event of redemption; (iii) transcendence as a dimension to our existence that is continually on the way to the revelation of God's self-communication.

Rahner's understanding of human transcendence may be inspiring, but, for Kasper, it is reductive. Rahner's transcendental Christology is a 'self-transcendent Christology' to the extent of representing 'the unique fulfilment of anthropology.'⁴⁹ In other words, when persons go beyond themselves in experiencing a true Christ-like nature, they experience the meaning of their being. Such a position grounds Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 49.

in the sense that for every fulfilling experience of human life there is an ‘implicit acceptance’ of the Son of Man.⁵⁰

In spite of Rahner’s logical analysis, the critical questions of human ‘being’ in the world have not been answered. ‘We have to ask whether, if we adopt so anthropologically oriented a theology and Christology, we are not unilaterally “metaphysicizing” historical Christianity, and cancelling by philosophical speculation the scandal of its specific reference.’⁵¹ This could suggest that Kasper is ultimately suspicious of Rahner’s tendency to ground theology, not only in anthropology, but also in metaphysics. In a later analysis of kenosis-Christology in *The God of Jesus Christ*, he remarks:

But the attempt to understand God and Jesus Christ in terms of the kenosis idea must be antecedently aware that such an understanding must not turn into a wisdom of this world but must hold fast to the folly of the message of the cross, which is the wisdom of God (cf. I Cor 1:18-31). The point of departure for such an attempt can therefore only be the testimony of the Bible and not some philosophy or other, whether classical metaphysics with its apathia-axiom, or idealism with its conception of the necessary self-renunciation of the absolute, or modern process philosophy. We must therefore resist all attempts, anticipated long ago in gnosticism, to turn the cross of Christ into a world principle, a world law or a world formula or to explain it as a symbol of the universal principle of ‘dying and living again.’⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 50.

⁵² Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 194.

Kasper's initial praise is, now, a lament. The passage highlights that Kasper is not only critical of transcendental anthropology, but also of such philosophies, as classical metaphysics, idealism, and modern process philosophy. Nonetheless, in questioning Rahner's metaphysics, Kasper does not succumb to the danger of falling into an anthropological-centred Christology, whereby the cross of Christ is misrepresented as a 'world principle,' rather than the true reality of Christ's suffering out of love for us.

Whilst Rahner focuses on the fundamental experience of our human condition in the world, Kasper is perhaps more attentive to the limits of human consciousness and understanding. Such limits define our human existence in relation to absolute mystery. We must face our limits and embrace the mystery of the cross, the very folly of God's secret and hidden wisdom (1 Cor 2:7).

Kasper may even go as far as questioning Rahner's theological integrity: 'This constitutive tension between historical reality and transcendental possibility discloses the basic problem of Rahner's approach. We might put it in thesis form by saying that Rahner's approach is still largely within the bounds of the idealistic philosophy of identity and its identification of being and consciousness.'⁵³ Is Kasper suggesting that we have in Rahner's reasoning a pantheistic, rather than a panentheistic, system? Is it really justifiable for him to state that Rahner is forgetful of the transcendental conditions of knowing and unknowing?⁵⁴

⁵³ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 50.

⁵⁴ For his part, Rahner is aware of the structure of knowledge, that is, the conditions of knowing and unknowing. In a text on the knowledge and self-consciousness of Christ, Rahner writes: 'In preparing for our reflections proper, it should be stated first of all that knowledge has a multi-layered structure: this means that it is absolutely possible that in relation to these dimensions of consciousness and knowledge something may be known and

According to Kasper, Rahner is forgetful of this structure of knowledge since he focuses more on the development of knowledge (its reality as one of becoming) than on its existential ground in mystery and enigma (where the truth of human existence converges in Christ).⁵⁵ It seems, in Kasper's mind, that Rahner has fallen into the temptation of confusing human consciousness with divine being or human being with divine consciousness.⁵⁶ This tells us that, for Kasper, the quest for the meaning of being does not depend first on redeeming anthropology, but on the proclamation of faith that Jesus is the Christ.

It would appear that Kasper's religious quest for Jesus Christ takes a detour to include a demythologizing of Rahner's theology. Following from this, we find that Kasper emphasises human response and human relations over against Rahner's emphasis on the human person as a question. Despite his later writings, which examine the experience of transcendence in history in relation to language, Rahner appears, nevertheless (at least in

not known at the same time' (Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *Later Writings*, translated by Karl Kruger [London: DLT, 1966], 199).

⁵⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 50-51.

⁵⁶ In more enigmatic terms, Levinas states: 'To be or not to be is not the question where transcendence is concerned. The statement of being's other, or the otherwise than being, claims to state a difference over and beyond that which separates being from nothingness – the very difference of the beyond, the difference of transcendence' (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 3). Hence, in order to have a true sense of being, we must be otherwise than being, that is, we must turn go beyond the pursuit of the everyday consciousness of caring for oneself and one's possibilities. The very ethical transcendence of care for the other leads us to a just sense in being, and hence, to the possibility of uttering the word God in love and mercy.

