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IS JESUS CHRIST A “SYMBOL” OF GOD?

1. INTRODUCTION

On December 13, 2004, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) published a Notification¹ in regard to the book of the Jesuit theologian Fr. Roger Haight, according to which Rev. Haight was forbidden to teach Catholic theology in a Catholic school. The CDF declared that the book contains “serious doctrinal errors contrary to the divine and catholic faith of the Church”².

Following the Notification, Haight, an American Jesuit priest and professor of historical and systematic theology at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, resigned from the Weston School of Theology. Though the Notification asserts that the book, *Jesus Symbol of God*, contains “serious doctrinal errors”, it does not apply the word *heresy* to its contents. In the meantime, the Notification does not prevent Roger Haight from publishing. However, currently Roger Haight teaches spirituality at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

The Vatican Notification, signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) and Titular Archbishop of Sila Angelo Amato, S.D.B., prefect and secretary of the CDF, states that as a consequence, the author is prohibited from teaching Catholic theology as long as his positions are not rectified so as to be in full conformity with the doctrine of the Church³. The Notification was approved by St. John Paul II, who ordered it to be promulgated.

What were those “serious doctrinal errors” of the book that the CDF identified and which led to Roger Haight’s proscription from teaching Catholic theology in a Catholic School? What was Haight trying to do? How was his work received by the theological community?

¹ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1999, p. 507-514.

² *Ibidem*, p. 513.

³ See *ibidem*.

According to the Notification, Haight makes affirmations contrary to the theological method, “the pre-existence of the Word, the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity [Haight depicts the Trinity with the lower case letter *t*], the salvific value of the death of Jesus, the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus and of the Church, and the Resurrection of Jesus”⁴.

2. THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Haight begins his essay⁵ with the theological premise that “the tradition must be critically received into the present situation”⁶. The book insists from the beginning that theology must be done in dialogue with the postmodern world. The author argues that in a postmodern culture with its pluralistic consciousness one can no longer claim the superiority of Christianity to other religions, or Christ as the absolute center to which all other mediations of salvation are relative.

In regard to the dogmatic formulas, especially those related to Christ, the theologian affirms that they do not have the same meaning in our culture on these days as they had in the past when they were formulated. What is Haight planning to do?

The Christological question has become a new question for Haight that is not answered by the old formulas. Haight, therefore, needs new language. He wants to interpret the classical formulas, particularly in the area of Christology, in a sense that was not intended by them. He emphasizes that the dogmatic formulas or statements of the classical Councils have to be rethought and reinterpreted explicitly for our present time in a cultural and linguistic context different from the one in which they were first formulated: “The speaker today must not only try to estimate what such a view meant in the Johannine community; one who makes such an affirmation must also know what he or she means by such a statement and explain it”⁷. One more time he emphasizes that “the tradition, therefore, must be allowed to criticize the present situation”⁸.

3. HAIGHT’S THEOLOGY OF “SYMBOL-JESUS”

In this paper I aim to interpret and summarize Haight’s Christology based on *Symbol-Jesus*. What is symbol and how can we understand the meaning and significance of religious symbol in our life? How is it important or not for us? These kinds of questions are raised by Haight in his book, *Jesus Symbol of God*, where the core of his Christology is “Jesus symbol of God”.

⁴ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 508.

⁵ In the preface of his book Haight indicates that “this is an essay in systematic theology and Christology” (p. xiii).

⁶ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 46.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

Haight is very accurate when he says that a religious symbol both is and is not what it symbolizes⁹. A religious symbol is something "through which something other than itself is made present and known"¹⁰; through which all experiences with God and talking about God are mediated. A symbol mediates awareness of something else.

Haight distinguishes two different kinds of religious symbols: concrete or material symbols and conscious or conceptual symbols¹¹. If the former are tangible entities of the world (they are objects and concrete events, things, and persons that make God present to the world and serve as media to communicate God to human consciousness), the latter are the human images of God (they are myths, words, notions, ideas, sayings, and other conceptions in which God is portrayed to human consciousness) that "reflect the reality of God because God is immanent and present to the concrete symbols from which they are drawn"¹². Hence God becomes both immanent and transcendent in our experience.

