Contemporary Roman Catholic Approaches to Non-Christian Religions

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CONTEMPORARY ROMAN CATHOLIC APPROACHES
TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
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by
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CHAPTER I

FROM EXCLUSIVE TO INCLUSIVE ECCLESIOCENTRISM

Introduction

Any serious student of Christian theology must be impressed by the many points of tension which are encountered in an attempt to understand and apply the truths which God has revealed for the salvation of His creation. Of these, however, none is as problematic, because it penetrates to the heart and core of Christian theology, as the tension between the gratia universalis and the sola fide; between God's universal offer of salvation and the particularity of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone; between God's will that "all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" and the undeniable, yet lamentable, "fact" that not all are saved, not all know the truth because they either do not know or do not believe in Jesus Christ. This tension is, in fact, a disturbing factor in the minds of Christians who realize that God loved the world enough to give His only Son to die that it might be saved and yet who watch untold millions live and die in ignorance of or in opposition to that Savior of the world. It must be stated at the outset that this tension is real and it
contains an element of urgency about it. It will not go away if it is ignored. It must be dealt with and faced by every Christian who loves his Lord and the world which He died to redeem.

Perhaps for the first time in history it is impossible for any one religion to live in splendid isolation and ignore the others. Today, more than ever before, Christianity too is brought into contact, discussion and confrontation with other religions. The Christian's encounter with non-Christians is now to be found in his own country, his own community and even within his own family. How is he or she to view the non-Christian person; the non-Christian who is his partner in work, his neighbor, his family member? Is it possible to admit that untold billions of people, stretching back to the dawn of history and forward into an indefinite future, as well as those whom we love dearly, merit nothing more than eternal damnation because they either did not know or had never heard of Christ? And even if we resolve this problem in the case of the individual, what can we say about the religions which these people practice? Are these to be viewed as instruments of the devil, as human fabrications which serve only to drive the people who practice them further away from the true God and lead them ultimately to perdition? It is easy to see, in light of such questions, that this tension between the universality and the particularity and exclusivity of the Christian faith is an
increasingly real problem today, which affects all Christians, some of them personally. And the solution to the problem is also the responsibility of every thinking, feeling Christian whom God has placed in the last decades of the twentieth century.

This tension has, perhaps, nowhere been felt with greater force than in the Roman Catholic Church in the years following the Second Council of the Vatican. In an attempt to deal more effectively with the increasing pluralism of modern times, the Catholic Church has had to rethink her ancient claim of being the exclusive channel of salvation. Increasingly, Roman Catholic theologians have had a hard time reconciling universality with particularity, that is, God’s universal will to save with the particular mediation of that will in the Church. And this difficulty has led to significant shifts and great diversity of thought concerning the possibility of salvation outside the Church. Gerald H. Anderson, a missiological authority well known and respected for his work, has recently indicated and predicted "radical changes" in Roman Catholic mission theology and in its attitude toward other religions:

... Roman Catholic mission theology has undergone more radical change in these fifteen years [since Vatican II] than in the previous century. And there is obviously a great deal more ferment to come in the last fifth of the twentieth century. What we see so far, in my judgment, is but a foretaste or the first fruits of a radical realignment of Catholic mission theology that by A. D. 2000 will be as far from our thinking today as our thinking today is from where Catholic mission theology
One of the most significant impacts on Roman Catholic thought resulting from Vatican II is that the attention has shifted from a consideration of the possibility of salvation for the individual outside the Catholic Church to a reappraisal of the extra-Christian religions themselves.

Paul F. Knitter, in a very penetrating article, has discovered five stages in the evolution of Catholic theology of religions which proves how correct Anderson’s assessment is. The first stage, according to Knitter, is what he terms "exclusive ecclesiocentrism," which was the dominant attitude from the time of the early church to the Council of Trent. During this stage the church was seen as the


2Paul F. Knitter, "Roman Catholic Approaches to other Religions: Developments and Tensions," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 8 (April 1984):50-54. J. Peter Schineller, in "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," Theological Studies 37 (1976):545-66, seems to have been the inspiration for much of Knitter’s information. Knitter seems to have drawn heavily from this article, a fact that Knitter does not acknowledge. Schineller presented four general stages of development along the lines of:

1. Ecclesiocentric universe, exclusive Christology: Jesus Christ and the Church constitutive and exclusive way of salvation.
2. Christocentric universe, inclusive Christology: Jesus Christ and Church constitutive but not exclusive.
3. Theocentric universe, normative Christology: Jesus Christ and Church normative but not constitutive way of salvation.
4. Theocentric universe, nonnormative Christology: Jesus Christ one of many ways of salvation.
exclusive means of salvation and anyone who was not in the church, especially one who separated himself from the church, was denied the possibility of salvation. The second stage, "inclusive ecclesiocentrism," was made official at the Council of Trent and continued into the middle of the twentieth century. In this stage, the Church continued to be the channel of salvation but the possibility of salvation was afforded to some individuals outside its walls based upon either the concept of the votum sacramenti, or of "in-vincible ignorance." Knitter's third stage, "constitutive Christocentrism," was introduced at the Second Vatican Council and, for the first time, addressed the issue of the non-Christian religions. The new element here was that the world religions were praised for the way they reflect the "truth" which was previously found only in the Church and that salvation could also be found in these extra-Christian religions. The fourth stage in the evolution of Roman Catholic theology of religions Knitter calls "normative Christocentrism." This is a new direction in that it recognizes non-Christian religions on their own merits and not only as they reflect elements of Christian truth. In this stage, Christ is not merely in the religions but above them all. The Church is not necessary for salvation. God has provided a "mosaic" of revelation to all religions and the purpose of dialogue is not only to understand other religions more profoundly, not only to reveal points of agreement
and similarity, but also to discover genuinely new aspects of God's universal revelation. Knitter's final stage is what he terms "dialogical Theocentrism." Within this stage is a broad spectrum of theologians, most of whom are Third-world and who are veterans in the actual arena of inter-religious dialogue. They find a contradiction between the previous view's more positive approach to other religions and its insistence on the normativeness of Christ. They try to show how Christians can encounter other religions with a clear affirmation of Christ's universal salvific role without having to claim His normativeness and finality. While continuing to affirm Jesus as a savior for all peoples of all times, together with the Church as the community by which Jesus' presence and message is brought about through time, they see all religions as partners in a "salvific dialogue" in which not the Church nor Christ, but God, is the final ground and goal and norm.

The purpose of this study is to explore, in greater detail, the final three stages in the evolution of Roman Catholic theology of religions. In order to do this, it will first be necessary to trace the historical background of the current Catholic approaches to non-Christian religions, from exclusive to inclusive ecclesiocentrism. Then, using Knitter's analysis as the general outline, the main part of this study will concern itself with an in-depth examination of the "radical changes" which were introduced
into Roman Catholic theology of missions by the Second Vatican Council. Because these stages of development are broad and the dividing lines between them are sometimes quite fluid, it will be possible to concentrate on the work of only one individual theologian who has provided a leading role and most clearly represents the central elements of the various stages. Karl Rahner will provide the focal point for the study of "constitutive Christocentrism." As an example of "normative Christocentrism," Hans Kung's theology will be investigated. Aloysius Pieris' "dialogical theocentrism" will provide a good example of the most recent stage in Roman Catholic approaches to non-Christian religions. In all three cases, some brief biographical information and an evaluation of their role in the development of modern Catholic theology of missions will be helpful in understanding their respective approaches.

It is important to mention at this point that none of these theologians represents the "official" view of the Roman Church. All of them have moved, in varying degrees, beyond the approach delineated in the documents of Vatican II. Additionally, there is a great difference of opinion among Roman Catholic theologians on how to solve the tension between the universal and particular elements of the Christian faith. Many important and influential Catholic scholars have disagreed vigorously with the views of Rahner, Kung, Pieris and the others of their schools. There have been a
variety of criticisms directed against these modern trends, many of which will be noted in a later chapter.

Finally, these approaches to non-Christian religions will be evaluated on the basis of three essential questions: Do they enable Christians to hear more adequately the witness of Scripture? Do they lead the Christian faithful to a deeper commitment to Christ and the Gospel? Do they inspire Christians to carry out more effectively their central mission of advancing God's kingdom by witnessing to God's Christ? The study will then conclude with some comments on the current interreligious dialogue and the possibility of a resolution of the tension between God's universal salvific will and the implementation of that will through particular means.

**Historical Background**

The tension being experienced in the Roman Catholic Church today, from one perspective, has not always been there. Until recent times the Church has maintained with the strictest seriousness that there is no salvation outside of herself. From the earliest times the Church has declared: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. This phrase goes back to Cyprian's remark that he who separates himself from the Church excludes himself from the promises of the Church and that he who does not have the Church as mother does not have God as Father. This familiar and oft-quoted phrase,
together with some of its context is cited here in detail because of its historical importance:

The spouse of Christ cannot be defiled, she is inviolate and chaste; she knows one home alone, in all modesty she keeps faithfully to one chamber. It is she who preserves us for God, she who seals for the kingdom the sons whom she has borne. Whoever breaks with the Church and enters on an adulterous union, cuts himself off from the promises made to the Church; and he who turns his back on the Church of Christ will not come to the rewards of Christ: he is an alien, a worldling, an enemy. You cannot have God for your Father if you no longer have the Church for your mother.3

Cyprian continues by equating the church with the ark of Noah, outside of which there could be no salvation, "If there was any escape for one who was outside the ark of Noah, there will be as much for one who is found to be outside the Church."4 Later, in the same work, Cyprian uses

3Cyprian, De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate, in De Lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate, text and translation by Maurice Bevenot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) no. 6: "Adulterari non potest sponsa Christi, incorrupta eat et pudica: unam domum novit, unius cubicule sanctitatem casto pudore custodit. Haec nos Deo servat, haec filios regno quas generavit adsignat. Quisque ab ecclesia segregatus adulterae iungitur, a promissis ecclesiae separatur, nec perveniet ad Christi præmia qui relinquat ecclesiam Christi: alienus est, profanus est, hostis est. Habere iam non potest Deum patrem qui ecclesiam non habet matrem." The translator of this volume, Maurice Bevenot, retains what he considers to be the better-attested iam, "no longer," which seems to indicate that Cyprian was referring not to all those outside the Church but only to those who had broken away from it. This is certainly probable in view of his statement above, "Quisque ab ecclesia segregatus." Cyprian’s language here, however, is strong enough to be understood in an absolute sense and, indeed, some did later understand it that way.

4Ibid.: "Si potuit evadere quique extra arcam Noe fuit, et qui extra ecclesiam foris fuerit evadet."
even stronger language to demonstrate that the unity of the Church cannot be broken and that anyone who is separated from the Church cannot hope to achieve salvation:

God is one, and Christ is one; His Church is one and the faith is one; and the cement of fellowship binds all the people together into the body’s solid unity. That unity cannot be broken; that one body cannot be divided by any cleavage of its structure, nor cut up in fragments with its vitals torn out. Nothing that is separated from the parent stock can ever live or breathe apart; all hope of salvation is lost.\(^5\)

Cyprian’s use of the ark as a figure of the Church and his insistence that there can be no salvation for those who have put themselves outside of the Church found ready acceptance among the later Fathers of the church in their polemics against both heretics and pagans. Especially under the imposing influence of Augustine and his anti-Pelagian polemic, the phrase *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* took on a more absolute sense. For example, while speaking about the need to make satisfaction for sins in the Church, Augustine connects the Church’s function of forgiving sins with salvation and, thus, states that salvation is not found outside the Church: “For, of course, outside her they [sins] are not forgiven. For she alone has received the pledge of the Holy Spirit, without whom there is no forgiveness of

\(^{5}\text{Ibid., no. 23: “Unus Deus est et Christus unus, et una ecclesia eius et fides una, et plebs in solidam corporis unitatem concordiae glutino copulata. Scindi unitas non potest nec corpus unum discidio compaginis separari, divulsis laceratione visceribus in frustra discerpi; quicquid a matrice dissecerit, seorsa vivere et spirare non poterit: substantiam salutis amittit.”}
sins. Those forgiven thus obtain life everlasting."\(^6\)

In the heat of the battle against the paganism of Islam, the prevalent attitude from the fifth century through the Middle Ages was that there was no salvation outside the Church. Even Aquinas stated in several places that this was the case. For example, in his *Summa Theologiae*, while speaking of the necessity of the sacraments, Aquinas makes the point that unity of the true religion is necessary for salvation: "Now it is necessary for human salvation that men should be united in one denomination constituted by true religion."\(^7\) During the Middle Ages the doctrine, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, was enunciated with greater force and became more firmly attached to the visible structure of the Roman Catholic Church. In September 1351, Clement VI, in his epistle, "Super quibusdam," said: ". . . that no man of those travelling outside the faith of this very Church, and

\(^6\)Augustine, *Enchiridion*, no. 65, in *Confessions and Enchiridion*, the Library of Christian Classics, vol. 7, trans. and ed. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955). In order to determine precisely the meaning of this passage and others like it, it will be necessary to explore in greater detail Augustine’s concept of the church. This is not the place to attempt to resolve the question of whether Augustine conceived of the church as a physical, visible institution or of a spiritual, invisible community of believers. What is important for our purposes is that Augustine was understood to have meant the visible structure of the Church when he made such statements about its necessity for salvation.

\(^7\)Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 61, art. 1: "Sed necessarium est ad humanam salutem homines adunari in unum verae religionis nomen." See also *Summa Theologiae*, II, II, q. 2, art. 5.
outside the obedience of the Pontiff of Rome, can finally be saved." The Council of Florence, in 1442, made the extra Ecclesiam doctrine official and clearly spelled out exactly whom the Church considered to be inside and whom outside the Church. Pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics were outside the Church and, thus, merited not eternal life, but eternal fire:

It is to be firmly believed, professed and preached that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart into everlasting fire...

These words are extremely blunt and they would come to characterize the Church’s attitude towards non-Christians and their religions for the next several centuries.

In November 1564, Pius IV, issued the Bull, "Inunctum nobis," which urged the Catholic Church to accept and profess the Tridentine faith and stated that salvation was not to be found outside the faith of the Catholic Church: "This true Catholic faith, outside of which no one can be saved."

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9Denzinger, sec. 1351: "Firmiter credit, profitetur et praedicat, nullos intra catholicam Ecclesiam non existentes, non solum paganos sed nec Iudaeos aut haereticos atque schismaticos, aeternae vitae fieri posse participes; sed in ignem aeternum ituros...

10Denzinger, sec. 1870: "Hanc veram catholicam fidem, extra quam nemo salvus esse potest."
Leo XIII, in 1824, called upon all those outside of the Roman Church, which he refers to as the "true Church," to return to the "mother Church, outside of whose teachings there is no salvation." Later, while speaking about false doctrines which had arisen, Leo XIII refers to the true wisdom which had been entrusted to the Church, apart from which one could not be saved:

For we have a surer word of the prophet, and in writing to you we speak wisdom among the perfect; not the wisdom of this world but the wisdom of God in a mystery. By it we are taught, and by divine faith we hold one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and that no other name under heaven is given to men except the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth in which we must be saved. This is why we profess that there is no salvation outside the Church.

Pius IX also made it very clear that there can be no salvation for those who stubbornly oppose the authority of the Church of Rome: "Also well known is the Catholic teaching that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church." He goes on to say that eternal salvation cannot be obtained by those who oppose the authority and statements of the same Church and are stubbornly separated from the unity of the Church and from the successor of Peter, "the Roman Pontiff, to whom the custody of the vineyard has been committed by


12Leo XIII, "Ubi primum," ibid., p. 201.
the Savior."\(^{13}\) The First Vatican Council, in 1870, states simply, "This is the true Catholic doctrine, outside of which no one can be saved."\(^{14}\) It continues by affirming that the Roman Church is the one flock under the one Shepherd, and anyone departing from this truth loses his salvation.

It is not necessary to recite all the places in which the rule is either explicitly or implicitly repeated. Many more examples could be cited. It is enough to say that throughout its history, the Roman Catholic Church has seen herself as necessary to salvation. A strong warning is implied here: a decision must be made, not in the innermost heart of the individual, but at the portal of the visible Church of Rome. The Roman Catholic use of the dictum, \textit{extra Ecclesiam}, raised few problems until recently. Its meaning was clear: "Outside of the Roman Catholic Church." There would seem to be no ambiguity or uncertainty in the Roman claim of being the one and only \textit{Ecclesia}, nor is there, it seems, any possibility of misunderstanding what is meant by being "outside" (\textit{extra}) this Church. Or is there perhaps the need for a closer look at the Roman interpretation of its familiar dictum?

\(^{13}\)Pius IX, "Quanto conficiamur morore," no. 8, ibid., p. 370.

\(^{14}\)Denzinger, sec. 3060: "Haec est catholicae veritatis doctrina, a qua deviare salva fide atque salute nemo potest."
Running concurrently with Rome's exclusivist claim of being the sole channel of salvation was another stream of thought which would come to play a decisive role in its modern views towards those outside the ark of the Church. While the Catholic Church denied salvation to those outside itself and especially to those who had broken with it, it never denied that God's grace was at work outside its structure. In the Church's struggles against the various heresies that arose, it consistently accepted the validity of baptisms performed by heretical sects. For example, the Council of Arelas, in A.D. 314, decreed that those baptized by the Donatists were to be received merely by the imposition of hands because their baptisms were valid: "... it is decided ... that, if anyone comes to the Church from the heretics, he is to be asked his creed, and if it is perceived that he has been baptized in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, only the hand should be imposed on him." 15 Innocent I (401-417), referring to the baptism of

15Denzinger, sec. 123: "... ut tantur ... ut si ad Ecclesiam aliquis de haeresi venerit, interrogent eum symbolum, et si perviderint eum in Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum esse baptizatum, manus ei tantum inponatur ..." J. Patout Burns, in "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," Theological Studies 37 (1976):598-619, traces this different attitude towards those outside the Church to two traditions that originated in the Patristic era: "In the ancient Church we find two significantly different explanations of the economy of creation and salvation. A tradition of Greek thought which began in Justin Martyr, developed in Origen, and achieved orthodox expression in Gregory of Nyssa stressed the general availability of the means of terrestrial and heavenly salvation and
the Novatians and the Montanists, was even more explicit in his affirmation of the validity of the baptisms of heretics: "... that those who come from the Novatians or from the Montanists are to be received by the imposition of the hand alone, because although they are from the heretics, yet they are baptized in the name of Christ." The Council of Trent continued this line of thought, making it even more explicit and adding an anathema to those who deny the validity of the baptisms of a heretical sect when it is done with the same intention as the Church: "If anyone says that baptism, which is also given by heretics in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the intention of doing what the Church does, is not true baptism: Let him

developmental continuity from birth to beatitude. These theologians recognized a universal operation of Christ and found in the Church the fullness of his effective presence. Moreover, both Origen and Gregory asserted that all whom God had created would finally be saved in Christ. The orientation of Latin theology contradicts this Greek universalism. Tertullian, Cyprian, and their Roman counterparts appear to have assumed that the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ could be attained only through his Church. A person passes from sin to salvation by fulfilling the conditions which God imposes for participation in Christ's redemption rather than by developing the potentialities with which every one was gifted in creation. Thus one must believe the teaching of Christ, receive baptism, and belong to the communion of the proper Church in order to be freed from sin and raised to the glory of Christ. This theological tradition finds its fullest elaboration in Augustine, who carefully specified the conditions which God has set down and the reasons for their necessity" (p. 599).

16Denzinger, sec. 211: "... ut venientes a Novatianiis vel Montensibus per manus tantum impositionem suacipientur, quia quamvis ab haereticis, tamen in Christi nomine sunt baptizati."
Thus the Catholic Church upheld the validity of baptisms performed outside of its visible structure and in doing so made a gesture toward recognizing the validity of an objective sacramental act among non-Catholics. The early Church apparently did not draw the same conclusion as to heretical baptisms from Cyprian's dictum that Cyprian himself drew. The early Church seemed to recognize a certain Christian bond between those within and those outside the Church. The recognition of heretical baptism was never withdrawn by the Roman Church. Whether it was always honored in practice depends on historical research of the contexts within which heretical baptism was practiced. The important thing, however, is that when non-Catholic baptism is honored by Rome, it is honored as a genuinely Christian and objectively valid instrument of salvation. And this is what makes the problem such an acute one for Rome with its assumption that it is the one true and only Church. In fact, Rome went so far as to condemn the idea, rather common in the eighteenth century, that no grace at all was given outside the Church. Clement XI, in 1713, in rejecting the errors of Paschasiaus Quesnel, condemned the thesis that:

17Denzinger, sec. 1617. Council of Trent, session 7, "Decree on the Sacraments," 3 March 1547: "Si quis dixerit, baptismum, qui etiam datur ab haereticis in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, cum intentione faciendi quod facit Ecclesia, non esse verum baptismum: anathema sit."
"Extra Ecclesiam nulla conceditur gratia."\textsuperscript{18}

It is clear that Rome's dictum, extra Ecclesiam nulla salus, was not to be considered in an absolute sense. It became directed primarily against those who had separated themselves from the Catholic Church and who stubbornly remained outside the ark. As was seen, Rome rather consistently upheld the validity of sectarian baptisms and condemned the idea that grace was not granted outside the Church. The Church held out hope for those who, ignorant of the truthfulness of the Church, remained on the outside. Pius IX, while maintaining that all hope of salvation was to be found in the Catholic Church, still did not deny the possibility of salvation to those who were ignorant beyond their control:

The Church clearly declares that the only hope of salvation for mankind is placed in the Christian faith, which teaches the truth, scatters the darkness of ignorance by the splendor of its light, and works through love. This hope of salvation is placed in the Catholic Church which, in preserving the true worship, is the solid home of this faith and the temple of God. Outside of the Church, nobody can hope for life or salvation unless he is excused through ignorance beyond his control.\textsuperscript{19}

In a later encyclical, Pius IX elaborates on this concept, which would become known as "invincible ignorance," stating that God would never punish anyone eternally who, completely

\textsuperscript{18}Clement XI, Constitution, "Unigenitus Dei Filius," 8 September 1713, in Denzinger, sec. 2429.

ignorant of the true Church, nevertheless strove to live an honest and upright life in accordance with the natural law:

There are, of course, those who are struggling with invincible ignorance about our most holy religion. Sincerely observing the natural law and its precepts inscribed by God on all hearts and ready to obey God, they live honest lives and are able to attain eternal life by the efficacious virtue of divine light and grace. Because God knows, searches and clearly understands the minds, hearts, thoughts, and nature of all, his supreme kindness and clemency do not permit anyone at all who is not guilty of deliberate sin to suffer eternal punishments.20

Thus, on the basis of "invincible ignorance," a step was taken from exclusive to inclusive ecclesiocentrism.

The Council of Trent, however, signaled a profound change in the exclusive ecclesiocentrism of the Middle Ages. Especially in light of the newly discovered peoples of the new world who had never heard of Christ and, perhaps, because of the rift in the church caused by the Reformation, the Council allowed that "baptism of desire" or the votum sacramenti could admit into the Church anyone who lived a moral life but could not receive baptism of water. The references to this concept within the documents of the Council of Trent are brief and, as it seems, only given in passing. Nevertheless, because of their inclusion in the official documents, they have been given an importance which belies their brevity. The votum sacramenti is used by Trent, first of all, in connection with the sacrament of

20 Pius IX, "Quanto conficiamur moerore," 10 August 1863, no. 7, ibid., p. 370.
baptism, which is the portal into the Church. Baptism, the Council declares, is necessary for membership in the church - or its desire:

In which words is given a brief description of the justification of the sinner, as being a translation from that state in which man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior. This translation however cannot, since the promulgation of the Gospel, be effected except through the washing of regeneration or its desire . . . 21

Again, the Council affirms the concept of the votum sacramenti in connection with the sacrament of penance:

. . . but also the sacramental confession of those sins, at least in desire, to be made in season, and sacerdotal absolution, as well as satisfaction by fasts, alms, prayers and other devout exercises of the spiritual life, not indeed for the eternal punishment, which is, together with the guilt, remitted either by the sacrament or by the desire of the sacrament . . . 22

This more optimistic attitude toward the "pagans," based upon either "invincible ignorance" or an implicit votum sacramenti, characterized, for the most part, Roman Catholic attitudes from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. What took place was a significant shift in Catholic

21Denzinger, sec. 1524. The Council of Trent, session 6, "Decree on Justification, cap. 4: "Quibus verbis justificationis impii descriptio insinuat, ut sit translatio ab eo statu, in quo homo nascitur filius primi Adae, in statum gratiae et adoptionis filiorum Dei, per secundum Adam Iesum Christum Salvatorum nostrum; quae quidem translatio post Evangelium promulgatum sine lavacro regenerationis aut eius voto fieri non potest . . . ."

22Denzinger, sec. 1543, chap. 14 of the above: " . . . verum etiam et eorundem sacramentalem confessionem, saltem in voto et suo tempore faciendum, et sacerdotalem absolutionem, itemque satisfactionem per ieiunium,
Catholic attitudes from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. What took place was a significant shift in Catholic theology from an exclusive to an inclusive understanding of the Church as the sole channel of grace and salvation. In other words, Catholic belief moved from holding "'outside the church no salvation' to 'without the church no salvation.'" Now that salvation and grace were possible for those walking outside the visible unity of the Roman Catholic Church and, at the same time, the Church was still somehow necessary for salvation, Catholic theologians, especially in recent times, found it necessary to look for ways to connect them with the Church:

During the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic theologians came up with ingenious concepts to include within the Church any trace of salvation outside it: saved non-Christians belonged to the "soul" of the Church; they were "attached," "linked," "related" to the Church; they were members "imperfectly," "tendentially," "potentially." It is possible, therefore, to see a distinct shift in Roman Catholic thought concerning the possibility of salvation of those outside her walls. This shift represents movement from an exclusive to an inclusive view of the role of the Church in salvation. What is often forgotten, however, is that this positive shift in Catholic attitudes towards "pagans" did not include a more positive attitude.

23 Knitter, p. 50.

24 Ibid.
toward pagan religions. Very few theologians ventured the assertion that universally available grace might be available through non-Christian religions. The experience of God's grace was always an ecclesial matter for Catholics, but it was apparently a private matter for pagans. It is, perhaps, one of the most profound accomplishments of the Second Council of the Vatican that it opened the door for a serious consideration of the possibility of salvation in the non-Christian religions.
CHAPTER II

VATICAN II ON NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS: FROM INCLUSIVE ECCLESIOCENTRISM TO CONSTITUTIVE CHRISTOCENTRISM

Introduction

When Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) called together a few of the Cardinals present in Rome for a meeting at St. Paul’s Outside the Walls on January 25, 1959, few could realize how momentous this gathering would be. His agenda announced a few reforms and the calling of an ecumenical council. He foresaw that the council would have three purposes: to link the bishops of the world to the pastoral responsibilities of the Bishop of Rome, to begin a reform or "aggiornamento" (Italian for "updating") of the Church itself, and to promote Christian unity. Preparatory commissions and secretariats were set up by the motu proprio of June 5, 1960, and the Council was formally summoned by the Apostolic Constitution "Humanae Salutis" of December 25, 1961. Cardinal Montini, then archbishop of Milan and later pope as Paul VI (1963-1978), remarked that it would be "the greatest Council the Church has ever held in the whole of the twenty centuries of its history . . . . Before our eyes, history is
opening up enormous prospects for centuries to come."¹

Only time will tell if Pope Paul’s prophetic statement will prove to be true, but all are agreed that the Second Council of the Vatican introduced vast and far-reaching changes in the areas of church life and theology that have occupied a whole generation of Catholic theologians, as well as many Protestant and Orthodox theologians, and have drastically altered the direction of the Church in the future. John XXIII himself indicated some of these changes in his opening speech to the Council. On 11 October 1962, approximately twenty-five hundred bishops and representatives of other Christian churches listened to a carefully worded but very clear message which hinted at the new direction which was to come:

But from the renewed, serene, and tranquil adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness, as it still shines forth in the Acts of the Council of Trent and First Vatican Council, the Christian, Catholic and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.²


What is of interest here, and what has occupied the thoughts of so many since these words were uttered, is that, despite John's caution that everything should be measured in the forms of the magisterium, he has nevertheless clearly set his Church on a "step forward toward a doctrinal penetration." Thus, while the substance of the ancient doctrine must always remain the same, the way in which it is presented is to be "taken into great consideration." In other words, the unchanging truths of the faith must be presented in a new way which conforms better to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

Pope Paul VI understood the Second Vatican Council in terms of a single goal which would enable the Catholic Church to better proclaim its message in the twentieth century: "Its teaching can be summed up in this single objective: to ensure that the church of the twentieth century may emerge ever better equipped to proclaim the gospel to the people of this century." Later, while examining the questions which the Church was asking herself in an attempt to address the problems of the modern world, he said that the question may be expressed in these words: "... whether, after the Council and thanks to the Council, which may be described as the hour of God in the annals of recent history, the church does or does not find herself better equipped to

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3Paul VI, "Evangelii nuntiandi," 8 December 1975, no. 2.
announce the gospel message and to implant it with conviction, effectively and in liberty of spirit in the hearts of men?"4 The meaning of these words is obvious. The Roman Catholic Church, as the result of a significant change in attitude stemming from Vatican II, is attempting to reach out to a whole world outside its doors. The Council was an ecumenical council in the true sense of the word; a Council that has caused the Catholic Church to turn its face outward, while at the same time providing "aggiornamento" for the internal life of the Church as well.