Kasper's mind), to be forgetful of the key transcendental conditions of our relating with God in history, namely, the limitations of human consciousness and understanding.

As noted, Kasper sees in Rahner the problems associated with idealism, in which, for example, being (God's being and our being) is over-identified with the categories of consciousness, that is to say, God's divinity is not distinguished clearly enough from our humanity. This in turn contributes to the aforementioned anthropological reduction. 'Is it really possible for him [man] as a finite being to conceive the infinite?'⁵⁷ We have here the perennial philosophical question of *the meaning of being*, for which there is no ultimate answer.⁵⁸

For his part, Kasper acknowledges the problem involved in understanding divine consciousness and being: 'What that infinite really is remains open, ambiguous and ambivalent. It can be interpreted in numberless ways.'⁵⁹ We are ultimately left with the fact that we too are an image and likeness of God, that is, we too are 'an impenetrable mystery.' This suggests that we cannot know in complete identity either God or human being. In Levinasian terms, this is expressed in the alterity, or otherness, which we encounter in the disturbing proximity of our neighbour.⁶⁰ Here the word of God in the other's face disturbs us

⁵⁷ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 51.

⁵⁸ It is not then surprising that Levinas sets out on a path otherwise than being as a means of realizing a transcendent truth in being, namely, peace, justice and mercy (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 16).

⁵⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 51.

⁶⁰ See Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 80-81. Elsewhere Levinas states: 'Proximity is a disturbance of the rememberable time. One can call that apocalyptically the break-up of time. But it is a matter of an effaced but untameable diachrony of non-historical, non-said time, which cannot be synchronized in a present by memory and historiography, where the

as it imposes on the self an unheard-of responsibility, to the point even of overwhelming self's consciousness in the demands placed on it. Levinas will describe this overwhelming effect in such dramatic terms as trauma, persecution, and that of being held hostage by the other.⁶¹

Acknowledging, finally, the *aporia*, namely, the problem that cannot be solved, but only resolved, Kasper clarifies: 'The main lines of man's real nature cannot be produced until they reach a certain point called Jesus Christ. ... Man has to acknowledge that in Jesus Christ everything which he hopes for is indeed fulfilled, but in an ultimately underivable way.'⁶² Jesus Christ is the resolution of the unsolvable problem of our day. The enlightenment's confidence that 'all problems can be solved,' leads to an irrational position, which Kasper sees resolved in Jesus Christ.

It should be pointed out, of course, that Rahner is aware of the reduction of being to consciousness in his Christology. Reflecting on Christology, he warns: 'To avoid misunderstanding, we must note that the Christology outlined above [of the Incarnation and God's relation to the world] is not a "Christology of consciousness" in contrast to an ontological Christology affirming the substantial unity of the Logos with his human nature. It is based on the metaphysical insight, derived from a strict ontology, that true being is the spirit as such itself.'⁶³ Nevertheless, Kasper's suspicions of Rahner's Christology are not present is but the trace of an immemorial past. The obligation aroused by the proximity of the neighbour is not to the measure of the images he gives me; it concerns me before or otherwise. Such is the sense of the non-phenomenality of the face' (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 89).

⁶¹ See *Ibid.*, 112, 117-118, 148-149.

⁶² Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 51.

⁶³ See Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 111.

without foundation. Moreover, even though Rahner speaks of the danger of mythologizing truth, his Christology contains elements of process philosophy / theology. He describes Christ as ‘this God-becoming-man’ in such terms as to introduce change into the reality of God, that is, in terms of human nature.⁶⁴ Kasper’s criticism of Rahner marks a tendency in Rahner’s Christology to give priority to the anthropological reality of the Incarnation over against the very personal and relational existence of the Incarnate Logos, and, derivatively, on our part, to a personal response to Christ.

The Analogy of Being

In the religious quest for Jesus Christ, Kasper underlines the importance of the very assent of faith, that is not just implicit: ‘Man has to acknowledge that in Jesus Christ everything which he hopes for is indeed fulfilled.’⁶⁵ The ‘has to,’ *muß* in the original text, implies an ultimate responsibility for accepting faith in Christ. Hence, against Rahner, Kasper highlights a new relationship between Christology and anthropology: one that uses the logic of the analogy of being (*analogia entis*), namely, that for every similarity between God and the human person, there is a greater dissimilarity. ‘In the sense of the classical notion of analogy, we have to say that however great the similarity between anthropology and Christology, the dissimilarity is still greater.’⁶⁶ We thus find that the analogy of being gives a structure to the relationship between anthropology and Christology. This is not new, as von Balthasar has already presented this very issue in his trilogy on aesthetics, dramatics, and logic.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 110-111.