The idea of a symbol is essentially tensive and dialectical: "A symbol mediates something other than itself by drawing or leading beyond itself to a deeper or higher truth"¹³. In the phrase, "a symbol is and is not what it symbolizes", Haight sees a dialectical quality of religious symbols, because that *is* and *is not* are viewed from different perspectives. God is present to the symbol and, through it, to human consciousness: "Since God is both present to and transcendent of any finite symbol, the symbol both makes God present and points away from itself to a God who is other than itself"¹⁴.

A symbol is always located within this world of time and space; all symbols are finite¹⁵. However, the finite symbol attempts to convey to a human's imagination the infinite one, the transcendent God. As the symbol points to God, it envisions the transcendent, and while the symbol is a flawed envisioning, it is an envisioning nonetheless.

Thus, as a fuller definition for religious symbol Haight states that a religious symbol is anything finite that discloses and points to what is other than itself (the Transcendent Other), and makes that Transcendent Other present by participation in it.

Haight begins his method of Christology by asserting the necessity of a "critical correlation" stating that a method of critical correlation entails bringing together the present and the past, "bringing into conjunction our present situation and the tradition about Jesus from a past that extends right up to the present"¹⁶. Imagination is necessary to understand the symbol and its conditioned past.

⁹ See R. Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2001, p. 135.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 130.

¹¹ See ibidem, p. 135.

¹² Ibidem, p. 140.

¹³ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 11.

¹⁴ R. Haight, *The Case for Spirit Christology*, Theological Studies 53(1992)2, p. 263.

¹⁵ See R. Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, p. 133.

¹⁶ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 45.

If one wishes to reach back through time and re-experience or to actually meet the Transcendent from a position of finitude, the person cannot do it, because he/she does not have the experience of that time. Haight believes that it can occur only through the imagination, for “the effect of Jesus research on Christology can be understood in a dialectical way through the mediation of the concrete, historical imagination and the role of the imagination in all knowing”¹⁷. The imagination of a Christology from below is not, as Haight thinks, incomplete at conceiving the duality of Jesus, but has the ability to be mature and encompassing of all parts in Christology¹⁸.

What we can see in Haight’s approach to Christology is an attempt to proclaim the good news of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ in language that people living in a postmodern culture can hear and understand. On the other hand, Haight goes too far with his symbolic language in order to reinterpret Christological doctrines for the Christians of our present time.

4. THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF THE WORD

According to Haight, “Christian faith is encounter with God mediated through Jesus of Nazareth, so that the Christian conception of God is not, as Haight thinks, confirmed by Jesus, but is mediated by Jesus”¹⁹. God acts through Jesus as through a medium, so that the salvific event occurs in the drama of revelation and faith in each believer and in the community as a whole. Therefore Haight believes that as the Word of God, Jesus is the medium of God’s self-revelation and self-communication.

In his book Haight reflects more on Jesus’ humanity than His divinity, and can be seen in his theological vocabulary when he talks about the Word of God as Jesus but never as the Christ. It seems that Haight’s Christology derives from Antiochene Logos-Anthropos Christology, of which the focus or imaginative referent is the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth. In asserting that the Logos should be understood in a purely metaphorical sense, Haight seems to deny the preexistence and incarnation of the Word as well as the divinity of Jesus Christ.

5. THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Who and what is Jesus Christ for Roger Haight? The theologian first discusses the question from the perspective of Jesus’ own lifetime. For Haight, Jesus was a person in whom the people of Israel encountered God in the first century. Haight thinks that “the interpretation of Jesus for our time will have the same structure

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 39.

¹⁸ See Haight, *The Future of Theology*, Continuum, New York and London 2005, p. 28.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

as it did when people first encountered Jesus²⁰. He believes that in Christian faith people still encounter God in and through Jesus. For Christian faith Jesus is the event in history where that encounter occurs. In the first century Jesus of Nazareth revealed God to the disciples and others. Jesus forms the central point of mediation for Christian revelation of and encounter with God. Haight's Jesus, as we see, revealed God the Father to his disciples and others, which means not all people but some of them.