One of the most interesting phrases that has been used to characterize post-Vatican II Catholicism is "open Catholicism."5 This phrase indicates that the Church of Rome is no longer pre-occupied with itself, that it has thrown open the windows of its concern to the whole world and all the problems and dangers that disturb it. The change of climate, then, has to do with the Catholic attitude towards those outside itself, towards the missionary character of the Church, as over against a self-assured apologetic of rigid self-defense. G. C. Berkouwer, himself a close

4Ibid., no. 4.

observer of the events surrounding the Council, has summed up this change of attitude very well:

The "others" are no longer merely or in the first place viewed as a threat to the Church, but as objects of a dutiful concern . . . the "others," those outside the Church, have come to be seen in a new light; they are no longer people whose unbelieving reactions and errors are looked down upon with surprise and offense. Now they are seen as those in whose lives are agitating questions that live in the hearts of believers also . . .

In a sense, John XXIII forged a new path for his Church which it has attempted to follow ever since: great cordiality of heart and the optimism that can allow the opportunity to emphasize what unites and overlook what seems to divide. Robert Blair Kaiser concludes: "For the first time in history, the Church sees partners in those who don't belong to her."  

This new sense of partnership is demonstrated in the documents issuing from Vatican II in a change of attitude, not only towards the "separated brethren" but also towards people of non-Christian religions. But with Vatican II the question has shifted from the possibility of salvation of non-Christian people to a consideration of the legitimate nature of extra-Christian religions as possible ways of God's presence and revelation. The question now is: are extra-Christian religions possible ways of revelation and

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6Ibid., p. 35.

salvation? While there was an answer, as we’ve seen, relative to the question of salvation for individual non-Christians, Roman Catholic theology has had very little to say about the legitimacy of extra-Christian religions as true religions. Contemporary Catholic theologians are attempting to come to terms with the theological fact of world religions. This attempt is taking place in light of two basic principles which have dominated the process in Catholic thought: the reality of God’s universal salvific will and the claim that this will is revealed in a definitive way and mediated by the Church. And this is precisely what has caused the tension in recent Catholic thought. Here again is the tension between the universality and the particularity of the Christian faith: between the universality of God’s gracious offer of salvation to all people and the particularity of extra Ecclesiam nulle salus.

Vatican II on Non-Christian Religions

The documents of Vatican II represent the first time in its history that the Roman Catholic Church has faced the question of the relationship of the Church to the religions in such an official way. Pietro Rossano has rightly distinguished two basic approaches to non-Christian religions within the documents of Vatican II.8 There is, first of all, 

8Pietro Rossano, "Christ’s Lordship and Religious
a "global" approach to the world religions. In comparison with the attitude prevalent in past centuries, this approach is very different and uses such terms as "esteem," "respect," "dialogue," "proclamation," and "witness." Secondly, according to Rossano, there is a "differentiated" approach to the individual religions according to the nature of each.

The global approach can be summarized in two words: proclamation and dialogue. The conciliar and post conciliar documents of Vatican II are filled with exhortations to proclaim the truths of the Church to the world. Proclamation is something the Church cannot deny itself. This is a dominant theme in the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" ("Gaudium et spes"), which contains many striking testimonies to the uniqueness and universality of Christ as the fulfillment of human history:

The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as a perfect man he could save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations. It is he whom the Father raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand, constituting him judge of the living and the dead. Animated and drawn together in his Spirit we press onwards on our journey towards the consummation of history which fully corresponds to the plan of his love: "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10).

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Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution, "Gaudium et spes," 7 December 1965, part 1, ch. 4, no. 45.
Paul VI elaborates on the necessity for the Church to place proclamation in the forefront of its approach to non-Christian religions, which had been established at Vatican II, by stating that only the Christian faith can fulfill all man's needs. While recognizing the value to be found in all extra-Christian religions, he states that there is still the need to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ:

Neither our respect for these religions nor the esteem in which we hold them nor the complexity of the questions involved should deter the Church from proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to these non-Christians. On the contrary she holds that these multitudes of men have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ. It is in these, we believe, that the whole human family can find in the most comprehensive form and beyond all their expectations everything for which they have been groping, as it were, about God, about man, and his ultimate destiny, about life and death and about truth itself. Accordingly, even in the face of the most admirable forms of natural religion, the Church judges that it is her special function, by virtue of the religion of Jesus Christ which she proclaims in her evangelization, to bring men into contact with God's plan, with his living presence, with his solicitude.10

The Second Vatican Council, acknowledging that "in ways known to himself" God can lead those who, "through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel" to faith, still maintains that it has the "obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize."11 It maintains that right because, as the Council decided in the "Decree on the

10Paul VI, "Evangelii nuntiandi," no. 53.

Church's Missionary Activity," that proclamation of the Gospel "purges of evil associations those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God; and it restores them to Christ their source."12 Thus, whatever goodness is found in the minds and hearts of men, or in the customs and cultures of peoples, "is purified, raised to a higher level and reaches its perfection,"13 through the proclamation of the Christian Gospel.

Every time, however, that the documents of the Council mention mission or proclamation, they also speak of esteem and respect for the religions, and of dialogue. Dialogue means that the herald of the Gospel should know the persons to whom he speaks and should respect them in their cultural and religious identity. This, affirms the Council again and again, requires a high degree of listening to the other in depth, to let oneself be judged by the other and to understand the other's objections toward himself. The Council put forth a two-fold basis upon which to build dialogue with the religions. First, there is the common humanity which all men share, both those within and those without the Church. Secondly, there are found the "seeds of the Word" among all religions, seeds which have their common source in God. Thus, the Council affirmed that dialogue takes place

12Ibid., no. 9. 13Ibid.
with extra-Christian religions with a mandate from below and from above: from below, based upon the common source and common destiny of all men, and from above, based upon God's universal revelation of his Word of truth to all men.

"Nostra Aetate" represents the first time in history that the Roman Catholic Church has attempted to enunciate clearly how the Church relates to the religions of the world.\textsuperscript{14} It begins in the very first paragraph to define approaches to non-Christian religions which have been used or are being used by Christians in an attempt to explain the relationship of the Church to the religions and which dictate the terms of dialogue with them:

1) Other religions are wholly false and the Christian church has nothing whatsoever to learn from them.
2) Non-Christian religions are the work of the devil and any similarities with Christianity are due to demonic cunning.
3) Other religions are a preparation for Christ, the Gospel fulfills them and makes them perfect.
4) Other religions have value but only in Christianity are all values to be found in a balanced way.
5) All the religions are seen as a series of concentric circles, each containing part of the truth, with the true church at the center.
6) Non-Christian religions are the means through which God's saving grace reaches those who have not yet been reached by the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{14}Lesslie Newbigin, "The Gospel among the Religions," in \textit{Faith Meets Faith}, Mission Trends no. 5 (New York and Grand Rapids: Paulist and Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981) pp. 3-19, has indicated that there have been at least six distinct approaches to non-Christian religions which have been used or are being used by Christians in an attempt to explain the relationship of the Church to the religions and which dictate the terms of dialogue with them:

1) Other religions are wholly false and the Christian church has nothing whatsoever to learn from them.
2) Non-Christian religions are the work of the devil and any similarities with Christianity are due to demonic cunning.
3) Other religions are a preparation for Christ, the Gospel fulfills them and makes them perfect.
4) Other religions have value but only in Christianity are all values to be found in a balanced way.
5) All the religions are seen as a series of concentric circles, each containing part of the truth, with the true church at the center.
6) Non-Christian religions are the means through which God's saving grace reaches those who have not yet been reached by the Gospel.

Newbigin maintains that it is the fifth approach which most clearly reflects the official Catholic opinion. It is true that Pope Paul VI, in "Ecclesiam Suam," 1964, explained the relationship with the religions in this way, with the Roman Catholic Church at the center. It must be pointed out, however, that there are distinct references in the documents of the Council, as was seen above, to the kind of approach reflected in number 3, where the other religions are preparations for and are perfected by the Gospel (cf. footnote 13, above). One could also make a strong argument in favor of number six above. As will be seen in the next pages,
the basis of dialogue with both the people of other religions and the religions themselves by saying that all men have a common source and a common goal: "All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God."\textsuperscript{15} "Nostra Aetate" then goes on to show how this commonality of source and goal, which all people share, demonstrates itself in the fact that all men share the same quest, ask the same questions, seek the same goals and tend toward the same God. It is upon this basis, ultimately, that the Roman Catholic Church can truly dialogue with the different religions:

Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, according to the Council, the struggle of

the Roman Catholic Church does consider the religions to be instruments of God’s grace for those who have not yet heard the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{15}Vatican II, Declaration, "Nostra Aetate," 28 October 1965, no. 1.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
mankind, its strengths and hopes, hold true not for Christians only but also for all men "of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly." For, because Christ died for all and since men are all called to "one and the same destiny, which is divine," the Church holds that the Holy Spirit offers to all the "possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery."18

The Council affirms, however, another basis for dialogue with non-Christian religions, one which is based, not upon the nature of humanity, but upon the nature of God's universal revelation through the Word. This aspect of Rome's theological position underlying the Church's relationship with extra-Christian religions can be found in pre-conciliar theology which refers primarily to the "Logos spermatikos" of the Greek Fathers. "Nostra Aetate" and some of the other documents of the Council which deal with the subject resurrected this ancient concept, long ignored or forgotten, and have put it to good use as an important part of its dialogue with world religions. And, in doing so, they affirmed Christianity's absoluteness over against other religions. The Church is viewed as the plenitude and fulfillment of all other religions which are seen as stages, as

17 "Gaudium et spes," no. 22.
18 Ibid.
"anticipatory phases on the way to fulfillment."\textsuperscript{19} John Paul II, recently interpreting and expanding upon this concept of the "Logos spermatikos," reflects the change which the resurgence of this concept has had in Rome's relationship with the religions, even implying that, though the routes by different, the religions can be means of achieving the same goal:

The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of that one truth, "seeds of the Word," attesting that, though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life.\textsuperscript{20}

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the profundity of the change in attitude which this concept has introduced into the Roman Catholic Church's relations with world religions. It has provided impetus for unparalleled activity in the areas of ecumenicity and dialogue, both with other Christian denominations and non-Christians religions.\textsuperscript{21} It

\textsuperscript{19}"Nostra Aetate," no. 2.

\textsuperscript{20}John Paul II, Encyclical, "Redemptor hominis," 4 March 1979, no. 29.

\textsuperscript{21}This new attitude on the part of the Council and post-conciliar Roman Catholic theology has contributed to the creation and increased activity of several Sacred Congregations and other departments for the promotion of unity and dialogue. Some examples are: The Committee for Religious Relations with the Jews, The Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, or Propaganda Fide, The Secretariat for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians,
has provided a theological undergirding and a motivation heretofore unutilized in Catholic circles which has resulted in a tremendous increase in mission activity. Imbued with new courage and excitement, the Church no longer approaches its task of evangelization of the world with the attitude of being the sole possessor of the truth. It rather first listens, seeking to become familiar with the various national and religious traditions of the world. It attempts to put forth the Gospel, not as a destructive force, but as a force liberating and perfecting the values which the other religions already possess. The new Catholic mission emphasis seeks to uncover, "with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them." Hence, the Church, while recognizing that the teachings of the religions differ significantly from her own, will nevertheless reject nothing of the truth which God has bestowed upon them and through them:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.

Thus far we have referred to the "global" approach of

The Secretariat for Unbelievers. In addition, numerous declarations, encyclicals, and other publications on the subject have appeared in recent years.

22 "Ad gentes divinitus," no. 11.

23 "Nostra Aetate," no. 2.
the Council towards the religions, which consists of proclamation and dialogue. It must be added immediately, however, that the Church’s approach varies in tone and emphasis in relation to particular religions. This is what was referred to above as the "differentiated" approach.\textsuperscript{24} It is not without significance that the Catholic Church has adopted also a differentiated approach to other religions because it shows that each religion is to be taken on its own merits, according to the amount of truth found in each. For the Church, then, all the religions are no longer to be lumped together as merely non- or extra-Christian and, hence, false. Rather, each is to be approached differently, according to its relationship with the Church, its level of complexity, and the measure of truth afforded it by God.

As a result, according to the Council, the Church stands in a different existential relationship with each religion. "Nostra Aetate" moves from the simpler and less structured religions to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and, finally, to the Jewish people with whom there is a unique "spiritual bond."\textsuperscript{25} "Lumen Gentium" reverses the order. It begins with the religions most closely related to Christianity, such as Judaism, and proceeds to those more distantly related. The section of the "Dogmatic Constitution

\textsuperscript{24}Pietro Rossano, pp. 33-4.

\textsuperscript{25}"Nostra Aetate," no. 4.
on the Church" which deals with the Church's relationship with world religions is so important and has had such a decisive influence on subsequent thought that it is worth a closer look.

It begins with the affirmation that all men are called to unity with the Catholic Church and that all people, in different ways, "belong, or are related" to it. It then proceeds in the succeeding paragraphs to outline four fairly distinct categories of belonging or being related to the Church of Rome. The Council first of all turns its attention to the Catholic faithful. These, who among all people are those most fully incorporated into the Church, are attached to the sacramental and ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Catholic Church:

Fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who - by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion - are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops.27

For the Catholic faithful, there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church because, "they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to


27Ibid., no. 14.
Not yet fully incorporated into the Church, yet closely related to it, is a second category, according to "Lumen Gentium." Those who have indicated an explicit desire to become members but who await instruction for full membership, or who, for one reason or another have not become members, the Roman Church considers as her own already:

Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church, are by that very intention joined to her. With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own.29

A third category of membership in the Church of Rome, though more distantly related than the first two groups, are those members of Christian churches which do not profess entirely the Catholic faith or are not in communion with the bishop of Rome:

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. For there are many who hold sacred Scripture in honor as a rule of faith and of life, who have a sincere religious zeal, who lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour, who are sealed by baptism which unites them to Christ and who indeed recognize and receive other sacraments in their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities.30

Fourthly, the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" turns its attention to those who have not yet received the

28Ibid. 29Ibid. 30Ibid., no. 15.
Gospel. These too, in various ways, are related to the people of God, the Church. Once again, the Council differentiates between the non-Christian religions according to the proximity of their relationship to the Church. First of all, there is that people "to which the covenants and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh: in view of the divine choice, they are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance."31 The council goes on to say, however, that the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, "in the first place amongst whom are the Moslems."32 Moslems also profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with the Church they adore the "one merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."33 Beyond those groups with which the Church maintains a certain external similarity of teaching, are those who, living according to the dictates of their consciences and who sincerely seek God, also bear a relationship with the Church and may achieve eternal salvation. The following citation shows that the Church considers herself related in some way to every form of natural religious expression, no matter how primitive:

Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since he gives to all men life and breath and all things and since the Saviour wills all men to be saved. Those who, through no fault of their

31Ibid., no. 16. 32Ibid. 33Ibid.
own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too many [sic] achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.34

Thus the Council affirmed that the Roman Catholic Church was related to all the religions in various ways and in varying degrees, depending on the amount of truth each one contained in comparison with the Church.

It is abundantly clear that the Second Vatican Council introduced radical changes in the way the Catholic Church approaches non-Christian religions. To be sure, much of the Council’s approach was built upon ancient and well-established doctrines. Yet it is impossible to escape the different attitude at work in the Council. No longer does the Catholic Church consider herself the sole possessor of truth and the only ark of salvation, outside of which there is only eternal fire. As we’ve seen, the Council, in more places than is possible to document here, affirms that there is the possibility of salvation for those outside the Church, and not just those stricken with “invincible ignorance.” Included are non-Catholic Christians, Jews, Moslems

34Ibid.
and others, many of whom are not only knowledgeable about the Roman Catholic claim of being the one true Church of Christ, but who have made conscious and explicit decisions not to become part of the mother Church (although this could be considered to be a decision derived from "invincible ignorance"). This new, open attitude has been reinforced repeatedly in the years since the Council by the Popes and the writings of the Sacred Congregations. It seems that only those are explicitly excluded from the possibility of salvation who have, at one time, been fully incorporated members of the Roman Catholic Church but who consciously and stubbornly excluded themselves from her authority.

What is evident from this survey of the Second Vatican Council's approach to the religions is that it is permeated with a new and optimistic spirit. The Church looks at the religions and no longer sees only their errors but rather seeks to uncover the truth found in all of them. It does this based upon man's common source and destiny as well as upon the "seeds of the Word" found within the other religions. The Church has left the exclusive ecclesiocentrism of

35 For example, Paul VI, in "Solemni hac liturgia," 30 June 1968, says that those who search for God, act according to the conscience and strive to do God's will, "can obtain eternal salvation," outside of the Church. John Paul II, in "Redemptor Hominis," 28 October 1979, no. 16, commenting about the piety of those of other religions, which often makes Christians ashamed, attributes it to "the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body . . . ."
the Middle Ages behind and has adopted a more inclusive approach in which explicit membership in the visible structure of the Roman Church is no longer the sole criterion for salvation. Although membership or relatedness in some way to the Church is still necessary, the Council has gone a long way towards leaving its ecclesiocentrism behind and replacing it with a new basis for salvation: Christ the "Logos," who, while he is to be found most completely in the Church of Rome, is nevertheless not confined to one Church or one religion, but is encountered in varying degrees in all the religions. This Christocentrism of Vatican II, however, was incomplete. It awaited further development at the hands of theologians like Karl Rahner and Hans Kung. It also encountered serious challenges by theologians like Aloysius Pieris.
CHAPTER III

CONSTITUTIVE CHRISTOCENTRISM: CHRIST IN THE RELIGIONS

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council continued the inclusive ecclesiocentrism of the previous period. While the Council fathers reaffirmed that the Church is necessary for salvation, they also extended the universal possibility of salvation. Even atheists could be saved. Yet the Council took a definitely new turn when, for the first time in the history of official Church statements, it praised individual world religions for the way they reflect the truth. Many Catholic thinkers interpret the conciliar statements to be an affirmation, implicit but clear, that the religions are ways of salvation. Prominent among these are the theologians who endorse the theology of religions elaborated by Karl Rahner, whose thought so strongly influenced the Council's deliberations. In Rahner, and in his followers, we see another "radical change" in Catholic attitudes toward non-Christian religions.

Born on March 5, 1904, in Freiburg in what is now West Germany, Karl Rahner joined his older brother, Hugo, in

1"Nostra Aetate," no. 2.
entering the Society of Jesus in 1922. After studying in
the Netherlands, Germany and Austria, he was ordained in
1932 and was assigned to the Jesuit theological faculty of
the University of Innsbruck. Very little is known of his
personal life, indeed, there seems to be very little to
know. As Herbert Vorgrimler, a personal associate of
Rahner, relates, Rahner was totally devoted to his work as
a theologian and churchman:

The reader must not expect to find here details of Karl
Rahner’s private life. In fact, there would be little
enough to relate. He is a theologian, at the service of
his order; he has no private property and cannot dispose
of his income; he lives in a Jesuit house, in a room fur-
nished with the utmost simplicity and which - like other
members of his order - he himself keeps clean and tidy.
We can say that he works unceasingly at theology . . .
that he has chosen to interest the public in these
things and has travelled all over Europe, speaking in
halls filled to overflowing; that he has addressed car-
dinals and bishops at the Council; or that his writings
have been translated into more than ten languages. What
more can be said of his "private life?" He rises after
a few hours’ sleep, says Mass, makes his prescribed med-
itation, reads his office, answers letters or applies
himself to study, so that he already has a whole day’s
work behind him when others are just beginning. Only
after this come the lectures, visits, and finally
writing articles and books until late into the night.²

²Herbert Vorgrimler, Karl Rahner: His Life,
Thought and Works, trans. Edward Quinn (Glen Rock, NJ:
Deus Books, 1966) p. 9. This little book is among the
best sources of biographical information about Rahner’s
life. For more information, see America 123 (Oct. 31,
1970) which is entirely dedicated to a presentation of
Rahner’s life and thought. These works, however, are
quite early. Although the definitive work on Rahner’s
life is yet to appear, the single best source, to my
knowledge, is Robert Kress, A Rahner Handbook (Atlanta:
John Knox Press, 1982). In view of Rahner’s recent
death (March 31, 1984), more information will doubt-
lessly be forthcoming.
Rahner was certainly one of the century's most prominent Roman Catholic theologians. As author of more than four thousand published works, including thirty books, and through thirty-four years of teaching at Austrian and German universities, he influenced several generations of Catholic theologians. At the time of the Second Vatican Council, however, Rahner exerted a leading influence, as personal theologian to both Cardinal Franz Koenig of Vienna and Cardinal Julius Doepfner of Munich, and, thus, extended his influence well beyond his time.

Rahner was, above all, an apologist, attempting to redefine and defend the Catholic Church's faith in the face of modern challenges and increasing religious pluralism. It is as an apologist that Rahner emerges as one of the "most significant theologians of the twentieth century." Partly because of his pastoral experience during World War II, Rahner took the view that human experience rather than Church doctrine should be the starting point for reflections on God, whom Rahner described as the "Mystery of human existence." He was, as Vorgrimler describes him, "wholly and unstintingly the Church's man," who saw his only task as service to the Church. He made her affairs, concerns and

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4Vorgrimler, p. 9
problems his own most intimate affairs, concerns and problems. He refused, on the one hand, to release his hold on the traditions which had been received from the past and, on the other hand, claimed an essential modernity of attitude and interpretation. As a result, he was accused by some of being constricted by the past and too narrowly ecclesiastical (for example, in his defence of the Marian dogmas or the authority of the Church), and by others as being too radical (in his reinterpretation of these same dogmas). He ruled out, as a new kind of bondage, the abandonment of the past in favor of a debased form of existentialism and argued for the possibility of "so transforming the past that, far from being dead weight, it is experienced both as enrichment and explanation of the present."5 His aim was to liberate theological formulas and concepts from the rigidity they had acquired as mere tools, without "throwing them aside and without questioning their value and importance in the Church's theological tradition."6 His approach to theology has been very aptly called the "creative affirmation of tradition."7

The death of Karl Rahner on March 31, 1984, at the age of eighty years, will no doubt increase interest in his

5Horne, p. 326.
6Vorgrimler, p. 11.
innovative approach to the study of theology. The articles and reviews have already begun to appear, adding to the already voluminous body of literature on his work. The impact of Rahner's theology, especially in the area of the Church's relationship to non-Christians and non-Christian religions, is only now beginning to be felt. Without a doubt, Vorgrimler's assessment is correct: "The work of Karl Rahner will have a determining influence on Catholic theology even in the twenty-first century."8

The main ingredients in Rahner's assessment of other religions are two: God's universal salvific will and man's essentially social nature. Combining the two ingredients, Paul F. Knitter summarizes Rahner's approach in the following way: "If God wills to grant grace to every person, this grace must take on a socio-historical 'body' in order to be really available; and among the most likely mediating bodies for grace are the religions."9 In this way, then, non-Christian religions are or can be instruments of grace which bestow salvation. What enables Rahner to draw this conclusion is his subtle but significant shift from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism.

This shift is embodied in Rahner's much discussed

8Vorgrimler, p. 88.

model of anonymous Christianity. The model’s first intent is to remind Christians that God’s saving presence is greater than man and the Church; grace can be found outside the visible Church and can be encountered in concrete forms through other religions. For Rahner, however, if grace is not bound to the Church, it is bound to Christ. Jesus is the constitutive cause of all salvation. As the full and final manifestation of God’s saving presence in history, Christ is both the final cause and the goal of every experience of God. Grace, therefore, is always Christ’s, always oriented toward Christ and toward Christ’s continued presence in the Church. In this sense, Rahner continues to claim the “necessity” of the Church because, as will be seen, the religions are incomplete without explicit knowledge of Christ as He is known in the Church. Thus, the extra-Christian religions are a preparation for the Gospel, which leaves untouched the Church’s missionary mandate.10

It should be stated at the outset that Rahner’s model of anonymous Christianity was not designed by him to be directed to those outside of Christianity, as some have suggested.11 Rather, it is directed to Christians, who feel the tension between the universal and particular claims of

10Ibid., p. 51.

their faith. His model stems from both a sense of practicality and a genuine, heartfelt concern for the modern Christian. This is perhaps nowhere better seen than in his article entitled, "The Christian among Unbelieving Relations." He says in this article, "One might gain the impression that we treat in the Catechism the subject of the Church as the exclusive channel of salvation and then silently pass these questions by in daily life, precisely where they become alive in concrete." In other words, Rahner's solution is drawn upon the lines of what is already practiced because the tension is so great. Rahner's is a practical solution because it encompasses a legitimization of common, though not legitimate, practice. It is motivated by true concern in that it attempts to solve the tension at the very point at which it is most troublesome: Where it affects those whom we love very much yet are not Christians. He says that part of the solution to the tension which Christians feel today is the realization that, "Salvation flowed out from a pierced Heart. And it was pierced by those whom it loved." God's love, then, is the primary theological presupposition undergirding Rahner's entire model. It rests upon the thesis of "God's will for the


salvation of all men in Christ . . ."15 Rahner calls this "God's universal salvific will." It is so important in his model that it will be necessary to refer to it repeatedly in the following presentation.

**Karl Rahner's Approach to Non-Christian Religions**

Rahner himself has outlined his approach to the non-Christian religions along the lines of four basic theses.16 These theses are: 1) Christianity is the absolute religion which recognizes no equal beside itself; 2) All religions, in as much as they contain divine truth and grace, are lawful religions; 3) Christianity, then, confronts non-Christian religions as anonymous Christians; 4) Christian mission work is to being anonymous Christians to explicit faith and unity with the Church. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with Rahner's theology of religions, using these four theses as the general outline. This will enable a rather detailed analysis of Rahner's theology as a whole, as well as his particular views on non-Christian religions.


Thesis I: Christianity proclaims itself as the religion determined absolutely for all men and recognizes no equal beside itself.

The first thesis upon which Rahner builds his attitude toward non-Christian religions is one which is often forgotten. Rahner maintains, in very clear terms, that Christianity is the absolute, the ultimate religion among all the others: "... Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right." Implicit in this thesis are two fundamental themes found throughout his work. First of all, Rahner affirms that the Church is essential to Christianity and therefore is "necessary." Secondly, and this is what above all else characterizes Rahner's approach, Christ is the ultimate ground, the cause and goal, of salvation.

