

BEYOND THE 'TRUE AND HOLY': ROMAN CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY
AND THE LEGACY OF VATICAN II

by

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(Under the Direction of William L. Power)

ABSTRACT

The Second Vatican Council, addressing the reality of our shrinking world, opened the door to dialogue with the world's non-Christian traditions in ways that had not previously been realized by the Roman Catholic Church. However, subsequent to the Council, conflict arose concerning the manner in which the Council should be interpreted. Therefore, the reason for this study is to analyze how this interpretation has developed, both positively and negatively, and what needs to happen for dialogue to move forward in an effective manner.

INDEX WORDS: Ecumenical Theology, Interreligious Dialogue, The Roman Catholic Church and Non-Christian Religions, Roman Catholic Theology, The Second Vatican Council

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who made this possible

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Introduction

The following will be an explication of the nature of post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology in relation to interreligious dialogue. The Second Vatican Council, addressing the reality of our shrinking world, opened the door to dialogue with the world's non-Christian traditions in ways that had not previously been realized by the Roman Catholic Church. However, subsequent to the Council, conflict arose concerning the manner in which the Council should be interpreted. Therefore, the reason for this study is to analyze how this interpretation has developed, both positively and negatively, and what needs to happen for dialogue to move forward in an effective manner. It will by no means be an exhaustive analysis of either the documents resulting from the Second Vatican Council or the Church's relationship to non-Christian religions. For example, initially, I intended to devote a significant portion of this study to the contributions of both Christian and non-Christian monastic traditions to the furthering of a dialogue between the religions of the world. While I still think, through the work of those such as Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh, that there is much potential for positive results through monastic dialogue, my research ultimately led me in the direction of a more thorough explication of the theological and philosophical prerequisites, which must exist before dialogue can be possible. The latter will be the basis for this study. Therefore, my intention here is to suggest a direction for dialogue, a theological and philosophical framework, which will be most conducive for the perpetuation of an effective dialogue in which the truth claims of all involved will be analyzed with the hope of the mutual enrichment of the understanding of all parties involved. In relation to this framework, I intend to argue that Vatican II should stand as the call to and the

cause for further theological inquiry and not the end and justification for all theological interpretation.

At this point, it is necessary to provide some clarification and explanation concerning some of the topics to be discussed. First of all, my title refers to “ecumenical dialogue.” Ecumenical dialogue is often equated with dialogue between various Christian traditions for the purpose of understanding and unity. It can also refer to dialogue between those representing the Christian tradition and those from non-Christian traditions. This study will focus on the latter definition, specifically, as stated above, dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and non-Christian religions. Also, “ecumenical” will be used interchangeably with “interreligious” and “interfaith” as synonymous terms referring to the relationship between two distinct religious traditions.

In addition, three options or methods are consistently mentioned in relation to dialogue between religions. These options are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism respectively. As I was reminded by someone who read a chapter of this thesis, these terms are not always properly defined and are frequently used in an inconsistent manner. Consequently, it is necessary to provide definitions for what I mean to convey when referring to these methods of dialogue. By exclusivism, I mean the position that there is one true religion, which consequently contains “saving” truth, and no “saving” truth is to be found outside of that tradition. Like exclusivism, an inclusivist stance implies that there is only one true religion. However, “saving” truth is offered outside of that one true, tradition, albeit mediated through the truth claims of the one, true religion. Finally, the pluralist position posits that there *are* multiple true religions all of which contain “saving” truth. It is important to note the distinction between “truth” and “saving truth” as , traditionally, granting “truth” to certain aspects of other religions has not been a

problem for the Roman Catholic tradition; however, the tradition has not been as willing to grant “saving truth” to these other religions.

