The Brazilian Jesus: In Search of a Protestant Christology in the Brazilian Context

Summary

The question underlining this study is as follows:

*What could be the main components of a Protestant Christology in the Brazilian context?*

Therefore, this research intends to contribute to the building of a contextual Brazilian Protestant Christology. A contextual Christology needs to address the issues of a determined context, but it also needs to keep in dialogue with the whole Christian church spread over the world. There are different Christologies in Brazil and each chapter from the third to the sixth one deals with one of them. Context is not static and in Brazil it is not different. There were important shifts in the Brazilian context and, interestingly, new Christologies or new emphases on Christology emerged to address these different contexts.

The structure of the work is as follows. The first chapter, which is the introduction to the dissertation, is an effort to illuminate what I understand by context/contextuality. It explores the issue of contextuality, by dealing with the possibility of a contextual Christology. It explains what the term ‘contextual’ means in the expression ‘contextual Christology.’ It introduces the historical background of the consciousness of contextuality in Christology and it shows its two forms: contextualisation and inculturation. It presents what approach is the most suitable to be applied to the Brazilian context. Attention is given to contextuality in its broader sense: possibility, history and interaction; but also its applicability to the Brazilian context. In that way, it intends to present one of the core terms of this dissertation: ‘contextual’.

The second chapter presents the methodological standpoints that are used in this dissertation. It presents my own theological context as fundamental to understand the perspective and the criteria adopted. Therefore, it discusses what kind of theological language is more suitable for theological discourse. Since theology always has to do with truth, it also defines the concept of truth I use here. It also deals with hermeneutics and presents the concept of hermeneutics that is more adequate to a contextual Christology.
It also presents the main criteria for any Christian contextual theology. Finally, it introduces the threefold office. This scheme is used in the whole dissertation to describe and evaluate the developments in Brazilian Christology and it forms my framework to build a contextual Brazilian Christology. In this dissertation, the three offices are dealt with as three metaphors for the relationship between humans and God. Thus, the priestly office points to the role of Jesus as a representative of the people before God. The prophetical role asserts the role of Jesus as a lawgiver, a new Moses that tells how to behave toward God and other people. And the kingly office points to the role of Jesus as the mediator that brings God to men, a heavenly king that judges, rewards, forgives, and gives what his followers dream of.

The third chapter deals with the first Protestant Christology that was brought to Brazil. It is the Christology of the North-American missionaries, which was embraced by the first Protestant Brazilian ministers and became the main Christology in Brazil. This chapter focuses on the priestly office and how the related doctrines of atonement, justification by faith, and redemption are viewed in that context.

The fourth chapter points out the emergence of the Liberation Theology and its Christology, showing how it address the changes in the Brazilian context. The role of Jesus as liberator, which is so important for this theology, is deeply related to Jesus’ office as prophet, and it empowers Christians to fight for justice and liberty and to combat the oppression of economic and political power over the marginalised people.

The fifth chapter presents the efforts to address new issues related to the Afro-Brazilian presence in Brazil and how, the Negra theology tried to build a new Christology to deal with these issues. The African religiosity was profoundly ignored in Brazilian theology for a long time. Recently, the Negra Theology has looked at the potential of Afro-Brazilian theology for a construction of a Brazilian contextual Christology. The contribution of this theology in Brazil is very important and it has still much to contribute and to develop. Nonetheless, this theology does not have a great impact on the great majority of Brazilian black Christians.

The sixth chapter shows how the Neo-Pentecostal movement and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) in particular approaches the same issues that Negra theology does. UCKG embraces an Afro-Brazilian cosmology and spirituality. It
incorporates the theological perspective and structure of the Afro-Brazilian religions in its own theology. It modifies and inverts some meanings, but it still maintains the basic theological structure. Thus, it offers many Brazilian people the possibility of reconfiguring and reframing their old beliefs in a new and strange context. UCKG's preaching and practice emphasise Jesus Christ's kingly office and the concept of the *Christus Victor*.

Finally, the seventh chapter presents a summary and conclusions of my research. The threefold office can help theologians to build Christologies that are more aware of the different cultures, how they relate to each other and how they are necessary for a fruitful and enriching dialogue. Certainly, it is a big challenge to reconcile all these three shifts in the Brazilian Christology and build one Christology that works with all these different emphases. Nevertheless, any Christology for the Brazilian context needs to be aware of them and deal with the various Christologies that emerged in Brazilian context. Each one answered specific expectations of particular contexts in Brazilian history, however, they are all alive and present in Brazilian religious scenario. Thus a contemporary contextual Brazilian Christology has to keep in balance these three shifts and maintain the three offices with their strong points, however, at the same time, it has to criticise and overcome the limits and weaknesses of these shifts.