In his discussion of the Church, the basic question that Rahner is attempting to answer is this: "Is relationship to Church an indispensable quality of Christianity?" Rahner's answer is a resounding "yes." He argues against those (such as Hans Kung) who suggested that one can have Jesus without the Church. Church-relatedness is essential to a Christianity which, as Rahner says, is not one's own


invention or the projections of one's own desires but a community which has pre-existed prior to one's entrance into it. The Church is more than a useful religious organization; it is a spiritual reality that offers institutional mediation of salvation and grace. It is from this perspective that Rahner reinterprets Cyprian's dictum, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. In other words, the Church is something that is of the essence of Christianity as God's self-communication to mankind made manifest and effectively expressed in Jesus. Rahner aims to show that the Church is necessary because human beings are persons whose "interior, social, historical experiences require shared interpretation." Furthermore, given the distinct possibility of distorting the message, or of being caught up in our own subjectivity to discern the true from the sham, Christianity would be a fragile and dangerously threatened

19 Michael A. Fahey, "On Being Christian - Together," in *A World of Grace*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) p. 128. Anita Roper, in *The Anonymous Christian*, trans. Joseph Doneceel (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) p. 141, expands on this concept: "Like all other aspects of life [the religious experience] needs to be expressed. It searches for self-interpretation and interpretation by others, since the intercommunication of men belongs to the essentials of existence. That is why the collective, social interpretation of what the individual experiences anonymously, unreflexively, is of paramount importance. That which is experienced only anonymously would not remain alive if it did not meet in the other person the experience which he too has had. Only in the personal exchange, in the I-Thou relationship, does it stay alive and avoid the danger of choking on itself . . . ."
organization if all depended only one's "subjective interiority." 20

Thus, the Church is necessary. Church-relatedness is not optional but it is an essential part of Christianity. At once, of course, the question arises, in what sense is it necessary to be related to the Church? In answering this question, Rahner examines Cyprian's dictum, extra Ecclesiam. Particularly he is interested in what it means to be "outside" the Church. Without throwing out this ancient dogma, he reinterprets its meaning. He postulates a system of degrees of membership21 in the Church by which all people, whether they know it or not, can be included in the Church:

... there must be degrees of Church membership. There must be ascending stages, rising from baptism to confession to the full Christian faith, to recognition of the visible government of the Church, full fellowship of eucharistic life, and finally to the attainment of blessedness. And there must also be descending stages, going from the explicitness of baptism down to a non-official and implicit Christianity, which nonetheless can and should be called Christianity in a valid sense, even though it cannot call itself such or refuses to do so. 22

In addition, he makes use of the concept of the votum sacramenti, which was discussed in Chapter I. Rahner's

20 Fahey, p.128.


peculiar contribution to this concept, however, is that, instead of applying it in the unusual or emergency situation for which it was originally intended, he makes it the general rule. "Baptism of desire," Rahner concludes, "may be said to exist in any one who lives according to his conscience, since such a person is accomplishing the will of God."\(^{23}\)

While a certain Church-relatedness, albeit implicit, is necessary for salvation, Rahner maintains that it is Christ, not the Church, which is the constitutive cause of salvation. If a non-Christian is saved, it is only through Jesus Christ. Although they may be unaware of it, all people stand in a relationship with Christ, since he is the fulfillment of all things. Rahner sees the "presence" of Jesus Christ throughout the whole history of the world and in relation to all people. This "presence," says Rahner, "cannot be denied or overlooked by Christians if they believe in Jesus Christ as the salvation of all people, and do not think that the salvation of non-Christians is brought about by God and his mercy independently of Jesus Christ."\(^{24}\)

According to Rahner, then, there is no such thing as \textit{sine Christo}, except where the human heart closes itself to


\(^{24}\)Rahner, \textit{Foundations}, p. 312.
the Lord, and even this "closure, this condition of sine Christo is never total this side of death."25 All of history, both salvation history and world history, is in Christo. Rahner says that the distinction between salvation history and profane history has sometimes been too sharply maintained. While they are distinct, they are nevertheless, "materially co-extensive,"26 that is, salvation history explains profane history, which allows the Christian to interpret all of history in a "Christo-centric sense."27

Since all of history, and every individual, stands in a Christ-determined situation, every example of knowledge and freedom, according to Rahner, on the part of man is an example of an experience of God:

Now in so far as every instance of intellectual knowledge and freedom on the part of the subject and his act is a "transcendental experience", i.e. an experience of the intellect's unlimited rootedness in absolute Being, on the subjective side every instance of knowledge is a real, even if implicit (i.e. not necessarily objectified) knowledge of God. . . . What we commonly call "knowledge of God" is therefore not simply the knowledge of God, but already the objectified conceptual and propositional interpretation of what we constantly know of God subjectively and apart from reflection.28

Thus, in spite of all the sinful and unbelieving distortions


27 Ibid., p. 114.

so noticeable in our world and in our age, "... the structure of our age is in its basic traits not only not un-
Christian but has ultimately been created by Christianity itself." 29 In view of this, while the world remains in
"undiminished profaneness," and cannot be spoken of as
"sacralized," it is, nevertheless, through Christ, a "sanc-
tified one." 30

But, where is Christ to be encountered by the person
who has not yet been explicitly encountered by Christ as he
is presented in the Christian Church? Rahner says that
Christ is found anonymously in a person’s brothers and sis-
ters and in his love for them:

This does not deny, of course, but rather implies posi-
tively that a person whom Christ has not yet encountered
in an explicit, historical witness which comes to him
from history can find him nevertheless in his brothers
and sisters and in his love for them. Jesus Christ
allows himself to be found in them anonymously as it
were, for he himself said, "What you did for the least
of my brothers, you have done it for me" (Matt. 25:40),
for him who lives his life in the poor, in the hungry,
in those in prison and in those who are dying. 31

In summary, Rahner’s first thesis maintains that
Christianity is the absolute religion and that there is no
equal to it among all the other religions. A certain
Church-relatedness is "necessary" and all people belong, in

29Rahner, "A Small Question Regarding the Contemporary
Pluralism in the Intellectual Situation of Catholics and the
Church," TI, 6:17.

30Ibid., p. 18.

31Rahner, Foundations, p. 311.
one way or another, to the Church. It is Christ, however, who is the constitutive factor in the salvation of all men. All of history and all people stand in a Christ-determined situation and all knowledge of God is nothing more than the objectified conceptual and propositional interpretation of what we constantly know of God subjectively. The world is a sanctified one and Christ is to be found in one's brothers and sisters and in one's love for them.

Thesis II: All religions, in as much as they contain divine truth and grace, are lawful religions.

Rahner's second thesis states that up to the precise moment in which the Gospel really enters the individual, historical situation, a non-Christian religion contains not only real elements of natural knowledge of God mixed with false elements, but also wholly supernatural moments of grace. Hence, a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a legitimate religion without at the same denying its errors and deviations from the truth:

It [the non-Christian religion] contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ. For this reason a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a lawful religion . . . without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it.32

In making this assessment, Rahner is constantly aware of the way the Church has addressed the role of the

32Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," p. 121.
non-Christian religions in the past. It is characteristic of Rahner's approach to theology that he seeks not to overturn the past or, in a subjectivistic way, ignore it. He seeks rather to effect a "creative transformation" of the traditional doctrines of the Church in order to address more effectively the challenges of the present and the future. Thus, as he asks the question of the salvific role of the religions, he does so with an eye toward the past:

In more than a millennium of struggle theology has overcome Augustinian pessimism in regard to the salvation of the individual and reached the optimism of the Second Vatican Council, assuring supernatural salvation in the immediate possession of God to all those who do not freely reject it through their own personal fault; our question must now be whether theology can regard the non-Christian religions with the same optimism.  

As Rahner addresses this question, he finds no reason why the Church would have to or even could deny a priori and in principle "at least a partial positive function to non-Christian religions" for people who have not yet been reached by the Christian message in a "way which would constitute an immediate obligation for them." This is because, according to Rahner, God's grace is always and every where active for man's salvation and its "salvific power, although obscurely and imperfectly, is also manifested in

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34Rahner, Foundations, p. 315.
the non-Christian religions, making them ways of salvation by which human beings approach God and his Christ.\textsuperscript{35}

Rahner sees evidence of God's grace in the religions in that they all have "savior figures" of some sort or another. The fact that people of all religions look toward a "savior" is an indication that God's grace is always and everywhere active:

Saviour figures in the history of religion can readily be regarded as an indication of the fact that mankind, moved always and everywhere by grace, anticipates and looks for that event in which its absolute hope becomes irreversible in history, and becomes manifest in its irreversibility.\textsuperscript{36}

In their anticipation of a savior, men are demonstrating the fact that God has given them grace, supernaturally, which gives all men a transcendental quality. Rahner refers to this as "openness to the immediacy of God himself," and he makes it clear that this is itself grace, "the innermost divinisation of the creature from its very roots" which does not merely begin at the "same point as does the explicit message of faith, Church sacrament, worship or written Word of God."\textsuperscript{37} In other words, grace is not limited to the Church and to the explicit message of the Gospel. Grace is also found outside the Church in all people, in the roots of

\textsuperscript{35}Rahner, "On the Importance of Non-Christian Religions," p. 295.

\textsuperscript{36}Rahner, Foundations, p. 321.

\textsuperscript{37}Rahner, "A Small Question," p. 18.
their being.

Grace comes to man in the "experience of his transcendence, his limitless openness, even without the explicit consciousness of it." And this is significant because it means that the explicit word of revelation does not come to man as an utterly foreign body from the outside, but it is nothing more than the articulate expression of "what we already are by grace and of what we experience at least obscurely in the limitlessness of our transcendence." In other words, grace is not something that comes from the outside, through the Church or through the sacraments or through the Word. Grace, for Rahner, is a quality which inherrs in man, all men, in the roots of their being, which determines man as a transcendental being, open to the God whom he seeks, yet whom he knows only imperfectly and incompletely without the explicitness of the Gospel. The expressly Christian


39 Ibid. See also Anita Roper, p. 90: "So when we speak this unobjectivated, anonymous, silently presupposed 'horizon consciousness,' we mean that divine grace, which permeates man's spiritual life, supplies for him not necessarily an object hitherto unknown, but an unthematic 'horizon consciousness' under which he knows everything else. He may be unable to make this horizon consciousness thematic, to reflect upon it. But it is there."

40 See Karl-Heinz Weger, Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology, trans. David Smith (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) p. 88: "This state of being called by God - by grace, which is God himself - forms a permanent and ontological factor which determines man's being, with the result that man's experience of himself is also an experience of God and at the same time an experience in the transcendental quality that is
revelation, then, is merely the explicit statement of the
"revelation of grace which man always experiences implicitly
in the depths of his being." 41

Since grace is available to all, is in all, Rahner says
that it is wrong for us to assume that all the wisdom and
truth found in the non-Christian religions is purely natural
and not evidence of God's grace. There can be no such thing
as "pure nature" since all people stand in a Christ-
determined relationship and all people, by their transcen-
dence and limitless openness, are already permeated by grace:

Who can say that the utterances of earthly philosophy,
even of a completely non-Christian or pre-Christian type,
are merely the voice of pure nature . . . ? May they not
be the sighing of the creature, secretly moved by the Holy
Spirit of grace, which longs for the glory of the children
of God and already unwittingly feels itself to be such a
child of God?42

Grace is none other than the acknowledgement that God has
drawn close to man so that the yearnings of the pagans can-
not be purely profane. God is not the One whom all seek but
cannot hope to find. He is the One whom they find, because
he has drawn "utterly close" to them through grace.43 Hence,

distinctive to man's experience of God."


43See Roper, p. 118: "... so that God is not only
the distant, asymptotic goal of all his strivings but the one
he really reaches, not through his own powers but because God
has drawn utterly close to him in a spontaneous movement.
But this is precisely what Christianity teaches about
man works out his salvation or damnation in everything he does and in everything which impels him, because "everything in the history of the world is pregnant with eternity and eternal life or with eternal ruin." God’s grace and his Holy Spirit are to be found in all of man’s searching for something outside of and beyond himself; whenever he accepts his radical transcendentality:

- where the one and entire hope is given beyond all individual hopes, which comprehends all impulses in silent promise,
- where a responsibility in freedom is still accepted and borne where it has no apparent offer of success and advantage,
- where a man experiences and accepts his ultimate freedom which no earthly compulsions can take away from him,
- where the leap into the darkness of death is accepted as the beginning of everlasting promise,
- where the fragmentary experience of love, beauty, and joy is experienced and accepted purely and simply as the promise of love, beauty and joy, without their being understood in ultimate cynical scepticism as a cheap form of consolation for some final deception,
- where the bitter, deceptive and vanishing everyday world is withstood until the accepted end, and accepted out of a force whose ultimate source is still unknown to us but can be tapped by us,
- where one dares to pray into a silent darkness and knows that one is heard, although no answer seems to come back about which one might argue and rationalize,
- where one lets oneself go unconditionally and experiences this capitulation as true victory,
- where falling becomes true uprightness,

supernatural grace. It presents "grace" - sanctifying, justifying grace - as the divine nature itself, the beatifying content of man's future life, already here on earth offered to the believer."

- where desperation is accepted and is still secretly accepted as trustworthy without cheap trust,
- where a man entrusts all his knowledge and all his questions to the silent and all-inclusive mystery which makes us such small people,
- where we rehearse our own deaths in everyday life, and try to live in such a way as we would like to die, peaceful and composed,
- where . . . (as I have said, we could go on and on):
- there is God and liberating grace. There we find what we Christians call the Holy Spirit of God.45

Because God's supernatural grace is given to all people, Rahner cannot attribute either no role or only a negative role to the religions which these people practice. "When a non-Christian attains salvation," he says, the religions "cannot be understood in such a way that they do not play a role, or only a negative role in the attainment of justification and salvation."46 In other words, the non-Christian is saved, not despite the religion he practices, but, in some way, because of and through the religions, although it is because of the faith of the individuals in them: "... Christ is present and operative in the non-Christian believers and hence in non-Christian religions in and through his Spirit."47 These religions are rightly regarded, not exclusively perhaps, but quite certainly as God's revelation, because as Rahner has


46Rahner, Foundations, p. 314. See also Weger, p. 113, who quotes Rahner: "I know of no religion of any kind in which the grace of God is not present, however suppressed or depraved it may be in its expression."

47Rahner, Foundations, p. 316.
claimed, man experiences in them the fact that he has been
"supernaturally raised up and finalized and he attempts to
express this experience in words." Rahner has the deep
conviction that man must experience God's grace and salva-
tion within the religion that is in fact available to him
as an aspect of his environment. He regards it as a dan-
gerous misconception from which we ought to free ourselves,
if we confront a religion outside Christianity with the
dilemma either of tracing all its positive teachings back
to God or of being no more than a human invention. A relig-
ion is not true or lawful only insofar as its teachings can
be compared favorably with Christianity's. Nor is it valid
to assume that the religions are nothing but inventions of
the human imagination.

In summary, Rahner believes that religions and philoso-
phies or world-views arise in the first place from the inner
dynamism of man's spirituality as this is manifested in his
transcendental experiences, which are the result of God's
grace by the Holy Spirit. He asks the question: What really
takes place when a person achieves his Christian salvation
outside the Church? That person believes, hopes, and loves,
but it is obvious that faith, hope, and love cannot simply
remain enclosed within man's transcendental subjectivity. It
must be shared with others. It must be reflected explicitly.

48 Weger, p. 136.
This, says Rahner, is the salvific role of the religions which are, despite the fact that Christianity holds exclusive claim to absoluteness and finality, ways of grace and salvation for those who practice them.


Rahner's third thesis is that Christianity encounters the pagan not as a non-Christian but as a man who must be considered an anonymous Christian. If a man has experienced grace, has accepted the limitless transcendentality of his being, then God’s revelation in the true sense has already taken place within him even before he hears its formal expression from the mouth of a missionary. Rahner says, "... Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian."⁴⁹ Rahner's theory of anonymous Christianity is the thing for which, perhaps, he is best known. It is a concept which Rahner has applied to those people who have achieved salvation but as of yet do not know it. He also refers to this as "implicit Christianity," a term which he prefers:

Implicit Christianity - it could also be termed "anonymous Christianity" - is what we call the condition of a

man who lives on the one hand in a state of grace and justification, and yet on the other hand has not come into contact with the explicit preaching of the Gospel and is consequently not in a position to call himself a "Christian." 50

In putting forth this theory, Rahner draws upon certain fundamental epistemological presuppositions. It is possible here to treat this only in the briefest way but it is essential to an understanding of this theory. 51 Without going into the philosophico-historical background of Rahner's epistemology, it is possible to say that Rahner distinguishes two kinds of knowledge. There is, first of all, a knowledge which man has of things that come from without, whether they show themselves directly to him or somebody tells him about them, of objects given in a completely a posteriori experience coming from the outside. This is known as "explicit cognition." On the other hand, there is a knowledge which man experiences from within, without any need of an express experience of the kind just mentioned. He simply has such knowledge. This is called "implicit cognition." It is not necessary, however, that the explicit and implicit cognition agree. Rahner contends that a person is perfectly capable giving quite false

50Rahner, "Atheism and Implicit Christianity, p. 145.

51For a more detailed discussion of Rahner's epistemology and its historical antecedents, see, Manteufel, chapter I. For an excellent summary and discussion of the practical applications of Rahner's epistemology, see, Roper, pp. 24-41.
theoretical explanations of his own intellectual act; that is, "what he experiences subjectively he may translate objectively falsely into objective concepts and statements."\(^52\) It is the implicit cognition, moreover, which is the foundation upon which the explicit cognition builds, if it is to be considered true knowledge. For example, our knowledge of God becomes real, solid knowledge about God only when "explicit theism - that system of statements we construct about God, the traditional and important 'proofs of God's existence' - when this thematic, logically deduced, reflexive knowledge" is backed up by that "mysterious subjectively implicit knowledge."\(^53\) Therefore, implicit cognition is the very condition of the possibility of such express knowledge. It is the "presupposition and background"\(^54\) of all explicit knowledge. It is for this reason that Rahner, when he addresses the question of the correct posture for true dialogue, maintains that even the truest objective statements are not a guarantee of one's being in the truth implicitly and that even behind a statement that is patently untrue may be hidden some genuine implicit truth:

Dialogue can and must be based on the knowledge that even the truest conviction objectified in propositions and doctrines is not yet a guarantee of one's 'being-in-the-truth' of existence, and that behind what one

\(^{52}\)Rahner, "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," p. 154.

\(^{53}\)Roper, p. 33.

\(^{54}\)Ibid.
judges to be the falsest theory can be hidden the 'being-in-the-truth' of the man who accepts his existence silently but nevertheless genuinely.55

God has revealed himself, if only implicitly, to all men. This, Rahner says, is presupposed by a universal supernatural salvific will of God, alluded to before, which is really operative in the world. "This implies," Rahner continues, "the possibility of supernatural revelation and faith everywhere and hence throughout the whole length and breadth of the history of the human will."56 In other words, since God has always wanted man to be saved, despite his sin, there must be a supernatural or "transcendental" revelation of God and this revelation is to all men.57 This supernatural revelation consists in man's freely accepted transcendentality because it involves a formal object, God, which arises not from man's intellectual abilities but from God's self-communication in grace:

The elevation through grace of man's freely accepted transcendentality is in itself revelation, because it involves an a priori formal object of man's mind, not necessarily reflected in consciousness, which qua formal object, cannot be reached by any natural intellectual ability but arises from God's self-communication in grace.58

It must be remembered, however, that this transcendental

56Rahner, Foundations, p. 313.
57Weger, p. 128.
58Rahner, "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," p. 163.
revelation is always an aspect of the categorical revelation. That is, it is part of the revelation that is made visible, perceptible and objective and is articulated in history. This transcendental revelation is, moreover, the necessary background to the categorical revelation and is expressed in the categorical revelation. Thus, whenever Rahner speaks of revelation of God, both these aspects should be seen forming "constitutive elements of the one revelation."59

That God has revealed himself supernaturally to man is predicated, according to Rahner, on the transcendental nature of man himself. Man can never be simply a "natural" man and a sinner. By virtue of the grace of Christ, which is at least a constant offer, he is "always in a Christ-determined situation, whether he has accepted this grace or not."60 Man, apart from actual guilt cannot be considered guilty of sin. Rahner defines original sin by saying, "... the essence of original sin will have to be understood now and in the future as the initially culpably caused absence of God's grace..."61 In other words, man is not guilty, unless he commits actual sins which he knows to be

59Weger, p. 128.
60Rahner, "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," p. 146.
contrary to God's will. Rather, according to Rahner, there exists in man prior to his decision for or against God a dialectic of original sin and grace (which exists always and everywhere as God's universal salvific will) which makes man, prior to explicit faith, both saint and sinner:

... there exists in man prior to his free decision for or against God a dialectical simultaneity of "original sin" (as lack of a claim to sanctifying grace from the very origin of mankind) and the grace existing always and everywhere as an offer because of God's infraal- sarian salvific will. Prior to his personal decision in freedom man is simul justus et peccator.

God's self-communication offered to all and fulfilled in the highest way in Christ constitutes the goal of all creation and, since God's word and will effect what they say, "even before he freely takes up an attitude to it, it stamps and determines man's nature and lends it a character which we may call a 'supernatural existential.'" By this Rahner means that man is a being of unlimited openness for the 'limitless being of God,' that is, man is a spiritual being. By spiritual Rahner means that immaterial being

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62 See, for example, Roper, p. 88: "But who is going to decide whether this state of mankind involves guilt rather than misfortune, whether this world history with all its depravity is not a record of finiteness and stupidity more than one of guilt? With all its objective culpability it may be interpreted as a history of unavoidable 'crises of development,' of groping and fumbling, rather than as one of a subjective guilt incurring divine condemnation . . . ."


"prior to and going beyond every individual thing that can be known and grasped, that openness which is always already opened by the creative call of infinite mystery which is and must be the ultimate and the first, the all-inclusive and the fathomless ground of all that can be grasped, of all that is real and all that is possible."65 What this means, in simple terms, is that man is naturally "positively expecting" God's revelation, that man has a natural "tendency towards God" so that this attitude "always completely permeates man's being and existence."66 It must be added, however, that, while Rahner considers this to be a "real-ontological determination of the creature's condition" it is not seen as an ontological determination of man's nature.67 And, for the sake of clarity, it should be noted again that this "supernatural existential," this "positive expectation" is, while it affects all men, a gift of God's supernatural grace given through transcendental revelation.

Based upon the universal offer of God's grace and upon man's "supernatural existential," it is possible to speak of three attitudes or actions which can be seen as manifestations of faith of anonymous Christians.68

65Ibid., p. 392. 66Ibid., p. 393.


the everyday call we experience and respond to in loving our neighbor; second, an attitude of bold hope for the future in spite of circumstances that suggest fear or despair; and third, an attitude of readiness for and acceptance of death not as the complete victory of emptiness but as an openness for life. These three basic experiences refer to the central areas of human existence. If a person is actually practicing them, according to Rahner, it is only because that person is acting from and responding to the grace of God that was fully manifest in the life of Christ. Each of the three areas involves an attitude of self-transcendence, which is possible only through the grace of God. As such, then, they witness to the hidden or anonymous, but operative grace of God which Christians name as the grace of Christ, since it is mediated through and perfectly exemplified in him.

Contained within these three areas is a variety of attitudes or actions which Rahner and his followers attribute to grace-inspired faith. For example, faith is described as the acceptance of self without despair over the purposelessness of life, or the experience and acceptance of one’s transcendental quality. At other times faith is spoken of as acting “in line with the demands of his

69Rahner, "Missions," SM, 4:80. See also Roper, p. 72.
70Weger, pp. 88, 134.
conscience,"\(^{71}\) or a "decision of one's conscience."\(^{72}\) Generally, the act of self-acceptance or the acting in accordance with one's conscience is said to be accompanied by "loving, trusting, hoping, working, caring, and persisting in thanksgiving,"\(^{73}\) and so on. At other times, faith is said to be active in "every moral decision,"\(^{74}\) or in "a moral decision in absolute faithfulness to his conscience."\(^{75}\) Finally, and perhaps this is the deciding factor, those are said to have faith and be Christian who "do not freely reject it [salvation] through their own personal fault."\(^{76}\) To sum up, Rahner says, "Therefore no matter what a man states in his conceptual theoretical and religious reflection, anyone who does not say in his heart, 'there is no God' (like the 'fool' in the psalm) but testifies to him by the radical acceptance of his being, is a believer."\(^{77}\)

In summary, Rahner's third thesis maintains that Christianity must confront non-Christians not merely as extra-Christian but as anonymous Christians. This implies

\(^{72}\)Rahner, Foundations, p. 311.
\(^{73}\)Weger, p. 134.
\(^{74}\)Rahner, Foundations, p. 313.
\(^{76}\)Rahner, "On the Importance of Non-Christian Religions," p. 291.
that a person may, indeed, be in a state of grace and salvation apart from the explicit preaching of the Gospel. He may know God through implicit cognition which God himself has revealed transcendentally to him through supernatural grace, given to all men in God’s drawing utterly close. As a result, it is not possible to speak of man as purely natural and in a state of guilt-incursing sin. Man is always in a Christ-determined situation because of God’s supernatural grace which opens man to his supernatural existential. In accepting his transcendentality, man actually lays hold of God’s grace and revelation and exhibits the fundamentals of faith either by loving the neighbor, hoping for a future beyond the present circumstances, or by accepting death as an openness to life.

Thesis IV: Christian mission work is to bring anonymous Christians to explicit faith and to unity with the Church.

Rahner’s fourth thesis argues that if we cannot hope on the one hand that the situation of religious pluralism will vanish in the near future, and if on the other hand we should understand the non-Christian as an anonymous Christian, then the Church of today will not consider herself so smugly as the exclusive community of the guardians of salvation. At the same time, however, the Christian must go out to meet the anonymous Christian in order to bring him or her to the explicit knowledge of what they have already accepted as their own. Rahner says that the explicit Christian "does
always still go out to meet" the anonymous Christian "as a missionary, seeing it as a world which is to be brought to the explicit consciousness of what already belongs to it as a divine offer or already pertains to it also over and above this as a divine gift of grace accepted unreflectedly and implicitly." 78

This implies, first of all, that the Church must not consider herself to be the full realization of the kingdom of God and that outside it there is no truth or grace. The Church, Rahner says, will not regard herself today as the exclusive "community of those who have a claim to salvation but rather as the historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church." 79 Triumphalist notions, which have characterized long periods of the Church's history, cannot be maintained today in view of God's universal salvific will and Christ's self-sacrificing love which embraces all men:

But can the Christian believe even for a moment that the overwhelming mass of his brothers, not only those before the appearance of Christ right back to the most distant

78 Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," p. 133.

79 Ibid. See also Robert J. Schreiter, "The Anonymous Christian and Christology," Missiology, 6 (January 1978): 49: "To only speak and not to listen implies a triumphalist notion of the Christian mission - that we embody the full realization of the kingdom of God."
past (whose horizons are being constantly extended by palaeontology) but also those of the present and of the future before us, are unquestionably and in principle excluded from the fulfilment of their lives and condemned to eternal meaninglessness? He must reject any such suggestion, and his faith is itself in agreement with his doing so. For the scriptures tell him expressly that God wants everyone to be saved . . . the covenant of peace which God made with Noah after the flood has never been abrogated: on the contrary, the Son of God himself has sealed it with the incontestable authority of his self-sacrificing love embracing all men.80

Only if we concede that salvation is possible to all, because of God's supernatural grace and man's limitless transcendentality, are we, say proponents of Rahner's theory, able to take seriously the biblical injunction not to judge others.81 We must not put ourselves in the position of judge. It is quite possible that the person we encounter has implicitly bowed in faith before the same God whom he explicitly rejects. It is possible that there have been "insurmountable obstacles" which inhibit the explicit

80Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," p. 391. See also Roper, p. 13: "He who in our planetized world meets the different religions in his own environment, who, as a man of today, has an acute sense of how all knowledge and every religious conviction is marked by relativity, dependent upon factors of perspective and historical circumstance, feels it almost as a scandal that Christianity insists on making absolute claims. And he understands these claims even less easily as it becomes more a matter of his experience that the so-called pagan is by no means less cultivated or less humane than the Christian. And even should he tell himself that absolute claims belong to the essence of religions, that religious relativism would spell the end of all religion, he cannot shake off the impression that these claims are arrogant."

81Weger, p. 114.
manifestation of that faith which he has already accepted in the depths of his being:

It may therefore very well be the case that someone has bowed before God in faith in some remote level of his conscience which is only with difficulty or not at all accessible to us and that the process of the unfolding of this saving event to full ecclesiastical Catholic Christianity has at some point, perhaps very early, come up against some insurmountable obstacle (in forms of thought, reactions of, sensibility, habits, prejudices on both sides, etc.), so that in point of fact the person who in the core of his being is in a state of grace finds it impossible to realize that what he is meeting in such Christianity is only the embodiment of a more articulated and further specified form of what he already is in the depths of his being.82

Fully explicit and objectified knowledge of theology has never been the sole criterion of faith and salvation, Rahner says. It is the object of the faith that matters, which influences the life and salvation of men. It is not necessary that a person should have a detailed and express knowledge of it. Thus, he may live without knowing anything about the chemistry of digestion, although it is an important factor in biological life and underlies the process of metabolism. Likewise, he may believe and live up to his faith in a Christian way without knowing all the data belonging to the content of his faith. Over the years, the Christian dogmatic system has become so complex that it is

82Rahner, "The Christian among Unbelieving Relations," p. 363. Rahner wrote these words specifically to address the problem of the person who explicitly rejects the teachings and structure of the Roman Catholic Church. But it is not improper to apply them to the pagan who either knows the Church's claims and rejects them or who has never known them at all.
impossible to know all the facts anyway. Rahner has suggested that, while Christian dogmatic development has been necessary and good for the Church, there is a need to reduce the essential message of Christianity to a formula that is easily managed by all, from the simple to the great. He has put forth the following, as the summary of the "essence" of Christianity: "God has given himself to man in direct proximity: perhaps the essence of Christianity can be reduced to this formula." Since the "essence" of Christianity can be summed up in such a simple way, it is wrong to make judgments about those, whether in the Church or outside of it, who have not, for one reason or another, arrived at a more complete knowledge of the data of the faith. In fact, Rahner says that conversion is nothing more than the religiously and morally good fundamental decision in regard to God. It is a basic choice intended to commit the whole of life to God which takes place at a more or less definite

83 See, for example, Roper, p. 111: "Almost everybody sooner or later experiences the peculiar difficulty presented by the sheer complexity of Christian dogmatic development - an unexpected complexity of religion which claims to be the religion required for salvation for all men. . . . When what is at stake is the salvation - that is, the bare survival of the individual, average man who must work out his salvation in a struggle with the harsh and insecure conditions of daily life - religion seems to stand in need of a simple system which everybody can manage, of a short, easy-to-learn formula, one that can in fact be known and practiced by everybody, and not only by those who make it their business to dispute about the various ways of explaining their theories."

point in a lifetime. But, he adds, this involves only "a relatively higher" degree of reflection, thus rendering the judgment concerning the explicit knowledge of a person's faith unnecessary.