With the aid of certain theologians, I will argue for an alternative to the three methods described above, which will point toward a critical pluralism concerning the manner in which the Roman Catholic Church conducts dialogue with other religious traditions. I will contend that Catholic ecumenical theology must proceed with an acceptance of this critical dialogue, a dialogue which will critically analyze the Church’s own position, accepting that some traditional views may ultimately fail to meet the requirements established by these theological criteria. I will maintain that effective dialogue must be unremitting in its search for theological and philosophical truth in one’s own tradition while simultaneously affirming the possibility of the existence of efficacy and “saving” truth in non-Christian religions. In other words, I will affirm the *possibility* of a plurality of true religions without accepting a priori that multiple religions, including my own, indeed *are* true while maintaining that all statements of truth must be validated through a thorough process based on a critical historical inquiry and a sound philosophical framework constructed with the proper canons of reason and religious experience. In relation to this, I will contend that Vatican II must be looked upon as the initial contribution to a new type of dialogue that is yet to be realized within Roman Catholicism. It must not be treated as the final, definitive word, but as the beginning of a process which will, one hopes, lead to further and deeper theological dialogue with the world’s non-Christian religions.

Chapter 1

Beyond the 'True and Holy': Interreligious Dialogue and the Search for a New Paradigm in Catholic Theology

My analysis of this topic begins with the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non Christian Religions” from the *Documents of Vatican II*. This document reflects the requisite characteristics for sincere, effective dialogue in that it attempts to avoid the extremes of exclusivism, on the one hand, and relativism on the other. The statement concerning the former of these two extremes marks a clear achievement in Catholic theology: “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” (*Documents of Vatican II* 739). An exclusivist stance is effectively avoided by allowing for the possibility of truth in other traditions while the uniqueness of the Catholic message is necessarily retained with the mention of the Church’s own teaching authority. However, it is my contention that the subsequent qualifying statement, which is an attempt by the Magisterium to more completely affirm the uniqueness of the Christian message, will ultimately hinder sincere dialogue with the world’s religions.

The first portion of this qualifying statement, taken from *The Gospel of John*, reads as follows: “Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way the truth and the life” (John 14:6). This statement implicitly upholds the traditional Catholic

view, perpetuated in Council and Creed, that the person of Jesus of Nazareth is synonymous with the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Eternal Word of God, and, therefore, coeternal and equal in standing with God the Father. I will contend that this will ultimately serve as an impenetrable boundary for effective dialogue. In other words, one cannot converse with others face to face if he or she has already prejudiced the possibility of others discerning that saving truth, which is available to all and not just mediated via our own religious tradition.

In order to develop this topic, I will examine the applicable aspects of the theologies of Hans Kung and Edward Schillebeeckx, primarily the former, as examples of what I see as a necessary continuation and positive improvement upon Vatican II as well as examples of the limitations placed on Catholic theologians by the Catholic hierarchy since the culmination of Vatican II. Also, I will point out evidence of the perpetuation of the negative legacy of Vatican II in terms of ecumenical dialogue such as, for example, Karl Rahner's assertion of the existence of "anonymous Christians." In addition, I will also rely heavily upon the theology of Schubert Ogden. In the case of Ogden, I have implemented his work for his theological framework rather than his relation to Catholic tradition; however, being open to the influences of those outside of the Catholic tradition is necessary if Catholic theology hopes to be valid for our contemporary setting in history as well as consistent with the dictates of Vatican II: "Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification" (*Documents of Vatican II* 458). The overall purpose of my explication will be to stress the need for theological freedom for Catholic theologians, in this case for the purposes of interreligious dialogue, treating the Second Vatican Council as a distinct and significant achievement in an ever continuing process. I intend to use this paper as an avenue through which to argue in favor of a Catholic theology that will continue to build upon

the achievements of Vatican II as opposed to a theology limited in scope by treating the pronouncements of the Council as rigid dogma under which the Church must function until the convening of another Council.

Using the theory of scientific paradigm change put forth by Thomas Kuhn, Hans Kung calls for a “new paradigm” in Christian theology. He sees the same scenario playing out in theology as Kuhn describes in science. Quoting Kuhn, Kung describes a paradigm as “‘an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community’ (Kuhn, p. 175)” (Kung, *Theology* 132). The replacement of the current paradigm, a process which Kung claims is “more revolutionary than evolutionary” (Kung, *Theology* 131), happens through a process in which, over a period of time, the existing paradigm has been rendered largely untenable by the emergence of new discoveries. This “paradigm shift” culminates following “*a transitional period of uncertainty*, in which faith in the established model began to waver, patterns of thought were seen through, bonds loosened, traditional schools dwindled, and a host of competing new approaches made their appearance” (Kung, *Theology* 143). According to Kung, Catholic theology went through such a period during the “transitional situation during the Vatican II era” (Kung, *Theology* 143) in which Catholicism faced the crisis of trying to hold on to an existing model that was being rendered increasingly untenable in its relationship to the modern world. However, he later asserts that a “crisis is surely not an ‘indispensable prerequisite’ for a paradigm change” (Kung, *Theology* 143). Thus, we are still waiting for this theology, which began to more visibly emerge during the Vatican II era, to mature (Kung, *Theology* 262). For him, this “new paradigm” must provide a theology that is “true” not “conformist or opportunist,” “free” not “authoritarian,” “critical” not “traditionalistic,” and, finally, “ecumenical” not “denominational” (Kung, *Theology* 161-162).

