CHRISTOLOGY AND CHRISTOLOGIES IN INDIA – AN INTRODUCTION

From December 27th, 1972 to January 12th, 1973 a series of papers on "Interpreting Christ to India Today" were read at Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, by roman catholic and protestant theologians. A summary of the findings of this meeting seems a good starting-point for an introduction to "Christology and Christologies in India", because it immediately shows the extensiveness and complexity of the task to answer the question: "Which are the impulses for a Christology developed in the confrontation or dialogue between two cultures?"

The participants at the meeting in Jabalpur started from the following definition of Christology: "Christology is the expression in a concrete situation of a committed Christian understanding of, and attitude to, Christ" (1). They also listed "some prerequisites in forming an Indian Christology":

(i) Knowledge of the India of today, India with all its hopes, aspirations, frustrations, conflicts.
(ii) Knowledge of Hinduism in its various forms, sects, schools; and other religions like Sufism, Sikhism, etc.
(iii) Assimilation of the Hindu Scriptures through meditations, etc.
(iv) A genuine Christian life lived in a truly Indian form, our life becoming the source of theological reflection.

These prerequisites make clear to us that the developing of an Indian Christology has to be left to Indians. People from outside India can do no more -- but also no less -- than solidarly and critically follow the work of the Indian theologians, ascertaining at the same time impulses and/or warnings relevant for elaborating Christologies in the various contexts of the northern hemisphere.

i) Paper read at the meeting on 8th June, 1985, of the Dutch Working-group of Catholic Theologians. Dr. van Lin is the study secretary of the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies in the Netherlands.
As for presenting Christ to India the participants have formulated some guidelines, based on the prerequisites mentioned above:

(i) Plurality of Christological models will have to be an essential feature of the Christological task in India.

(ii) There is no possibility of a uniform vocabulary: for the bhakta type, bhaktiliterature terminology, for the jnana type an advaitic-Sankara system of terminology needs to be used.

(iii) Christ must be presented as the liberator of men in the concrete situation today in India: as the friend of the poor, as the builder of a new community of men, as the builder of a future for man, with man.

(iv) Greater emphasis is to be placed on the indwelling Spirit, the risen Lord, and from the risen Lord to the Lord of suffering, death, etc.

(v) In relation to Hinduism, Christ is to be presented as the answer to the aspirations of Hinduism, the fulfilment of the promise of God through the avatars.

(vi) Following the Image, the idol worship tradition, Christ can be presented as the true image of God, given by God himself.

(vii) The uniqueness of Christ is perhaps not the starting point, but rather the point of arrival.

(viii) The starting point of our Christological task in India should be the humanity of Christ.

(ix) Some of the ways of presenting Christ in the past may yet be tried, e.g. following the sahasranama typology.

(x) A mere comparison and translation of terminology based on any existing Christian systems of Christology is of limited value, yet as a starting point some such words as sabda, Akriti, Saguna-Nirguna, (both used for Christ), Chit, purusa, etc., could be used.

The participants mentioned two more points, namely:

- the guest of the historical, which refers to the problem that to non-Christians, Christians seem to be over-emphasising the historical character of the Christ-event, whereas Christians have the impression that non-Christians seem to ignore the historical completely;

- the global dimension, implying that in developing a Christology relevant to the Indian situation, Indian theologians should not be interested merely in a Christology for India alone, but construct an Indian theology that is embedded in the main stream of Christian thought and witness (2).