

# **CHRIST** **in** **EVOLUTION**

ILIA DELIO, O.S.F.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# EVOLUTION, CHRIST, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

### The New Scientific Paradigm

If the book of Genesis were rewritten today, how would the story begin? In light of what the new science tells us, it might begin something like this: “In the beginning was God, filled with power and mystery, and God spoke one Word, and the Word exploded into a tiny, hot, dense ball of matter that gave rise to forces and fields, quarks and particles, all joined together like a single strand of thread.” However we may understand the new science of the twenty-first century, it has certainly changed our view of the cosmos from what the original author(s) of Genesis could have known, a view that continues to unfold through the use of scientific discovery and advanced technology.

There is little doubt today from the perspective of science that evolution is the way life proceeds in the universe. From the simplest structures to complex unions, the emergent properties of life show coherence and unity as life unfolds with increased complexity. But what exactly is evolution and how does it account for life in the universe? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word *evolution*, to unfold or open out, derives from the Latin *evolvere*, which applied to the “unrolling of a book.”<sup>1</sup> The biologist Francisco Ayala writes that “contrary to popular opinion, neither the term nor the idea of biological evolution began with Charles Darwin ... It first appeared in the English language in 1647 in a non-biological connection, and it became widely used in English for all sorts of progressions from simpler beginnings.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of evolution emerged among the nineteenth-century biologists but was

made famous by Charles Darwin in his *Origin of the Species*. What Darwin sought to show was that natural life unfolds primarily through the process of natural selection, “a process that promotes or maintains adaptation and, thus, gives the appearance of purpose or design.”<sup>3</sup> The idea that life unfolds from more simple to complex structures now holds true not only on the level of biology but on the levels of cosmology, culture, and consciousness as well.

The area of cosmological evolution is a complex topic because of the vastness of the universe and the ongoing development of science. A brief view of the cosmos (if such a view is possible!) reveals an ancient, dynamic, and expanding universe. Scientists indicate that the universe is approximately 14.7 billion years old and began in a “Big Bang,” a fiery explosion of dense, hot material.<sup>4</sup> Today we know that we are an intermediate-size galaxy and one of 100 billion galaxies. Our own galaxy, the Milky Way, is a mid-size galaxy consisting of 100 billion stars and stretching about 100,000 light years in diameter.<sup>5</sup> With Albert Einstein’s theories of relativity, scientists discovered that the universe is not static but dynamic and changing. Einstein’s theory of special relativity showed that time is elastic and a constituent of space. His theory of general relativity showed that gravity is not a force like other forces but is a consequence of the fact that space-time is not flat but curved or “warped” by the distribution of mass and energy in it; gravity acts to structure space.<sup>6</sup> The idea that space and time are dynamic quantities has changed our view of the universe from one launched from the hands of the creator in a fixed state to one that is dynamic and expanding.

In 1924 Edward Hubble, using a high-powered telescope, showed that ours was not the only galaxy in the universe, that there were many others with large empty spaces between them. Hubble concluded that the universe is not static but is expanding, since the distance between galaxies is growing all the time (a static universe would soon start to contract under the law of gravity).<sup>7</sup> The fact that the universe is expanding suggests that the expansion began from an extremely compressed and dense state. The discovery of background microwave radiation by A. Penzias and R. Wilson in 1965 provided support to the Big Bang theory of the universe. Using a sensitive microwave detector, they discovered extra noise outside the atmosphere, a noise that was the same day and night

and throughout the year, thus beyond the solar system and beyond the galaxy, and the same in every direction. Their findings supported the work of George Gamow, who suggested that the early universe should have been very hot and dense. He predicted that radiation from the very hot early stages of the universe should still be around today.<sup>8</sup> Scientists now believe that the universe began at a single point (Big Bang) and rapidly inflated, and this gave rise to the forces and elements that form life in the universe.