While all of these criteria are applicable to the present study and will be dealt with here, at this point, I will begin by dealing with the latter of these most explicitly.

Those who are even vaguely aware of the history of the Second Vatican Council are familiar with the image, at the commencement of the Council, of Pope John XXIII's symbolic gesture of opening the windows of the Church letting light in so that the Church could gaze out upon the world, while the people of the world could simultaneously see into the Church. In the spirit of this gesture, Kung wishes to perpetuate a theology that will "dare to make a 'new departure toward a theology of the world religions'" (Kung, *Theology* 11), a truly ecumenical theology, which "sees in every other theology not an opponent but a partner" and one that is "bent on understanding instead of separation" (Kung, *Theology* 162). The question, which now arises, is how can we develop an ecumenical theology, which can adequately retain the unique aspects and avoid compromising any of the truth of one's own tradition, while, simultaneously, not taking a prejudiced stance when dealing with another tradition?

The ecumenical theology developed by Schubert Ogden provides a more than adequate answer to this question concerning the development of a theological framework through which to implement an effective interreligious dialogue. He attempts to avoid, on the one hand, "Christian monism in its two forms of exclusivism and inclusivism respectively" and, at the opposite extreme, "Christian pluralism, with its logically contrary position that there not only can be but are other religions whose claim to be formally true is as valid as Christianity's" (Ogden 82-83). His answer concerning how to avoid this problem lies in what he calls the "fourth option," which effectively avoids the errors of both exclusivism and inclusivism and the relativity of any manifestation of blanket pluralism. According to Ogden, "What one needs to assert to counter monism is not that there actually *are* many true religions, but only that there *can*

be, this being the logical contradictory of any position that there *cannot be* because Christianity alone can be true” (Ogden 83). One is thus able to affirm that one’s own tradition, while containing truth, does not hold absolute truth, while not falling into any type of egregious “different roads leading to the same destination” terminology: “One could hold, in other words, that religions other than Christianity can also be formally true even if, in point of fact, none of them actually is true or has as yet been shown to be so in a reasoned way” (Ogden 83).

Kung speaks in much the same language in developing his theology concerning Christianity’s relationship with the world’s non-Christian religions. He states that he has “tried to walk the difficult *via media* between extremes” attempting “to avoid a narrow-minded, conceited *absolutism*...which sees its own truth as ‘ab-solute,’ that is, detached from the truth of others” as well as avoiding “a superficial and irresponsible *relativism*...that relativizes all truth and nonchalantly equates all values and standards” (Kung, *Christianity* xviii). As a result, he has argued for neither “a *standpoint of exclusivity*, which issues a blanket condemnation of the non-Christian religions and their truth, nor a *standpoint of superiority*, which rates my own religion as a priori better (in doctrine, ethics, or system).” In addition, he finds both “*arbitrary pluralism*” and “the *indifferentism* that exempts certain religious positions and decisions from criticism” equally untenable (Kung, *Christianity* xviii). Therefore, like Ogden, Kung rejects both extremes, regardless of whatever title they may hold, as valid options for dialogue with the world’s religions. In addition, to return his aforementioned criteria for the theology of the “new paradigm,” Kung claims that any ecumenical theology must also be a critical theology: “We need a dialogue with give and take, into which the deepest intentions of the religions must be introduced. Thus it must be a critical dialogue, in which all religions are challenged not simply to justify everything, but to deliver their best and most profound message” (Kung, *Christianity*

xviii). Of course, these criteria apply equally to the Christian confession as they do to the religions with which Christianity is in dialogue.

