

2022 Meeting Keynote Address

"Jesus Christ as 'real-picture' of Faith: Paul Tillich and the Debates of Christology"

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In 1934, one year after his emigration, Paul Tillich published a review of Emil Brunner's book *The Mediator* in the journal *The Christian Century* under the title *Disciple and Critic of Barth*, which appeared in English translation in the same year.¹ For his review, Tillich not only used the original German version of Brunner's book, published in 1927, he also wrote his review in German. Most importantly, Tillich's 1934 Brunner review is an expanded version of a footnote from his essay *Christologie und Geschichtsdeutung* published in 1930. Here it says: "It is the merit of Brunner's book: 'The Mediator' that he treats the historical question up to the problem of the non-existence of Jesus. It is his shortcoming that he does not leave the questionability of the empirical in the radicality which includes the non-existence. In the crucial point he softens and thus deprives himself of the possibility of new positive ways of

Christology.”² But what does this new, positive way of Christology consist of? Christology, according to Tillich in his 1930 essay, is interpretation of the meaning of history. Its circular structure explicates Christology. This is precisely the substance of Tillich’s talk of a middle of history but also of his formula Jesus Christ as real-picture of faith.

With his Christology, Tillich reacted to the Christological debates since 1900. These debates in German Protestantism are characterized by a double feature. On the one hand, historical Jesus research led to the insight that the historical Jesus does not belong in Christianity, but in ancient Judaism. On the other hand, in reaction to this, reflexive versions of Christology were elaborated that no longer refer to the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, Christology is used by Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten and others to describe the reflexive structure of the act of faith. Paul Tillich’s Christology, which will be the subject of the following, also stands in this context. His new, positive way of Christology consists in a reflexive version. The object of Christology, is the reflexive structure of the act of faith, but not the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. This is precisely the systematic content of Tillich’s determination of Jesus Christ as the real-picture of faith, which will be the subject of the following.

I have divided my remarks into three sections. In order to understand the specificity of Tillich’s Christology, we must include his theological development. This will be done in the first section. Then we will turn to the Christology of *Systematic Theology*. In the concluding third section, I will explore the question of what starting points Tillich’s Christology offers for debates in the 21st century.

1. The Development of Tillich’s Christology

In 1911, the young Tillich discussed together with friends 128 theses about *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*. In his theses, he claims that the certainty of the Christian faith is independent from the historical Jesus. In the background of the 128 theses there is, on the one hand, the contemporary historical Jesus research which leads to a difference between the historical Jesus and Christianity. Especially Johannes Weiss and other theologians from the so-called History of Religion School (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), like William Wrede, for example, had all shown that Jesus of Nazareth must be understood in the apocalyptic horizon of the ancient Judaism³ – and that means, in difference to Christianity. Albert Schweitzer in his famous book about the history of Jesus research from 1906 had taken up this result from historical debates of his time and declared that the historical Jesus plays no role for the Christian religion.⁴ The result for the theological debates is a dissolution of the historical Jesus from Christology. Christology does not start with the Jesus of the history, but rather with the Christian religion, which refers itself back to Jesus.⁵

On the other hand, there is the framework in which Tillich’s Christology is understood as a conception of a speculative theology. Following Fichte and Schelling, the foundation of the theological system is for Tillich the absolute truth or the absolute identity. The main principle as *spirit* that is characterized through a relation to itself. Tillich calls this principle the identity of self-consciousness, which is at the same time the principle of certainty and autonomy.⁶ It is important to see that this principle means an identity of the universal and the concrete. This is the structure of the absolute spirit or the absolute truth. The concrete is true insofar and only insofar as it is a

² Cf. P. Tillich, *Christologie und Geschichtsdeutung*, in: *Ausgewählte Texte*, ed. by C. Danz/W. Schüßler/E. Sturm, Berlin/New York 2008, 238-253, Fn. 27.

³ Cf. J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, Göttingen 1892; W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*. Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums, Göttingen 1901.

⁴ Cf. A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, vol. 2, Hamburg 1966, 620-630.

⁵ Cf. P. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*, in: *ibid.*, *Briefwechsel und Streitschriften*. Theologische, philosophische und politische Stellungnahmen und Gespräche, EW VI, Frankfurt a. Main 1983, 31-50, here 32-34 (*A. Critique of the historical evidence*).

