An Introduction to the Jesus Event and the Challenge of Modernity

-- A Constructive Postmodernist Perspective

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Abstract: The event of Jesus is the fundamental event of Christian practice, and the church is a community that originates from the event of Jesus and tries to gain knowledge and lessons through the remembrance of that event. With the spread of modernist thinking and significant changes in the shape of social life, it is difficult for the church to interpret topics such as euthanasia and homosexuality through the Jesus event, and the call for church reform has been growing louder and louder. Based on Whitehead's constructive postmodernism, this paper tries to provide a new perspective for the Jesus event, and argues for a way of reform that can respond to the challenges of modernity while conserving religious traditions.

Keywords: Postmodernism; Jesus Event; Modernity; Church Reform.

1. Introduction

Moltmann, a representative of the theology of the cross, discussing the task of Christian theology, states, "Christian theology must show what exactly is meant by the confession that 'Jesus is the Christ'." Thereby, the first task of Christology is to critically substantiate the origins of the Christian faith in Jesus and his history, and secondly to critically substantiate the significance of the Christian faith for the present and the future [1]. The New Testament primarily records the historical events of the Word of God becoming the historical incarnate Jesus and the historical incarnate Jesus becoming the Christ of faith (NIV 1:14-18, 3:31-34), which are called the events of the "Word becoming flesh" and the "Flesh becoming Word". The two events are collectively called the "Jesus Event" [2]. This event had a profound and even fundamental impact on the development of Christianity and even human history. "Christianity believes that Jesus is the pivotal event in human history; that the special self-understanding of human beings - in fact, the ultimate truth about the encounter of human life with God in this world - is realized through the person of Jesus, the incarnation, and the incarnation of God. -- is brought out through the person, words, and actions of Jesus." [3] Christians meet regularly to evoke memories of history and the events of Jesus through the rituals of communion, sermons, and readings, and to gain ongoing knowledge and lessons. The Christ-event has an extremely central and important place in the Christian system, even to the extent that when it loses its normative significance, many of the practices of the Church's life and even the socio-historical movement of Christianity come to an end.

However, with the development of Christianity and a more accurate account of the history of the person of Jesus, certain assumptions based on the past have been overturned because they are so different from the reality of the situation. Only by reformulating the teaching on the basis of this changed historical knowledge can the Church provide more convincing answers to the faithful on this shore, and respond to questions such as the "over-inflated rationality," the "aberrant development of society," and the "abnormal development of the world," among others. It is only by responding to the new challenges of the "diseases of modernity," including the "over-expansion of reason," the "perversion of society," and the "over-expansion of subjectivity" that [4] can provide more persuasive answers for believers on this shore. New ways of social life, including gay marriage and euthanasia, have also created sharp contradictions with traditional teachings, contradictions that cannot be explained by reinterpretations of the events of Jesus. Under the influence of neo-modernist thinking, there have also been radical changes in some churches, which deny the firstness of the Jesus event, arguing that doctrine is dependent on a changing culture, and thus that doctrine changes from time to time, and denying that there is any unchanging essence to Christianity. Yet as noted above, this radical change, while denying the Jesus event, has also virtually ended the socio-historical movement of Christianity, and has even been criticized for saying that it no longer believes in Christ [5]. While not wishing to deny the special status of the Jesus event, there also seems to be important theoretical implications for some kind of reshaping of theological theory to accommodate all the changes brought about by modernity. Pope Francis has pointed out a similar direction for the reform of the Church, "Truth cannot be possessed, we do not have it, we should meet it, meet God as Truth" out of a closed ecclesiology or narcissistic theology towards an open ecclesiology or a culture of encounter. [6] Considering the above difficulties, this paper, based on a postmodernist perspective, discusses how the Jesus event is closely related to the Church Reformation without entering into a situation of severance and antagonism, and tries to propose a new perspective of understanding on Christian theology to respond to the many challenges of modernity.

2. Overview of Constructive Postmodernist Methodology

On the so-called constructive postmodernism, the theoretical basis is Alfred North Whitehead's organic philosophy (also known as "process philosophy"), which takes process thinking as its main way of thinking, and agrees with postmodernism's critical attitude toward essentialism,
substantivism and centristm, but always emphasizes the basic claim of "constructiveness": "process" worldview is more constructive than "substantivism" worldview. It emphasizes the basic claim of "constructiveness": a "process" worldview is more constructive than a "solid" worldview. The main ideas and Whitehead's philosophy can be summarized as follows:

First, event ontology. According to Whitehead, the event is first and foremost a collection of relations that govern the nature of things, rather than the nature-determining relations of solid philosophy (cosmology). The world is constituted by unit events, many of which form the objective environment, and thus all events are "intrinsically related" to their environment. Each event becomes a subject at the moment of its occurrence, incorporating the process of history into itself (inheriting the process of history) and actively reinventing itself as a new unitary event, which in turn influences its future, and when this reinvention is complete, the unitary event participates in the composition of the environment and becomes the object of the succeeding event. The assumption that the past, the present and the future appear in a close relationship of mutual care, located in a complete chain of events, makes the world spatially interconnected, temporally interconnected, and everything and its activities are in a dynamic process of change (organism) [7].