While the new science has not entirely dispensed with the laws of physics, we know that the universe is much different from what Isaac Newton described in the late seventeenth century. The mechanistic view of the world associated with Newtonian physics has been replaced with a dynamic, open-ended view of the world in which some events are in principle unpredictable. At the infinitesimal level of the atom and its subatomic particles, quantum mechanics has uncovered a realm where time, space, and matter itself behave according to laws whose very functioning have uncertainty built into them. Quantum physics has given us a new view of matter today as not only indeterminate but also as relational. The universe seems to be inherently relational.<sup>9</sup> There is an interplay of chance and law in the physical fabric of the universe, according to John Polkinghorne, who notes that “both chance and necessity are indispensable partners in the fruitful history of the universe.” “The role of chance does not turn evolution into a cosmic lottery,” he states, “but is the way the physical world explores and realizes its potential.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the most interesting scientific theories to emerge in the twentieth century is chaos theory. Whereas in the Newtonian world physical reality was assumed to follow rigid causal pathways, today physical reality is seen to be open and “flexible,” with the capacity not only to sustain change but to sustain novelty and spontaneity. Chaos is a word that the average person hardly associates with order, and yet, the science of chaos is primarily concerned with order. The science of chaos and complexity indicates to us that nonlinear dynamical systems are characterized by spontaneous, emergent changes that give rise to new order within systems. The strange attractor is a basin of attraction within the system (but different from the system) that describes the shape of chaos or spontaneous movements of a system that deviates from the normal

pattern of order. Some scientists claim that the appearance of the strange attractor means that order is inherent in chaos since the “attractor” itself is a novel pattern of order that arises spontaneously within a system. In the fluctuations of chaotic systems, randomness and unpredictability at the local level, in the presence of a strange attractor, cohere over time into new, definite, and predictable forms. As a way of explaining the unfolding of life in the universe, chaos theory underscores the nature of the universe as open to new possibilities; thus, there is a certain determinate level of order in chaos, although it is not predictable.<sup>11</sup>

The whole history of the universe, and particularly the history of biological life on earth, has been characterized by the steady emergence of complexity. Polkinghorne states that “the story moves from an initial cosmos that was just a ball of expanding energy to a universe of stars and galaxies; then, on at least one planet, to replicating molecules, to cellular organisms, to multicellular life, to conscious life and to humankind.”<sup>12</sup> There is now a significant amount of evidence indicating that in these “sciences of complexity” open dynamic systems do not evolve smoothly and continuously over time in a gradual manner but do so in comparatively sudden leaps. Complex dynamic systems, whether physical, chemical, biological, or social, are regularly driven far from thermodynamic equilibrium where they reach critical bifurcation points and have a propensity to self-organize or leap abruptly into new states of increasing order and complexity.<sup>13</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin described evolution as a “biological ascent,” a movement toward more complexified life forms in which, at critical points in the evolutionary process, qualitative differences emerge. This progressive evolutionary movement, according to Teilhard, is one in which the consistence of the elements and their stability of balance lie in the direction not of matter but of spirit.<sup>14</sup> This movement from matter to spirit, in Teilhard’s view, marked “the fundamental property of the cosmic mass to concentrate upon itself ... as a result of attraction of synthesis.” Thus, he concluded, “there is only one real evolution, the evolution of convergence, because it alone is positive and creative.”<sup>15</sup> Today, scholars speak of “mind” embedded in the physical fabric of the cosmos, an idea consistent with Teilhard’s notion of convergence. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson states that consciousness is integral to the whole evolutionary process that culminates in the human spirit. She writes:

The law of complexity-consciousness reveals that ever more intricate physical combinations, as can be traced in the evolution of the brain, yield ever more powerful forms of spirit. Matter, alive with energy, evolves to spirit. While distinctive, human intelligence and creativity rise out of the very nature of the universe, which is itself intelligent and creative. In other words, human spirit is the cosmos come to consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