In view of this, however, the question arises as to just what is the role of mission work in the Church. Why should the Church engage in missionary activity? What is the advantage of having an explicit knowledge of God, since one may have faith and salvation apart from such knowledge? Rahner and his followers have given a number of reasons why the Church, despite the fact that it goes out to meet anonymous Christians, must still go. In the first place, instead of regarding non-Christian religions, and even atheistic humanism, in a totally negative fashion, the Christian can truly learn from them since the grace of God in Christ is or can be operative in these traditions, as it is in the hearts of all men and women. If the Church enters into true dialogue with the religions, it can expect to learn much about God's revelation and grace from them. Note, however, that there is no question of making such religious traditions equal to Christian faith in its salvific significance. The Church knows Jesus Christ to be the definitive or decisive revelation of God. There is ultimately one movement of God to the world of persons, and this plan from its eternal

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origins was "to be realized and actualized in and through the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." At the same time, it is possible to speak of the presence of Christ in the other religions as the presence of Christ in and through his Spirit and, therefore, there is much to learn from them.

The Church, however, goes out not only to dialogue and learn, it goes out to proclaim. The anonymous Christian, on the basis of his supernatural transcendentality, wants to know something about this inexpressible mystery which is the direction and aim of his life. This knowledge cannot simply be known in an obscure and dull way; it does not always want to be simply nameless and uncertain. A non-Christian, however, does not know, with explicit knowledge, the closeness of God, his grace as a communication of himself or his love and redemption. He is therefore always in doubt, because he does not know whether what he hopes and longs for in his innermost being is a reality or will ever be a reality. Thus, the church goes out to evangelize the world in order to enlighten, to remove obscurity, to take away doubt and

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86Schineller, p. 102.

87Weger, p. 122. See also Roper, p. 141: "No need of reading novels to know what love, gratitude, faithfulness, guilt or anxiety are. We know because we are living men, we know out of the subjectivity of our own being. Yet this does not prevent us from looking for the 'poet,' for the interpreter, who expresses, makes explicit, what we ourselves experience vaguely in the obscure depths of our being and all too frequently misunderstand."
misunderstanding of the things that all people experience in their innermost being. It gives a sure and explicit name to the inexpressible mystery which is both the source and goal of man's life.

There is a more urgent reason, however, that the Church goes out in proclamation according to Rahner. This is that the believing Christian has a greater likelihood of salvation than the non-Christian. If a man knows more reflectively who he is and how he can express himself in freedom, there is a greater possibility that he will be more "radically successful in this self-expression and perfection than if he expresses his humanity in a dull and unreflecting way." Furthermore, explicitness in Christian knowledge is not only a "plus in knowledge, but also a plus in being, and results in a commitment of life in the light of faith." In other words, having the explicit faith provides a greater potential salvation and also results in greater commitment to the ground and source of salvation, Jesus Christ.

To summarize, Rahner's fourth thesis states that the purpose of Christian mission work is to bring anonymous Christians to explicit faith and to unity with the Church. Implicit in this thesis is the necessity of the Church to go out in humility. She does not consider herself to be the

88 Weger, p. 121.
89 Ibid.
sole possessor of truth but rather she encounters the religions in a posture of dialogue. She listens and learns. Christians do not make judgments about the faith of others, because they realize that not all can or must know all the facts of Christian dogmatic development. At the same time, however, the Church proclaims the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In doing so she gives an explicit name to that experience which all men, in their limitless transcendentality, experience implicitly. She removes doubt and misunderstanding and provides a greater likelihood of salvation and an increased commitment to the Lord through her missionary activity.

In conclusion, Rahner offers his model of anonymous Christianity to the Christian of today who is continuously faced with non-Christian relations and neighbors. His purpose is pastoral; an attempt to offer comfort and strength and to relieve some of the anxiety which inevitably accompanies this confrontation:

But the Christian who finds himself in a diaspora situation which is becoming increasingly acute, the believer who finds his faith and his hope sorely tried at the sight of his unbelieving brothers, can derive from it [the model of anonymous Christianity] comfort and the strength of objectivity. Knowledge about the anonymous Christian does not in any way dispense him from caring and troubling about those who do not yet know the necessary truth in its explicit affirmation in the gospel message. But this knowledge will keep him from panic and will give him the strength to practice that patience which - according to the Lord's saying - brings salvation to life, his own as much as that of his brother.90

CHAPTER IV:

NORMATIVE CHRISTOCENTRISM: CHRIST ABOVE THE RELIGIONS

Introduction

Although most contemporary Roman Catholic theologians readily accept the basics of the mainline approach to other religions, as outlined in the documents of Vatican II, many are uneasy with the way it seems to judge religions before really listening to them, especially by predefining them as anonymous Christians. This uneasiness has given rise to another realignment in Catholic attitudes toward the religions. There is a shift beyond Vatican II and Karl Rahner, toward a clearer recognition of the independent value and enduring mission of other religions. The underlying, often implicit, theological foundation for this shift is a new understanding of Christ's salvific role. Implied in this new direction is the belief that other religions and Christianity may be parallel paths to salvation. Another aspect of this new shift is seen in their approach to dialogue. They suggest that Christians should speak with other religions not only to reveal points of agreement or conflict, not only to understand more profoundly what they,
as Christians, already have in Christ, but also to discover genuinely new pieces of the mosaic of God's universal revelation. The underlying foundation of this new view, however, is a new understanding of Christ's role in salvation. Just as Rahner no longer tied universal saving grace to the Church, many Roman Catholic theologians no longer tie it to Christ. Yet despite the Christological shift and its intent to let the religions stand on their own, all the theologians exploring this new direction\(^1\) continue to affirm Jesus Christ as God's normative revelation. Jesus and the Gospel remain the "superior ideal type, which can function to measure, correct, and judge others by its own standards."\(^2\)

Foremost among the theologians of this new direction is Hans Kung.

Born March 19, 1928, in Sursee, Lucerne, Kung attended the Gregorian University in Rome and the Institute Catholique and the Sorbonne in Paris. He was ordained in 1954, and served as a priest (1957-59), in the cathedral of Lucerne.


In 1959, he became a professor of theology at the University of Tubingen, where he served until 1980. He founded the University of Tubingen’s Institute for Ecumenical Research, of which he still serves as director.³ Kung’s work is given a distinct cosmopolitan flavor in that, while Swiss-born, he taught for eighteen years at German universities, but before that he studied for seven years in Rome and for two in Paris, as well as spending varying periods in Amsterdam, Berlin, Madrid, London and elsewhere.

It has been said about Kung that he is "probably the most widely read, among Protestants as well as Catholics, of any living theologian."⁴ He is an example of what, in our age may seem a paradoxical phenomenon, "the best selling theologian."⁵ His devotion to the study of theology and his


⁵Nowell, p. 14. See also p. 16 where Nowell refers to Kung as a "paperback theologian."
desire to promote the Christian faith among the common man
is seen in the fact that he is very prolific: The com-
plete bibliography of Kung's published works from 1955 to
1978 is nearly sixty pages long.⁶ He does not, however,
indulge in mere "theologizing," that is, "trotting out old
ideas in new and modish costume."⁷ His goal is, above
all, to communicate. Kung has always been concerned to
express himself in plain language, understandable to the
people, and he is undoubtedly the most readable of all the
theologians writing in German today. This provides a most
refreshing change from the study of Karl Rahner,⁸ whose

⁶Haring/Kuschel, pp. 185-241. It should be noted
that this list was compiled in 1978. Kung has since added
many titles to this list. One also notes, however, with
some disappointment, that Kung has a tendency to repeat
himself. For example, whole sections of some of his works,
sometimes going on for pages, are simply "lifted" from a
previous work. Also, several times he republished articles
under a new title. This will be noted, wherever possible,
in the footnotes of the following presentation. None of
this, however, should diminish the fact that Kung is truly a
prolific writer and the list of his published works remains
impressive.

⁷Reardon, p. 263.

⁸Nowell, pp. 70-1, says: "The temptation for the user
of German when grappling with ideas right at the limits of
human understanding - and that after all is where much of
the raw material of theology is to be found - is to burrow
ever deeper into a thicket of obscurity, perhaps even to
discover distinctions the validity of which is called into
question by the fact that they can virtually only be ex-
pressed in German. The deformation of German as a language
of theological discourse is well exemplified by Karl Rahner,
who can write simply and clearly when he wants to; his
brother Hugo is widely quoted as having expressed the wish
that someone would translate Karl's books into German."
convoluted style, so laden with nuances, has become a by-word. Kung, on the other hand, is never afraid to call a spade a spade.

Kung is, like Rahner, an apologist for the Christian faith. This is especially noticeable in his most popular book, *On Being a Christian*, which Kung himself has called a "small summa of the Christian faith."\(^9\) In this work, but throughout his writings in general, the constant refrain is voiced: Why be a Christian? What difference does it make? What is distinctively Christian? The result of his work is that he has helped to re-establish apologetics as a valid category of Christian writing. In all this there are certain basic assumptions and presuppositions that need to be brought out. Robert Nowell points out that all of Kung’s work is characterized by two basic factors: reasonableness and the search for truth.\(^10\) Kung assumes that the Christian faith is fundamentally reasonable, that what we are called on to believe in as a response to God’s gracious revelation of himself does not contradict our reason however much it may transcend it. In other words, belief for the Christian is not something irrational, even if its complete rational justification may be impossible to attain within the limits of this life and must await the next. A second basic

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assumption concerns the way at which we arrive at and re-
cognize the truth. For Kung, the truth clearly is something
that imposes itself, not something that can be imposed. Nor
is truth something that is simply given, in the way that the
magisterium of the Church supplies the answers. Rather, it
is something that men and women have to struggle to reach
through the normal human process of argument and reflection.

Jose Gomez Caffarena has noted four qualities which
can express Kung's theological personality. Kung is,
first of all, ecumenically minded. This has been the major
focus of his life and led him to found, in 1963, the Insti-
tute for Ecumenical Research, which he still directs. His
thesis on justification according to Karl Barth was, as
Barth himself recognized in the foreward which he wrote for
it, a decisive step towards the breaking down of prejudices
which divide Protestant and Catholic theology. Secondly,
according to Caffarena, Kung is prophetic. He is intimately
familiar with and uses the results of scientific exegesis
and the history of the Church and its dogmas, yet he does
not put science before everything. On the contrary, he

11Jose Gomez Caffarena, "A Summa for People of Today,"
in Haring/Kuschel, pp. 112-13.

12Hans Kung, Rechtfertigung: Die Lehre Karl Barths
und eine katholische Besinnung (Einsiedeln: Johnannes Verlag,
1957). See also the English translation, Justification:
The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection, trans.
Thomas Collins, Edmond E. Tolik and David Granskou (New York:
understands the need to harness science to the service of the spiritual, and "without confusing his own work as a theologian with prophecy he has put it [science] to serve prophecy." Kung is, thirdly, thoroughly modern. Culturally, Kung is a man of our century, with all that that means. If one reads chronologically through his work one finds himself brought face to face with the questions which occupy the technological age imbued with the spirit of history and there is little doubt that this was the source of his most polemical book, *Infallible*. Kung is, finally, radical. By this Caffarena intends the specific, etymological sense of getting to the root, but also in the sense of speaking clearly and without compromise which has made him well known as a polemicist. It is this latter quality that has landed Kung in trouble with the hierarchy of his Church.

In addition to being one of the most widely read theologians of our times, Kung is perhaps the most controversial theologian of the present, as Bernard Reardon says, "not merely by inadvertence, as it were, or even with his reluctant consent, but deliberately, forthrightly and continuously so." His works, particularly those on the

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13 Caffarena, p. 112.
15 Reardon, p. 260.
question of papal infallibility, have so disturbed the Vatican as to bring it to the limits of its patience. The climax of years of conflict was the declaration, on December 15, 1979, by the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, that Kung, in his writings, deviates from the complete truth of the Catholic belief, and, for that reason, could no longer be regarded as a Catholic theologian or allowed to teach as such. The upshot of this withdrawal of his missio canonica has been that, while retaining his directorship of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, he now operates as a free-lance, though he remains in his priesthood and enjoys full spiritual rights as a member of the Church.

Although Kung is undoubtedly a zestful controversialist, it would be a mistake to see him as a man who is simply out to harass indignant curial theologians. Kung has, in fact, compared Infallible? to a parliamentary question from Her Majesty’s loyal opposition. But this is not a role that fits him well. He is not a natural rebel. If he finds himself in opposition, it is because he is

16Leonard Swidler, in his large volume, Kung in Conflict (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981) provides an exhaustive account of Kung’s conflict with the magisterium of the Catholic Church. It is a wealth of information, including a chronological presentation of letters and documents associated with the eventual withdrawal of Kung’s missio canonica.

17Nowell, pp. 17-18.
forced there by inner conviction. His rebellion is the ex-
pression of his loyalty to the Church. That loyalty is so
deep-rooted that, as Nowell says, he cannot conceive of its
coming into conflict with the passionate commitment to the
truth that is the other pole of his nature.18 Where other
Catholics may be tempted to sacrifice truth to loyalty, Kung
sees no essential conflict between his commitment to the
truth and his commitment to the Church. For it is precisely
because it is at the service of the truth, and despite all
its scandalous shortcomings it has indeed been able to pro-
claim the truth that the church can lay claim to his or
anyone else's loyalty.

To the question, natural enough, and no doubt often
asked by both Catholic and Protestant alike, why he remains
within the Roman Catholic Church, he has a prompt and posi-
tive answer: "Not merely because of my Catholic origins but
also because of this life task of mine which is grasped as a
great opportunity and which as a Catholic theologian I can
fulfill appropriately only in the context of the Tubingen
faculty of Catholic theology."19 Besides, he says, no other
Church fares any better on the scale of truth. He cannot
bring himself to describe certain centuries as

18Ibid., p. 17.

19Hans Kung, "Why I Remain a Catholic," in The
Church - Maintained in Truth: A Theological Meditation,
"un-Christian" or "unevangelical," as some Protestants do, "wanting unhistorically to begin at zero and so pass from Jesus to Paul, from Paul to Augustine, and then in a great leap to pass over the Middle Ages to Luther and Calvin."20

The Christian today, says Kung, must learn from the total experience of Christian history, from its awful mistakes as well as from its ever new or renewed spiritual insights.

Hans Kung's Approach to Non-Christian Religions

Introduction

Kung begins his approach to non-Christian religions with an honest appraisal of the situation. The great world religions are to be recognized as "a fact . . . and - at least provisionally - as a permanent fact."21 This, he adds, may not always have been the case, but recent developments have made it clear that we cannot expect much by way of "sensational progress in the immediate future," and in certain parts of the world the Christian mission is still more difficult, if not "altogether impossible."22 The problem of the Christian missions in the world today is becoming more acute. With the development of gigantic new continents, the world religions previously were mainly an external, quantitative challenge to Christendom. But now they

20 Ibid., p. 81.
21 Kung, On Being a Christian, p. 89.
22 Ibid., p. 90.
have become an internal, qualitative challenge. It is no longer merely the fate of the world religions which is in question, Kung explains, as in the colonial epoch, no "the fate of Christianity itself is in question."23 Thus, the future of Christian missions to the religions of the world has taken on a greater sense of urgency and the answer to the problem will have to be drawn upon different lines than traditionally.

Kung is very critical of the mainline answers to the question. This, of course stems from his criticism in general of official ecclesiastical dogmatic definitions. Since they can never have been false, he says, and therefore may not be corrected under any circumstances, only two possibilities remain, both of which he emphatically rejects: either simply repeat them and support them with any quotations from Scripture and Tradition that can be found, which "is how positive neoscholastic theology works;"24 or to interpret them speculatively and try to make it possible for them to be assimilated by the modern mind, which is "how speculative neoscholastic theology works."25 The latter is not the answer because such an interpretation lacks any sort of criterion, and no limits are set in practice to subjective

23 Ibid., p. 99.
25 Ibid., p. 43.
"whim in the 'interpretation' or 're-interpretation' of
dogmas." 26 Thus, for example, the axiom, extra Ecclesiam,
is still used today when it is admitted by Vatican II that
vast numbers of people in no way attached to the visible
Church can be saved, so that it means in effect: "outside
the Church there is certainly salvation. Interpretation is
turned into contradiction." 27 Kung says that the problem
must be faced in a much more honest way. If the Church has
been wrong in its dogmatic assertions, this should be openly
admitted and confessed. The answer is not to cling stub-
bornly to outdated "infallible" statements, nor is it pos-
sible to re-interpret them in order to make them conform
better to our modern way of thinking. "Salvation outside
the Church," he says, "why not honestly admit it, if this is
in fact what we assert? This is the only way to take the
other religions quite seriously, only in the light of this
assumption can we take a realistic view of the problems." 28

In attempting to define his approach to the non-
Christian religions, Kung wishes to achieve a delicate bal-
ance between what he considers to be two extreme positions:
syncretism and particularism. It is wrong, Kung says, to
attempt to solve the problem of the religions by mingling
all the gods together and reducing the differences. Kung

26 Ibid.  
27 Ibid.  
says:

Not the syncretist mingling of all gods, however much they contradict one another, harmonizing them and reducing the differences, and thus evading the question of truth. For a crippling, dissolvent, agnostic-relativistic indifferentism, approving and confirming the other religions and gods indiscriminately, at first perhaps has a liberating and gladdening effect, but in the last resort is too monotonous to satisfy thinking people, because it has abandoned all fixed standards and norms.29

On the other hand, Kung rejects an exclusive particularism which, he says, condemns the other religions and despises freedom:

Not the arrogant domination of a religion claiming an exclusive mission and despising freedom. This danger, although unintended, arises as a result of the dogmatic repression of the problem of religion by Karl Barth and ‘dialectical theology.’ We do not want a narrow-minded, conceited, exclusive particularism which condemns the other religions in toto, a proselytism which carries on unfair competition and takes too restricted a view not only of the religions but also of the Gospel.30

Kung says that the place to begin to address the problem of the non-Christian religions is to come to a better definition of what Christianity itself is. He says that the Christian who has been institutionally sheltered and ideologically immunized in the Church must ask: "... compared with the world religions and modern humanisms, is Christianity something essentially different, really


something special?"\textsuperscript{31} This is a question which he says the Church has not seriously asked, "In the last five hundred years - to go no further back - no solemn doctrinal statement has been issued by Rome on the critical question of what Christianity really means, what the Christian message really implies."\textsuperscript{32} Kung's answer, therefore, to the problem of the religions will have as much to do with a re-assertion of the meaning and message of Christianity as it will with an evaluation of the world religions themselves. Before proceeding to a positive presentation of Kung's approach to the religions, however, it will be helpful, by way of comparison, to ascertain what his approach is emphatically not.

Kung on Anonymous Christianity

Kung has little tolerance for some of the Catholic theologians who attempt to re-interpret infallible doctrinal formulas to conform better to the modern way of thinking and, thus, affirm what they explicitly deny. His witty


\textsuperscript{32}Kung, \textit{On Being Christian}, p. 88. On an ironical note, reflecting on his then current controversy with the Roman curia, he adds, "Evidently they are less concerned in Rome with some things things than with others, as one may observe - perhaps with a rueful smile - after the experience of so much attention roused there from the very beginning by one's books."
Cynicism is directed particularly against Rahner and his model of anonymous Christianity. Kung calls this theory a "theological fabrication" which in no way solves the problem:

If we compare the old and the new teaching [of Vatican II], we cannot fail to notice an epoch-making reversal of attitude to those outside the "holy Roman Church." What has happened here? Not much, some Catholic theologians soothingly claim, only a new "interpretation" of the infallible ancient dogma: "Church" no longer means as at Florence "the holy Roman Church," but "properly speaking," "rightly understood," "fundamentally," all men of good will, who all "somehow" belong to the Church. But is not the whole of good-willed humanity thus swept with an elegant gesture across the paper-thin bridge of a theological fabrication into the back door of the "holy Roman Church," leaving no one of good will "outside"? The formula, "no salvation outside the Church," is then as true as ever, because all in fact are in the Church from the very beginning: not as formal but as "anonymous" Christians or - as we ought logically to say - "anonymous Roman Catholics."33

This "pseudo-orthodox stretching" of the meaning of Christian concepts like "Church" and "salvation" is no answer to the challenge of the world religions, according to Kung. He calls it an evasion of the challenge and alerts us to the danger of diminishing the reality of Christianity "merely to save an infallible formula."34 It makes the Church equal to the world and Christendom equivalent to humanity, which makes Christianity nothing more than a "religious luxury and the Christian ethos superfluous."35

Nor does this theory respect the wishes or freedom of the world religions. The non-Christian, Kung says, who has

33Ibid., pp. 97-8.  34Ibid. p. 98.  35Ibid.
no desire either explicit or implicit, either conscious or unconscious to belong to the Church, who has if anything quite the opposite desire, cannot be silently adopted by Christianity. He says that the sole criterion for entering the community of believers should be a profession of faith. The fact that those "outside the 'Catholic Church', that non-Christians too, are included in Christ's grace and so can be saved, should not lead us to the conclusion that such people can be regarded as members of a specific ecclesial community against their will."36 He sees this theory as an offense to those people of non-Christian religions:

The will of those who are outside is not to be "interpreted" in the light of our own interests, but quite simply respected. And it would be impossible to find anywhere in the world a sincere Jew, Muslim or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an "anonymous Christian" as presumptuous. To bring the partner to the discussion into our own circle in this way closes the dialogue before it has ever begun. This is a pseudo-solution which offers slight consolation. Is it possible to cure a society suffering from a decline in membership by declaring that even non-members are "hidden" members? And what would Christians say if they were graciously recognized by Buddhists as "anonymous Buddhists"?37

This kind of "theological sleight of hand" does not at all solve the problem. Rather, it increases the problem and hampers the Church's attempt at witness to the religions.38

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38Kung, The Church, p. 316. In this work, Kung goes on to say that to extend the concept of the Church in the way
Kung says that the axiom, extra Ecclesiam nulla salus, which Rahner's model is designed to re-interpret, has led to innumerable misunderstandings which continue to recur in spite of all the explanations by those both inside and outside the Catholic Church. He says that even if the extra Ecclesiam were previously of help to the Church (which he doubts) "it is certainly a hindrance to her today." This is because these words are more often than not interpreted as either intolerance or duplicity:

...as intolerance when they are understood literally and exclusively in accordance with the old tradition; as duplicity when it means on the one hand that no one will be saved outside the Catholic Church and on the other hand does not exclude the fact that people outside the Catholic Church are saved, in fact millions and billions of them, the greater part of mankind. Intolerance and duplicity are rightly deeply repulsive to modern man, who has espoused the cause of the freedom of the individual in religious matters and rejects every sort of dishonesty or duplicity.40

Therefore, Kung recommends that, rather than hold stubbornly to this axiom and rather than try to re-interpret it, it should be simply dropped.41 If, however, we insist on using Rahner does is unjustified on the following grounds: 1) Such a concept of the Church contradicts the Biblical understanding of the Church for which an explicit belief in Christ is necessary; 2) Such a concept of the Church is unnecessary in order to show that the salvation of non-Christians is also possible; 3) Such a concept makes it hard for Christian missionaries to preach a membership in the Church to those outside of it; 4) Such a concept is an affrontery to thinking non-Christians (p. 317).

39Ibid., p. 316. 40Ibid. 41In The Church, Kung explains further: "1. In dogmatic theology the phrase should be commemorated as an
this negative axiom, then, Kung says, we must not use it to threaten or damn those outside the Church but "interpret it as a hope and promise for ourselves and our community: it is true for me, we are able to say with joy, there is no salvation outside the Church for me personally."\(^{42}\) As far as others are concerned, we do better to use a positive formulation: "Salvation inside the Church! and so emphasize the positive truth at the heart of the easily misunderstood negative axiom."\(^{43}\)

Six Theses on Non-Christian Religions

Kung himself outlines his positive approach to the world religions in six theses.\(^{44}\) These will provide a

expression of Catholic tradition and attention drawn to the limitations and misconceptions inseparable from it. In doing this it should be emphasized that what is really vital is the fact that salvation is given to us in Christ and in him alone, whether as sincere individuals we are inside or outside the Christian community of believers. 2. In preaching the phrase should be passed over and used as little as possible, since today it is either not understood or misunderstood. . . . For the sake of this very faith the formula ‘no salvation outside the Church’, which is so open to misunderstanding and so damaging to the Church’s mission in the world, should no longer be used in the preaching of the word of faith." See also Kung’s Freedom Today, trans. Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) pp. 122-3.

\(^{42}\)Kung, The Church, p. 318.

\(^{43}\)Ibid. Kung’s discussion of the axiom "no salvation outside the Church" may also be found in substantially the same form in Freedom Today, pp. 117-23.

\(^{44}\)Kung, Freedom Today, pp. 139-51. The third
convenient outline for our study of Kung's approach to the non-Christian religions and also provide a glimpse into the larger context of Kung's theology.

Thesis I: Despite whatever truth they have concerning the true God, the world religions are in error.45

Kung begins on this negative note because he desires to establish the only possible terms on which true dialogue may be achieved, that is, with "plain speaking." The theologian, he says, is doing no service either to Christians or to non-Christians if he "does not call things by their true names and take concepts at their face value."46 The theologian cannot spare himself the sober, modest task of elucidation. Truth, then, is the primary goal, which cannot "be excluded or minimized."47 It does no one any good to idealize, as some have done, the world religions. An analysis of the religions must not be allowed to conceal their negative side, "their quite concrete defects, weaknesses, errors; their actual remoteness from their original


45Kung, Freedom Today, p. 139. See also "The
World Religions," p. 51.


positions; their very mixed and contradictory structure."48 However much truth they exhibit in certain respects, they do not offer the truth.

This, Kung says, is "an expression of estrangement from God and from him whom the gracious God has sent, and who is not only light but the Light, not only truth but the Truth."49 For this reason, the understanding of God on the part of the religions is not coherent. The gods of the religions display many contrasts in names and natures. They contradict and refute one another; it is impossible to believe in all of them at the same time. The biblical faith in God is, on the other hand, coherent and "is also rationally justifiable and has proved itself historically over many thousands of years."50 The God of Israel is for believers the one, sole God who has no other gods beside him. He "bears unmistakably the one name of Yahwah; man is to believe in him alone."51 In this and many other respects the religions differ from Christianity and these differences cannot be smoothed out and reduced to an "utterly ambiguous inward religious experience."51 The differences are

49Kung, Freedom Today, p. 139.
50Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 626.
51Kung, On Being Christian, p. 102. Kung continues on the same page by saying, "... although the truth in other religions can be recognized, it cannot be disputed that there are substantial differences between the
real and the only way to address the problem honestly and realistically is to acknowledge them.

Thus, Kung begins his assessment of the religions with an honest search for the truth. The religions contain many errors. These cannot be overlooked. The approach to non-Christian religions begins with a "critical, self-critical discussion with the world religions the criterion of which cannot be compassion but only truth: a searching diagnosis of the world religions which seeks not to judge but to help."52

Thesis II: The world religions do, though in error, proclaim the truth of the true God.53

Having begun with an honest, critical appraisal of the religions, Kung now turns to the positive side. Despite their many errors, the religions teach the truth and this truth is the truth of the one true God. Kung explains in the following way:

fearsome grimacing gods of Bali - the marvelous island of the gods - and a wall with icons of Orthodox saints in Zagorsk; between sacred temple prostitution and Christian consecration of virgins; between a religion whose symbol is the lingam (stone phallus), reproduced a thousand-fold in the same temple, and another whose symbol is the cross; between a religion proclaiming a holy war against the enemy and a religion which makes love of enemies an essential part of its program; between a religion of human sacrifice (at least twenty thousand human beings sacrificed within four days at the consecration of the main temple in Mexico in 1487) and a religion of everyday self-sacrifice for men."