Christians know the nature and character of God by focusing their attention on Jesus. What Haight wants to say in these words is to repeat the idea of Juan Luis Segundo, who used to capture functionally the meaning of Jesus' divinity, namely, by asserting that "God is like Jesus"²¹. Jesus is a witness, mediator, and parable of God. He is a prophet, teacher, healer, and savior or liberator. Jesus mediates the God of Jewish tradition by representing that God to his followers²². As a human being Jesus is Jesus. He is not God but points away from himself to God²³. Here we see that Haight's Jesus is a human being who only symbolized or mediated the saving presence of God, which is in contrast to the classical doctrines according to which Jesus Christ is truly divine and truly human.

Who is the God who is mediated through Jesus' ministry? For Haight, in Jesus God is Father and personal to Him. God's personal concern is love, which is universal and redemptive. As the Gospels indicate very clearly, Jesus is theocentric, but what He presents to His disciples and others is a God who is anthropocentric. God's cause is the cause of human existence. With God's unconditional and universal redemptive love God loves humanity, and as creator God wants to preserve and save God's creation.

6. THE UNICITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE SALVIFIC MEDIATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Coming to the doctrine of salvation, Haight states that salvation saves humanity from evil and meets human needs with the mediated God through Jesus and God's kingdom²⁴. The kingdom of God is a religious symbol that points to something else that is experienced religiously and thus specifically as other and transcendent²⁵. In other words, the symbol of the kingdom of God points to God who acts in history for our salvation.

Salvation, for Haight, is the point at which humanity meets with the divine, for it is salvation that lifts us beyond our unfulfilled humanity and captivity²⁶.

²⁰ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 87.

²¹ J.L. Segundo, *Christ in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1987, p. 26.

²² See R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 89.

²³ See *ibidem*, p. 112.

²⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 365-82.

²⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 97.

²⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 455.

In the Christian context, Jesus is the Christian mediation of the transcendent God, “insofar as Jesus Christ is the central medium for Christianity’s conception of ultimate reality, it is impossible by definition for Christ to be less than normative for a Christian appropriation of ultimate reality”²⁷. This Christological focus has two dimensions: the objective, “the work of Jesus Christ”, and subjective, “the appropriation of this salvific effect by human beings”²⁸.

Historically Jesus preached and lived the kingdom of God, extending the divine to His immediate context. However, as contexts change, both in space and time, the liberative, salvific kingdom of God must be translated from the dynamic symbol of God²⁹. It is within the context of the need for salvation that Jesus of Nazareth mediates the liberative, transcendent God.

In his book, Haight makes to rethink the doctrine of salvation. Haight argues that Jesus is a teacher and exemplar but not the sole, universal Savior. Haight depicts Jesus Christ as Savior only for Christians: “Jesus is savior because he is the symbol of God for Christians; it is in Jesus that Christians encounter God”³⁰. For Haight, other mediators of salvation, including both Christian and non-Christian religions, also play very important role in the life of their own people and culture.

Hence Haight holds that Jesus is normative only for Christians but not constitutive for followers of other religions³¹. He believes that it is not necessary to believe that God saves only through Jesus. He argues that we need to look at the salvation not from the perspective of Christocentrism but that of theocentrism: “It is impossible in a postmodern culture to think that one group is a chosen people. Or that one religion can claim to inhabit the center into which all others are to be drawn”³². Therefore, Haight is very sure saying that “if God is as Jesus reveals God to be, i.e. universal savior, one must expect that there will be other historical mediations of this salvation”³³.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 407.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 336.

²⁹ See ibidem, p. 337.

³⁰ R. Haight, *Jesus and Salvation: an Essay in Interpretation*, Theological Studies 55(1994)2, p. 230.

³¹ Elizabeth Johnson identifies three positions in the modern theological debate about salvation in Jesus Christ and the peoples of the world. I am not going to introduce all three positions but only the third one according to which Jesus Christ is not constitutive for the salvation of all people, but rather he is normative. Christ is extremely important, because there are other savior figures like Buddha or Krishna who also have a role to reveal the divine mystery to their own cultures. Hence there is only one God, who saves the world in various ways. Jesus Christ can be salvation only for Christians, because other religions have their own mediators who lead them to salvation. Johnson adds that the theologians, who hold the third position, depict Christ as normative in a universal way. It means that “for those who believe in him, he is a norm for human behavior and even for the revelation of God. For those who do not, he functions to measure and correct whatever in their religion may be deficient” (E. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*, Crossroad, New York 2005, p. 132-139).