Although consciousness may be latent in the whole evolutionary process, the spiritualization of matter that leads to consciousness involves suffering and death. It is now widely acknowledged by evolutionary biologists that no significant change in creation happens without environmental stress. In light of Darwinian science we can say that there is a cruel and wasteful aspect of evolution by which living beings evolve. In the evolution of life on earth we can now identify the deep potential for life to become more complex, diverse, and elaborate following critical threshold points of environmental stress and instability. Although there are evolutionary dead ends in the history of life, and the process of evolution is punctuated with periods of crisis, instability, and catastrophe, there is also an inner logic to evolution, an inherent urge to evolve new, more complex biological forms. The process of life can transcend seemingly insurmountable obstacles and thus has a truly staggering capacity to go beyond what went before, even in the face of catastrophic mass extinctions and environmental decimations.<sup>17</sup> Thus we can say, according to neo-Darwinian science, evolution is a self-organizing process with an overall increase in adaptive complexity, despite periods of critical instabilities and catastrophes. The process of evolution exhibits a dynamic pattern of “crisis and renewal” across all three great domains of reality—massive explosions of supernovae in the chemical enrichment of the cosmos, mass extinctions and the relatively abrupt origination of new species in the biosphere, and socio-cultural revolutions in human history, each of which gives rise to new, more organized and more inclusive forms of life.<sup>18</sup> Ken Wilber maintains that any fair and balanced approach to human evolution involves what he calls the “dialectic of progress.” As evolution unfolds in the world of human history, each new stage resolves certain difficulties of the previous stage but then adds new and sometimes more diffi-

cult problems of its own—problems that were not present at the preceding stage of development.<sup>19</sup> Whereas each new emergent stage contributes new possibilities because of a greater degree of structural organization/complexity or consciousness, there are also new potential problems. Hence, evolution is a dialectic of gains and losses, although Robert Wright describes a net gain which provides evolution with a positive direction.<sup>20</sup>

We find an example of this dialectic of “good news, bad news” at the very origins of human history, as portrayed in the Bible by the Judeo-Christian myth of “the fall,” which some scholars suggest is a “fall upward” into more complex forms of consciousness and hence freedom.<sup>21</sup> The biblical account of human origins suggests that the emergence of free will in the first humans, which can be correlated with the relatively sudden growth of the complex neocortex in the fossil record, goes hand in hand with our distinctively human capacity for evil. When constructing theories of human cultural evolution, therefore, it is important to acknowledge both the significant advances and yet the profound horrors that each new stage of evolution brings forth—from hunter-gatherer tribes to mythic religious empires to global informational societies. Evolution is not a linear positive progression; rather, it is movement in tension marked by gains and losses in the development of more complex life forms. As Cameron Freeman writes, “evolution is a painful process of growth ... one cannot overemphasize the growth aspect of evolution to the exclusion of the losses in the evolutionary process.”<sup>22</sup>

The idea that evolution is necessarily a positive or beneficial affair, therefore, must be balanced by more realistic theories of human evolution, which include a dialectic of suffering as well as a dialectic of advance. For evolution in human history constantly brings forth wonderful advances, including democratic freedoms, expanding knowledge, increasing life-spans, as well as negative consequences of the way freedom is used, such as the ecological crisis, the potential for a nuclear holocaust, and global terrorism.<sup>23</sup> But there is a pattern that connects evolution across all domains of reality, an inherent urge for evolution to go beyond what went before it by crossing critical thresholds that generate chaos and disruption and allow for systems to reorganize themselves onto a higher, more inclusive level. We humans are part of this all-encompassing evolu-

tionary current. We emerge from an evolutionary process and are biologically linked to the natural world, although not equal to non-human creation because of intelligence and free will. Thus, we are situated in a web of life. The same currents that run through our human blood also run through the swirling galaxies and the myriad of life-forms that pervade this planet: one and the same evolutionary current moves through all—a single self-transcending current of all-pervading energy that brings new life out of seeming catastrophe. This evolutionary current has the inherent capacity to overcome even the biggest obstacles in a sweeping advance from subatomic particles to human creativity, from hydrogen gas to the human neocortex.<sup>24</sup> From a theological perspective, this means that the emergence of human life is contingent on more than evolution of the physical world alone; there is an inner pressure for spiritual transcendence.