⁶ Cf. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*, EW VI, 43 (thesis 102): “If the proposition ‘I equals I’ or the identity of self-consciousness is the principle of certainty, there is no principle of cognition above the autonomy of the self-positing I [*sich selbst setzenden Ich*]”.

representation of the universal. If the concrete exists for itself as concrete, then the concrete stands in contradiction to the absolute truth.⁷

Against the mentioned background, Tillich constructs not only his theology and philosophy of history but also his Christology. The concrete is a medium that represents the absolute. In this sense, Jesus Christ is an image that is produced from the spirit, namely the relation between the universal and the concrete. "The autonomous version of the Christological problem has to replace the two-nature-doctrine through a doctrine about the relation between the absolute and the concrete spirit that must be viewed in Christ and realized through him."⁸ Tillich identifies the dialectical structure of the absolute spirit and its realization in history with Jesus Christ. Only in this way does Jesus play a role in Christology – namely, as an image of the relationship between absolute and individual spirit. Certainty is the individual spirit which knows itself as the realization of the absolute spirit. But the localization of this event in history remains doubtful.⁹

During and after World War One, Tillich transformed his early theology and also his Christology that was built within the horizon of the speculative construction of absolute truth and identity. Absoluteness is no longer a subordinate frame of the construction of history, but rather absoluteness is a part or an element of the act of self-disclosedness of the concrete existence. In his writings after the War, Tillich calls this *breakthrough*, a metaphorical description of the revelation of God. Instead of the absolute, Tillich speaks now from the unconditioned. Religion is a performative act in the human consciousness. What happens in religion is that the consciousness becomes aware that the unconditioned is the presupposition of all acts of consciousness. But this presupposition is not a content as such, because the unconditioned is the

condition of all contents. On the one hand, this structure must be disclosed for an individual, that is to say, it is always an act of revelation. Otherwise, knowledge of God is not possible. On the other hand, insofar as one can talk about this breakthrough, namely the disclosedness of the unconditioned as a presupposition of all acts of the consciousness, this is only possible by using cultural forms, which must at the same time be negated. Every concept of God is a human production and therefore both necessary and totally wrong.¹⁰ This understanding of revelation leads also to important transformations of Tillich's Christology. The latter is now understood as a symbolic description of the reflexive structure of the religious performative act, and within another aspect, it is connected with soteriology.¹¹ What remains is that the doctrine of Jesus Christ does not start with the historical Jesus. The historical Jesus is not the foundation of the Christian faith. In contrast, Jesus Christ is a structural description of the faith event as a personal act in the present. This shows that Tillich's Christology describes the appropriation of faith by the individual as an act in history. In the religion of paradox – of which Christ is the image –, the content of religious consciousness is the connection between religious act and the representation of this act in consciousness. Only by representing this connection in the religious consciousness does consciousness become true, whole and transparent.

We find a detailed elaboration of Tillich's Christology in the lectures on dogmatics that he gave at the University of Marburg and Dresden between 1925 and 1927. If Christology explains the structure of the performative act of faith, then Christology must begin with the act of faith as the breakthrough of the unconditioned in the human consciousness. Since 1924, Tillich calls this salvation revelation, as differentiated from foundational revelation.¹² The latter is the disclosedness in the human

⁷ Cf. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*, EW VI, 41 (thesis 87).

⁸ Cf. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus* EW VI, 45.

⁹ Cf. Tillich, *Die christliche Gewißheit und der historische Jesus*, EW VI, 42f. (thesis 100).

¹⁰ Cf. Tillich, *Die Überwindung des Religionsbegriffs in der Religionsphilosophie*, in: *ibid.*, *Frühe Hauptwerke*, GW I, Stuttgart 1959, 367-388, here 381.

¹¹ Cf. F. Wittekind, „Allein durch den Glauben“. Tillich's sinntheoretische Umformulierung des Rechtfertigungsverständnisses 1919, in: C. Danz/W. Schüßler (eds.), *Religion – Kultur – Gesellschaft. Der frühe Tillich im Spiegel neuer Texte (1919–1920)*, Wien 2008, 39-65, here 46-52.

¹² To this differentiation, cf. Tillich, *Rechtfertigung und Zweifel*, in: *ibid.*, *Offenbarung und Glaube. Schriften zur Theologie II*, GW VIII, Stuttgart 1970, 85-100.

consciousness that the unconditioned is the presupposition of all acts of the consciousness. This general revelation is the condition of the salvation revelation but at the same time is always ambiguous.¹³ Also the foundational revelation is a part of the theological circle, namely a moment in the structural description of the Christian faith. Having this in mind, it becomes clear that Tillich goes out from the conviction that the foundational revelation has a teleological orientation to the salvation revelation.