³² R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 333.

³³ R. Haight, *The Case for Spirit Christology*, p. 281.

As Christians, we recognize that at least God wishes everyone to be saved. Elizabeth Johnson is very correct saying that "while we may not be sure that everyone is saved, at least we can *hope* that everyone is"³⁴. Then she adds: "The universality of Jesus Christ gives ground for the hope that the power of God triumphs over sin in the life of every person, whether they are members of the visible church or not"³⁵. Johnson refers to the meditation of Hans Urs von Balthasar who had spoken of the mystery of universal salvation on Holy Saturday. Von Balthasar verifies the universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ in the world. He is sure that "in the end through the cross the love of God wins what it has been after all along, namely, the return love of the beloved creatures, even those who had shut themselves off"³⁶. At least, says von Balthasar, "precisely this is something that we can only *hope for*"³⁷.

However, Haight's argument that "from a Christian theological standpoint Jesus is normative for the Christian imagination"³⁸ contradicts the church's traditional faith in Christ as the one and universal bearer of God's salvation for the entire humanity.

7. HAIGHT'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

In regard to the Trinity, Haight believes that the Logos and Spirit are symbols representing two different historical, salvific mediations of the one God, rather than referring to the differentiated inner life of God. The theologian interprets Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as two different "mediations" of God in various times of human history.

My own sense is that Haight makes Jesus Christ a unique mediator of the Incarnate Spirit but not the Incarnate Word. Haight does not believe in the pre-existence of the Word. He regards Jesus of Nazareth as a human being, like Adam: "This is not a pre-existence Christology, but a two-stage Christology in which the one compared with Adam is Jesus of Nazareth who went to his death in obedience, was raised and exalted, and is now the one who determines humanity into the end-time. Jesus Christ, the human being, was the vehicle of God's action of love for human kind (Rom 5:8), and now Jesus Christ is risen and exalted with God"³⁹.

According to Haight, "God is single and one"⁴⁰, who is manifested in history as Father, Son and Spirit, but this language does not say anything about the divine

³⁴ E. Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, p. 138.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 139.

³⁷ H. Urs von Balthasar, *The Von Balthasar Reader*, eds. M. Kehl, W. Löser, Crossroad, New York 1982, p. 147-156. See also H. Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?: With a Short Discourse on Hell*, transl. D. Kipp, L. Krauth, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, p. 210.

³⁸ R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 410.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 157.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 482.

inner life. He thinks that they are different “persons” that compromise the oneness of God. This leads in turn to a diminished doctrine of the Trinity, which contradicts the classical doctrine of the church.

The way he would revise the Trinitarian doctrine is to say “the historical genesis and intrinsic structure of Christian faith, revelation, and salvation are functionally trinitarian”⁴¹, not that God is Trinitarian. The doctrine is not intended to provide information about the internal life of God, but is about how God relates to human beings. This formula guarantees that “the salvation experienced in Jesus is really God’s salvation; the Spirit is God as Spirit”⁴².

The Trinity, that Haight conceives, would be understood as God’s means of manifesting God’s salvation, not three “persons” or “Gods”. Symbols of God’s activity to save are seen in Word (Logos), Love, Breath, Wind, Spirit, Light, etc., but there is only one symbol that is the composite image of God and His means of salvation for humankind – Jesus Christ.

Talking about the “collection of terms” in the Gospel according to Matthew, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mat 28:19), Haight states that they “represent the fundamental structure of Christian faith, because it is the narrative structure of Christian faith’s experience of God’ salvation in history. The event of salvation for the Christian is precisely God saving, first through creation and providence, and then through the Son, Jesus, and in God as Spirit active anew in the community”⁴³.

As we see, Haight is confused in his created and interpreted Trinitarian doctrine. However, the classical doctrines of our faith have claimed that the Trinitarian communion of three persons of the Holy Trinity is at the very heart of the Christian understanding of God, and, indeed of the very essence of God.