### Creation and Evolution

In his book *A Window to the Divine*, Zachary Hayes writes that “a careful reading of the theological tradition prior to the modern era indicates that before the so-called Copernican revolution ... there existed a religious cosmology that involved not only the insights of faith but the physical understanding of the cosmos as it was known at that time. The breakdown of such a cosmology by the shift from a geocentric model to a heliocentric model led eventually to the isolation of theology from the development of modern science.”<sup>25</sup> The most fundamental shift in our understanding of the cosmos is the move from the vision of a universe launched essentially in its present form by the hand of the creator at the beginning of time to a vision of the cosmos as a dynamic, unfolding chemical process, immensely large in both time and space. This shift in cosmic worldview continues to challenge the place of the human in the universe, as the human has been shifted from center stage to the growing tip of an evolutionary trend. From a Christian perspective, the unfolding dynamic universe has caused a division in our consciousness. According to Hayes, we live in two worlds. In our everyday experience we live in a culture deeply conditioned by the insights and theories of modern science. But in the context of the

church, its theology and liturgy, we live in a premodern world.<sup>26</sup> Christian theology, he states, no longer has an effective cosmology that enables believers to relate to the world in its physical character in a way that is consistent with their religious symbols. We need to reshape our religious understanding of the world, he claims, by engaging our faith with the best insights of science concerning the nature of the physical world. In a recent lecture on science and religion, John Haught said that the very substance of Christian faith seems irreversibly intertwined with the outworn imagery of an unmoving planet nested in an unchanging cosmos. He asks, "Is it possible that the universe has outgrown the biblical God who is said to be its creator? Can Christianity and its theological interpretations find a fresh foothold in the immense and mobile universe of contemporary science, or will science itself replace our inherited spiritualities altogether, as many now see happening?"<sup>27</sup> Although some scientists see the process of evolution as a meaningless process suffused with blind chance, the dynamic nature of the universe speaks to us, from a Christian perspective, of the home in which a loving creator has placed us. The gift of Darwin's science to theology, Haught claims, is that it can give depth and richness to our sense of the great mystery of religion.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the science of evolution can help open new windows of insight into the relationship between God and world. Evolution helps us realize that God works through the chaos of creation and is less concerned with imposing design on processes than providing nature with opportunities to participate in its own creation.

While theology depends on science for information on the concrete flow of evolutionary history, science as such can provide no framework for interpreting the ultimate levels of meaning. This is the proper task of theology.<sup>29</sup> Creation is not about a static world but a relationship between the dynamic being of God and a world in process of coming to be. The openness of the cosmos to what is new, its capacity to leap forward, the emergence of intelligent beings, all direct the believer to the nature of the divine presence empowering the whole cosmic process. From a theological perspective, we must admit that the one God creates the whole cosmos as one diverse but interrelated system. The same creator is present to every part of the cosmos. Creation is a relationship between God's absolute being and the finite being of creatures whereby

finite beings are continuously constituted in existence by God. Creation is not something that happened at the beginning of time but is rather the continuing relationship of the world to its transcendent ground. In the history of evolution, creatures become more than they were—a process whereby reality becomes not just more than it was but essentially different. This process of transcendence reflects the spiritual nature of the physical world, the capacity of matter for spirit, and for evolution toward spiritual maturity and self-reflection. Teilhard de Chardin claimed that the whole evolutionary movement is a movement toward greater consciousness, the emergence of mind in the universe, a process he called “noogenesis.”<sup>30</sup> In this respect we can begin to describe evolution on the level of humanity as an evolution of consciousness that expresses itself in religious belief.