52Ibid., p. 104.

53Kung, Freedom Today, p. 139. See also "World Religions," p. 51.
Though they are far from God, God is not far from them. Though they flee from the true God, they are yet held by him who is their God too. By him they are made able, in the midst of all their errors, to speak truly of him. The grace of the true God can witness to itself even through false gods, and can trace the image of the true God even through its misplaced and dissociated features.54

Thus, while fully recognizing the errors of the religions, Kung says that the truth of their conceptions about God are to be respected and appreciated. It is in this way that "mutual contempt might give way to mutual appreciation, disregard to understanding, attempts at conversion to study and dialogue."55

First, one can see the truth of the religions in that they all start out from the same unending questions of man: "where does the world and its order come from, why are we born and why must we die, what decides the fate of the individual and of mankind, what is the explanation of moral consciousness and the existence of ethical norms?"56 But all the religions also seek to go beyond the questions, beyond interpretation of the world, in order to make possible a practical way to salvation out of the distress and torment of life. Kung asks: "Do they not all regard lying, theft, adultery and murder as culpable? Do they not uphold

54Ibid. See also "World Religions," p. 51.


56Ibid., p. 626. See also On Being Christian, p. 92.
a universally valid practical criterion something like a 'golden rule' . . .?"57 In this sense, then, every religion in the concrete is a mixture of faith, superstition and unbelief. And the Christian cannot overlook the "devotion and concentration with which people in the world religions have tirelessly sought - and also found - the truth."58

Kung, however, is quick to point out that the religions and the truth which they possess do not emerge from conceptual reflection nor from the purely irrational, unintellectual strata of the human psyche. No, he says, "they are rooted . . . in the experiential unity of knowing, willing, and feeling."59 This, however, is not to be understood as the achievement of the individual, but rather as an answer, "an answer to an encounter with or an experience of God (or the absolute), whatever form it may have taken."60 It is for this reason that most religions appeal, quite rightly, to an illumination or manifestation of God, who, however, remains hidden and ambivalent. The truth in the religions is the result of God's self-revelation.

57Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 626. See also On Being Christian, p. 92: "... were not Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tse, Zarathustra, Muhammad, impelled by the same great final questions to which we have just been alluding? Are not the Hindus perhaps seeking in Brahman (not the personal God, Brahman), the Buddhists in the Absolute, the Chinese in the Tao and the Muslims in Allah one and the same mystery of mysteries, one and the same ultimate reality."


59Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 625. 60Ibid.
To support his contention that the religions' claim to divine illumination is justified, Kung appeals to the concept of the *logos spermatikos*, which was discussed in Chapter II. He says that the "seminal word" was active everywhere from the beginning. But, he adds, "if the pagans Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, or later - for others - even Marx and Freud could be 'pedagogues' leading men to Christ, why not also the philosophers and religious thinkers of other nations?" Kung's exegesis of the Bible's attitude over against the pagan religions reveals that an exclusive intolerance of the religions is biblically unjustifiable because God, through His word, has revealed himself in grace to all men so that, even prior to man's encounter with the Gospel of Christ, there is already a history of God's presence with him. Kung summarizes his exegesis of Scripture in the following way:

1. In the light of the universalist testimonies that pervade the Old and New Testaments it is quite impossible to maintain that the Bible takes a purely negative attitude of exclusive intolerance toward other religions.

2. It is perfectly clear that the God of the Bible is not only the God of Jews and Christians but the God of all men.

3. The negative statements concerning the error, darkness, lies and sin of the pagan world refer to paganism insofar as it sets itself against the saving will of God. These negative statements are to be understood not as a definitive sentence of damnation but as a call to conversion addressed to the pagans of the present day.

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The fate of earlier pagans, or those not confronted with the revelation of Christ, is of only indirect interest to the Bible.

4. The positive statements about the pagan world show that there exists a primitive, original communication of God to the whole of mankind. This is something asserted explicitly by individual witnesses, and assumed throughout the Bible: the Gentiles can know the God of grace. This knowledge of God is not simply a self-sufficient human activity of "natural theology," but a response to the basic revelation of the God of grace in creation, of which man is himself, in the first instance, a part. Thus even before their encounter with the Gospel of Christ, there is already a history of God's presence to the pagan peoples, a history in which decisions are taken. There is no explicit answer in the Bible to the question of who, among those pagans untouched by the Gospel, are saved. But it is certain that even in the darkness of paganism God is near to every human being, is indeed necessary for his very life.62

Thus, according to Kung's second thesis, God, through the logos spermatikos, has revealed Himself in grace to all men with the result that, despite their many errors, the world religions proclaim the truth of the true God.

Thesis III: As against the "extraordinary" way of salvation which is the Church, the world religions can be called the "ordinary" way of salvation for non-Christian humanity.63

By virtue of the fact that God, through his "seminal word" has revealed His grace to all men and all religions, the world religions can be spoken of properly as ways of salvation. Kung says that God is the Lord not only of the special salvation history of the Church but also of that


other salvation history, "the universal salvation history of all mankind." These two, however, are not to be separated because they are bound up with one another in a common origin, a common meaning and a common goal and they are both "subject to the same grace of God." Thus, "every historical situation, outside the Church as well as inside it, is . . . included in advance within his grace." There is, therefore, no essential difference between "nature" and "grace" between special salvation history and universal salvation history. It is true, they are different with regard to the specific content, the clarity of the revelation, but this is only a quantitative, not a qualitative difference. Kung's study of the Bible leads him to conclude that "God operates everywhere, that he has made a covenant with all men (the 'cosmic covenant,' with Noah)." Since God wills all men to be saved, without respect of persons, Kung says that non-Christians too, as observers of the law, can be justified. For this reason, Kung concludes: "In fact, then, there is

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64Ibid.

65Ibid., p. 140. Rudolf J. Siebert, "Toward a Critical Catholicism: Kung and Metz," Anglican Theological Review, 65 (1983):162 says that Kung and others refuse to make a distinction, as was common previously, between nature and grace: "... concern with a united world view, in which the religious and the secular consciousness, faith and science, Christian existence and humanism, the Infinite and the finite, the Absolute and the relative, God and the world, are newly in each other."

salvation outside the Church. In addition to particular, there can be seen a general, universal history.\(^67\)

Thus, whereas the other religions were formerly regarded as lies, works of the devil or, at best, vestigial truth, they are now counted as a kind of "relative" revelation, "through which innumerable individuals of ancient times and of the present have experienced and now experience the mystery of God. Formerly they seemed to be ways of damnation. Now they are recognized as ways of salvation."\(^68\)

\(^67\)Ibid. Kung goes to great lengths to deny the distinction between nature and grace, between the order of creation and the order of salvation. He summarizes his position, in Does God Exist?, p. 522, in the following way:

"a. There is in reality only one single goal of salvation ordained by God for all men (the beatific vision of God) and consequently only one single order of salvation ordained by God's grace.
b. A 'pure nature' not oriented to the vision of God, does not exist. It can at best be abstracted theologically from the existing order of grace (as an unclear and imprecise auxiliary theological construct).
c. There is therefore no two-level reality, consisting of a 'natural' substructure of truths of pure reason and a 'supernatural' superstructure of truths of pure faith; justifiable distinctions between nature and grace, reason and faith, philosophy and theology, must therefore by seen and made within the one undivided reality.
d. The abstract, quasi-Aristotelian, ambiguous, iridescent categories of 'natural' and 'supernatural' have proved inadequate for a discriminating solution of the complex problems presented here.
e. Instead of abstract talk in terms of 'natural' and 'supernatural,' there must be concrete talk of man (not of human 'nature') and of God (not of a 'vision of God'), which for Christians must be oriented to the authentic Christian message and to an understanding of modern man."

\(^68\)Kung, On Being Christian, p. 91.
As such, they are, according to Kung, "legitimate" religions and represent all the religion that is possible in a particular social situation, with forms of belief and worship, concepts and values, symbols and ordinances, religious and ethical experiences, "which have a 'relative validity,' providential right to exist."69 In fact, since God wills all men to be saved, every "man is to be saved within the religion that is made available to him in his historical situation . . . it is his right and his duty to seek God within that religion in which the hidden God has already found him."70 Every man is to find his salvation within in his own historical condition. This means that man is to be saved within his particular individual and social environment, that is, within the religion which is socially imposed on him and from which he cannot escape. Since man is an essentially social being, his religion is never merely an individualist, subjectivist activity in a purely private interior zone, "but always an activity in a particular social embodiment, i.e., in the form of a particular religion, a concrete religious community."71

The significance, then, of Kung's third thesis is that there is to be no longer a sharp distinction between nature

69Ibid.

70Kung, Freedom Today, p. 140. See also "World Religions," p. 52.

71Ibid.
and grace, between the order of salvation and the order of creation. God is the God of both and both, whether inside the Church or outside it, provide ways of salvation. Thus, Kung concludes, "In Christ the whole world receives God's grace. If we could see God's plan of salvation there would be no outside, only an inside."\(^{72}\)

**Thesis IV: The world religions teach truth about the Gospel of Christ, which, in their error, they do not know as that which it really is: the Truth.\(^ {73}\)**

With this fourth thesis, Kung begins moving in the direction of his final thesis (the sixth) in which he establishes the priority of Christianity among all the religions and the absoluteness and normativeness of Christ among all the world's religious founders. In this thesis, however, he is concerned to show that, despite the fact that the religions are burdened with errors and despite the fact that they are unaware of it, they all teach the truth of the Gospel. Kung finds evidence of the Gospel among the religions in three factors which are more or less universally found in all of them: a sense of man's need for salvation; knowledge

\(^{72}\)Kung, *The Church*, pp. 318-19. In another place Kung says: "The question of what lies outside the Church is one which can be asked but, as we have seen is difficult to answer. As to what lies outside God and his plan of salvation, this is not a real question at all. If we look at God's plan of salvation, then there is no extra, only an intra; no outside, only an inside." (*Freedom Today*, pp. 133-4). See also *On Being Christian*, p. 447.

\(^{73}\)Kung, *Freedom Today*, p. 141. See also "World Religions," p. 53.
that God is far off; and the fact that the religions listen to the voice of their prophets.

First of all, Kung says that the religions teach the Gospel of Christ when they recognize man's need of salvation, when they see man's alienation, fear, and loneliness:

Despite their errors the religions teach the truth of Christ when, in a multitude of insights, they recognize man's need of salvation; when they discern the loneliness, the helpless and forlorn state of man in this world, his abysmal fear and distress, his evil behavior and false pride; when they see the cruelty, perdition and nothingness of this world, and the meaning and meaninglessness of death; when, because of this, they look for something new, and long for a transformation, a rebirth and a redemption of man and his world.\(^\text{74}\)

He says, secondly, that the religions teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ when they realize that God is far off and must come close to liberate man, who is unable to redeem and free himself, but is thrown back upon God's all-embracing love:

Despite their errors, the religions teach the truth of Christ when they recognize God's graciousness: when, that is, they know that the Godhead, for all its nearness, is far off and hidden, that it is the divine itself which must grant us its nearness, presence and accessibility; when they know, then, that man cannot draw near to it by himself, relying on his own innocence, but that he needs to be purified and reconciled, that he can only arrive at life through death, that sacrifice is needed for the purging of guilt; more, that man cannot redeem himself but is dependent on the loving mercy of God.\(^\text{75}\)

\(^{74}\)Ibid., pp. 141-2. See also "World Religions," p. 53; On Being Christian, pp. 92, 122; Does God Exist?, p. 627.

\(^{75}\)Ibid., p. 142. See also "World Religions," pp. 53-4; On Being Christian, pp. 92, 122; Does God Exist?, p. 627.
Thirdly, Kung finds evidence of the truth of Christ in the religions when they heed the call of their prophets; when they find courage and inspiration for a new start toward greater truth and deeper understanding and renewal of the traditional religion through their prophets:

Despite all their error, the religions are teaching the truth of Christ when they listen to the voice of their prophets: when they thus, through their prophets, receive courage and strength for a new break-through into greater truth and deeper knowledge, into a revival and renewal of religion as it has been handed down.76

According to Kung's fourth thesis, then, the world religions make a constant claim on the Church's thoughtful attention. Confronted with the manifold errors in the world religions, the Church can reach a new and thankful awareness of the grace of her special election. But, confronted by the manifold truth in the world religions, Christianity must recognize new, meaningful revelations of God's truth and grace in them and be humbly aware of her own numerous betrayals and constant falling-short of the message of Christ.

Thesis V: It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is able to liberate the truth of the world religions from their entanglement in error and sin.77

With this fifth thesis Kung draws nearer to that aspect of his approach to the religions which underlies all else: the normativeness of Christ in all religious

76 Ibid. See also "World Religions," pp. 53-4; On Being Christian, p. 92.

77 Ibid., pp. 142-3. See also "World Religions," p. 54.
expression. Here he makes the point that the message of the Gospel liberates and redeems the religions from their errors. Implicit in this thesis are two fundamental points: the religions, despite their truth, are bound in oppression and wickedness; and only the Gospel can dissipate the darkness into which, because of man's sin, the religions have fallen.

The religions, he states, are structures which, because of God's gracious revelation of Himself in creation, are light. Yet, at the same time, because of man's failure to recognize the true God in Christ, they are darkness. Kung is careful to point out that this does not mean that they are natural theology or natural piety or natural morality. Nothing is pure "nature." But, he says, they are "sharply ambiguous: on the one hand embraced, upheld and penetrated by God's grace, and yet, on the other hand, in the bonds and oppression of man's betrayal and wickedness."78 The world religions all stand in need of "demythologizing and the casting out of devils, of interiorizing and humanizing."79 However, as non-Christian religions, though they are not simply un-Christian, they are pre-Christian, directed toward Christ.

In his writings which deal specifically with the non-Christian religions, Kung has very little to say about sin.

78Ibid., p. 143. See also "World Religions," p.54.
79Ibid.
and wickedness. Yet, in his earlier writings, especially his work on justification, he has much to say. He does not agree with Rahner and others in their assumption of basic innocence and neutrality before God. Indeed, Kung speaks very bluntly about man's sinfulness and his guilt before God. He sees man, in his unregenerate state, as "not 'free' but a slave of sin. The sinner's arbitrium therefore is a servum arbitrium." Man's sinful condition is more than the deprivation of original righteousness, as Rahner held, but also involves a willful and free turning away from God. Furthermore, according to Kung, the whole man has sinned, "not only his sensual nature or reason or will, not only his body or soul, but man as a person . . . For man is entirely sinful flesh." What is true about the being of the sinner is also true about his activity. Kung says that "no self-disposing autonomous good resides in any act of the sinner . . . for no act of the sinner is good in the sense that it is capable of accomplishing something for eternal salvation and thus of being an act of salvation in the strict sense of an act of merit." Thus, for Kung, man's will is bound; he has turned away from God in willful disobedience and he is incapable of meriting in any way eternal life.

It is for this reason that man needs the Gospel of

80 Kung, Justification, p. 184.
81 Ibid., p. 185. 82 Ibid., pp. 186-7.
Christ, which dispells the darkness and liberates man. And this is true for the religions as well. Though they contain light and are channels of God’s revelation and ways of salvation, they are also bound in darkness and sinfulness. Only the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Kung, is able to bring light and dissipate darkness; to liberate the truth which is there to a large extent but oppressed and held in bondage. The Gospel of Christ "lights up the point of man’s deepest need, and shows where his real salvation is to be found, what God really means for men and what man really has to be in the sight of God, what the real communion is between God and man."83 This is what, in the end, the world religions, according to Kung, cannot know.

This fifth thesis, then, states that the Gospel is the only thing that can give the religions meaning; the only thing that can bring them to their full realization, answer man’s deepest needs and shed light in the darkness of their sin and error. Kung concludes:

Could not therefore all that which otherwise exists perhaps isolated and scattered, fragmentarily and sporadically, distorted and disfigured, be brought to its full realization in Christianity: without a false, antagonistic exclusiveness, but with a creative rethinking, resulting in a new inclusive and simultaneously critical synthesis?84

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83Kung, Freedom Today, p. 144. See also "World Religions," p. 56.

Thesis VI: Christian faith represents radical universalism, but one grounded and made concrete in, and centered upon, Jesus Christ.85

With Kung's final thesis we arrive at that aspect of his approach to the religions which is characteristic of his entire program. He uses the term "radical universalism" several times. By this he means a universalism which is "rooted." In other words, all people can be saved and all religions can be ways of salvation, but all is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ, who is normative for salvation. Christ is not in all the religions, as with Rahner, but he is above all the religions and apart from him there is no salvation to be found.

Kung begins by affirming that every person, as a recipient of God's grace, can be saved:

Every human being is under God's grace and can be saved: whether he be of this or that nation or race, of this or that caste or class, free or slave, man or woman, or even inside or outside the Church of Christ. Every human being can be saved, and we may hope that everyone is.86

He then goes on to reaffirm that every religion, of whatever kind, can be a way of salvation:

Every world religion is under God's grace and can be a way of salvation: whether it is primitive or highly evolved, mythological or enlightened, mystical or rational, theistic or non-theistic, a real or only a quasi-religion. Every religion can be a way of salvation, and we may hope that every one is.87

85Kung, Freedom Today, p. 147. See also "World Religions," p. 56.

86Ibid. 87Ibid.
Kung believes this, however, not on the basis of an indefinable, unaccountable mystical experience, but on the basis of the message of Jesus Christ. It is on Jesus Christ, Kung says, "in whom God himself has spoken and acted for all men in a unique way, that our radical universalism is grounded, centered and made concrete." 88

For this reason, Kung finds it necessary to distinguish between two central questions: the question of truth and the question of salvation. These must not be confused. Kung maintains, on the one hand, that the religions can be called ways of salvation. But, he adds, the question of salvation does not make the question of truth superfluous: "If Christian theology today asserts that all men - even in the world religions - can be saved, this certainly does not mean that all religions are equally true." 89 They are not all equally true. No matter how much truth can be seen in the world religions, they do not provide the truth. Only the one true God of Isreal is the truth for Christians. No Christian "could claim that he might just as well be a Muslim, or even a Buddhist, Hindu or Confucian." 90

It is Jesus Christ himself that constitutes the truth of Christianity. It is the explicit confession of Jesus

88Ibid.
90Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 627.
Christ that sets Christianity apart from all the other religions.91 This is something that can be found on nearly every page of Kung's writings: the normativeness and definitiveness of Jesus Christ. The one true God is the Christian God, the one who manifested himself in Jesus Christ:

From eternity there is no God other than the one who manifested himself in Jesus. The face he showed in Jesus is really his true and single face . . . . Behind the God we know as the Father of the lost ones there is not some kind of sinister abyss, as Gnosticism suggested . . . . No. God was from the beginning and always will be as he became known in Jesus Christ. His being and action from the very beginning bear - as we might formulate it retrospectively - a "Christological" imprint.92

This Christ, who is normative for all the religions, is not the Christ of popular piety or religions experience; he is not the Christ of dogma, who is "full of contrasts, often disparate and contradictory;" he is not the Christ of enthusiasm, based on "emotions, hysterias or ideologies of intoxication;" he is not the Christ of literature, "the product of subjective emphasis." The Christ who is

91In On Being Christian, p. 125, Kung gives an example of how he separates the question of truth and salvation and also what, for him, constitutes Christianity: "Is a Muslim in Beirut who upholds everything said of Jesus in the Koran - and that is a great deal - already a Christian? Answer: He is a good Muslim as long as the Koran remains binding on him and in this way he may gain salvation. But he becomes a Christian only if Muhammad is no longer the prophet with Jesus as his precursor, but if this Jesus Christ becomes authoritative for him."

92Ibid., p. 446.
definitive and who stands above all the religions is the "historical Christ," whose life on earth can be accurately dated and located geographically; Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified as a ransom for all.

This Christ is spoken of in the Bible as God's divine Son, which, Kung says, substantiates "the uniqueness, underrivability and unsurpassability of the call, offer and claim made known in and with Jesus, ultimately not of human but of divine origin and therefore absolutely reliable, requiring men's unconditional involvement." The Bible, according to Kung, also speaks of Jesus as true man and, as such, he "represents the permanently reliable ultimate standard of human existence." Jesus, finally, is "ultimately decisive, definitive, archetypal for man's relations with God, with his fellow man, with society." Jesus is "unique and

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93 Ibid., pp. 127-49. See also Does God Exist?, pp. 690-92.

94 Ibid., p. 449.

95 Ibid., p. 450. It will be remembered that Kung was censured not only for his views on infallibility. For his defense of his Christological views, see Swidler, pp. 455-67.

authoritative"\textsuperscript{97} for the understanding of God and man. When Kung says this, however, he does not simply mean that Christianity is different and therefore unique among the religions. He means that it surpasses all others, Christ is the one and only, superior, absolutely and universally normative for all the others. He is definitive.\textsuperscript{98}

The Role of Christian Missions

The Church, then, is not the exclusive channel of salvation, and it is not the sole possessor of the truth. But, as the Church of Christ, as the company of believers who publicly confess the name of Christ, who is unique and normative, the Church is the "vanguard of humanity" a "sign to the peoples," which is made up of people who are witnesses of Christ, confessing him in word and deed.\textsuperscript{99} The Church believes and confesses that which is already a reality for the people of the world religions, even though they do not wish to acknowledge it. The Church, then, is not simply to be equated with the official Church, with pope and bishop. It is rather the "hidden, but completely real Church of those who truly believe."\textsuperscript{100} Because, however, 

\textsuperscript{97}Kung, \textit{Does God Exist?}, p. 683.

\textsuperscript{98}See Knitter, "World Religions," p. 152.


\textsuperscript{100}Kung, \textit{Infallible?}, p. 195.
the Church is those who confess the name of Jesus Christ, the whole world is not, as Rahner would say, part of the Church. The Church exists in the world, but it is not synonymous with the world. Nevertheless, it can lay no exclusive claim to certainty of salvation vis-a-vis the world nor to spiritual authority. It is different from the world but it must not think of itself as an exclusive society of those already saved, rather, "as an open community of people dedicated to serve and work for the salvation of all, of the whole of mankind."101

Thus, the Church has a definite service to the world. That service does not involve bringing salvation to them because they already have this. But, Kung says, the Church must have a "missionary presence and service among the other religions, self-critically listening to their concerns, identifying with their needs and at the same time bearing living witness of its own faith in word and deed."102 Kung sees this missionary service as having a three-fold function: understanding, solidarity, and obligation.

Since the Church exists for God, she has also to exist for the people of the world and of its religions. The first way in which the Church exists for the sake of the world religions is that she knows the real situation of the world

101 Kung, The Church, p. 319.
religions. This is something that the world religions do not know: "whence they come, where they now stand, where they are going, what ultimate situation is between God and man, wherein lies their own true salvation and damnation." Thus, the first function of the Church's missionary service to the world religions means providing understanding. Another way in which the Church exists for the sake of the world religions is that she is linked with them: "Precisely because the Church knows and understands the world religions for what they are, it is absolutely impossible for her to hold pharisaically aloof from them." So, the second function of the Church's missionary service to the world religions means showing solidarity with them. Another way in which the Church exists for the sake of the religions is that she has obligations to them. Seen in this light, Kung says that "co-existence will rather become pro-existence; being with each other will turn to being for each other." The Church's understanding of the world religions would be sterile, her link with them would be mere idleness, Kung says, if these things did not lead to active coresponsibility. In everything that she does, however interior to herself it may seem, "the Church of Christ exists toward the outside, toward humanity."

104Ibid. 105Ibid., p. 154. 106Ibid.
It would be not only pedagogically unsound, but also theologically false, Kung says, for the Church to address herself polemically to these peoples as to antagonists and enemies, "as though God had not already declared in their favor, in Christ, and already had mercy on them too; as though they were not already redeemed; as though this did not mean that the whole of their paganism, their remoteness and alienation, has already been overcome."\textsuperscript{107} The Church, Kung says, is like Israel wandering through the desert. As to the old, so also to the new people of God, the word of revelation has gone out, "not so that it may settle down in 'possession' of the truth, but so that, summoned by the word of truth, it may set out on the road in obedience and faith."\textsuperscript{108} The Church does not possess the truth, it seeks it wherever it may be found.

Thus, the Church’s mission service is to be an open-minded unselfish proclamation which avoids the extremes of accommodation and particularism; a modest, unpretentious service among the religions, which becomes a "critical catalyst and crystallization point of their values":

> What we must strive for is an independent, unselfish Christian ministry to human beings in the religions. We must do this in a spirit of open-mindedness which is more than patronizing accomodation; which does not lead us to deny our own faith, but also does not impose any particular response; which turns criticism from outside

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid. p. 158.

\textsuperscript{108}Kung, \textit{Infallible?}, p. 179.
into self-criticism and at the same time accepts everything positive; which destroys nothing of value in the religions, but also does not incorporate uncritically anything worthless. Christianity therefore should perform its service among the world religions in a dialectical unity of recognition and rejection, as critical catalyst and crystallization point of their religious, moral, meditative, ascetic, aesthetic values.\(^\text{109}\)

Seen in this way, the Christian missionary activity would not be directed primarily toward winning the greatest possible number of converts. The real aim would be to enter into genuine dialogue with the religions as a whole, giving and taking, in which the most profound intentions of the religions would be fulfilled. Thus, it would not come to a "pointless, fruitless collision, with the Christian self-confidently but un成功fully attempting to prove the superiority of Christianity."\(^\text{110}\)

This entails a genuine fruitful encounter in which the other religions would be encouraged to bring out what is best and deepest in them. The truth of the other religions would be acknowledged, honored and appreciated; but the Christian profession of faith would not be relativized or reduced to general truths. In this way, Kung says, "there would be neither arrogant absolutism, not accepting any other claim, nor a weak eclecticism accepting a little of everything, but an inclusive Christian universalism claiming


\(^{110}\)Ibid.
for Christianity not exclusiveness, but certainly uniqueness.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid.
CHAPTER V

DIALOGICAL THEOCENTRISM: MANY RELIGIONS/PARTNERS IN GOD

Introduction

Another group of Catholic theologians, a small minority, detect a tension, even a contradiction between the previous view's more positive approach to other religions and its insistence on the normativeness of Christ. The theologians of this category, all of whom are veterans in the actual arena of inter-religious dialogue, try to show how Christians can encounter other believers with a clear affirmation of Christ's universal salvific role without having to claim his normativeness and finality. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds and deal with the problem of the religions from a variety of perspectives. Raimundo Panikkar, for example, in his dialogue with Hinduism, affirms that no religion can enter the dialogue with claims of final or absolute normativeness.¹ Christian mission, according to Panikkar, consists both in witnessing and being witnessed to. Another clear call for revisions in

traditional views of Christ and other religions is sounded by Catholic theologians engaged in the dialogue with Judaism: Gregory Baum, Monika Hellwig, John Paulikowski, and Rosemary Reuther. While their particular perspectives differ, they are unanimous in insisting that insofar as Christian understanding of Christ has led to a "supersessionist," subordinating approach to Judaism, "our traditional Christology is severely inadequate" and must be "significantly rethought." 

Some of the boldest proposals for a revision of the approach to other religions, however, come from Third World theologians who claim that traditional Catholic claims of having a normative, complete, or definitive revelation in Christ have made Christian dialogue with other religions a virtual impossibility. This most recent shift in Roman Catholic theology of religions incorporates a clearly

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theocentric perspective. It is distant from, yet continuous with the ecclesiocentrism and Christocentrism of the other Catholic views. While these theologians continue to affirm Jesus as a savior for all peoples and the Church as the community by which Jesus’ presence and message is embodied through time, they see all religions as partners in a salvific dialogue in which, not the Church or Christ, but God and the mystery of salvation, is the ground and goal and norm.4

Aloysius Pieris, a member of the Society of Jesus and a native of Sri Lanka, serves as an excellent example of this final approach to non-Christian religions. He differs from Karl Rahner and Hans Kung in that, at least to the present time, he is not well known. Very little information about his life is available. This is most likely because he has spent most of his life in his native country and has devoted himself to the on-going dialogue between Christianity, his adopted religion, and Buddhism, his native religion. In addition, his views, as will become obvious in the following presentation, represent a significant departure from accepted Roman Catholic theology. As Director of the Tulana Centre for Research and Encounter in Gonawala,

Kelaniya (Sri Lanka) and as editor of Dialogue, a journal devoted to the exchange of ideas between Buddhism and Christianity (it has both Buddhists and Christians on the editorial board), Pieris has placed himself in the forefront of the Christian dialogue with Buddhism. As one who received his theological education in Europe and a Buddhist education in a Buddhist monastery in Asia, he feels "obliged in conscience to exercise a ministry of reconciliation" between the two religions. It is this, in fact, that characterizes his entire approach to non-Christian religions, especially Buddhism.