Ultimately, according to Kung, complete truth lies only with God. Consequently, for him, “Christianity, *so far* as it attests to God in Christ, is certainly the *true* religion. But no religion has the *whole* truth, only *God alone* has the *whole* truth...Only God *himself...is the* truth” (Kung, *Theology* 254-255). Kung sums this issue up perfectly by asserting that the “truth cannot be different in the different religions but only one...” (Kung, *Christianity* xviii-xix). In other words, despite the various truth claims of all religions, neither any one nor any combination of religious traditions holds the ultimate truth of which we can only partially describe:

As far as the future goes, only one thing is certain: At the end both of human life and the course of the world Buddhism and Hinduism will no longer be there, nor will Islam nor Judaism. Indeed, in the end Christianity will not be there either. In the end no religion will be left standing, but the one Inexpressible, to whom all religions are oriented, whom Christians will only then completely recognize—when the imperfect gives way before the perfect—even as they themselves are recognized: *the* truth face to face. (Kung, *Theology* 255)

We are left to move forward, acting within our own traditions, with what grains of truth we can garner from reason and experience accepting that we can never monopolize truth and, ultimately, “that there is not a little falsehood and distortion in all religious praxis, including that of persons who think and speak of themselves as Christians” (Ogden 103).

Consequently, both the theologies of Kung and Ogden call for what can only be seen as a brutal honesty both in relation to one’s own tradition, in this case Christianity, and in relation to the tradition with which the dialogue is taking place. Ultimately, this honesty will result in a difficult dichotomy for the Christian theologian with an interest in interreligious dialogue. On the one hand, he or she must relinquish the idea that he or she holds a “*monopoly on the truth*”;

however, at the same time, the Christian theologian in dialogue must not compromise the unique expression of his or her Christian faith in order to proclaim some sort of relative pluralism (Kung, *Theology* 237). In Kung's words, "there must be no betrayal of freedom for the sake of truth. The *question of truth* must not be trivialized and sacrificed to the utopia of future world unity and the religion of world unity" (Kung, *Theology* 237). According to Ogden, any truth claim made by a religious tradition, Christian or otherwise, has to be validated through reason and religious experience: "There is the distinct alternative of recognizing the truth claim of the Christian religion to be exactly that—a claim—and of being willing to critically validate it through unrestricted dialogue and common inquiry, whenever it is rendered problematic by counterclaims to religious or existential truth" (Ogden 100-101). To make a long story short, one does not want to unnecessarily relinquish what one holds as truth for the sake of tentative agreement, and any dialogue that glosses over philosophical differences in favor of promoting an illusory compatibility or spurious understanding is not only a waste of time but has ceased to be a valid expression of religion. The Christian theologian must neither universally deny the unique truth claims of his or her own tradition in favor of appeasing another nor must he or she treat his or her own tradition as universally normative but as one expression amongst others all of which are attempting to attain religious truth.

However, Kung asserts that one's own tradition can be seen as exclusive at the individual level claiming that "only when *a* religion has become *my* religion, does the conversation about truth take on exciting depth...In my religion and in the other religions as well, the issue is not a general, but an existential truth...In this sense there is for me—as for all believers—only *one true religion*" (Kung, *Theology* 249). Of course, for Kung, this does not deny the possibility of truth existing in a religion that lies outside of the tradition that one calls his or her own: "Still at

the same time it is true that the *other* religions (which for hundreds of millions of persons are the *true* religion) are for that reason still *in no ways untrue, religions*, are by no means simply untruth. Not only do they have a great deal of truth in common with Christianity. They also have their own truth, which we do not have” (Kung, *Theology* 250). Once again, we return to the issue of truth, which, for Kung, as has been previously stated, cannot be contained within any one religious tradition despite the exclusive truth claims of that tradition’s adherents.

How then, accepting all that has been stated above, does one classify his or her devotion to Christianity in relation to the world’s other religious traditions? Kung describes his reasoning as follows:

Thus, in brief, I am a Christian because and to the degree that I believe in this Christ and—though of course the times have changed—I try to practically emulate him (along with millions of others, each in his own way), and I take him as the guide for my path in life. Hence, in accordance with the words of the Gospel of John, he is for us, *the way, the truth, and the life*. (Kung, *Theology* 250-251)

Of course, this is the very same Scriptural passage that I cited at the beginning of this chapter as being a hindrance to effective dialogue. The very important difference between Kung’s reference to the *Gospel of John* and the former reference from the Vatican II statement is that Kung uses the reference to demonstrate exclusivity at the *individual* level whereas the statement from the Council uses it to promote this exclusive statement as binding on a *universal* level.