### **Axial-Period Consciousness**

One of the most helpful terms to assist in understanding the relationship between human consciousness and religious belief is “axial period.” “Axial period” was used by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers in 1949 to refer to the centuries between 800 B.C. and 200 B.C. when a new kind of thinking arose in the major areas of the world: in China with Confucius and Lao-Tzu, in India with Gautama Buddha, in Persia with Zoroaster, in Greece with Thales, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, and in Israel with the prophetic movement. Jaspers described this period as an axial period because “it gave birth to everything which since then, the human person has been able to be.”<sup>31</sup> In this new age, Jaspers claimed, “man [*sic*] becomes conscious of being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the tension of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void, he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing his limits, he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of self-hood and in the lucidity of transcendence.”<sup>32</sup> William Thompson states that “what makes this period the ‘axis’ of human history, even *our own* history today, is the fact that humans emerged as ‘individuals’ in the proper sense.”<sup>33</sup> The significance of axial-period consciousness is apparent

when considered in light of pre-axial consciousness. In the pre-axial period, the human person was cosmic, collective, tribal, mythic, and ritualistic. Myth was a way in which the human person gave meaning to his/her world through the context of stories that contained essential truths. The idea of primal consciousness as mimetic consciousness, that is a consciousness of imitation, meant that humans identified with their surroundings. Ewert Cousins notes that the pre-axial consciousness of tribal cultures was located in the cosmos and in fertility cycles of nature. Primitive persons “mimed” nature and venerated nature, which appeared as a sacred reality determining one’s destiny. This created a harmony between peoples and the world of nature, a harmony expressed in myth and ritual. While primitive people were closely linked to the cosmos, they were also closely linked to one another. One gained one’s identity in relation to the tribe. The strong web of interrelationships within the tribe sustained persons psychologically and energized all aspects of their lives.<sup>34</sup>

John Cobb has claimed that what lies at the basis of the axial period is the increasing role that rationality came to have at this time.<sup>35</sup> The more profound role of reason in human life had several implications. Rationality, which meant the ability to control, check, and analyze, began to supercede mythical thinking, which was governed by “projection,” fantasy, and fulfillment. Axial consciousness generated a new self-awareness that included awareness of autonomy and a new sense of individuality. The human person as subject emerged. Jaspers states that, with axial consciousness, personality was revealed for the first time in history. With the emergence of the rational individual came a new sense of freedom by which the human person could make conscious and deliberate decisions.<sup>36</sup>

Although the world religions that emerged in the first axial period are widely divergent in their doctrines and rituals, they share a common existential thread: self-reflection and self-transcendence of the human person. Jaspers claims that “what was later called reason and personality was revealed for the first time during the axial period.”<sup>37</sup> Cobb identifies rationality as the principal characteristic of axial-period consciousness which signals several changes: (1) the power of mythical thinking was gradually superseded and replaced by rational learning through experience; (2) a new sense of what it meant to be an individual arose, that is, a new awareness of auton-

omy and thus identity; (3) a new sense of freedom emerged, the sense of the “autonomous I” and thus the free, self-transcendent “I.”<sup>38</sup> Unlike the pre-axial period, which was marked by a tribal consciousness, that is, a deep sense of the collective community or tribe, nurtured by myth and ritual, as well as a sense of relatedness to the cosmos, the first axial period was marked by individual consciousness. “Know thyself” became the watchword of Greece. The Upanishad identified the *atman*, the transcendent center of the self. The Buddha charted the way of individual enlightenment; the Jewish prophets awakened individual moral responsibility.<sup>39</sup> Jesus, according to Jaspers, was the last in the series of Jewish prophets and stood in conscious continuity with them.<sup>40</sup>

