

## THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST II

## The Uniqueness of Christ

Ulrich Parzany

It is not enough merely to state and proclaim the uniqueness of Christ: We must be able to give reasons. The more the uniqueness of Christ is being questioned, the more carefully we must explain the reasons.

Reasoning is necessary even within the fellowship of Christians. For only when the uniqueness of Jesus is the center of the church will the task of world evangelization be fulfilled by the church. World evangelization depends on the certainty, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Reasons must be given to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ is the loving invitation which we have to extend in the name of the living God. Yet the question must be asked: *Why do we invite people to follow Jesus?* Adequate reason can only be rooted in the Holy Scriptures which are the document of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

It is impossible to develop a comprehensive Christology in this short discussion. The uniqueness of Christ proves itself in all aspects of his being and doing. I will just mention one important aspect which has been neglected in Christian teaching and in proclaiming the gospel.

**Jesus—the Son of Man**

In the four Gospels, Jesus often refers to himself as the "Son of Man." Many Christians mistakenly interpret this title as a description of the humbleness of Christ. But the expression "Son of Man" comes from Daniel 7:13–14:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

The Son of Man is the Ruler and Judge of the world, as authorized by God. The meaning of the New Testament title "Son of Man" is only properly understood when we add, "Judge and Lord of the world."

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Surprisingly, in the New Testament the title "Son of Man" is used in most cases when Jesus speaks about himself. The expression occurs sixty-nine times in the first three Gospels and only when Jesus speaks about himself. It occurs twelve times in the gospel of John. Eleven of these are times when Jesus speaks about himself. Once was when listeners to Jesus quoted him (John 12:34).

Jesus claimed to be the incarnate Judge of the world. He spoke about his coming for the final judgment (Matthew 19:28; 25:31–46; Luke 17:22–30). Already during his lifetime on earth he had the authority to forgive sins—an authority which only God has (Mark 2:10).

It is the uniqueness of Christ that at the same time he is doing the work of the Son of Man (Daniel 7) and the work of the servant of God (Isaiah 53). "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In response to Peter's confession, Jesus announces the suffering of the Son of Man (Mark 8:29–31). Although he is Lord of Lords, his basic human need for housing has not been satisfied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

The uniqueness of Christ is that in him the Lord and Judge of the world has become a human being. The question, "Who is Jesus?" leads to discovering his uniqueness. The uniqueness of what he said, what he did, and what happened to him in suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection is to be derived from the uniqueness of who he is.

Why is the death of Jesus the only way to reconcile men with God? The uniqueness of his death is not in how he died. Thousands were crucified by the Romans with the same brutality and cruelty. The uniqueness of his death is in who he is. The suffering Lord and Judge of the world takes the place of the lost sinner. The Judge himself suffers the consequences of the rebellion and enmity of man against God.

It is impossible for us to claim another person's biography and history. Guilt is not something which we can throw away like a dirty shirt. Rebellion against God is the nature of life. And only the Creator, the Lord and the Judge of the world, is able to break through the barriers of space and time in order to take our sinful lives and crucify them on the Cross, and finish the whole case.

Because of the uniqueness of Christ I can confess, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

**Criticism**

The proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ has been criticized and we need to deal with some aspects of this criticism. Christians who proclaim the uniqueness of Christ have been accused of having a subjective, narrow-minded, and one-sided theological view. Some people feel that in order to improve the greater community of people of different religions, the proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ should be expressed more cautiously. It is more acceptable if the subjective view is kept personal. The uniqueness of Christ is said to be a view of a believer, but not a statement which is obligatory for all people.

Nevertheless, the importance and the meaning of life and death of Jesus Christ does not depend on human judgment, but on God's judgment. By the Resurrection, God has proved, validated, and confirmed that Jesus is the one key figure of the world. Even the disciples thought the death of Jesus disproved his claim. But the risen Lord has overcome the doubts of his disciples and proved himself to be Lord of Lords.

By proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ, we are repeatedly challenged by this truth.

The confession of the first Christians was *Kyrios Jesus*, “Jesus is Lord.” It does not only mean, “Jesus is my Lord,” Jesus is proclaimed as Lord of Lords. Because Jesus has risen from death, we do not have the right to reduce the uniqueness of Christ merely to a personal, subjective perception.