Secondly, by denying opposites and emphasizing tension or "polarity", an attempt is made to synthesize and reconcile contradictions. Every event, in its initial stage, is both physical and mental, objectively occurring on the one hand and subjectively recognized by man on the other, so that the world, in the sense of the unit event, is not made up of the dichotomous mind and body, but rather of events of both natures. Human experience is also an illustration of the events that make up the world, and it is not essentially different from the events that make up nature, and thus there is no dualism between man and nature (which quite naturally leads to the insight of naturalism). John Cobb Jr. argues that Whitehead overcame a series of dualisms that are representative of modernity through this event hypothesis [8]. Taking the land issue as an example [9], constructive postmodernism argues that human beings and the land are not a simple dichotomy of mind and body, that the land is not a mere external object (factor of production) that satisfies the "core values" of human beings, but that it not only provides human beings with material outputs, but also has a spiritual or mental level of enlightenment, and that human beings inhabit the land, prosper with the land, and become closely connected to the land. Human beings inhabit the land, prosper with the land, and become closely connected to the land in a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship as a whole. There is an intrinsic difference between the two, but this difference is similar to the two poles of the earth, which is a "polarity" within the unity, rather than an opposition. One example of postmodernism's critique of the dualistic logic of modernity is the commodification of land, which, on the one hand, exacerbates the scarcity of non-renewable resources, leading to overexploitation and environmental destruction, and, on the other, causes the alienation and fragmentation of the minds of the people who live on the land (abandoning their symbiotic relationship with the land and looking at the land from a purely materialistic and monetary perspective), losing their daily lives in materialization [10]. Postmodernism criticizes this dualism and addresses the "disease of modernity" through a coherent and holistic analytical logic.

The relevant issues discussed in this paper are based on these two insights.

3. The Jesus Event Revisited on the Basis of Event Ontology

Event ontology holds that all events are intrinsically related to their contexts, and that the process of history is inherited to affect itself and the future. The challenge to the Jesus event discussed above is that Jesus as history (incarnation) cannot answer for modernity (incarnation into word), a seemingly intractable conflict. However, event ontology seems to offer a potential solution to this difficulty.

First, event ontology takes a coherent view of historical tradition and reality, and the two are closely related. The historical event becomes alternately subject and circumstance through the recreation and regeneration of subject and object, so that the Jesus event is not just a single isolated historiographical issue or the only bridge to God's presence on earth. The Jesus event becomes a subject (God's presence) only at the time of its occurrence, but over a long historical period it becomes a link in a complex sequence of events that participates in constituting the cultural tradition of Christianity, where believers are constantly acquiring new knowledge and lessons through the remembrance of this event and its priestly interpretation. This view also reveals to us that it is not only the event of Jesus that the faithful recall, but also the whole set of religious and cultural traditions and the complex habits of ecclesiastical life that are associated with it. They are intimately and intrinsically related to the event of Jesus and are intertwined with the modern way of life of Christians in the sense of a sequence of events or a stream of experience. This event, together with a host of intrinsically related events, shaped a new socio-historical and cultural landscape after the completion of the re-creation of the subject. Thus, the Christian movement is not merely a flux of language and symbolic systems based on doctrine, but a social and historical movement that is closely linked to the believers and churches in history. Looking back at the history of Christian development, Dante's Divine Comedy and Martin Luther's Reformation changed the course of Christianity in different senses. Based on the event perspective, they are also essentially a re-creation and re-articulation of the event of Jesus, and thus the reforms of the church that are called for in the face of the onslaught of modernity do not have to be in conflict with the event of Jesus. This view calls on the Church to abandon symbolic and linguistic regulations, for dogma arises from the socio-historical movement itself and not merely from the recollection of the events of Jesus or the adherence to religious traditions, and new dogmas will arise as society develops, without any deliberate connection to tradition, which is already at work in it. Rather than being caught between tradition and modernity, the Church needs to be bold enough to carry out ecclesiastical reforms without abandoning the long tradition of the Jesus event, which, in fact, according to the perspective of the event, would have been impossible because everything is intrinsically related to everything.