At the outset of this discussion, several difficulties in presenting Pieris' approach to non-Christian religions must be noted. First of all, Pieris is a Liberation theologian and one is tempted to digress into his very interesting and challenging criticism of Western social-political-economic dominance of the people of his native Asia.

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6Pieris is not the only theologian to become actively involved in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. This area of inter-religious dialogue has received a great deal of attention in the past few years. See, for example, Pieris' late colleague and co-editor of Dialogue, Lynn A. De Silva, The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity (New York: Barnes & Nobel, 1979); also Walbert Buhlmann, The Search for God: An Encounter with the Peoples and Religions of Asia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980); and John B. Cobb Jr., Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
The problem here is that the concept of liberation is so intimately tied-up with his conception of the nature of religion that it is impossible to ignore it. Nevertheless, Pieris's political ideologies will be dealt with only insofar as it will help to shed light on his approach to non-Christian, especially Buddhist, religions.

A second problem associated with the study of Pieris' approach to the religions concerns his manner of presentation. In the previous chapters, we saw that Rahner and Kung both spelled out very clearly and carefully their approaches to the religions. While their approaches were not "simple" in the sense of being uncomplicated, nevertheless they went to great lengths to give a more or less systematic presentation of their views. Pieris, on the other hand, seems to have no such systematic method. His views must be pieced together from a variety of sources. As editor of the Dialogue, he wrote many editorials and book reviews from which bits and pieces of information must be drawn. The danger here is that there is a risk of "forcing" Pieris into a mold that would give a false or distorted impression of his views. It is hoped that this is not the case here.

Additionally, most of what Pieris has to say about the religions concerns Buddhism. He does speak about the others, but his is in a much less detailed fashion. This is understandable, in view of his "ministry of reconciliation." It means, however, that we must assume that what he says about
Buddhism in particular, he would also say about all the major world religions. This is not unjustified in view of his general concept of the nature of religion (as will be seen in the next section).

Finally, Pieris presents difficulties to those who would try to extract a clear idea of his approach to the religions in that he presupposes a great deal. He seems to begin at a very different starting point than Rahner and Kung. For example, he never poses the most basic questions which have been addressed in this study, such as, are non-Christians saved? Are the non-Christian religions ways of salvation? What is the relationship between the Church and the religions? His starting point is well beyond these basic questions. As we shall see, however, according to Pieris not only can non-Christians be saved (in the sense of Liberation), not only are the non-Christian religions ways of salvation, but they are, in many ways, superior to Christianity. What is necessary, says Pieris, is to combine the best elements of Christianity and Buddhism (and the other religions too) so that in a spirit of mutual complementarity they might lose themselves in the "baptismal immersion" of "total participation."

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7Ibid., p. 84.
Aloysius Pieris' Approach to Inter-Religious Dialogue

It must be stated at the outset that Pieris does not approach the question of Christianity's relationship to the world religions merely as a theoretical exercise. He is actively and intimately involved in this dialogue himself and in his opinion, it is imperative, at least in some parts of the world, that Christianity increase its dialogical encounter with the religions. In view of recent political circumstances, he says, this need has taken on an aura of urgency about it. For example, he says that by the turn of the century, with tribal Africa mostly shared between Islam and Christianity, we can expect one of three things, if not all of them: "a disastrous confrontation, a defensive compromise or a daring collaboration between the two religions."8 The first, he says, is not unlikely, but the last is imperative.

Pieris says that there is no room for arrogance or exclusivism in this dialogue between the religions because no religion is perfect and sin and paganism "cut across the Church as well as other religions, all needing redemption."9 Every religion, including Christianity, is at once a "sign

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9Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 74.
and a counter-sign of the Kingdom."\(^{10}\) Thus, Pieris puts all the religions on the same level, all are potential means either of emancipation or enslavement. Each religion is a singular phenomenon and is, in a way, a judgment passed on every other religion. "In the very process of approving and appropriating the basic insights of homo religiosus,"\(^{11}\) he says, a religion also sets itself apart from all the others by ordering these same insights according to its own pattern, formulating them doctrinally within its own conceptual framework and crystallizing them into its own hierarchical structure, so that the resultant synthesis, "identified as a social phenomenon, not only corroborates the common contents of all religions but also judges every other synthesis as a minor or major deviation from what it regards as Ultimately and Savingly True."\(^{12}\)

Thus, religion, for Pieris, is the ordering of the basic insights of man into a conceptual framework. This is true of Christianity also. But Pieris says that the vast majority of people in the world (especially in Asia) perceive these insights, these ultimate concerns, in the language of non-Christian religions and cultures.

\(^{10}\)Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions," p. 6.


\(^{12}\)Ibid.
Therefore, it is essential for Christianity to speak its theology also in these non-Christian idioms. A theology that does not speak through this non-Christian peoplehood is an "esoteric luxury of a Christian minority."\footnote{Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions," p. 5.} What is needed, therefore, is a theology of religions that "expands the existing boundaries of orthodoxy in the very process of entering into the liberative streams of other religions and cultures."\footnote{Ibid.} Since religions, all of them, are really nothing more than "so many alternative configurations of basic human values,"\footnote{Pieris, "Mutual Exposure," p. 45.} however, it is in their nature to provoke comparison and mutual criticism, confrontation and reciprocal correction. This is natural and proper. But it represents only the initial stage of the dialogue between them, which begins with tolerance and culminates with positive acceptance. Claims of uniqueness and singularity and judgments on another religion are an essential ingredient of dialogue, but the test of maturity in dialogue does not lie in mutual criticism, but in "reciprocal correction."\footnote{Ibid., p. 46.} Pieris' approach to inter-religious dialogue, then, does not imply the mixing of traditions; it does not mean syncretism; it does not mean diluting one's doctrinal tenets. Rather,
he says, "it does imply listening and learning."\textsuperscript{17}

In order to truly listen and learn, Pieris says that it is better to go by "an experiential rather than a textual knowledge of other religions."\textsuperscript{18} Such an approach, he says, would help the Church be a "sacramental embodiment of a universal search for God, a symbol of a people drawn by God."\textsuperscript{19} For, how can the Church be a sacramental people if she does not "participate in other people's experience of God?"\textsuperscript{20} In other words, the Christian dialogue, especially in Asia, should be a discovery, that is, a Christian participation in and a "Christic explicitation [sic] of all that happens at the deepest zone of the Asian ethos."\textsuperscript{21} This, he says, is the reason that he entered into a Buddhist monastery and spent a considerable amount of time studying the Buddhist scriptures and why he has devoted his entire life to the study of Buddhism and the East Asian socio-political context. This is also why he has such a positive attitude towards the Zen-Buddhist/Christian dialogue which is happening in Japan today. Christians are entering into


\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.  \textsuperscript{20}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21}Pieris, "The Place of non-Christian Religions," p. 6.
Buddhist temples and meditating on the Buddhist scriptures and listening and learning at the feet of Buddhist Masters. He notes that "all the Christians I interviewed claimed that they deepened rather than compromised their Christian commitment as a result of doing Zen."22

The reason that one must dialogue through participation is that, as was mentioned, all religions, including Christianity, are "so many alternative configurations of basic human values," which are incomplete or distorted of themselves. Both Christianity and Buddhism must listen and learn from each other. No religion can claim to have absoluteness of completeness. The answer to the problem of the religions is no longer to be found in exclusivistic judgment upon the other but in participative complementarity.

**Pieris' Criticism of Traditional Christian Approaches to Non-Christian Religions**

Pieris is very critical of traditional Christian approaches to non-Christian religions. He notes that the Roman Catholic Church had an isolated existence for centuries and was not sufficiently exposed to the non-Christian cultures. The pagan culture of pre-Christian Europe was so easily domesticated by the Church that she could not acquire a dialogical approach towards anything not Christian,

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especially since "she was always in a position of power." 23

In addition, the non-Christian religions that did come into contact with the Church until the Modern Period were Judaism and Islam, against which she had always adopted a defensive posture. Thus, even when she was exposed to other Asian religions in the East, "she maintained her past attitudes rather than correct them in the face of new exposures." 24

Pieris identifies three elements which, in varying degrees of intensity and combination, give a very definite character to Western discussions on non-Christian religions:

1) The "academic and philosophical" approach to religious dialogue;
2) The "instrumental" or "apologetical use" of non-Christian thought in favor of Christianity;
3) The "power-consciousness" of the Church over and against the religions. 25

These three factors have determined the Church's approach to the religions and have, to this day, effectively destroyed the chances of any meaningful dialogue. They have led, says Pieris, to two basic approaches, both of which are unacceptable to the Asian East because they display a spirit of Western dominance. They have led to a "unilateral view of religions" which accounts for the


24 Ibid.

25 Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 57.
polarization of the Church into a "Christ-against-the-religions-theology" and a "Christ-of-the-religions-theology."  

The former view he blames on the Latin apologists, who, unlike their Greek counterparts, spoke of a _vera religio_ (meaning Christianity) in contrast with _falsa religio_, a conviction which, he says, grew aggressive due to conflicts with Judaism and Islam. Thus, he says, "the classical Roman Missiology had set Christ against other (i.e. false) religions." This led to the "conquest theory" of religions which saw the religions not only as un-Christian but as anti-Christian, and the "adaptation theory" of religions for which the religions were merely un-Christian. Both of these were based on a Medieval ecclesiology which identified Christ with the Church (and the Church with the Pope), so that "salvation which was impossible outside Christ seemed also impossible outside the Church." Pieris rejects these theories as anachronistic and destructive of dialogue, blaming them for the manifold woes which he says the Western world has inflicted upon the Eastern world.

The other pole of modern Catholic theology of


27Ibid., p. 8.

28Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 72.
religions, which Pieris terms the "Christ-of-the-religions-theology," is a great improvement over the "Christ-against-the-religions-theology" because it regards the other religions as pre-Christian. This "fulfilment theory," as he calls it, is founded on the rediscovery of the ancient Christian belief that Christ is "a greater reality than the Church not only spatially (Kingdom of God goes beyond the visible limits of the Church) but also temporally (the Salvation History goes beyond what the Scripture and Tradition reveal)" so that the Church and the Bible do not exhaust salvation and revelation respectively but are "normative guides" and "sacramental pointers" to God, who it is that really reveals and saves. Pieris is more favorable to this view since it denies any exclusivism which is based on ecclesiology or revelation:

This theory of "Fulfilment" clearly militates against Catholic Triumphantism based on ecclesiology (no salvation outside the Church) and protestant fundamentalism based on bibliolatry (no revelation outside the Bible), and all intransigent evangelsim that springs from them.

Pieris expresses pleasure with Rahner's theory of anonymous Christianity (although with some serious reservations) in that it recognizes the Church's need for a humbler opinion of herself and that it admits, though reluctantly, that sin and "paganism" cut across the Church as well as other religions. Despite the fact that the phrase,

29Ibid., pp. 72-3. 30Ibid., p. 73.
"anonymous Christianity" is a "condescending appellation,"\textsuperscript{31} Pieris is glad that it has replaced the term "pre-Christian" and could, in his opinion, refer to the Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim who lives according to his religious conscience insofar as he is called by God to His Kingdom in those religions and "not necessarily to the Church which is the visible sacrament of that Kingdom.\textsuperscript{32} The call into the Church, according to Pieris, is conferred on only a few ("the little flock") to confirm and strengthen the universal thrust of the Kingdom which is already operating in the religions. In other words, God has not called all people to be in His Church. He has called most of the people in the world to enter into His Kingdom through their own religions. The effort, then, should not go into making all people Christians but rather into making them better Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims:

It is only we who deal with the good, practising Buddhist in our daily life, that know how the Kingdom preached by Christ has already germinated in him and, how our attempt to make him a better Buddhist would imply a true furthering of the Kingdom in him and in his environment - except in the case of one who clearly receives the vocation to the Church - i.e. to be the sacramental expression of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{33}

It is Rahner's attempt to bring all the people of the religions into the Church that leads to Pieris' criticism and ultimate rejection of his theory. He notes that Christianity has gone from a church-centered view to a

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 74. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{32}Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{33}Ibid.
Christo-centric theology which sees the Buddha as a precursor of Christ, or Buddhism as a quasi-sacrament of salvation or a good Buddhist as an anonymous Christian. But, he says, "in all this, the element of condescension remains unchanged" and "can be offensive to Buddhists in particular." 34 He continues: "For it all amounts to saying: You non-Christians are saved because and in so far as you are Christian (like us) in some mysterious way intelligible only to us." 35 He attributes all such theories to the attempt on the part of Western Christianity to justify, for themselves primarily, that there could be other ways of salvation, even though the theories emerging from such speculations can be "as enchantingly persuasive for those who propose them as they can be embarrassingly offensive to those about whom they are proposed." 36

Peiris asks some penetrating questions of the "fulfilment theory," which in various ways speaks of the religions as pre-Christian, and into which both Rahner's and Kung's models could be classified: "How would one relate the pre-Christian character of Israel and the Old Testament to the pre-Christian character of non-Christian religious traditions?" 37 The answer that the former is a supernatural

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37 Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 73.
revelation while the latter is on the natural plane, he says, is opposed to the belief that there is one order in the world and that is the "Order of Christ." Anything outside it is sin. But, he says, "If the religions are outside this order, then we are back again with the Conquest Theory! If they are inside this order, then the distinction is not valid." 38

Pieris' second question to the "fulfilment theory" concerns the locus of this fulfilment: "Is it the visible church in which other religions find fulfilment? Or is it Christ who fulfils the Church, and along with it, all religions." 39 In this connection, he mentions Jean Danielou, a spokesman for the fulfilment theory of the Fathers, who took the non-Christian religions as precursors of Christianity. He then, according to Pieris, spoke of "saving" and "baptizing" the pagan soul in the way the pagan spirit of the Semites was saved in Abraham and in the way the pagan spirit of the West was baptized in Plato or Virgil. Yet, Pieris says, "he never seemed to have asked himself whether it was Christ who baptized the precursor or the precursor Christ." 40

It is this question that leads Pieris to begin to formulate his own theory of the relationship of the Church to the religions. He says that, rather than the Church baptizing the religions, she herself should be baptized by

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38Ibid. 39Ibid. 40Ibid., p. 40.
them, immersing herself in their culture and religion so that she may be more worthy of being listened to:

Does the fulfilment of all religions imply that the Church should 'baptize' oriental religions or that she should plunge into the Jordan of these religions and come out with the messianic awareness so that she may be worthy of being listened to: 'Hear ye Him'? Moreover, the Western Church which still sees mere 'philosophy' where there is 'soteriology' is busy talking of instrumentalizing (or more euphemistically, 'baptizing') the oriental 'thought' and 'culture' rather than about the humble need of 'being baptized' by the religious experience which is inextricably bound up with that thought and culture.41

His critique of main-line Roman Catholic approaches to non-Christian religions centers upon the theme that they are all, to one degree or another, unilateral and do not give full credit to the religions themselves. Whether the approach be "Christ-against-the-religions-theology" (the "conquest theory" or the "adaption theory") or "Christ-of-the-religions-theology" (the "fulfilment theory" or the "Anonymous Christian theory"), all of them are one-sided. The Christian Church, according to Pieris, has no business either prescribing dictatorially what the truth is or, by subterfuge, claiming that all that is good and right in the religions is really "Christian." What is necessary is a total immersion in the religions by "baptism" into their culture and religiosity, not as "natural" wisdom or philosophy, but as a divinely-given "soteriology."42

41Ibid.

42Neither time nor space permit a detailed
Towards an Asian Theology of Religions

The first step in becoming "immersed by baptism" in the religion of Asia is to come to a familiarity with Asian religiosity and poverty. And Pieris spends much time in his analysis of Pieris' concept of soteriology. Nor would this be essential to an understanding of his approach to non-Christian religions. Nevertheless, soteriology is at the heart of Pieris' "program" and elements of it may be found in nearly everything he writes. Essentially, his orientation is liberational. His writings are spattered with elements of Marxist social analysis and hypercritical denunciations of Western political-economic exploitation of the Third World, especially Asia.

Soteriology, for Pieris, "is the foundation of theology" which derives from a "religious instinct," defined as a "revolutionary urge, a psycho-social impulse to generate a new humanity" ("Place of Non-Christian Religions," pp. 26-7). The common thrust, then, of most religions remains soteriological, that is, "liberation rather than speculation about a hypothetical liberator. Many metacosmic religions point to a Future that is attainable as the present moment of total human emancipation, positing the accent on a metaphysical or personal Beyond, if not on an 'impersonal' but tranphenomenal 'It'!" ("Place," p. 26).

The main recipients of this "revolutionary urge" are, of course, the poor. Pieris divides the world's poor into two basic groups, depending on whether their poverty is voluntary or forced: "... voluntary poverty ... and forced poverty ... the first is the seed of liberation and the second is the fruit of sin. The Kingdom of God can be viewed in terms of a universal practice of the one and the consequent elimination of the other" ("To Be Poor as Jesus Was Poor?" The Way, 24 (July, 1984) p. 192). It is this poverty, both actual and spiritual, which was meant to be the "basic spirituality of all Christians," and which "guarantees one's undivided devotion to God." (Ibid., p. 190).

It is, in fact, voluntary poverty which enables us to become one with God: "We become one with God (is this not the aim of all mysticism?) to the degree that our poverty drives us to appropriate his concern for the poor as our own mission. ... If the Master (Jesus) is the victim-judge of oppression, the disciple too must become the victim of the present order or else he or she has no right to denounce it. The struggle for the poor is a mission entrusted only to
writings explaining to his predominantly Western readers the nature of Asian religion and culture. He reminds us, first of all, that Asia is the cradle of all the scriptural religions of the world, including Christianity, which, he says, "left Asia very early and forced its way back several centuries later as a stranger and an 'intruder' whom Asia consistently refused to entertain." This is how he explains the fact that, after four centuries of missionary presence, Christians are numerically and "qualitatively" an insignificant minority, a mere two percent of the Asian masses. He adds that Asia, as circumstances clearly indicate, "will remain always a non-Christian Continent." 44

It is liberation theology, then, that enables one to be put in touch with Christ as he truly is: "Liberation theology puts us in touch with such a Christ whose bleeding heart [like the Sacred Heart] demands brave deeds of love, a Christ hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, homeless and fettered by social chains, Christ the labourer's son, Christ without a place to be born in, to lay his head on or to be buried in, Christ who is a threat to Herod's security and therefore, hunted out by him, Christ calumniated before the Court of Law, Christ in chains in the Praetorium, Christ tortured by the Army, Christ a 'Criminal' among criminals, Christ the victim of priestly fanaticism and political opportunism . . . and Christ the unwanted leader!" ("Spirituality in a Liberation Perspective," East Asian Pastoral Review, 20 (1983): 150. For similar views, see "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, 63 (1979) and in Dialogue (N.S.) 7 (1979):29-521.

43Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology," p. 166.

44Ibid., p. 167.
He warns that it is only in as far as Christianity can rid itself of its "Westernness" that it can begin to make any inroads into the Asian context.\textsuperscript{45} This, of course, can only be done by Asians, despite the fact that a substantial amount of information regarding religions and cultures in the Third World is gathered, processed and distributed by Euro-American research centers. The "First World" still enjoys the monopoly of resources required for such studies so that there are "deeper predispositions acquired by all of us - the present writer included - in the course of our intellectual training since we are all dependent on these same sources for our understanding of the religious phenomenon in its global magnitude."\textsuperscript{46} Thus, it is imperative that theologians free themselves from Western influences so that they can begin to come to grips with a theology that is truly Asian.

The overarching difference between Western and Eastern religiosity is the extent to which religion permeates all of life in the East. Eastern religiosity disdains an

\textsuperscript{45}Pieris defines the phrase, "Asian context" in the following way: "... the common denominator between Asia and the rest of the Third World is its overwhelming POVERTY: the specific character which defines Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted RELIGIOSITY. These are two inseparable realities which in their interpenetration constitute what might be designated as the ASIAN CONTEXT and which is the matrix of any theology that is truly Asian" (Ibid., p. 162).

\textsuperscript{46}Pieris, "Place of Non-Christian Religions," p. 15.
artificial and sharp distinction between religion and life, which, according to Pieris, prevails in the West. He explains:

It is common knowledge that the West studies all the world religions while the East simply practices them! Religion is a 'department' in many a Western University just as it has become a 'department' in life. Amongst us, however, religion is life. The same is true of interreligious dialogue: an academical luxury, there; and a modus vivendi, here! The interfaith encounter with all its psycho-sociological tensions constitutes a day-to-day experience in plur-religious societies of the Orient.47

Pieris, further, has uncovered three distinctive features which clearly demarcate the "religio-cultural" boundaries of Asia within the Third World: 1) linguistic heterogeneity; 2) integration of the cosmic and the meta-cosmic elements in Asian religions; 3) the overwhelming presence of non-Christian soteriologies.48 First of all, Pieris says that Asia has seven distinct linguistic zones49 and that within each zone language is a distinctly different way of experiencing the truth: "... language is the 'experience' of Reality and religion is its 'expression'."50 In other words, religion begins with language; language is


49In Ibid., pp. 162-4, Pieris lists these seven zones as: 1) Semitic languages; 2) Ural-Altaic languages; 3) Indo-Iranian; 4) Dravidian; 5) Sino-Tibetan; 6) Malayo-Polynesian; 7) Japanese.

50Ibid., p. 163.
a "theologia incoghativa - an incipient theology." The language that a person speaks puts him in touch with the basic truths that every religion grapples with, but each in a different way. For this reason, Pieris maintains that it is imperative that a theology which is truly Asian must be spoken in Asian languages:

We Asians professionally theologize in English, the language in which most of us think, read and pray. The theological role of Language in a 'continent of languages' has been grossly underestimated and our stubborn refusal to consult each other's treasures directly in each other's linguistic idioms, or even to be familiar with one's own cultural heritage, will remain one major obstacle to the discovery of a truly Asian Theology. This is not an appeal for Chauvinism but a plea for authenticity imposed on us by what we have defined as the Asian Context.

The second feature that is distinctive of the Asian religio-cultural heritage is the integration of the cosmic and meta-cosmic elements in Asian religions. A "cosmic" religion is, according to Pieris, the basic "psychological posture that the homo religiosus (residing in each one of us) adopts subconsciously towards the mysteries of life." They relate to the cosmic forces - heat, fire, winds and cyclones, earth and its quakes, oceans, rains and floods. "Meta-cosmic" religions are those religions which have searched for and found above the world the causes and purposes of the cosmic events. Their search has ended in the "Beyond" or in the "Absolute." The distinctive feature

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51Ibid.  
52Ibid., p. 164.  
53Ibid.
of Asian religiosity in this regard is that the cosmic and the meta-cosmic have become integrated into one another in such a way that the major religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism) have been shaped by the "cosmic religions" and have been able to adapt themselves to a wide variety of linguistic, political and cultural situations.

The third characteristic feature of Asian religiosity is that, unlike in Africa or Oceania, the cosmic religions do not appear in their pure and primordial form, except in certain isolated pockets. Pieris says that they have been "domesticated and integrated into one or the other of the three meta-cosmic soteriologies, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, and to some extent Taoism."54 This situation, says Pieris, is ambivalent. It creates enormous opportunities for more creative modes "of Christian presence in Asia by humble participation in the non-Christian experience of liberation; or it can repeat past mistakes in radically new ways."55

54Ibid., p. 165. He adds on the same page that the establishment of scriptural religions, such as Islam in Indonesia and Catholicism in the Philippines, was easier partly because "cosmic religions were found there in undomesticated [sic] or mildly domesticated forms at that time; whereas in Sri Lanka, India, Burma and other countries neither Islam nor Christianity could sweep over these cultures because the aforesaid gnostic soteriologies had already domesticated cosmic religions into a well integrated cultural system."

55Ibid., p. 167.
"Baptism by Immersion"

Pieris says that if there is a valid theology of religions that can understand non-Christian religions, it should be along the lines suggested by Raimundo Panikkar. The student of religions, he says, should "intuit into the self understanding of the other religions," something which is impossible unless he adopts what Pieris calls the "participatory approach." This is the approach that many monks, both Christian and Buddhist, have developed. They have tried to enter into the oriental religious experience to sharpen their monastic instinct with Asian sensitivity. This is true not only of some monasteries in the West where the East is not only a "silent guest but an active collaborator in the Christian search for God," but also some of the Christian monasteries in the East where the "sap of monachism is sucked up from the ancient roots and circulated back to the West, discovering in this process the Asian face of Christ and disclosing it to their non-Christian brethren."

In order to initiate the "participatory approach" to the religions, Pieris makes two proposals: 1) that theologians should resume a dialogue with Christian monks who empathetically participate in the Eastern ethos; 2) in

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56 In Panikkar's The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, pp. 74-96.
57 Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 53.
58 Ibid., p. 71.
addition to accepting the full theological importance of the Asian presence in the West, there should also be an effort to make the Western presence in Asia the focus of a serious reflection in Asia's theology of religions.59 Pieris says that this first proposal would help to minimize the gap between "theology and theopraxis, between philosophy and religion, between reflection over the contemporary thought and participation in the contemporary reality, between monastic theology which is 'God-talk born of God-experience' and the scientific theology which is 'God-talk passing judgment on the experience'"60 or, as the Buddhists would say, between the pursuit of the Path and the pursuit of the Truth.

The problem with Western theology, according to Pieris, is that it is too thoroughly hellenized; it is too academically oriented. Greek culture, says Pieris, "is so refined and pervasive that it would not allow itself to be substantially affected by an outside religion or philosophy; and if it did allow itself to be Christianized it was, at least partially, because Christianity allowed itself to be hellenized."61 Hellenism, therefore, remains the door as well as the barrier for any non-Christian religion to make a fresh contribution to Western theology. Pieris admits that the academic approach is guided by intellectual honesty and

59Ibid., pp. 75ff. 60Ibid. p. 75.
61Ibid., p. 59.
that it does allow for both an evangelical zeal for one's religious commitment and a certain amount of dialogical accommodation to religious pluralism. But, he adds, "there can be a non-academic approach that transcends this tension allowing one to meet the other right in the depths of the secular."62 In other words, the academic approach to theology in the West is not the only, nor is it the best, approach. An approach to theology based upon a common experiential, non-intellectual, basis can help to off-set the West's over-emphasis on intellectualism.63

It is for this reason that Pieris believes that the proper locus for Christian and Buddhist dialogue resides in monkhood, which provides the only common ground between Western Christianity and Eastern religions:

If the West wants to meet the Asian religions, then at least some Christians must leave the sublime heights of Greek philosophy and go to the desert). [sic] It was there that non-Christian and non-Hellenic religious insights percolated into the Christian praxis precisely at a time when the councils were busy with 'theoretical formulations' and the hierarchy with the 'expansion of power'. The code words are monasticism and mysticism;

62 Pieris, "Legitimacy and Limitations," p. 43.

63 Pieris says that it is this very principle that has allowed the Christians and Buddhists in Japan to achieve such a high level of mutual understanding: "It is perhaps this disregard for intellectualism that may have helped the Japanese Buddhists and Christians to break through the language barrier in a manner unheard of in Sri Lanka. The Zen Masters and Christian mystics can understand each other's religious idiom and use almost the same vocabulary because of their common experiential basis" ("Zen-Christian dialogue," p. 110).
there is no other common ground between Western Christianity and Eastern religions. 64

As a result of his experience at the Second Congress of Asian Monks, which met in Bangalore in October 1973, Pieris says that the hundred or so Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Hindu monks (and a few hippies) came to the awareness that "if interreligious dialogue should not degenerate into a play, a pastime, a game of concepts, then it should 'happen' in persons who give the fullest and the most authentic expression to their religious urge: the Monks." 65 A discussion that remains in the upper region of concepts where divergence is at its maximum can evaporate into useless words unless the meeting has taken place also "in the deeper zones of a salvific experience where conceptualization is minimal and doctrinal formulation nil. And this is the domain proper to the monk." 66 It must be the concern of all monks, Buddhist as well as Christian, to rise above religious particularism, in face of the cross-cultural needs of the world's poor. Hence it is through an inter-religious collaboration of monks that the awareness of these needs could be "effectively carried to the monasteries throughout the world" 67 and all the world religions could join in the liberation of poor people of the world.