⁶⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 51.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Kasper goes further, stating that ‘anthropology is so to speak the grammar which God uses to express himself. But the grammar as such is still available for a great number of pronouncements. It is concretely decided only through the actual human life of Jesus.’⁶⁷ Accordingly, we have the important statement of faith that Christ is the *analogia entis* par excellence. As pointed out, this is the same position held by von Balthasar. Christ, as the ultimate analogy of being, is the one in whom we find the meaning and truth of our human existence. This might suggest that Rahner’s Christology is forgetful of the Christological implications of the analogy of being.

It is now not unexpected that Kasper favours the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a theologian whose influence no doubt permeates his thought. With von Balthasar, Kasper introduces the category of the ‘New’ in the sense that we cannot limit the event of Jesus Christ to a specific time in history. The Christ event cannot be limited to just one instance in time or to one meaning; in fact its meaning permeates all time and every human heart. Its meaning is dependent on (divine) being, rather than on human knowledge. We can begin to see things as truly historical when we realise that, like Mary, we too can have a share in Christ’s mission and life, and realise that the quest for salvation is an important source of meaning and truth for us.⁶⁸

The Quest for Salvation in an Historicized World

In the spirit of Vatican II, Kasper analyses the transition in Catholic theology from having a static view of reality towards having a more dynamic and evolutionary one. The danger of the quest for Jesus Christ today is that of falling into a search for a ‘temporal well

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 51-2.

being which we ourselves plan, organise, devise and fight for.’⁶⁹ Such a quest for human well-being has indeed taken a hedonistic and narcissistic turn with the increasing wealth of society. In contrast, a philosophical and theological quest for the absolute (for redemption and salvation) goes deeper in the search for meaning and truth.⁷⁰ From a Levinasian perspective, however, I would argue that God does not have to safeguard the truth against a hedonistic and narcissistic distortion of it. The nature of divine truth is infinite and is encountered through an extreme passivity that reflects an infinite responsibility before the other.⁷¹

In order to investigate the meaning of Christ’s being for our historical situation, Kasper begins with the question: ‘What is history?’⁷² He responds: ‘There is history only where there is freedom.’⁷³ Freedom is the human spirit bestowing its meaning on our existence. Our human spirit develops an ‘inner sense of history and understanding of time,’⁷⁴ that complements external time and history. History is relational, ‘a process of reciprocity between subject and object,’⁷⁵ and is the foundation of experience and meaning in the world. The issue, for Kasper, is how we might continue to speak ‘about God and something absolute inside that kind of historical framework of thought?’⁷⁶ Repeatedly we find Kasper searching for a rational way of speaking of God in relation to history and the secular world. As a

⁶⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 120.

⁷² Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 52.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

response to the search for a logic of faith in history, Kasper offers arguments from three viewpoints: existence, evil, and self-transcendence.

Existence

Kasper emphasises that all our knowledge is in the sphere of the infinite. If we ignore the infinite we are left only with facts (the facticity of our historical situation) and, hence, live separated from the truth. Acknowledgement of the infinite offers humanity space for ‘freedom, decision and venture.’⁷⁷ Humanity is greater than the facts of our historical reality because of our relationship to God. Granted that the reality of our existence restricts us to the fact of living in the world (facticity), we, nevertheless, have a chance for freedom because of our relationship to the infinite. Thus we are caught between power and impotence, grandeur and poverty, or, transcendence and the limits of facticity.

Examining our existential state, Kasper introduces the theme of suffering. Our poverty is an experience of suffering. We suffer because we always already have an inkling of our greatness that is ultimately the possibility of relating to God. The very possibility of transcendence underlines for us that we can never truly reduce God to the totality of knowledge. It further points to the human person as an impenetrable mystery. The human person cannot be grasped or sufficiently explained through an objective knowledge.⁷⁸

‘Freedom as the transcendental definition or determination of human beings is not something that is factually “given”. It cannot be objectively established and proved.’⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁹ Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 66.

‘How is human existence possible in this aporetic historical situation?’⁸⁰ In such words, Kasper asks how we are to live in a world in which we cannot find ultimately a rational answer for our existence. This is the perennial tragedy wherein we must discover meaning and truth. In its own terms, anthropology cannot give the final word on the meaning of our existence. But we can find a ‘resolution’ in God who is infinite truth. Kasper’s quest for the meaning of divine being takes a turn towards the notion of freedom. In a complementary manner, for Levinas, the way of truth is directed to a life of difficult freedom, namely, having to take responsibility even in situations of humiliation and persecution. Levinas will speak, therefore, of a ‘persecuted truth’ in a manner that is distant from the idea of truth as unconcealedness (Heidegger), or as presence in consciousness. The transcendent power of truth is experienced in being exposed to the destitution of the other. It is found in the trace or proximity of God in the other’s face. In this formulation Levinas wishes to protect God’s transcendence from onto-theological reductions.⁸¹

Evil

Kasper’s second viewpoint, in developing a rational way of speaking of God, highlights the phenomenon of evil as a means to refine his reflection on existence. The existence of evil is ‘an impenetrable mystery.’⁸² Philosophies have struggled to respond adequately to the problem of evil. Equally theology is confronted with the problem of theodicy, of trying to explain why there is a God and why there is evil. Kasper comments firstly on the facticity or existence of evil. He notes that evil is part of the being of human

⁸⁰ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 54.