The starting point of Tillich's Christology in his dogmatics lectures in the 1920s is neither the historical Jesus nor the faith of his followers, but rather the image of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ That means an interrelation from both aspects. Already here is the image of Jesus Christ a "real picture" of the structure of the performative act of faith.¹⁵ But what does this image symbolize? Nothing else other than the before mentioned reflexive structure of the religious act. Christology describes the salvation revelation. The content of the revelation of salvation is the foundational revelation and thus the negation of the content of consciousness, which represents this revelation in consciousness. Exactly this dialectic represents the image of the Christ in and for the Christian faith.¹⁶

In 1936, Tillich gave his first dogmatics lecture in New York, entitled *Advanced Problems in Systematic Theology*.¹⁷ What is new in these lectures is not the construction of Christology as such. Also in his dogmatics in the 1930s Tillich does not deal with the historical Jesus in his Christology.¹⁸ Rather Jesus is an image produced from faith which is not dependent upon the historical Jesus.¹⁹ As well as in his German

dogmatics, Tillich connects the explication of the Christology with the performative act of faith.²⁰ So it remains that Christology is an explanation of the reflexive structure of faith. One can say that the Christological conception in the dogmatics courses from New York is an intermediate stage on the way to the Christology of the *Systematic Theology*.²¹

2. Jesus Christ as 'real-picture' in *Systematic Theology*

As we have seen, the task of Christology for Tillich is not to give a description of the historical Jesus. The man from Nazareth is not the founder or the foundation of the Christian religion. Rather, he is an element in and a part of the Christian faith. This is exactly the content of Tillich's formula in *Systematic Theology* that the Christian event is both "a historical fact and a subject of believing reception" (ST II, 98). This formula is a continuation of his German Christology. The starting point for the Christological construction in the *Systematic Theology* is that the Christian faith is a performative act in history and theology has the task of explaining this faith. We must now deal with the construction of Tillich's Christology in his magnum opus. First, we must explain the interrelation between fact and reception in the Christian event, second, we must consider the function of the historical Jesus for the Christian faith and finally the function of Christology as an expression of the reflexive structure of the performative act of faith.

First: One does not obtain a correct understanding of Tillich's differentiation between the fact of the Christian event and the believing reception of this fact if, for example, the fact is understood as a presupposition. The fact of the Christian event and

¹³ Tillich takes this up in the *Systematic Theology* in his conception of the ambiguity of life. Cf. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Chicago 1963.

¹⁴ Cf. P. Tillich, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung*, EW XIV, Berlin/New York 2005, 332-335.

¹⁵ Cf. Tillich, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung*, EW XIV, 339.

¹⁶ Tillich offers a short summary of his Christology in the 1920s in his article *Christologie und Geschichtsdeutung* from 1930. Cf. Tillich, *Christologie und Geschichtsdeutung*, 238-253.

¹⁷ P. Tillich, *Advanced Problems in Systematic Theology*, EW XIX, Berlin/Boston 2016.

¹⁸ Cf. P. Tillich, *The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Christian Faith*, in: *ibid.*, *Advanced Problems in Systematic Theology*, EW XIX, Berlin/Boston 2016, 317-321.

¹⁹ Cf. Tillich, *The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Christian Faith*, EW XIX, 319: "The content of our faith is a picture which is created by faith – namely, the picture of Jesus given in the whole New Testament".

²⁰ Cf. Tillich, *Advanced Problems in Systematic Theology*, EW XIX, 115: "The method of our lecture is to show the correlation of the theological concepts with anthropological concepts. [...] Christology in correlation to the doctrine of man".

²¹ Cf. also P. Tillich, *Existential Questions and Theological Answers. First Series: Existence and the Christ*. Syllabus of Gifford Lectures 1953, University of Aberdeen 1953.