One of the most distinctive forms of spirituality that emerged in the first axial period, according to Ewert Cousins, was monasticism, the solitary search for the divine ground of being, that is, for God. Monasticism did not exist among pre-axial (primal) peoples, Cousins states, because primal consciousness did not contain the distinct center of individuality necessary to produce the monk as a religious type.<sup>41</sup> In the axial period, consciousness evolved from mythic awareness “governed by ‘projection,’ fantasy, and wish fulfillment” to critical reflection.<sup>42</sup> Philosophers and spiritual teachers appeared, calling the public to use the intellect to free themselves from collective consciousness, from the physical world, from myth and ritual. With the awakening of reflective subjectivity, the individual could take a stand against the collectivity, become a distinct moral and spiritual self, and embark on an individual spiritual journey.<sup>43</sup> Like human development itself, the axial period marked the culmination of a long process of human complexification and differentiation, an increasing expansion of “worlds” from “the immediate and mythical world of primitive man to the conventional and thus increasingly rationalized world of the great civilizations, to the post-conventional world of axial man” marked by individuation.<sup>44</sup> This expansion or “evolution” in human development, from myth to rationalization to individuation, is what characterizes the axial person. Although Jaspers disclaimed the notion that the axial period represents a universal stage in human evolution because it is neither irreversible nor inevitable, there is no reason not to view the emergence of this new level of consciousness as evolutionary in structure, since none of the world religions have shown a reversibility in their development.

It is within the first axial period that we can locate the original meaning of Christ and, indeed, the whole development of Christology. Eric Voegelin has identified axial consciousness in the early Israelites, and the gradual conventionalizing of Israel, with the establishment of a monarchy and development of rational thinking. Israel entered into axial consciousness through its increasingly rational understanding of God, that is, neither as a tribal deity nor a national deity but as a transcendent deity, a personalized God who summoned the human to a personalized mode of existence. It is in the context of Hebraic consciousness that Jesus emerged. Thompson asks, "Are we permitted to speak of a new level of consciousness initiated by Jesus and coming into existence with the first Christian community?" Following John Cobb, he writes that "in Jesus we find the Hebraic ethically-responsible individual and the intense experience of God's immediacy, simultaneously ... Jesus' sense of divine immediacy resulted in a present experience of the kingdom."<sup>45</sup> Thompson then states, "Jesus radicalized the Hebraic entry into axial consciousness ... [his] death glaringly sums up what such a consciousness entails, and forever manifests that the style of life characteristic of radical God-centeredness is not the negation of this-worldly responsibility, but its intensification to the furthest limits. The suffering and death of Jesus were a radical manifestation that faith in God liberates the individual to accept the full implications of his freedom and responsibility."<sup>46</sup> The awareness of God's immediacy and a sense of ethical responsibility (e.g., feed the hungry, clothe the naked, have compassion on the poor) marked the Christian axial-period consciousness. Belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus meant a breakthrough in consciousness within Jewish life and thought. "The resurrection belief completed the Hebraic entry into axial consciousness by revealing the last implications of belief in a transcendent God," a belief that life was not subject to mutability and death and decay but a higher kind of life beyond the life of nature and history.<sup>47</sup> Gerald O'Collins states that "in the faith of Israel belief in resurrection emerged as a corollary of theism," indicating that belief in the resurrection corresponded to an increasingly spiritual and transcendent view of selfhood.<sup>48</sup> Thompson claims that "Jesus' ministry and resurrection brought the process of man's spiritualization to its completion and removed every barrier to its complete emergence."<sup>49</sup> In some way,

the empowering presence of God activated and heightened one's own self-responsibility as we see, for example, in Paul, who found himself capable of confronting every imaginable obstacle: death, life, the powers of the cosmos, present and future, and every living creature (Rom 8:35-39). This heightened sense of self-responsibility meant a heightened freedom. Through the work of the Spirit one was free from the law and could live on a new level of existence, free from the oppressive powers of this world and from the past. One could now live in a reality that radically transcended and rationalized them.<sup>50</sup> What emerged in Jesus was the immediacy of God's presence and, in his death and resurrection, the power of God's presence to conquer all forces threatening to destroy human individuation. Thus, belief in the resurrection enabled the emergence of the spiritual, transcendent self which knows itself to be more than natural and biological, capable of uniting with God and attaining eternal life. In this respect the church fathers declared that God became human so that we might become divine. The first axial-period consciousness of human transcendent nature fulfilled in Jesus Christ became the basis for the doctrine of Jesus Christ as true God and true human. That is, our understanding of Jesus Christ up to the present moment has been formulated on a level of human consciousness that has since moved to a new structure or level of existence—in short—that has evolved.