Second, event ontology provides the stage for God's presence. Through Jesus' "incarnation," God experienced the many sufferings of the Son of Man, and finally "became flesh and spoke" to bring judgment and salvation to the Son of Man. This event, as a part of the chronological sequence, participates in the formation and establishment of the faith of every believer in history, i.e., God contacted the Son of Man
through the event of Jesus, and God is not only present in Jesus, but also in every believer through the immanence of the event of Jesus. Through immanence, one presence can be united with another without losing its identity. "The doctrine of the Incarnation is enriched by the fact that God is present in everyone, all the time. At the same time, the doctrine of the Incarnation is transcended in that doctrine or the Jesus event is no longer an exogenous normative condition, not a teaching of the Church on high, but a process endogenous to the faithful and affecting the rest of the faithful by means of a socio-historical process, so that it is not necessary to continue to argue about doctrinal coherence in the same way that the Church of history has continued to argue about the separation of the Trinitarian body, as the Church of history did. continue to argue for doctrinal coherence, as Pope Francis, quoted earlier, has said, "We should have an encounter with the truth, with God as truth." The ontology of events calls for a perspective of constant discovery that fully affirms the subjectivity of the human person and allows God to be present in the everyday, narrowing the alienation of the Church from the faithful in the society of modernity.

Third, event ontology does not eliminate the authority of Jesus. The above discussion seems to give the illusion that everyone has his own Jesus, and because one is no longer bound by the events of Jesus, it would seem that the prescriptions of doctrine are rather arbitrary, losing the coherence of the Church and predisposing it to disintegration. However, just as one examines one's own experience, one can distinguish the continuity of the sequence of events from past to present from the role of the other elements that share in the construction of that experience, and the ready change of circumstances always creates new variables for the generation of a strictly historical pattern, such as plagues and earthquakes, etc., which are not determined by one's personal appreciation of history and the past, and thus one feels a certain lack of autonomy and control. feel a certain lack of autonomy and control. As discussed above, the apprehension of God realizes the presence of God, which one may gratefully see as a gift, or one may feel guilty for experiencing a justified demand and rejecting it. Thereby, in every moment, one's experience will feel the tension between one's actuality and one's causality, and one will feel guilty and guarded in some way. However, Jesus' speech is free of such tension and wariness; his description is based on a perception that is not distorted by the ego (being human but not speaking from the ego), and Jesus forms a unity with God that is at work in every experiential encounter, and tension, suspicion, and wariness are absent in this situation [11]. Jesus who speaks with authority, who perceives what is perceived, in a certain sense sees what God sees, thus establishing and emerging the unity of God and man in the event perspective as well. The way in which God is present in Jesus is unique, and unlike the indirect, tense correlations of others, God is immanent in Jesus.

Fourth, event ontology is not an overwhelming statement of authority. Postmodernism rejects all forms of centrism, and the absolute authority of doctrine and Jesus is no exception. The discussion of Jesus in the previous article seems to confer on him the authority of direct insight, yet this authority itself does not provide a direct, authoritative guide to life for those bound in tension. It is more like a normative force, i.e., one that can be drawn upon to judge the many norms that govern the direction of life, the church, and society, and to create environments and ways of living that are consistent with those norms. Doctrine is in constant tension with human action, and together they construct the socio-historical movement of Christianity. In other words, doctrine does not overwhelmingly override man and tell him how to live his life, but provides a set of insights and criteria for living well, and how to conform to these norms is the freedom of the Son of Man and is not prescriptive in form or red tape.

4. Summary and Reflections

Based on Whitehead's process philosophy, this article discusses the gradual loss of validity of the Jesus event in the face of the challenges of modernity, and how to reshape a coherent understanding of Christianity based on the ontology of the event as a continuous and changing socio-historical movement, and analyzes the characteristics and advantages of this perspective. Church reform is a complex and ambitious topic, and the study of postmodernist theology or religiosity in China is still in its infancy, lacking more mutually supportive and explicative arguments, and many of the perspectives may be a bit thin. As far as Whitehead's philosophy is concerned, is this methodology so encompassing that it loses its explanatory validity, and the church reforms discussed according to its viewpoints also risk losing their authority and internal disintegration, thus further abandonment of Whitehead's philosophy is needed. Admittedly, this paper is only a relatively preliminary attempt to discuss Whitehead's philosophy in conjunction with the field of religion and even theology, and I hope that the reader will criticize and correct me for the immaturity of my views!

References