the believing reception of this fact are not two separate parts. Indeed, there are some phrases from Tillich that sound as if he meant a historical assumption,²² but this is not correct. As we have seen in our overview of the development of his Christology, this is not Tillich's position. The historical fact as the one aspect in the Christian event is not a presupposition of the faith, rather the historical fact is a presupposition which only exists in the act of faith, with the believing reception consisting not of a separated element. The Christian event, namely the act of faith, is both fact and reception. Tillich constructs his Christology as an expression of the act of faith and this means an act of appropriation. Faith is a personal act. The personal dimension, i.e., that it must be performed by a human being, is represented by Jesus as the image of faith. But this act is always an act bound to the history of revelation. Its basis is the distinction between foundational revelation and salvation revelation. This means for the image of Christ that it describes the transition from the foundational revelation to the revelation of salvation. Tillich's differentiation between fact and reception exemplified this structure of the faith. Tillich's formula of the Christian event as fact and reception is not a historical thesis but rather a systematic thesis about the beginning of Christianity. The Christian religion begins neither with Jesus nor with the kerygma of the early Christians.²³ It starts with an interrelation between Jesus and his followers, or – as we can call it with a contemporary terminology that is used in the historical research – with the remembered Jesus.²⁴ Also in this view it becomes clear that Tillich exemplifies with the interrelation between both *factum* and *reception* the structure of the faith as an act, which is bound to a concrete history. Jesus means here an image produced by faith to describe itself as a personal act of the disclosedness in the self-relation of the

consciousness. Without this act, no faith is possible, and at the same time this act produces an image from itself. Christianity is what it is only through this act, namely the individual appropriation of the remembered Jesus as an image of the act of faith.

Second: Tillich clearly distinguishes in his *Systematic Theology* two meanings of the concept of the historical Jesus. On the one hand, the term "historical Jesus" is defined as the result of historical research. Historical knowledge is not simply a contemporary construction, it is also ever "fragmentary and hypothetical."²⁵ In this sense, the term "historical Jesus" is a methodological construct. Yet, there is another meaning of the term "historical Jesus" that differs from this conceptual usage. Here the term is used as "the factual element in the Christian event."²⁶ And this is very different from the first sense used in the historical research. As an element of the interrelation in which the Christian faith is composed, the term "historical Jesus" does not mean the man from Nazareth behind the sources of the New Testament. Rather, the term refers to the personal act in which the faith consists, and which occurs in history. Tillich's distinction between the two meanings of the "historical Jesus" is very helpful for the Christological debates. Historical research is important for an understanding of the history of the Christian religion, its sources, and their relation to the ancient Judaism, but the historical research itself gives us no foundation for the Christian faith. The question of both historical research and Christology are not identical but are rather two independent questions that cannot be collapsed together into homogeneity. The image of faith from its own history is, so we can say, not only different from the historical image of the history, but also the image of faith is to a certain extent independent from history. Undoubtedly, there are interrelations between both dimensions, but as Tillich says, faith "cannot even

²² Cf. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, Chicago 1957, 98: "If theology ignores the fact to which the name of Jesus of Nazareth points, it ignores the basic Christian assertion that Essential God-Manhood has appeared within existence and subjected itself to the conditions of existence without being conquered by them".

²³ Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 97: "Christianity was born, not with the birth of the man who is called 'Jesus,' but in the moment in which one of his followers was driven to say to him, 'Thou are the Christ'".

²⁴ Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, *Remembering Jesus. How the Quest of the Historical Jesus Lost Its Way*, in: J.K. Beilby/P. Rhodes Eddy (eds.), *The Historical Jesus. Five Views*, Downers Grove 2009, 199-225.

²⁵ Cf. Tillich, *The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Christian Faith*, 317. ST II, 107

²⁶ (ibid.)

guarantee the name 'Jesus' in respect to him who was the Christ."²⁷

What follows from this is that faith has its own foundation not in the historical Jesus as a result of the historical research, but in a historical event. This is only momentarily a paradox, because the historical event means that faith arises without historical foundations in history. Faith, and this is Tillich's thesis, has its foundation and its truth in itself.²⁸ There is no ground or principle through which one can give a justification of faith as a personal act which has happened in history. Only in the event of faith lies the justification of the faith, for Christology gives no reason for faith. Against this background, the doctrine of Jesus as the Christ is not a content of faith, rather Christology has a reflexive function for faith, namely to give a description of the structure of the act which faith is. This is what is meant when Tillich calls Jesus as the Christ the "real picture" of faith.