64 Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 59.
66 Ibid. 67 Ibid., p. 10.
Pieris' second proposal is that, besides accepting the full theological importance of the Asian presence in the West, there should also be an effort to make the Western presence in Asia the focus of a serious reflection in the Asian theology of religions. One of Pieris' basic themes is that there is a distinct Asian presence in Western Christianity, which remains to this day despite the Church's attempt to wipe it out. For evidence of this, Pieris gives two primary examples. He cites, first of all, the example of Evagrius Ponticus, a fourth century Greek who seems, according to Pieris, "to have drunk deep from the non-hellenic springs of spirituality." The decisive and lasting influence which Evagrius exercised in shaping the entire spiritual tradition of both the Latin West and Eastern Christianity, despite the Church's ruthless effort to erase his writings and his name from Christian memory, he says, is a fact attested by recent scholarship. He concludes: "Anyone acquainted with Buddhist Vipassano-bhavana (insight meditation) and the Abhidhamma (Buddhist metapsychology) would find himself at home - as I did - in reading his instruction on prayer." In fact, he says that Evagrius was more Buddhist than Christian and his basic spiritual experience would be Mahayana idealism.

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68Pieris, "Western Christianity," pp. 59-60.
69Ibid., p. 60.
Pieris also uses the example of St. Joasaph, who appeared in the Catalagus Sanctorum of Peter de Natalibus in 1370, and who was immensely popular during the Middle Ages. His name was quietly dropped from the catalogue when it was discovered, recently, that the same St. Joasaph was, in fact, the Buddha himself. Pieris, of course, capitalizes on this somewhat embarrassing discovery and shows that there is a distinct Buddhist presence in Christianity:

This indirect canonization of the Buddha as a model Christian, and the liturgical celebration of his 'World-rejection' as a Christian event, demonstrates that the Church's theopraxis had appropriated what its theology repudiated: the Gnosis-oriented spirituality of the East. Should not the Western Theologians' theoretical condemnation of Evagrian spirituality as 'pre-Christian' and 'Buddhist' deserve a similar confrontation with the actual Christian praxis?70

The point here is that there have always been "Asian" elements in Western Christianity, at least on the popular level, despite the Church's public repudiation of them. Pieris calls upon the West to bring its theory into conformity with its popular praxis and simply admit this "Asian presence."

In fact, Pieris says that all the main features of a religion, such as sin, liberation, ultimate reality, spiritual path, and so forth, are "spelt in two different idioms by the two religions [Christianity and Buddhism] so that their doctrinal frameworks too remain distinct but

70Ibid., p. 62.
For example, he says that what constitutes sin in either context is egoism. Although the theoretical formulations differ, they are essentially the same in that both religions call for the renunciation of self as the prerequisite for liberation:

What constitutes Sin in either context, is egoism. In Buddhism it is 'self-belief' (Attavada, Puggalavada, sakkayaditthi) leading to 'self-seeking' (tanha). In the Bible, sin is 'self-worship' that makes a God of one's own self, isolating it from the People. In the one case it is sense-knowledge that generates the false-belief in self, and it is gnosis that removes it. In the other it is 'Eros' that makes the Ego the centre, and it is Agape that creates a 'humble heart'. Both the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (anatta) and the Christian call to self-abnegation (taking up the cross) seem to converge in that a true renunciation of self is advocated as the conditio sine qua non of liberation.72

Another example of the complementarity of Buddhism and Christianity can be found, according to Pieris, in the concepts of "love" and "wisdom." He says that the two idioms (that is, the gnostic idiom of Buddhism and the agapeic idiom of Christianity) are not contradictory, but rather complementary because they need each other for a "more forceful expression of the basic experience of mankind."73 Thus, Buddhism is not without an agapeic element in the sense that it advocates "the need for Metta (a loving attitude) and Karuna (a loving involvement)."74 Similarly, Christianity is not without a gnostic vein running through

72 Ibid. 73 Ibid., p. 118. 74 Ibid.
its history, as was shown. The difference, Pieris says, is a matter of "emphasis and not of exclusion as both religions have integrated one idiom into the other." Therefore, while the two concepts are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive, giving Pieris justification for speaking of a Christian presence in Buddhism and a Buddhist presence in Christianity which can provide the basis for valid and legitimate comparisons between the two religions:

Therefore we can rightly say that there is a Buddhist territory or a gnostic boarder within Christianity and that there is a Christian extension or an agapeic invasion into Buddhism. This fact of history should make the symbiosis of gnosis and agape (or panna and Karun) possible, if only the Buddhist as well as the Christian cares to learn the language proper to each other's religion in their common territories. May be, then, we can truly intuit into the 'experience' that lies beyond the symbols, and make comparisons that are valid and legitimate.""76

Christianity would, then, be wise to revise its philosophical apparatus to accommodate the gnostic idiom of the East already operating in the West, in its monastic tradition. The West must, in order to do this effectively, enter into dialogue with its own monks for, as Pieris believes, "the most creative encounter between East and West could come from the monks whose calling it is to bring about within

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75Ibid. On the same page, Pieris summarizes how these two concepts have been integrated by the two religions in the following way: "Buddhism integrates the two idioms by polarization and by subordinating love to knowledge, but Biblical Christianity does it by identification, i.e. by absorbing knowledge into love.

76Ibid., p. 128.
Western Theology a fruitful interaction between Christian love and Buddhist wisdom.\textsuperscript{77}

Another example of the complementarity of Christianity and Buddhism can be found, according to Pieris, in the concept of the "Trinity." He says that the traditional Christian dogmatic formulations about the Trinity are nothing more than a "word-game about nature and person or the mathematics of one and three,"\textsuperscript{78} which have only generated centuries of verbosity. The "trinitarian" experience of the Word and silence through the experience of harmony, however, could provide the basis of a theology that is both Eastern and Western. It is wordlessness, says Pieris, that gives every word its meaning. The inner harmony between word and silence is the test of "Asian authenticity, indeed it is the Spirit, the Eternal Energy which makes every word spring from Silence and lead to Silence."\textsuperscript{79} When, for example, Pieris writes about the problem of mixed marriages, which he admits, is a real problem, he says that it is this mutual complementarity between Christianity's word and Buddhism's silence that can provide harmony in an otherwise inharmonious situation: "Would not then a mixed marriage be the most coveted locus for an in-depth encounter between Christianity, the religion of the Word and Buddhism, the Way of

\textsuperscript{77}Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 65.
\textsuperscript{78}\textit{Ibid.}, p 83.
\textsuperscript{79}\textit{Ibid.}
The final solution which Pieris is able to offer to the problem of the religions is that Christianity must be willing to be baptized by the Asian religions through total participation. This baptism, however, will involve two elements: a baptism into Asian religiosity and a baptism into Asian poverty. What this means is that a Church must be humble enough to "be baptized by its precursors in the Jordan of Asian Religiosity and bold enough to be baptized by oppressive systems on the cross of Asian poverty." A truly Asian theology, which is not only theoretical but also practical (that is, a theopraxis) is "born of a submission to the non-Christian judgement of gnostic (that is, Asian) soteriologies and Revolutionary (that is, Marxist) Socialism." Pieris explains this "double baptism" in greater detail in the context of mixed marriages:

Baptism is a universal calling to 'live for others to the point of self-immolation', a 'bodhisattva' ideal, symbolized by the cross of Christ. In fact, in Mark 10/35-41 as well as in Luke 12/50, Christ refers to his own baptism on the cross, the true Baptism which gives meaning to the sacrament which goes by that name. Jesus hardly baptized others as the Fourth Gospels [sic] assures us (Jn. 4/2), but only allowed himself to be baptized not only by John the Baptist in the Jordan, but by the Father on the Cross; and since Christian discipleship is in 'taking up the cross' (Mt. 10/38), it is this

81Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 84.
82Ibid.
self-immolating and altruistically joyful spirit of selfless love that decides who is a Christian and who is a 'pagan'. Conversion means accepting these values. Such a Baptism is more important than its ritual expression which, for the Christians, is a grace and an initiation to the Way of the Cross, the path to eradication of selfish desire (tanha). The children of a mixed marriage must, in this sense, be 'baptized' and be 'converted', so that they may truly be 'religious' both in the Buddhist and Christian understanding of the term.83

Only a Church which has been "fully baptized in the waters of Eastern poverty and religiosity,"84 that is, a Church that responds to both the monastic and socialist imperatives, can be an authentically Asian Church.

What Pieris is calling for, in the end, is a theology that is explication rather than excogitation: theology that is an unfolding of a theopraxis and which is not simply equated with a Christian witness among non-Christians. By theopraxis, he means "a God-experience (which is at once a Man-concern) of God's people living beyond the Church, and amongst whom the Church is called to lose itself in baptismal immersion or total participation."85 Thus, he says that the two-fold door to Asian religiosity (and, hence, to an effective Christian theology of religions) is "poverty and not power; participation and not propaganda!"86

We close this chapter with a final quotation from

84Pieris, "Western Christianity," p. 83.
85Ibid., p. 84. 86Ibid.
Pieris which is an exhortation to the monks in Asia to adopt his approach to Buddhism. This has been chosen because it, in a few words, ties together some of the major themes which have been dealt with in this chapter: the central role of monkhood, liberation of the poor by means of Marxist socialism, and baptism of Christianity by immersion in the waters of Asian religiosity:

Hence our final appeal to the Christian monks in Asia - Harden not your hearts; Enter into the stream at the point where the religiosity of the Asian poor (represented by the peasants) and the poverty of the Religious Asians (reflected in our monks) meet to form the ideal community of total sharing, the ‘religious socialism’ which, like the early Christian Communism, can be swallowed up in the jungle of Asian feudalism and Western ideologies. Step into the Jordan [sic] of Asian religiosity, and the Spirit will soon guide you through desert and city to the Calvary of Asian Poverty. In you then the Asian Church will at last become Good News to Asia’s Poor.87

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Tracing the radical changes in Roman Catholic attitudes toward other religions reveals a definite evolution from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism and, most recently, to theocentrism. The Catholic Church, throughout most of its history, and with very few exceptions, held that there was no possibility of salvation outside the ark of the Holy Roman Church (extra Ecclesiam nulla salus). Very early, however, the Church also maintained that there was the possibility of grace outside the Church and that God would never punish eternally anyone who was stricken with "invincible ignorance." This allowed for a subtle shift, at the Council of Trent, from a rigid exclusive ecclesiocentrism to an inclusive ecclesiocentrism whereby explicit membership in the visible structure of the Roman Church was no longer absolutely necessary. A more radical shift was introduced at the Second Vatican Council. Although membership or relatedness in some way to the Church was still necessary, the Council went a long way towards leaving its ecclesiocentrism behind and replacing it with a new basis for salvation: Christ the "Logos," who, while he is to be found most
completely in the Church of Rome, is nevertheless not confined to one Church or one religion, but is encountered in varying degrees in all the religions.

It is in the post-Vatican II era, however, that Roman Catholic theology has introduced its most radical changes with regard to its attitude to the non-Christian religions. Karl Rahner's model of anonymous Christianity represents a shift from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism. Rahner contends that God's saving presence is greater than man and the Church: grace can be found outside the visible Church and can be encountered in concrete forms through other religions. If grace is not bound to the Church, however, it is bound to Christ. Jesus is the constitutive cause of all salvation because he is the full and final manifestation of God's saving presence in history.

Hans Kung represents a continuation of Rahner's Christocentric approach but with some significant differences. Just as Rahner no longer tied universal saving grace to the Church, Kung no longer tied it to Christ. Yet, despite this Christological shift, which has the intention of letting the religions stand on their own merits, Kung continues to affirm Jesus Christ as God's normative revelation. Jesus and the Gospel are the superior ideal type, which can function to measure, correct, and judge others by its own standards.

Aloysius Pieris represents a definite shift away from Christocentrism towards theocentrism. He says that the
Christian can encounter other religions with a clear affirmation of Christ's universal salvific role without having to claim his normativeness or finality. He advocates "total immersion" into the religiosity and culture of non-Christian religions so that, through a dialogical encounter, Christians may reach a more complete picture of the totality of God's revelation, of which Christianity represents only a part.

The purpose of this chapter is to present, in a brief way, some unifying themes which may be found in these otherwise widely disparate approaches to the religions. Some important areas in which these three theologians have been criticized by their Roman Catholic colleagues will be helpful in offering some constructive criticisms. It will be necessary to point out some areas in which these theologians have been criticized by the magisterium of the Roman Church. An analysis of some of the major themes treated in this study will reveal the degree to which this evolution in Catholic thought has been in a direction which would help Christians deal more effectively in this world of increasing religious pluralism or if, at any point in its unfolding, it has arrived at dead ends. At stake is the integrity of the Gospel, the quality of Christian commitment and the vitality of Christian mission.

Roman Catholic Criticisms

The fundamental questions which Rahner, Kung and
Pieris have attempted to address as the Church encounters modernity are questions of Christology and ecclesiology. This examination of their responses to the questions, "who is the Christ?" and "why the Church?" have unearthed a "wide range of substantive differences." In terms of Christology, all affirm that Jesus Christ is a way to salvation, a mediator of authentic existence. All view the Church as a way or means to salvation. They differ, however, on the relation of Jesus to other mediators of salvation, and on the relation of the Church to other mediations. They differ, therefore, on the degree of "dispensability and normative value of Jesus Christ and the Church for salvation."  

Despite these differences, however, they are all united by a common goal, which is the unification of the human family. All three of these men are apologetes for their faith. And, in the true spirit of the Catholic Church of post-Vatican II, they are driven by an ecumenical desire. Felipe Gomez, in an excellent article on the uniqueness and universality of Christ, characterizes the dialogue with other religions as a "quest for unity."  

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2Ibid., p. 549.

ecumenicity which unites these men despite the wide divergence of opinion that exists concerning the best way to achieve their ecumenical ideal. Interestingly, despite their attempts at unity between the world religions, their views have caused a considerable amount of disunity within their own community in the form of some very penetrating criticisms.

Rahner, as reported by Karl-Heinz Weger, has often expressed surprise that his theology has not been more violently attacked by the neoscholastic theologians of the Church, "who have accepted it relatively quietly." He has not, however, escaped entirely and a number of Roman Catholic theologians have put forth some very serious criticisms of his work. That Rahner's model of anonymous Christianity has been attacked for being offensive to non-Christians has already been mentioned. Additionally, Rahner's method of doing theology has been criticized as "trying to do far more to commend Christianity than its best advocates would ever claim." Carl J. Peter says that care must be taken lest Rahner's transcendental method come

1978, p. 124, in a speech presented on the campus of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA, April 22-4, 1976, said, "Like all of us, I am searching for a source of unifying energy that will overcome the self-destructive tendencies from which our human family is suffering."


5Carl J. Peter, "A Shift to the Human Subject in Roman Catholic Theology," Communio, 6 (Spring 1979):71.
through as "if others would surely be converted or recon-
verted to Christianity if they were to analyze their sub-
jectivity and the Christian tradition properly." Rahner’s 
model has been criticized for not making anonymous Chris-
tianity sufficiently Christological, making any "explicit
Christological affirmation a superfluous act," and a
"minimalist affirmation."  

Rahner’s views have been more seriously condemned for
the great harm they can, and have, caused to the Church’s
missionary effort, causing it to "lose its meaning," and
bringing the "whole edifice of mission to crumble." He has
been criticized for his co-mingling of nature and grace,
which is seen by some as a "divinization" of the world.
Rahner has received further censure for his minimizing of
the effects of conversion, for making "Christian conversion
plausible of terms other than those of Christianity." Perhaps
the most damaging indictment brought by Roman Catholic

6Ibid.

7Robert J. Schreiter, "The Anonymous Christian and
  Christology," Missiology, 6 (1978):40. For similar views,
  see Lucien Richard, What are They Saying about Christ and
  p. 55.

8Prudencio Damboriena, "Aspects of the Missionary
  Crisis in Roman Catholicism," in William J. Danker and Wi Jo
  Kang, eds., The Future of the Christian World Mission
  (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971) p. 78.

9Ibid., p. 85.

10Avery Dulles, "Fundamental Theology and the Dynamics
theologians against Rahner's theory is that it minimizes the effects of sin and evil in man. Peter says that Rahner's analyses of human subjectivity "miss at least to some extent the excessive character of evil that affects man profoundly..." 11

Kung has fared much worse. His conflict with the magisterium of the Church is well known. The ire of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well as the papacy is, perhaps, understandable in view of Kung's persistent and relentless attacks on the doctrine of infallibility. For this reason, the officials of the Roman Catholic Church have been his greatest critics. Kung affirms that the Spirit of God acts on the Church, is attested by the Church, founds, maintains, and rules the Church, "but the human beings who constitute the Church, can miscalculate, say the wrong thing and write the wrong thing; they can fail to see, fail to hear, fail to grasp, can blunder, fall short and go astray." 12

Sometimes his criticisms come very close to being a personal attack on the Pope himself (then Pope Paul VI): "... contrary to the Pope and his advisers, the longer the teaching office is

11Peter, p. 72. These views are echoed by Brian O. McDermott, "The Theology of Original Sin: Recent Developments," Theological Studies, 38 (1977):512-14. He is critical of Rahner and others who attempt to deny or soften the effects of original sin. He says that original sin is more than privatio, as Rahner held, but that it is, in fact, an act averaio Deo.

exercised by pope and Curia, the more it is exercised in a way which ... inflicts the worst damage on the unity and credibility of the Catholic Church."\(^{13}\) Statements like these, many of them, finally led to the withdrawal of his missio canonica in a statement by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated 15 December 1979:

But since this presumption (since 1975, that Kung would abandon his views) can no longer be entertained, this Sacred Congregation is now in the fulfilment of its task forced to declare that in his writings Professor Hans Kung departs from the integral truth of the Catholic faith and that therefore he cannot be regarded as a Catholic theologian nor perform the task of teaching as one.\(^ {14}\)

Nor has Kung escaped the criticism of his fellow theologians. For example, G. H. Duggan, in dealing primarily with Kung's views on the Church and the papacy, refers to Kung's work as "relativistic,"\(^ {15}\) "revisionistic,"\(^ {16}\) containing "suggestio falsi and suppressio veri,"\(^ {17}\) as well as "generalizations."\(^ {18}\) Joseph F. Costanzo is no less scathing in his assessment of Kung, which consists of a page-by-page refutation of Kung's Infallible? He refers to Kung's grasp of Church history as "myopic considerations of ecclesiastical

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 15.


\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 87. \(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 52.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 65.
history."19 Kung's book, according to Costanzo, is "certainly not an inquiry," and "it reveals not only a psychological alienation but also an intellectual turning of the worm."20

None of these criticisms, however, are directed against Kung's approach to non-Christian religions. In fact, surprisingly little attention has been given to this area of his theology. Perhaps the reason for this can be found in the fact that so much criticism has been directed against Kung's views on the Church and infallibility that there has been no time left for a serious consideration and criticism of his other views. On the other hand, perhaps Roman Catholic theologians have found little to criticize in Kung's approach to the religions.21 At any rate, the only negative criticism of Kung's views on the extra-Christian religions comes from those who feel that he is too restricted in his views, that his emphasis on the normativeness of Christ inhibits any real opportunity for dialogue with the religions.22


20 Ibid.

21 The Catholic Church's censorship of Kung's views on Christology has already been mentioned. See Chapter IV, footnote 95.

22 For example, Paul F. Knitter, "World Religions and the Finality of Christ: A Critique of Hans Kung's 'On Being a Christian,'" Horizon, 5 (1968):164: "My criticism boils down to: it would be just as, if not more, convincing if he
Ironically, Pieris, who represents the most extreme position of the three, has come in for the least amount of criticism. This is no doubt due to the fact that he is the least known of the three and that he is tucked safely away in Sri Lanka. His views have not been published as widely as the others and have, therefore, received less attention. He has not, however, been ignored by his peers. For example, his fellow Asian, Felipe Gomez, in speaking about the relativization of Christianity, says that "From a relativized Christianity, which may be understandable, some pass to relativize Christ Himself, which is quite another question." 23 Laksham Wickremesinghe, also an Asian, is skeptical of Pieris' and others' campaign to acknowledge Christ as absolute only for Christians, while others may have their own saviors as not corresponding to the reality of the absolute character of the other great religions. 24 The relative silence of Roman Catholic theologians over and against Pieris' views, however, should not be misconstrued as meaning that his views, were they known, would go completely unchallenged. Indeed, the magisterium of the Church has said much that has a direct bearing on Pieris' views. What the official organs of the Catholic Church have said about the nature of avoided such terms as: 'only,' 'essentially different,' 'normative.'"

23Gomez, p. 11.

dialogue itself, about the place of the Church in salvation and about the centrality of the Gospel can be taken as an indirect but very sharp repudiation of Pieris' approach to the religions.

The Secretariat for Unbelievers, for example, while it has said nothing about Pieris' approach in particular, nevertheless has said much about the general nature and purpose of dialogue with non-Christian religions which has a direct bearing on Pieris' approach, as well as, to a lesser extent, the approaches of Rahner and Kung. According to the Secretariat for Unbelievers, dialogue does not mean, as especially Pieris and Kung say, that one must enter into it without any predisposition towards the truth of one side or the other, but that one must simply "listen and learn."

Rather than immersing one's self by baptism into the religiosity and culture of other religions, the Secretariat maintains that dialogue, for the Christian, "involves bearing witness to his own belief and thus in its own way it is part of the Church's proclamation of the gospel." It goes on to say, however, that dialogue is not only proclamation but that it "can be called a true form of teaching, since it is able to provide the benefit of doctrine for very many men."

At the heart of the proclamation and teaching which

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26 Ibid., I.
the Secretariat sees as the purposes of dialogue is a search for truth. Indeed, truth is the necessary condition for dialogue since the two sides that come together for dialogue have the moral obligation to seek the truth, especially in the realm of religious problems:

That truth is possible is an affirmation, therefore, which is not merely in harmony with dialogue, but is its necessary condition. When engaging in dialogue, there must be no ambiguity about truth, as though it could be postponed until after dialogue, as some false forms of irenicism seem to do. Indeed, dialogue should originate in the common moral obligation on all to seek the truth, especially in the realm of religious problems. Further, although each of the participants thinks that he is in possession of the truth, this does not invalidate dialogue. Such conviction is not contrary to the nature of dialogue, for dialogue begins from two positions, which it attempts to clarify and as far as possible to bring closer together.27

It is easy to see that the Secretariat for Unbelievers has a very different conception of the nature and purpose of dialogue than Pieris does, a conception which involves both proclamation as well as listening, teaching as well as learning, and, above all, the conviction of truth before the dialogue, not only after. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith adds the warning that the Church’s sons and theologians above all, "must hold fast to the whole doctrine of the faith under the leadership of their pastors and of the pastor of the universal Church."28

27Ibid., II, 1.

28Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Mysterium filii Dei," 21 February 1972. In a different statement, the S.C.D.F. is even more explicit in its demand that Catholic theologians abide by the official dogma of the Roman Church. The implicit reference to
The official documents of the Catholic Church have also had a great deal to say about the Church's role in salvation and its necessity which, at least indirectly, serves as a repudiation of the Christocentric approaches of Rahner and Kung and, more so, of the theocentric approach of Pieris. As was seen (in Chapter II), the documents of Vatican II allowed for the possibility of salvation outside the Church. But this is not to be understood as if the Church had no role in salvation at all. "Lumen Gentium" says that the Church is "for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity" which is "the instrument for theologians like Kung is clear here but it would also apply to Rahner and Pieris as well: "As for the meaning of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed. The faithful therefore must shun the opinion first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify truth in a determinate way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it; secondly, that these formulas signify the truth only in an indeterminate way, this truth being like a goal that is constantly being sought by means of such approximations. Those who hold such an opinion do not avoid dogmatic relativism and they corrupt the concept of the Church's infallibility relative to the truth to be taught or held in a determinate way" ("Mysterium ecclesiae," 24 June 1973). The same document goes on to warn that, while theologians must engage in exploring more deeply the mystery of the Church, "the due freedom of theologians must always be limited by the Word of God as it is faithfully preserved and expounded in the Church and taught and explained by the living Magisterium of the Pastors and especially of the Pastor of the entire People of God." The Synod of Bishops also has spoken on the need of theologians to "be aware of their responsibility... in such a way as to imbue their brethren with a spirit of love and reverence toward the Word of God and the teaching Church," and of their "duty which obliges them to act in communion with the magisterium and according to its directions" ("Ratione habita," 28 October 1967).
the salvation of all."29 "Gaudium et spes" echoes the words of "Lumen Gentium" and elaborates on them, stating that "Every benefit the people of God can confer on mankind during its earthly pilgrimage is rooted in the Church's being 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God's love for men."30 "Dignitatis Humanae" uses even stronger language, saying that the Catholic Church is the one true religion which has the task of spreading its truth to all men: "We believe that this one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus entrusted the task of spreading it among all men . . ."31

It will be noted that, despite the same Council's admission that salvation can be found outside the Roman Church, these statements, employing the definite article when referring to the Roman Church as the sacrament of salvation, imply that the Catholic Church will admit of no other church or religion as its equal and it still maintains itself as necessary for salvation.

This has not changed in the years following the Council. For example, Paul IV, in "Solemni hac liturgia," says that those who withdraw from the Church "contract the


31"Dignitatis Humanae," no. 1.
sins and impurities of the soul . . ." from which "she [the Catholic Church] has the power to free her sons from their guilt through the blood of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit."32 Later he is even more forceful in his wording, again, it seems, in opposition to Kung. In "Evangelii nuntiandi" he says that there is a very close connection between Christ and the Church and that the task of evangelization cannot be carried out without the Church, much less in opposition to her:

This task [evangelization] cannot be carried out without her [the Church], and much less in opposition to her. It is expedient to recall this truth because in these days we hear, not without grief, of men, in good faith, as we like to believe, but certainly misguided, who frequently declare that they are willing to love Christ but not the church. The absurdity of this distinction appears clearly from those words of the gospel: 'He who rejects you rejects me.' [sic] How can anyone claim to love Christ without loving his church in the face of that most striking testimony given by St. Paul: 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.'33

Not only has the Catholic Church offered statements which challenge modern theologians' conceptions of the nature of dialogue and the necessity of the Church but it has also spoken about the necessity of the Gospel of Christ in such a way as to pose a serious repudiation to those who would in any way reduce or minimize the uniqueness and universality of Christ. The Vatican II and post-Vatican II documents are filled with statements about the necessity and centrality of the Gospel which directly contradict what, for

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example, Pieris has to say. A statement of Paul VI from "Evangelii nuntiandi" is chosen as just one example among many because it summarizes all the major points concerning the Gospel which have been at issue in the discussion of Christology:

The gospel message is, therefore, necessary; it is unique; it is irreplaceable. It does not admit of any indifference, of any accommodation to the principles of other religious beliefs or of any compromise, for on it depends the whole issue of man's salvation and in it are contained all the splendours of divine revelation. It expresses a wisdom not of this world and by virtue of its content evokes the spirit of faith - a faith which rests on the power of God. It is truth itself and it is fitting, therefore, that the herald of that truth should consecrate to its cause all his time, all his strength, and if the occasion arises, his very life.34

Thus, it is clear that the theologians of this study, Rahner, Kung, and Pieris, have deviated, to a greater or lesser extent, from the official views of the Roman Catholic Church. It is therefore necessary to stress the point once again that none of their approaches represents the official views of their Church. Indeed, there is a great deal of disagreement among Catholic theologians on how to solve the problem of the universal and particular elements of the

34Ibid. The S.C.D.F. has also spoken about the discussion on Christiology, rejecting in very clear terms a number of common errors, such as the denial of the eternal pre-existence of Christ, or that the humanity of Christ existed of itself as a person and therefore that the mystery of Jesus Christ consists "only in the fact that God, in revealing Himself, was present in the highest degree in the human person Jesus." Such views, the Congregation says, "are far removed from the true belief in Christ" and "are in open conflict with this [orthodox] belief" ("Mysterium filii Dei").
Catholic faith. In a very real sense the windows of the Catholic Church were opened at the Second Vatican Council and Catholic theologians have begun to wrestle in earnest with some of the most basic problems and tensions of their faith. Perhaps they have raised more questions than they found answers, but in doing so they have progressed far beyond the questions that were addressed at the Council. The crucial question is no longer, "what is the Church?" but rather, "why the Church?" and even, "Why be a Christian?"

Thus the Catholic Church, as she enters the waning years of her nineteenth millenium, is asking herself the most radical questions in her history, questions that deal precisely with her own self-identity in a religiously plural world.

Analysis

This study has taken us a long way. It has spanned virtually the entire history of the church. Yet all the while our attention has been focused on how the church, especially the Catholic Church, has dealt with the friction that has always been along her boarders. In the face of increasing confrontation with religious pluralism, Catholic theologians have suggested various models attempting to solve the tension that is inevitably felt when the Church encounters those outside of herself. These attempts have demonstrated the polarity of response that is possible: from exclusive ecclesiocentrism to dialogical theocentrism.
The most prominent feature of this polarity are two poles that are central to the Christian faith: universality and particularity.