8. THE SALVIFIC VALUE OF THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

In the section, *Foundational Metaphor*, Haight presents the dialectical nature of Jesus as symbol. He suggests that “the metaphor that best expresses the insight of how God is present to and at work in Jesus in a Spirit Christology is empowerment”⁴⁴. “Jesus symbol of God” recognizes that it was not Jesus alone who was the symbol, but rather, Jesus was empowered. Haight quite simply states: “Empowerment presumes the indwelling of God as Spirit to the human person Jesus”⁴⁵. This is how Jesus saved, by being the mediating revelation of God in act and being, and “in this empowerment Christology Jesus is the reality of God”⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 484.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 485.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 475.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 454.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 455.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

Haight does not affirm the salvific value of the death of Jesus Christ and the universal salvific mission of the Son of God, which raises questions about His presentation of the resurrection. In our days, in our present post-modern consciousness, Haight is reluctant to accept "the language of Jesus suffering for us, of being a sacrifice to God, of absorbing punishment for sin in our place, of being required to die to render satisfaction to God"⁴⁷. Christ's voluntary passion, suffering and death are "symbolic of the strength of his attachment to God"⁴⁸.

Indeed Haight states his theology on the salvific death of Jesus Christ: "Jesus' physical death per se is not salvific, but represents the degree of God's love and Jesus' obedience which are salvific"⁴⁹. Thus, for Haight, salvation does not occur through the person of Jesus Christ but rather through His actions, namely, obedience.

9. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Undoubtedly, within the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ Haight would also reinterpret the resurrection of the Son of God. He proposes that "one should ordinarily not expect to have happened in the past what is presumed or proven to be impossible today"⁵⁰. For Haight, belief in an empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are not essential to the faith. All the biblical stories of the empty tomb, in their various forms, are symbolic: "They give expression to the faith of the community that Jesus is risen"⁵¹. This faith is faith-hope, therefore Haight states that the historicity of the empty tomb and appearance narratives of the Gospels are not essential to resurrection faith-hope.

If Haight is right, why then St. Paul did write to the Corinthians: "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). As Christians, we believe that the appearances of the risen Jesus Christ and the empty tomb are the foundation of the faith of the disciples in the resurrection of the Lord⁵².

10. CONCLUSION

Consequently can we say that the Incarnate Son of God the Father, Jesus Christ, is a "symbol" of God? Haight's answer is yes, "for Christians Jesus is a concrete symbol of God" or Jesus Christ is a "sacrament for an interpersonal encounter with God"⁵³.

If we believe and declare in our Creed that Jesus Christ is "true God from true God", then how can we believe that He is the definitive concrete "symbol" of God

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 241.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 241-242.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 241.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 127.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 135.

⁵² See ibidem, p. 513.

⁵³ R. Haight, *Jesus and Salvation*, p. 248.

in human history⁵⁴? By accepting Jesus Christ as a “concrete symbol of God”, then we will also need to accept that Jesus both is and is not God, because according to Haight “a symbol both is and is not what it symbolizes”⁵⁵. Hence rather than Jesus Christ being God, Haight says “Jesus is a classic symbol of God”.

However, after reading Roger Haight’s books on Christology, I do think that the former Catholic Jesuit priest lives or dies by his understanding of the word “symbol”. The terms “symbol” and “symbolic” are used frequently in his three books – *Dynamics of Theology*, *Jesus Symbol of God*, and *The Future of Christology*.

With a language appropriate to postmodern culture, Haight thinks that he has brought a new light to Christology, but actually he goes too far in reinterpreting core and traditional doctrines about Christ and salvation. As John L. Allen Jr. writes in his article, “Haight insisted that this work is a service to the church. ‘My fear is that educated Catholics will walk if there isn’t space for an open attitude to other religions,’ he said”⁵⁶.

Unfortunately, I think Haight’s work not only cannot be a service to the church, but rather it will confuse those Christians who do not have a strong faith in our Lord and God Jesus Christ. Haight’s Christology, I think, makes the Son of God a simple human, just Jesus but never the Christ.

It is crystal clear that Jesus Christ became the central, most beautiful, inspiring, and powerful symbol for understanding and knowing God but let us not forget that being God Christ represented, symbolized and mediated God to the humanity. The Son of God revealed His Father to humanity through His Incarnation.