Third: Like in his writings after the First World War, Tillich connects his Christology with Soteriology in the *Systematic Theology*.²⁹ This is not really surprising because the Christology is an expression of the act of faith that is at the same time salvation. Tillich called this salvation revelation in his dogmatics of the 1920s, and final revelation in the *Systematic Theology*. But what exactly does Christology express if it is a description of the act of faith? Tillich names the reality of faith since the late 1920s the "New Being".³⁰ The faith or the "New Being" in history is a happening in the human consciousness which finds its representation in the image of Jesus as the Christ. In this event the consciousness becomes not only aware that the unconditioned as ground and abyss is the presupposition of all acts of the human consciousness, but exactly this performative act is

the content of the consciousness. It is exactly this, the position and the negation of the forms, that makes the content of the image of Jesus as the Christ. He represents a concrete personal life that negates his own life. Only in this act is Jesus *the* Christ or the final revelation.³¹ Christology describes the reflexive structure of the act of faith or the New Being. Therefore, Tillich focused his Christology on the cross and the resurrection of the Christ.³² Cross and resurrection are on both sides of the act of faith, namely the negation of the form and the affirmation of the form. In this dialectic of critique and formation (*Gestaltung*), which constitutes the act of faith, lies the realization of the true religion in history. In short, Jesus as the Christ is the real image of the faith.

3. Tillich's Christology and the Contemporary Christological Debates

Paul Tillich works out his Christology as a theological description of the performative act of faith. Christology does not deal with the historical Jesus or the kerygma of the early Christians. The background of the history of the problems of Tillich's doctrine of the Christ are the debates in the first half of the 20th century, especially the historical Jesus research on the one hand, and the Christological debates in Protestant theology on the other hand. In this respect, one can say that Tillich's Christology is a child of his own time. But what is the significant importance of Tillich's Christology that must be considered for 21st century debates? There are two aspects of his Christological conception that are significant for a Christology in our time. The first is his starting point with the theological circle, and the second is what follows from this regarding the debates about a theology of religions. But both aspects mentioned, in contrast to Tillich, must be reformulated on the basis of another understanding

²⁷ Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 107.

²⁸ Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 114: "And the inevitable answer is that faith can guarantee only its own foundation, namely, the appearance of that reality which has created the faith".

²⁹ Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 150: "Christology is a function of soteriology. The problem of soteriology creates the christological question and gives direction to the christological answer".

³⁰ Cf. P. Tillich, *Die Gestalt der religiösen Erkenntnis*, in: *ibid.*, *Dogmatik-Vorlesung*, EW XIV, Berlin/New York 2005, 395-431, here 428f.

³¹ Cf. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, Chicago 1951, 134: "Jesus is the religious and theological object as the Christ and only as the Christ. And he is the Christ as the one who sacrifices what is merely 'Jesus' in him. The decisive trait in his picture is the continuous self-surrender of Jesus who is Jesus to Jesus who is the Christ".

³² Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 150-165.

of religion. Tillich starts from a conception of religion as a breakthrough of the unconditioned in the human consciousness, whereby the unconditioned is already given in consciousness. Religion is directedness towards the unconditioned. In the interest of the generality of religion, the disclosedness of the basic dimension of consciousness, i.e., the unconditioned, is itself indeterminate. But this is a construction of a presupposition that is today not plausible in the least. In contrast to Tillich, a general concept of religion must be rejected and the construction of the concept of religion must be limited to Christianity.³³ Religion is also not an essential part of the human being, as Tillich presupposes. Rather, religion is a special form of communication in culture, which, as such, is not necessary for being human. Religion arises contingently in history and underlies an evolution in the culture. So religion is a form of interpretation of the world in symbolic forms and the knowledge of religion must be a part of religion. There is no unconscious religion. Such an understanding of religion is a postulate that finds no plausibility in a pluralistic world. On the basis of the mentioned new understanding of religion as communication, it is possible to take up Tillich's Christology. At first, however, we must deal with his formula that the Christian event is both fact and reception, and then with the implications of this formula for a theology of religions.

First: Tillich presupposes in his Christology the historical Jesus research from the first half of the 20th century. In this time, the historical research stands in the shadow of the so-called form-history, and the general opinion was that there is no certain knowledge about the historical Jesus.³⁴ The further development in the historical research, especially in the so-called third quest since the 1980s, leads in the end to a methodological change. On the one hand, it

becomes clear that the historical Jesus is a methodological construct of historical science, and on the other hand that it is not possible to go behind the sources in a methodological way. Against this development, the historical Jesus behind the sources is no longer the aim of the historical research, rather the remembered Jesus *in* the sources.³⁵ Memory is always a construction of the past and not merely a photographic record.³⁶ For the historical research on Jesus, this means that we can only find the interrelation between Jesus and his followers, i.e., the remembered Jesus, but not a Jesus for himself.³⁷