⁸¹ See Emmanuel Levinas, ‘A Man-God?’ in *Entre Nous*, 55-56.

⁸² Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 55.

history and freedom, and, indeed, characterises it as a ‘perversion of being: as the perversion of the meaning of existence.’⁸³ Next he qualifies it in terms of the reality of being: ‘Evil is either the humiliation or the violation of man.’⁸⁴ Hence, if we separate being into the two categories of existence and reality, we find two modes of evil: (i) evil as a perversion of existence; and (ii) evil as absolute meaninglessness.⁸⁵

It is not possible to easily come to terms with the existence and reality of evil.⁸⁶ Furthermore, even in pitting ourselves against evil and injustice we may be wounded by its power. Our suffering in the name of justice, for example, can turn into bitterness, hatred, and revenge. Only the God of redemption can save us. Such faith-inspired knowledge of redemption means that at the very moment when all might appear to be lost, everything is, in fact, possible.⁸⁷ Such hope is beyond the ground of history; it is forged in the meaning of Christ’s being-for-the-world, namely, in his grace and redemption.⁸⁸

Self-Transcendence

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ In contrast, Levinas goes a step further: ‘Evil as an excess, evil as an intention; there is also a third moment in this phenomenology: evil as hatred of evil. ... The experience of evil would then be also our waiting on the good – the love of God’ (Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 183).

⁸⁶ In a similar characterization, Levinas points out that, ‘evil-doers are disturbing to themselves like phantoms’ (Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 61).

⁸⁷ See Ibid., 92.

⁸⁸ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 55-6.

We now come to the third viewpoint in Kasper's logic of giving a rational basis for faith in Jesus Christ. The first two underlined that, given finite existence and evil, history cannot find fulfilment from within its own parameters. Despite this, however, a new logos is possible, if we direct ourselves towards the Logos, that is the Father's Word of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ: the truth that 'Jesus is the Christ.'

To arrive at this insight, we have to realize that an individuation, perhaps even a *super*-individuation is possible, in which through the 'phenomenon of self-transcendence' we become a new person in Christ. This transformation signifies becoming 'more' like Christ, and, in this, 'the achievement of a greater fullness of being.'⁸⁹ We find, thus, the centre of Kasper's search for a logic of faith in the dynamic of transcendence. Self-transcendence is an opening to the infinity of divine being.⁹⁰ This, in turn, opens the path that leads to hope, fulfilment, and ultimate meaning beyond the limitations of history.

Conclusion: The Quest for Jesus Christ Today

'The compelling and convincing aspect of Jesus Christ is that in him both the greatness and the inadequacy of mankind are accepted, and accepted infinitely. In *that* sense, Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of history.'⁹¹ This suggests, to Kasper, that in our historicized world, an ultimate reason can be encountered in the grace of Christ's salvific love and acceptance. We can be transformed and so uncover a hope for ultimate meaning in an act of

⁸⁹ Ibid., 56-7.

⁹⁰ From a Levinasian perspective, 'the infinity of divine Being,' namely, the Infinite, is glorified in our responsibility for the Other (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 144).

⁹¹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 58.

faith in the person of Jesus Christ.⁹² The more we participate with others in becoming like Christ in humility and solidarity, the more we can experience the truth of our freedom and of our existence. Our finite condition and the problem of evil are but obstacles to be negotiated as we move beyond the limits of our own being towards the otherness of divine being. We are to witness to the wisdom that Jesus is the Christ. In the hope of witnessing to such glory, we might truly discover ourselves in turning to Jesus Christ and asking: ‘Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another? (Mt 11:3).’⁹³

The proclamation that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God is one that needs to be renewed for those who remain deaf and blind to the possibility of freedom and redemption through Jesus. Whilst on a philosophical level we may be unable to find the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of being, we may, on a theological level, begin to discern a response to the above question from Matthew’s gospel in the realization that Jesus is the Christ. At the end of modernity, Kasper has opened a new path for us in responding in faith.

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⁹² ‘It is only when someone, in the act of faith, gives himself up to the encounter with God and his revelation that these make an impact on him, and for him become salvation’ (Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 68).

⁹³ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 58.