It is here that all Christians, not only Catholics, join in the search for a resolution of the tension. For Protestants, the tension centers not so much around the place of the church in salvation but around the particularity of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Yet, the tension is equally troublesome for Protestants as well. And this is the value of a study such as this one. The Roman Catholics have gone to the forefront of the dialogue with the religions. They have raised difficult and persistent questions which all Christians must face. Protestants, too, must enter the dialogue. We too must find ways to make our Christian witness in a world of religious pluralism. Much of the groundwork has been laid for us. It remains only to evaluate, critically, what the Catholic theologians have done, to reject what is unacceptable, appropriate what is of value, and to provide a few modest proposals as to how we may better fulfill our Lord's Great Commission to preach the Gospel to every creature.

In the opening chapter of this study it was proposed to evaluate the approaches of Rahner, Kung and Pieris on the basis of three basic questions: Do they enable Christians to hear more adequately the witness of Scripture? Do they lead Christians to a deeper commitment to Christ and the
Gospel? Do they inspire Christians to carry out more effectively their central mission of advancing God's kingdom by witnessing to Christ? Obviously, these questions are essential. A complete analysis of the entire "program" of each of these three theologians, however, would require much more time and space than is possible here. To compound the problem, this study has touched upon nearly all the central doctrines of the Christian faith, such as ecclesiology, Christology, soteriology, original sin, grace, faith, revelation, and many others. An additional problem is that the bibliography, the surface of which we have only been able to scratch in this study, is immense. In a sense, the major thrust of a study such as this one must, of necessity, be exploratory. There is, of course, great value in this alone, since through it one is able to isolate problems and tensions that Christian theologians are encountering as they attempt to relate the message of Christianity to the world. To merely have found the right questions to ask would have been highly beneficial in itself. Nevertheless, this study has provided much to which to respond.

The first question is: Do these approaches to the non-Christian religions enable Christians to hear more adequately the witness of Scripture? It is, of course, impossible to evaluate each of the views of these three theologians on the basis of Scripture. All that will be attempted here will be to draw attention to a few of the
major areas in which Scripture would seem to pose rather serious problems for these approaches and for which more study will be required.

First of all, there will be serious questions about how their concept of universal revelation compares with the Scriptural doctrine that God reveals his salvific will through his Word. There will be objections to their contention that God has bestowed saving grace through nature in view of the biblical doctrine that God bestows his grace upon man through the mediation of the Word and Sacraments. Furthermore, their attack on the concept of salvation history, which they refuse to distinguish clearly from history as a whole, will also raise questions. As Morris A. Inch has pointed out, if everything is salvation history, then nothing is salvation history, and man as a whole remains alienated from God. Salvation history is "God's calling out of a special people to bear His name." This is what is meant when God, after having given Moses the Aaronic Benediction with which to bless the people of Israel, said, "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:27). It is difficult, if not impossible, for them to sustain this particularism when salvation history is so blended with world history that it loses its distinctiveness.

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The witness of Scripture also raises serious questions about the theological methodology of all three of these men. Rahner's "transcendental" method, Kung's "theology from below," and Pieris' theory that religion, even the Christian religion, is nothing more than the "process of approving and appropriating the basic insights of homo religiosus,"36 or "so many alternative configurations of basic human values,"37 all seem to encounter serious opposition from Scripture, which gives a very different view of the Christian religion and the nature of Christian theology. According to Scripture, Christian theology does not consist in fitting together the basic desires or wishes or values of man. This kind of a view is ultimately atheistic since it denies any separate existence to God apart from man's "subjective implication," or transcendental openness, or man's "basic insights." It leads ultimately to nihilism. Christian theology, on the other hand, is God-given, from above. This is a fact that is attested countless times in the Bible where it is God who comes to man and reveals himself sav- ingly to him. Every time, in the Bible, that man tried to construct his own way to salvation or his own conception of what God was like or how to approach him, man fell into


error. It was God who, time and again, came to man and revealed Himself. Christians who are biblically oriented believe that their religion is not a human insight but a divine revelation which must be believed and obeyed.

There are many other aspects of the theology of these three men that must be critically examined in the light of Holy Scriptures. Surprisingly little has been written by Protestants by way of criticism of their views. All that has been possible in this study is to point out a few areas for further study. The second question, however, brings us to the center of the issues that have been raised in modern Roman Catholic mission theology.

Do the approaches to non-Christian religions put forward by Rahner, Kung and Pieris lead Christians to a deeper commitment to Christ and the Gospel? In attempting to answer this question it will be necessary to ask a few more questions. For example, what is meant by "Christ?" What is the nature of His work? What has He accomplished by His life and death? Here we are brought to the heart and core of the Christian faith and, not insignificantly, the thing

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38 Thomas E. Manteufel, "The Message of Salvation," (S.T.M. Thesis Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1976) has done a thorough study of the theology of Karl Rahner. His exhaustive comparison of Rahner's theology with the Lutheran Confessions was done on the basis of four basic criteria, in thesis-antithesis form: the nature of man, the message of the Gospel, the message to the Jews and pagans, and the message to the atheists. His conclusions are that Rahner's theology is fundamentally incompatible with the Lutheran Confessions.
that sets Christianity apart from all the other religions and gives it its unique character. The person and work of Christ are, needless to say, central to Christian theology. Yet, these are the very issues that have come to the forefront of the dialogue with non-Christian religions. If, however, Christians do not have a clear understanding of the person of Christ and the effects of His work, true dialogue with the religions is an impossibility.

The Roman Catholic struggle with the tension between the universal and particular aspects of its teaching began with the ecclesiological question of the church's role and necessity for salvation but it ended with the Christological question of Christ's role and necessity for salvation. Originally, the question was whether or not salvation was possible outside the Church, but today the question is whether or not salvation is possible outside of Christ. In fact, Lucien Richard has indicated that the "avoidance or non-avoidance of the opposite poles of absolutism and relativism is dictated by Christology."39 He goes on to say that Christologies that are incarnation-centered tend toward some form of exclusivity. Where the doctrine of the incarnation is challenged, however, there is evidence of a more relativistic approach. Christology, then, plays an

essential role in determining one's views towards non-Christian religions.

Once again, on the basis of Scripture, one must have grave doubts about the Christological views of the three theologians in this study. Rahner's "transcendental theology" seems to reduce Christ to nothing more than man's subjective, implicit yearning for "something" outside himself. Kung, at first glance, seems to fare better. Yet, when all is said and done, he too says that the religions teach Christ when they experience loneliness or fear or distress; when they recognize that God is "far off" and outside man. Pieris also seems to reduce Christ to nothing more than a quasi-gnostic "word" or idea which, when combined with, for example, Buddhism's "silence," is made complete. The problem with all of these models is that they separate Christ from the historic Jesus.

The revelation of God's saving love and power in Jesus entitles, indeed, requires Christians to believe that God wishes the salvation of all men, but it does not require them to believe, as Lesslie Newbigin says, that this "is to be accomplished in any way which ignores or bypasses the historic event by which it was in fact revealed and effected."40 According to Scripture, Christ and Jesus are

the same. The eternal Word, the "Logos," which was present from the beginning, assumed in time human form and became incarnate so that Jesus, who lived and walked on earth at a particular time and in a particular place, is the same Christ who is of the same nature with the Father. This is the biblical teaching and it stands in sharp contradistinction to the teachings about Christ which the models of these three theologians seem to imply.41

The danger of views like these is that they run the risk of seeing Jesus Christ as coming in order to give a name to a reality which existed before him as nameless. They tend to explain Christ in light of the religions instead of the religions in the light of Christ. They tend to interpret the incarnation as the "historization of an archetype that is already found throughout the history of religions."42 They reduce Christ to a symbol of some timeless truths and, therefore, trivialize His historicity and His uniqueness. Jesus becomes a mere symbol of a wider universal truth about God rather than a once-for-all unique

41Maurice Wiles, "Does Christology Rest on a Mistake? in S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton, eds., Christ, Faith and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. 8, seems to carry these Christological views to their logical conclusion when he suggests that "just when we have gone through the painful but meaningful process of remythologizing the 'special' one time, one-man character of the First Adam in the Creation-and-Fall myth, should we not do the same for the Second Adam in the Incarnation Myth?"

42Richards, p. 55.
manifestation of God otherwise unknown, except through Scripture.43

Rather than "translating"44 the name of Jesus into some universal philosophical or religious concept, we ought to be more concerned to proclaim the universal and definitive consequences of the concrete once-for-all event that occurred at the cross. We cannot separate Christ from the historical Jesus, nor from the historic name of Jesus. This historical Jesus was the one whom doubting Thomas was invited to touch and the one who invoked the response, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

This brings us to the next aspect of the Christological questions involved in the dialogue with the religions:

43Paul F. Knitter, p. 161, attributes the impossibility of postulating the normativeness of Christ to the doubts which the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation has cast on all facets of the life of Jesus. The historical critical methodology indicates "The probable impossibility of appealing to the way Jesus lived and concluding to his normative excellence over all other religious figures."

44Donald G. Dawe, "Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World," in Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World, p. 20, defines the concept of "translating" the name of Jesus in the following way: "The 'name of Jesus' is the disclosure of the pattern of God's action in human salvation. As such, it is open to translation. This 'name' may be translated or given fresh expression in differing times and places. It is not in the continuity of verbalism but in faithfulness to its meaning that the saving 'name of Jesus' is the disclosure of the structure of new being. It is the pattern of salvation. So the universality of Christianity is grounded in the translatability of the 'name of Jesus,' not in the imposition of particular formularies on others. This power of new being operates throughout the world under the names of many religious traditions."
Christ’s work. It is interesting and revealing, that, amid the profusion of literature which has appeared on the subject in the past few years, almost nothing has been said about Christ’s work. All the time and energy is spent on either relativizing or defending the absolute nature of His person. This is odd, since the person and work of Christ can never be separated and it is the two together that comprise the uniqueness both of Christ Himself and of the religion which bears His name.

Perhaps the reason for this can be found in two facts which have been already seen. First of all, the need for Christ’s work has been eliminated by the fact that none of these theologians take seriously the hopelessly sinful nature of man. If man is, as Rahner says, at worst neutral towards God, or, at best actively tending towards and seeking God, what need is there for a Savior? If the best that one can hope for is to encounter the explicit explanation of what he always already is, what can Christ, in the end, offer him? Or if, as Pieris says, religion is merely so many alternative configurations of the basic values of homo religiosus, where does Christ fit in and what need is there for Him? Secondly, Christ’s ability to do anything meaningful or lasting for man is virtually destroyed when the incarnation is denied. When the divine is torn apart from the human nature of Christ, what is left is merely another man, among many, who died a miserable death many
years ago and a divine "name" which somehow hangs over all the religions but never seems to touch ground. What is missing in the Christologies of these models is exactly what and how Christ did anything for man and why this was necessary.

This conspicuous absence of any mention of Christ's work in the encounter with the religions is truly unfortunate because this is the very thing that sets Christianity apart from all other religions and it is this that Christianity can, and must, bear witness to. The Christian religion is, in contrast to all other religions, a religion of pure grace. No other religion in the world teaches that the same God who demands obedience from His people fulfills his own commandments in their stead. Yet this is what God has done in Jesus Christ. It is Christ's substitutionary atonement for the sins of the world and His vicarious satisfaction on the cross that makes Christianity unique among the religions. Additionally, grace, according to Scripture, is not a quality which inheres in man, whether it comes through creation or revelation or the church or the sacraments, which then enables man to seek God or do things that are pleasing to Him. Grace is rather a quality that is in God and which, in Christ, is directed towards man. Grace is \textit{favor Dei propter Christum}, the favor of God on account of Christ, which comes to man without his having to do anything to earn it. Thus, contrary to the models of these Catholic
theologians, Christianity is a religion of Christ for us, not simply Christ in us. Any approach to non-Christian religions which attempts to do justice not only to the religions but also to Christianity itself will have to do a better job of taking into account doctrines that are as central to the message of Christianity as these are.

The third question which we wish to address to Rahner, Kung and Pieris is: Do their models inspire Christians to carry out more effectively their central mission of advancing God's kingdom by witnessing to Christ? This is, perhaps, the most important question of all in terms of this study. The whole focus of this study has been, after all, to explore ways in which Christian theologians have tried to help Christianity relate to those outside itself. The answer to this question, however, must be answered largely in the negative. To be sure, many positive things can be learned, and these will be noted in the concluding section which follows. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how any of the three models we've looked at can help Christians be more effective witnesses of their faith. In fact, all of them, because they are ultimately universalistic, destroy the foundation and purpose of Christian mission. Christ's Great Commission is predicated upon the fact that people need what Christ has to offer them. If, however, all people, Christians as well as others, may or will be saved anyway, through their own religions or even apart from any religion,
Christianity has nothing lasting to give.

None of the three models gives a valid rationale for a Christian to engage in the difficult task of communicating the Christian message. Rahner's theory that Christian mission should involve making explicit what was previously implicit is insufficient since all can be saved any way and, in fact, only those who have an explicit knowledge of Christ and the Church but reject it will ultimately be lost. They would be better off left alone because explicit knowledge of the Gospel brings also the potential for condemnation. Kung's theory that mission work should involve bringing the full truth to those who have it only imperfectly does not provide a reasonable basis for the evangelistic task since, for him too, all may be saved in the end. Besides, as he says, the religions already have the truth of the Gospel, even though it is shrouded in error. Pieris' model does an even better job of destroying any reason for doing mission work. For him, not only is Christianity not the only true religion, not only is it just one among many, but it is in many ways inferior to the other religions. It is difficult to imagine how a model which states that the only purpose that Christianity has in the dialogue with the religions is to lose itself by immersion in the other so that it no longer retains any of its distinctiveness would provide a valid rationale for engaging in the dialogue.

The approaches to the religions which have formed the
foundation for this study all prove insufficient as models for a Christian, Scriptural approach to the problem of religious pluralism. They have, in varying degrees, undermined many of the central doctrines of the Christian faith. Any approach which attempts to deal honestly with the problem of pluralism must be more faithful to the witness of Scripture. It must find ways to communicate the message of the Gospel without altering the Scriptural doctrine of Christology, without ignoring Christ's work and without destroying the purpose and function of Christian mission.

In the end, as we view all these models, we can echo Gerald H. Anderson's penetrating questions, originally addressed to Pope John Paul II's "Redemptor Hominis," but which apply equally to the models we have seen in this study:

... since you have said that everyone without any exception whatever, is already redeemed by Christ and united with Christ, even where they are unaware of it, why is there any urgency or need at all for persons of other faiths to hear the Gospel, to proclaim their faith in Jesus Christ, to be baptized into membership in the visible church and to partake of the sacraments?45

Conclusions

Our response to these approaches to the non-Christian religions must not be allowed to take on the nature of negative criticism alone. There are many positive things to be learned from these models. All of them, especially Pieris,

teach us the need to approach the dialogue between Christianity and the religions in a spirit of humility. There is no room for arrogance as we try to spread the message of the Gospel. For too long, Christian mission work has been wedded to Western ethnocentrism and the result of this marriage has been a clear message of Western superiority. Alfred C. Krass, himself a convert to Christianity from Judaism who has also spent time in the foreign mission field, suggests that the place to begin for Christian missions is in a spirit of humility towards the people of other religions:

Though I stand in the long train of Christians who have taken the message of Christ to places where it has not previously been heard, I know the history of the missionary movement too well not to recognize its blemishes—its caricatures of the gospel, its outright denials of the faith of Christ. A crucified Lord can—in the hands of dominant elites—become an imperious idol of culture . . . . I cannot feel anything but remorse for the long marriage between Christian missions and western ethnocentrism.46

In view of the history of missions, which has often been marred by triumphalism and, at times, exploitation, what is called for is, first of all, confession and a rededication to the principles of servanthood which our Lord outlined for us and for which his own life serves as the definitive model. At the same time, however, this spirit of humility must not allow us to enter into the kind of

theological accommodation which may ultimately sound more arrogant than Christianity's exclusivistic claims. We may enlarge the boundaries of the church to accommodate "anonymous Christians." We may extend the lineage of Christ before Abraham to relate him to larger humanity. We may emphasize the "cosmic Christ" to include principalities and powers, even nature, in his domain. But, as Stanley Samartha points out, "this kind of 'co-option' may be regarded as patronizing by our neighbors of other faiths. It may satisfy an uneasy Christian conscience, but cannot cancel the persistent fact of religious pluralism. It is certainly not acceptable to our neighbors who are 'listening in' to us." 47

Our spirit of humility over and against the religions, however, should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that a spirit of humility is also due our own faith. This is true not only because Christians believe that their faith-system is God-given and revealed in Scriptures but it is also true on a purely phenomenological level. Christianity is not just the religion of a particular people but, as Krass says, it is "a world-historical phenomenon." 48 Christianity has had a very diverse, far-reaching, and extensive

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history. Christian ideas and Christian affirmations have been let loose in world history and are embodied in various configurations, encased in various institutions. As Krass says, Christian ideas "have a life of their own."49 Christianity antedates us as individuals or as churches or as peoples. Even humanly speaking, we cannot choose, nor can the world, whether the truths of the Christian faith are going to continue to exist or in what form. Since the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, the church has been committed to the Christological formulations which have made Christianity one of the great exclusivist religions. The incarnation is the unique and distinctive identification of God's Logos with Jesus of Nazareth. To attempt to redefine all the terms or to simply wipe them out with the stroke of a pen is a sign of arrogance and does an injustice not only against the preponderance of historical testimony but also against Scripture.

In a sense, the "arrogance" of Christianity cannot be removed without making it something other than Christianity. Likewise you could not expect Muslims to remain Muslims were their creed to become: "There are many Gods beside God, but Mohammed was one of their prophets."50 A monotheistic

49Ibid.

50Even Pieris, "The Legitimacy and the Limitations of the Academic Approach to Inter-Faith Dialogue," Dialogue (N.S.), 1 (1974):41, says that a certain amount of exclusivity is part of the essence of all religions and that even
religion is ultimately intolerant of pluralism. This cannot be changed. What can be done, however, is distinguish between superficially similar words, as John Stott does, words like assurance, conviction, presumption and bigotry. Stott says that conviction is "the state of being convinced, and assurance of being sure, by adequate evidence or argument, that something is true." Presumption, on the other hand, is "a premature assumption of its truth, a confidence resting on inadequate or unexamined premises" while bigotry is "both blind and obstinate; the bigot closes his eyes to the data and clings to his opinions regardless." Presumption and bigotry are incompatible with any serious concern for truth and should have no place in the Christian's attempt to relate the truths of the Gospel to non-Christians. Assurance and conviction, however, have a most proper place in Christian mission as long as they are based, not on ethnocentric triumphalism, but on humble obedience to the Lord of the church, who "came not to be served, but to serve, and

"open" religions, such as Hinduism, display clear signs of particularism: "By accepting all religions as true and equally valid ways of salvation, the Hindu Theology of Religions . . . seems paradoxically intolerant of another religion's particularity in the very act of conceding it a place in the Hindu theological household. The Hindu approach tends to neutralize the other by absorbing the other's individuality into its own theological framework."


52 Ibid.
to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

This is all the more true in view of the fact that it is quite possible, as Samartha says, that "religious pluralism has proved itself to be a persistent fact of human life." As we approach the end of the twentieth century, we are conscious that we are confronted with a dilemma. Carl Braaten says, "If Jesus is the unique and universal Savior, there is no salvation in the non-Christian religions. If there is salvation in the non-Christian religions, then Jesus is not the unique and universal Savior." This is precisely the dilemma which Christian theology is facing today. The problem, however, stems not so much from the outside but from within and hinges, as we have seen time and again, on the polarity of the universal and the particular which is so much a part of Christian theology. This, of

53Samartha, p. 21.


55A number of articles have been written on this tension, which has come to dominate Roman Catholic thought in recent years and a number of schemas have been put forward as attempts to explain how the tension arose. Eugene A. LaVerdiere and William G. Thompson, "New Testament Communities in Transition: A Study of Matthew and Luke," Theological Studies, 37 (1976):567-97, for example, postulate that these two poles can be found in the different circumstances in which the various communities of the early church found themselves. For example, they say that the people among whom the Gospel of Matthew was written struggled not to become sectarian and so developed a more universal approach. The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, came from a community
course, involves asking some very disturbing, but necessary, questions. Can Christianity accept other religious traditions as valid ways to salvation without giving up its fundamental conviction about the absoluteness and uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to believe simultaneously that God has acted decisively and for the salvation of all in the person and work of Jesus Christ and that Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists are warranted in remaining who they are and in following their own religions? As Anderson says, "... either all people need Christ or none do! This evaluation of Jesus Christ is inherent and central in the Christian faith." Is it possible to purify the Christian message of its exclusivistic claims without invalidating the message altogether?

It is, of course, not possible to purge the Christian faith of its particularistic elements. What is possible, however, is to clarify a little what the Biblical nature of Christianity's universal and particular aspects is. Christianity is a universal religion in the sense that God does, which felt a greater concern for its inner life and thus projected a more particularistic approach. Gregory Baum, "Is There a Missionary Message?" in Anderson and Stransky, eds., Mission Trends no. 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 1974) p. 84, says simply that the particularistic wording of the New Testament was "survival language" which no longer has any function in the church today.

indeed, wish to save all people and give them, all of them, eternal life. This is God’s gracious will, or, as Rahner would say, God’s salvific will. In addition, Christianity is a universal religion in the sense that God has offered his grace to all people, whether free or slave, male or female, Jew or Greek, Third World or First World. This is known as gratia universalis: God has offered His salvific will to all people, indiscriminately, and He wants all people to be brought to the knowledge of His will and to receive the eternal rewards He has prepared for them. It must be noted that, according to Scriptures, God does not impose His saving grace on all people, even though He wishes them all to have it and has offered it to them all. Man can and does reject this grace, through sinful disobedience and stubbornness, unless moved by the Holy Spirit to accept it in faith. Thus, the universality of Christianity consists in God’s universal will to save all and in His universal offer of grace through His Word.

The particularity of the Christian faith consists in the fact that God wills to save all and offers salvation to all only through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The particularity of the Christian religion does not consist in the fact that God chose a particular people, nor in the fact that Christianity arose among a particular culture, nor in belonging to a particular church or a particular class group or a certain socio-economic status. The particularity of
Christianity is found in the fact that only through faith in Jesus Christ may one attain salvation, which is attested countless times in Scripture. That God's universal will and offer are mediated through the particular means of faith in Jesus Christ does not solve the tension, but it helps at least to understand what is meant when the two terms are used.

Ultimately, of course, the tension between the universal and the particular aspects of the Christian faith cannot be resolved. In this entire discussion, during

57 This is true despite some rather valiant, and ingenious, attempts to do so. For example, Lesslie Newbigin, "The Gospel among the Religions," Faith Meets Faith, p. 18, speaks of the necessity of "self-emptying" as we approach the task of dialogue: "There has to be a kenosis, a 'self-emptying.' The Christian does not meet his partner in dialogue as one who possesses the truth and the holiness of God but as one who is ready to hear the judgment spoken through the lips and life of his partner of another faith." John Macquarrie, "Christianity and Other Faiths," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, 20 (1964):43-4, says that it is impossible to use one religion as the yard stick for the others: "A creative dialogue is possible only if there is complete openness, and no preliminary assumption that one revelation . . . must be the yard stick for all others." William H. Thompson, "The Risen Christ, Transcultural Consciousness, and the Encounter of the World Religions," Theological Studies, 37 (1976):382, introduces the concept of "transculturalization" and stresses detachment in the dialogue with the religions: "Contemporary Christianity is being universalized and transculturized, and this in direct proportion to its ability to detach itself from a simple identification between Christendom and Christianity. What needs emphasizing is the word 'detachment.'" Finally, Joseph A. Bracken, "Salvation: A Matter of Personal Choice," Theological Studies, 37 (1976): 423, is even more inventive, maintaining that God will ratify whatever means a person chooses to obtain salvation by means of an "individualized" approach: "Human beings are called by God to become fully individuated personas and thus freely to choose their own mode of salvation. The three
which we have looked closely at three models and more superficially at a number of other approaches, there is a note of irony. First of all, which model should we choose? Can they all be correct? But more importantly, the question is not ours to decide. God has not provided us with a great riddle which we, with all the powers of our imagination, must solve. God Himself has decided the question. Theologically, this is why the issue does not hang ultimately on the question of equal justice for all. God's justice in determining his way of salvation, as Krass reminds us, "comes about neither through 'democratic' pluralism but - glory be! - through his total commitment to the specific in his act of salvation."

God has made Jesus Christ Lord of the universe and, fortunately, he has not asked our opinion on the subject. This is a point that H. G. Davis makes very well:

This is God's arbitrary, unilateral, undemocratic action. God had no allies or confederates in this, no pacts with anybody. God did not call a world conference to discuss the proposal that Jesus be made Lord. He established no commission, appointed no fact-finding committee to report on the advisability of making Jesus Lord, or to devise ways and means to make Jesus Lord and Christ. He did not consult Congress in Washington, the Parliament in London, or the Kremlin in Moscow. He did not wait till the Bureau of Scientific Research approved his plan as feasible. He did not stop to ask what all the professors in universities and theological schools

divine Persons, to be sure, deeply desire that we find our salvation in and through union with Themelves and our fellow human beings. But ultimately They will ratify whatever we choose by way of a personal life-style, an individualized salvation."

58 Krass, p. 159.
would think if he made Jesus Lord. He just made him Lord, and then sent his messenger to announce what he had done.59

In the end, even if we were able to agree on a plan to set Jesus up as Lord in a way that would not be scandalous to other religions, that would not make Him Lord. If He is Lord, then He is Lord even if not a single man, woman or child on earth believes in Him or confesses Him. If He is not Lord by God’s own "it is so," then He would not be Lord though every person on earth accepted Him as such. If His being Lord depended on anybody’s confession, or on majority vote, then He would not be Lord at all, but only a "puppet lordling created by human decision and subject to human opinion."60

Nevertheless, this study reveals that difficult and important questions are being asked by theologians today, which cannot be ignored. Do we have the liberty to reclothe the message of Scripture in modern dress without being guilty of manipulation? What are the relationships between history and faith, Jesus and Christ, Scripture and theological formulations? How can we present the Good News of Jesus intelligibly to non-Christians without distorting it? These are some of the urgent questions which are facing all of us today. If we cannot agree with all the answers which


60 Ibid., p. 219.
are being offered, we have no real quarrel with the questions. As Christians we must go to the frontiers and engage in the debate, while at the same time, we must actively search the Scriptures for answers to the many questions that inevitably arise.

While we cannot disregard the Christian claims that faith in Christ is the only means of salvation and that Christianity is the only true religion, this does not preclude appreciation for, and even high regard for, the world religions as cultural expressions of the best that mankind has to offer. This implies that we should enter the dialogue with the religions in a spirit of optimism, not, as Waldron Scott says, as a means for discovering God but "as a way of understanding humankind, and an opportunity to experience and express solidarity with our fellow human beings."61 Some possible foci for interreligious dialogue might include dialogue on the nature of dialogue itself, dialogue to promote freedom of worship and witness, dialogue concerned with meeting human need, dialogue designed to break down barriers of distrust within the religions of the world and dialogue that has as its objective mutual comprehension of conflicting truth claims.

Churches and theologians are calling us to a new dialogue with the world religions. Perhaps this study can

61 Waldron Scott, "No Other Name - An Evangelical Conviction," in Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism, p. 66.
serve as part of the groundwork for the task that lies before us. Braaten, however, issues a warning which merits serious consideration. "I do not want the church of which I am a part," he says, "to be represented by a theology that has already abandoned the heart of the Christian gospel."62

The only sound basis for true dialogue with the religions is one which presents clearly but winsomely the true Christian message. To temper the message, to soften Christ's own exclusive claims is to be dishonest both to the religions and to ourselves. As Anderson says, "Whenever the church falls into sub-mission, failing faithfully to witness to the unique, ultimate, and universal lordship of Jesus Christ over all of God's creation, it soon ceases to be the church."63

What of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ? Christian compassion has moved each generation to ask this question. The jailor at Philippi asked a more pertinent question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). While the love of God will move people of all ages to endless speculation on the fate of those who do not know Christ, William J. Danker reminds us, "God and human beings have their separate roles in the salvation of people. God

62Braaten, p. 79.

reserves executive privilege to Himself." Meanwhile, our struggle with the tension between *gratia universalis* and *sola fide* encourages us all the more fervently to "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), and to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

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