God the Incarnate Logos entered fully into human history. In the past “God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Heb 1:1-2).

Unlike prophets, the Son of God “is not simply a word *about* God, a word that no matter how saintly and full of grace it is, is in principle surpassable because it is a finite word about the infinite God”⁵⁷. Rather, Jesus Christ is the Word of God that took human flesh in a real, historical event of salvation. In biblical words, Christ “is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3).

We encounter God in the Son who is the perfect image of the invisible God the Father (Col 1:15). In other words, we can say that the only begotten Son of God embodied all the great symbols or personifications of God: Wisdom, Logos, Light, Life, Truth, and Spirit. As such being perfect God the Word of God became perfect human.

⁵⁴ See R. Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, p. 138.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

⁵⁶ J. L. Allen Jr., *Vatican denounces Fr. Roger Haight’s book, bars him from teaching*, National Catholic Reporter, February 18, 2005.

⁵⁷ B. O. McDermott, *Word Become Flesh: Dimensions in Christology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 1993, p. 285.

God the Incarnate Word was touched and embraced all humanity in the incarnation: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – this Life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal Life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3).

Do we need other evidences to claim that Jesus Christ is “true God from true God, true Light from true Light” who, on behalf of our salvation, became incarnate? The disciple shares his experience with us and testifies to the Son of God as a witness; therefore we trust him and continue to believe in the One who is our Lord and God, Jesus the Christ. Thus, “we proclaim no new thing; we proclaim the essential truth in everything that is old”⁵⁸.

IS JESUS CHRIST A SYMBOL OF GOD?

Summary

This is a critical review of the book by the American Jesuit theologian Fr. Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*. The terms *symbol* and *symbolic* are used frequently in Haight’s book, *Jesus Symbol of God*. For Christians, as Haight states, the Incarnate Logos of God is “a concrete” or “a classic symbol of God”. By accepting Jesus Christ as a concrete symbol of God, it follows that we need also to accept that Jesus Christ both is and is not God, because according to Haight “a symbol both is and is not what it symbolizes”.

With language appropriate to postmodern culture, Haight thinks that he has brought a new light to Christology, but actually he goes too far in reinterpreting core and traditional doctrines about Christ and salvation.

Unfortunately, Roger Haight’s work creates confusion among those Christians who do not have strong faith in Jesus Christ. He creates confusion even for Christians of strong faith. Haight’s Christology tries to make the Son of God a simple human, just Jesus but never the Christ, who revealed God to humanity through His Incarnation.

Keywords: Jesus, Christ, Holy Spirit, Holy Trinity, Symbol, Christology

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⁵⁸ K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the Sixth Edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1933, p. 95.

CZY JEZUS CHRYSZTUS JEST SYMBOLEM BOGA?

Abstrakt

Jest to polemika z książką amerykańskiego jezuitę i teologa ks. Rogera Haight'a pt. *Jezus Symbol Boga*. W swej książce ks. Haight często stosuje terminy: „symbol” i „symboliczny”. Stara się też dowodzić, że dla chrześcijan Wcielone Słowo Boga jest „konkretnym” lub „klasycznym symbolem Boga”. Przyjmując jednak takie twierdzenie, trzeba też przyjąć, że Jezus Chrystus zarówno jest i jednocześnie nie jest Bogiem, ponieważ – według Haight'a – „symbol jednocześnie jest i nie jest tym, co symbolizuje”.

Stosując język właściwy dla kultury postmodernistycznej, Haight uważa, że wniósł wiele nowego światła w pojęcie chrystologii. W rzeczywistości posunął się za daleko w reinterpretacji istoty i tradycyjnych doktryn o Chrystusie i zbawieniu.

Niestety, praca Rogera Haight'a może wprowadzić w błąd tych chrześcijan, którzy nie mają silnej wiary w Jezusa Chrystusa. Chrystologia Haight'a próbuje zrobić z Syna Bożego zwykłego człowieka, po prostu Jezusa, ale nie Chrystusa, który poprzez swe wcielenie objawił Boga ludziom.

Słowa kluczowe: Jezus, Chrystus, Duch Święty, Trójca Święta, symbol, chrystologia