### Intolerance and Fanaticism

Has the proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ led to intolerance and fanaticism against people who believe differently? Has it led even to violence? As Christians, we need to repent of what has happened during the history of the church. The Christian witness of the uniqueness of Christ has been misused and discredited. Christians cannot claim to be the only ones who own the truth. This is an attitude of pride—a superiority complex that is not appropriate for disciples of Jesus.

But Jesus Christ himself *is* the unique way of salvation:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: . . . All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy (Colossians 1:15–18).

Therefore, only Jesus has been entitled to offer himself as God’s absolute truth—for all mankind, but against all who want to compete with him. It is part of his uniqueness that Jesus prayed for his enemies and died on behalf of them. In Jesus, God proves how dearly he loves his enemies.

Those who believe and proclaim the uniqueness of Christ, must realize that to excuse fanaticism or to permit violence in the name of Christianity is to betray Jesus Christ. Proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ must be combined with openness to dialogue and love towards everyone—even if they refuse the gospel of Jesus.

### The Joint Action for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation

Facing overwhelming problems of today’s world, many people believe that actions for justice, peace, and integrity of creation are of the highest priority. Therefore, it may seem more important to them to cooperate with people of other faiths than to proclaim Jesus Christ as the unique Savior.

When we believe in the uniqueness of Christ, we also realize that God loves and sustains his world and wants to save it through Jesus. The risen Lord Jesus assures us that God will create the new heaven and the new earth. Jesus Christ is God’s guarantee of the new world. Therefore, a follower of Jesus should lovingly and carefully work for justice, for peace, and for the integrity of the creation which God has entrusted to us. There are many fields in daily life where Christians can cooperate with people of other faiths without denying Jesus, but cooperation must never lead to compromising the uniqueness of Christ.

Our work in evangelism and in social action for justice, peace, and integrity of creation will not be in vain because Jesus has overcome death (1 Corinthians 15:58). Only Jesus will be able to complete this work. He will create the new world of perfect peace and justice, not us. As we proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, we need to abandon all utopian concepts of self-redemption. We can no longer believe in the human ability to create a paradise. Due to human selfishness and pride the situation of the world will deteriorate (Matthew 24). Because we trust in the unique Lord Jesus Christ, we will proclaim the gospel of salvation and offer signs of hope because and until Jesus comes.

### Trying to Integrate Jesus

In the process of evangelization, we do not just experience either acceptance or refusal of the gospel. There are also many attempts to integrate Jesus into a gallery of religious leaders, prophets, and deities. Jesus then becomes a part of a larger system. He is worshiped along with others. This is also a refusal of the unique and saving offer of Jesus Christ.

In this process, the name of Jesus is being used deceptively. People deny his right to be their Lord by politely putting him alongside other venerable persons or institutions. Such syncretistic integration immunizes people against the true gospel of Jesus Christ as the unique Savior. In Europe today, Jesus appears in a gallery of deities alongside the worshiped god of money, the god of sex, the god of security, the god of health and success.

How far have we accepted the integration of Jesus into the gallery of deities in our own respective cultures? The danger is that we become blind and insensitive to a process of creeping integration. At times we become anesthetized by the approval we receive for proclaiming a type of Jesus who appeases the desires to present Jesus as the God of happiness and success, or as a prophet of the modern, Western “health-and-wealth” cult. These are not only dangers outside the church, but they influence Christians inside the church as well.

### Dedicating Ourselves to the Unique Lord Jesus

It is vital to defend the gospel of the unique Christ against all kinds of darkening and misleading interpretations. A deformed gospel no longer has rescuing power.

The biggest temptation comes from within ourselves, not from outside. As long as we worship Jesus in his uniqueness, as long as we surrender our lives to the supreme and loving Lord, we will be faithful messengers of the gospel. Christology must not only shape our thoughts but also our lives. People will easily recognize contradictions between our strong theological statements and our compromising Christian lifestyles.

In February 1988, I met our beloved brother, the late Bishop Festo Kivengere, in a Nairobi hospital. After prayer, I asked him to give me a word which I could take to the young people in my country who had listened to him many times. He bowed his head for a few seconds, then looked up and quoted Paul from his letter to the Philippians, “. . . That now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:20–21).

May our life and death be a credible testimony to the uniqueness of Christ. Let us join the apostle Paul as he puts himself and his ministry of evangelization in the light of the unique Lord Jesus:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men (2 Corinthians 5:10–11).