If we turn our attention to the twenty-first century, we can discern another transformation of consciousness, which Cousins refers to as the second axial period. Like the first, this period has been developing for several centuries and has reached a critical point. And like the first, it is effecting a radical transformation of consciousness. While the first axial period produced individual, self-reflective consciousness, the second axial period is characterized by global consciousness. The second axial period is largely the result of human creativity and inventiveness. Technology has fundamentally altered our view of the world and ourselves in the world. The tribe is no longer the local community but the global community which can now be accessed immediately via television, Internet, satellite communication, and travel. Explorations in space and satellite photographs of the earth have revealed the earth to be a luminous web of humanity and nature woven together like a quilt of many colors. The first photograph of the planet Earth in 1968,

reprinted in all the major magazines, triggered immense awe as people marveled at the tiny blue marble-like globe suspended in space. From space, the earth seems like a single tribe of humanity. It is only when one begins to walk the earth that one realizes that the tribe has many different voices and religious expressions. For the first time since the appearance of human life on our planet, Cousins writes, all of the tribes, all of the nations, all of the religions are beginning to share a common history.<sup>51</sup> People are becoming more aware of belonging to humanity as a whole and not to a specific group. This new global consciousness must be seen from two perspectives: (1) from a horizontal perspective, cultures and religions must meet one another on the surface of the globe, entering into creative encounters that will produce a complexified collective consciousness. Cousins borrows the term “complexified collective consciousness” from Teilhard de Chardin to describe the convergence of centers of consciousness in the evolutionary process;<sup>52</sup> (2) From a vertical perspective, cultures and religions must plunge their roots deep into the earth in order to provide a stable and secure base for future development. This new global consciousness must be organically ecological, supported by structures that will ensure justice and peace. Cousins indicates that the second axial period is communal, global, ecological, and cosmic. It is not merely a shift from first axial period consciousness; it is an advancement in the whole evolutionary process. The second axial period challenges the religions to bring about a new integration of the spiritual and the material, of sacred energy and secular energy into a total global human energy.<sup>53</sup> Thus it encourages dialogue, community, and relationship with a growing awareness that each person is something of the whole. The field of quantum physics offers an understanding of the material world that radically differs from the past. Matter and energy are interrelated, and what was once understood as atoms, the building blocks of matter, are now seen to be interrelated particles. From an evolutionary viewpoint, the whole of humanity emerges from a common set of proteins and, while genetically divergent, shares the same genetic materials with lower species. The “electronic mind,” the Internet, offers global connectivity and instant communication across the boundaries of languages, cultures, religions, and ethnicities. The advancement of technology and science, therefore, has rendered the second-axial-period person a global, pluralistic person, an interrelated being in

search of identity and relationship. No longer is the human person content with the subjective, reflective critical awareness of the first axial period. Now one is in need of relatedness.

### **The Emergence of a New Christology**

It is because we are aware of the interrelatedness of the earth that we can no longer maintain a homogenous, reified Western European view of Jesus Christ, a “white” Christ who is personal savior of the confessed baptized. Justo Gonzalez points out that Christology cannot be an abstract doctrine but begins with the experience of God in human history.<sup>54</sup> While Christology is the name for theological reflection on the mystery of Christ, it is not speculative knowledge but has a *Sitz im Leben* (a concrete or particular context). Christology is a reflection on Christ in a particular historical milieu, shaped by a particular theology, philosophy, social and political climate. In this respect, all Christology (like theology itself) is local because context, culture, language, and experience shape the understanding of Jesus Christ. The Christology of the first twenty centuries of Christian history has been forged by the unfolding of Christian belief against the background of Hebrew and Greek culture. As Teilhard wrote, “Our Christology is still expressed in exactly the same terms as those which, three centuries ago, could satisfy those whose outlook on the cosmos it is now physically impossible for us to accept.<sup>55</sup> Raimon Panikkar finds today’s Christology narrow and stifled. He writes, “Today’s Christology is not catholic or universal, nor does it need to be. Independent of its content, the very parameters of intelligibility belong to a powerful phylum of human culture, but a single phylum after all.”<sup>56</sup> Panikkar describes Western Christology as a tribal Christology centered almost exclusively on its own concerns, with almost total neglect of other human religious experiences, a Christology for the internal purposes of Christians, perhaps even to conquer the world. Because this Christology was forged against the backdrop of Greek philosophy and Roman politics, he asks how this Christology relates to the current situation today:

The existential situation of the world at the outset of the twenty-first century is so serious that we must not allow our-

selves to be absorbed by internal political polemics or problems of a minor order (priesthood for women, protestant sacraments, ecumenism, sexual morality, etc.). The world is undergoing a human and ecological crisis of planetary proportions. Seventy-five percent of its population lives in sub-human conditions; thousands of children die every day because of injustices man has perpetrated. Since 1945 wars kill more than twelve hundred persons a day; religious intolerance is still all too alive throughout the planet, and the conflict among religions is still intensely inflamed.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, one does wonder about the relevance of a Christology that was developed in categories and terms of first axial-period consciousness. We too may ask, with Panikkar, what does contemporary Christology have to say about the present world in which we live? “What bearing does the Christian response have on the problems of our day and how is all of this related to Christ?”<sup>58</sup>

There is no doubt that the problem of defining Jesus Christ in fifth-century Greek philosophical terms is problematic for our current age. Panikkar points out that “nobody is saved by uttering a simply theoretical sentence or a statement of fact.”<sup>59</sup> Rather, the existential confession of Christ (“Jesus is Lord”) is what saves. It is a personal witness of having met the reality that the name discloses. That is why it is a “saving name,” because no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by (or in) the Holy Spirit. This is the Christian confession: Jesus is the Christ. Panikkar writes, “Jesus Christ as an undivided experience is the central Christian dogma, whereby the copula *is* drops off in order to avoid an epistemic split in the unity of Christian faith.”<sup>60</sup> Simply put, Jesus is truly God. When Jesus asked his disciples, therefore, “Who do people say that I am?” he was asking, “How do people experience me?” “What is their awareness of my identity?” These are questions for us today as well. After two thousand years, our awareness of Jesus as the Christ has diminished not because of time itself but because our awareness of the world and of ourselves in the world has radically changed. Could it be that we no longer have an operative Christology that speaks to our world? Are we witnessing the elimination of Christ from the world because we no longer grasp the significance of Christ for the world? Panikkar reminds us that a Christology confined to doctrine alone—words and formulas—is essentially dead. He states, “A Christology deaf to

the cries of men and especially women today would be incapable of uttering any 'word of God' whatsoever."<sup>61</sup> In Panikkar's view, a Christology uninvolved with the world is no Christology at all.

We are faced with an immense problem today if Christianity is to survive. We are operating out of a Christology of first axial-period consciousness, devised in an outmoded cosmology that is no longer relevant to our world. Teilhard de Chardin wrote, "the universe is not a fixed framework upon which we have simply to project the image of Christ so that we can then quietly admire it for the rest of our days."<sup>62</sup> If Jesus Christ is a living person and not merely a living-room statue, then we need a Christology that is organic, interrelated, and cosmic. We need a Christ who is "no longer master of the world solely because he has been proclaimed to be such but because he animates the whole universe and constitutes physically the only definitive reality in which the evolution of the world is expressed."<sup>63</sup> The Christ of the Gospels must be rediscovered anew if Christ is to be relevant to the world in which we live. As Teilhard wrote, "a Christ whose features do not adapt themselves to the requirements of a world that is evolutive in structure will tend more and more to be eliminated out of hand."<sup>64</sup> Thus we ask with Teilhard, "what form must our Christology take if it is to remain itself in a new world?" If we live in a cosmos of relatedness, not simply to one another but to the earth itself, what then is the meaning of Christ? Can it be that the Christ of the first axial period must be discovered anew?