As we have seen above, Tillich starts his Christology, not unlike the so-called third quest, with an interrelation between fact and believing reception. Christology deals neither with a historical Jesus that stands behind the interpretations of his followers, nor simply with these interpretations alone. Historical Jesus research is different from the task of Christology. The first deals with history, while the second deals with the actual Christian faith and explains its structure. As mentioned before, Tillich distinguishes for this reason two meanings of the term "historical Jesus". Also for Tillich, the historical Jesus as a historical question is a construct of science, but as such is not the basis or foundation of the Christian faith. The historical Jesus as an element of faith must be understood quite differently. Jesus exists as Christ only in and for the Christian faith. So it is not simply the remembered Jesus that constitutes faith, but solely the religious *use* of the memory of Jesus that gives rise to the Christian religion that he represents. Therefore, Tillich's Christology is important for the contemporary debates because his conception can be connected with the historical Jesus research in the horizon of the third quest and its methodological program of the remembered Jesus. His Christology allows for a

³³ Cf. C. Danz, *Gottes Geist. Eine Pneumatologie*, Tübingen 2019; *ibid.*, *Religious Diversity and the Concept of Religion. Theology and Religious Pluralism*, in: *NZStH* 62 (2020), 101-113.

³⁴ Cf. the overview about the historical Jesus research by P. Rhodes Eddy/J. K. Belby, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction*, in: *The Historical Jesus. Five Views*, ed. by. Paul Rhodes Eddy/James K. Belby, Downers Grove 2009, 9-54.

³⁵ So, for example, James D. G. Dunn, and the New Testament scholar Jens Schröter in Germany.

³⁶ Cf. J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in den frühen Hochkulturen*, München 2013.

³⁷ Cf. Dunn, *Remembering Jesus*, 203: "The fact that Jesus made disciples is generally recognized. What has not been given sufficient recognition or weight, however, is the effect of his impact. These disciples encountered Jesus as a life-transforming experience: they followed him; [...] Why? Because they had believed Jesus and what he said and taught".

theological interpretation of the remembered Jesus of the historical research.

Second: And there is yet another aspect in Tillich's Christology that is significant for contemporary debates, namely his construction of Christology as a reflexive description of the act of faith. As we have observed, this means that Jesus is only seen as the Christ *in* and *for* the Christian faith. One can say that Jesus is the origin of faith *in* the Christian religion, and is not a presupposition outside of the Christian religion. From this point of view, consequences for a theology of religions follow. In the contemporary debates about theology of religions, especially in the so-called pluralistic theology, we find the demand for a reduction of Christology. If Jesus as the Christ is the only one incarnation of God in an objective historical fact, then all other religions are false and wrong. The argument is that there is no possible recognition of other religions within the framework of a traditional Christology.³⁸ Therefore, the doctrine of the Christ must be reduced. Jesus Christ is like other religious heroes – an appearance of the absolute Real, but neither identical with the Real nor the only one who manifests the absolute. The presupposition of the pluralistic model is a general concept of religion, which reduces religious diversity.³⁹ Religions are equal because they are human responses to manifestations of the same indeterminate transcendence. The pluralistic model is based on an unclear understanding of the relationship between theology and religion. Thus, pluralistic theology constructs the equality of the religions in the dimension of theology that is different from the self-view of the religions. Such a model can neither explain how religions function nor could it recognize the distinctiveness of the concrete religions.

Against the pluralistic model of a theology of religions, we must explain both how religion function, and also how religions legitimately differ from each other. For this task allows us to reject a general concept of religion that assumes religion as intrinsic to being human, and at the same time

explain, in a theological level, the distinctiveness of Christianity in contrast with other religions. The peculiarity of the Christian religion lies in Christology.⁴⁰ But the doctrine of the Christ is neither a content of the Christian religion, nor is Christology related to other religions. As we have seen, Jesus Christ is an image of the Christian faith for Tillich. With the doctrine of the Christ, the Christian religion describes in itself its distinctiveness, namely that the individual appropriation of God is a part or an element of the understanding of God. Christology has a function for the description of religion in Christianity, and does not refer to a historical person. Jesus as a man of history is both a part of the ancient Jewish religion and the Christian religion.⁴¹ However, only in the latter is he the Christ. But this is the central insight of Tillich's Christology. He opens a new perspective on the contemporary debates of Christology in the age of religious pluralism that allows, on the one hand, the recognition of other religions as religions and, on the other hand, to explain the distinctiveness of the Christian religion. But this is only possible, however, if Tillich's own understanding of religion is itself transformed.

³⁸ Cf. J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New Haven 1989; P. Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology. The Gifford Lectures – An Extended Edition*, New York 2017, 26-27.

³⁹ Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 235-236.