Kung is very clear that Jesus is “for us” (i. e., Christians), and not necessarily for all, *the way, the truth, and the life*. On the other hand, the subsequent statement to the Johannine reference contained within the Vatican II document reads as follows: “In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fulness of their religious life” (*Documents of Vatican II* 739). Basically, the Council statement, in its requisite attempt to affirm the uniquely Christian profession of the ultimate has overshot its mark and allowed

exclusivism to reenter the discussion. I could elaborate here concerning the necessity of treating the Christian Scriptures as a catholic whole as opposed to taking verses out of context in order to promote a certain viewpoint, but that will be the subject of another part of this project and one that I do not have the room to express completely here.

It has been pointed out to me, by some who have read this chapter, that Kung's notion of exclusivity at the individual level could be problematic. I am in complete agreement, and, thus, it is necessary to provide some clarification concerning what I intend to convey here. His problematic terminology aside, I think Kung is saying that one can be exclusive in religious practice. However, the individual and ultimately the community of individuals professing a similar belief must accept that their practice does not hold exclusive truth but is one expression of human existence among a myriad of others, all of which have an equal opportunity to attain "saving" truth. Thus, while one's individual religious devotion may be exclusive in practice, a claim of exclusivism cannot be allowed to be promoted to the level of a truth claim at the universal level and used to discount the possibility of truth that may exist in other traditions.

For this very reason, Kung recognizes and does not deny the legitimacy of the criticism levied against Christianity by those outside of the tradition: "With good reason *criticism by the world religions of Christianity* is clear and pointed. Christians have too little awareness of how often, despite its ethic of love and peace, Christianity, in its actual appearance and activity, strikes the adherents of other religions as exclusive, intolerant, and aggressive..." (Kung, *Theology* 238). In addition, Kung also recognizes the criticism that those within the Christian community have, at times, used a heightened christology in order to place the figure of Jesus of Nazareth in a superior position in relation to the founding figures of other religions (Kung, *Theology* 238). With this in mind, it is necessary to turn now to a discussion, albeit brief and

certainly not exhaustive, of the role that christology plays in Christianity's dialogue with the world's religions.

It is precisely a certain kind of christology that can be cited as the most prominent hindrance to Catholic dialogue with the world's religions. Of course, it is necessary to reiterate, at the outset of this discussion, that one does not want to unnecessarily relinquish what one holds as religious truth, in this case concerning christology, for the sake of appeasing a dialogue partner from another religion. However, Christian theologians should also not be expected to retain views, even those which have been traditionally upheld by Church tradition, that no longer seem credible in relation to our contemporary experience. That being said, I would like to begin by examining an example of how the Second Vatican Council's interpretation of the person of Jesus of Nazareth in relation to the world's non-Christian religions has been manifested in a negative way by looking at the assertion made by Karl Rahner of the existence of "anonymous Christians."

Rahner attempts to avoid Christian exclusivism by extending the possibility of God's "salvation" to those outside of the Christian community; however, he does so by implementing a type of inclusivism—a view that has already been found here to be equally unacceptable—which is dependent on the salvific power of Jesus, who is seen by Christians as the Christ: "In the acceptance of himself man is accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of his own anonymous movement towards God by grace, and the acceptance of this belief is again not an act of man alone but the work of God's grace which is the grace of Christ..." (Rahner, *Theological Investigation* 394). With this idea of "anonymous Christianity," Rahner has taken the message of Vatican II to its logical conclusion. The Council has endorsed the freedom of the Catholic theologian to converse with those affiliated with other religious traditions and to learn

from them while, at the same time, attesting to the validity of his or her own tradition: “The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians...” (*Documents of Vatican II* 739). However, the Council does not endorse achieving God’s “salvation” through any other means than through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Consequently, Rahner’s “anonymous Christians” achieve their salvation, unbeknownst to them, through the salvific power of Jesus, the incarnate Second Person of the Divine Trinity.

Both Kung and Ogden adamantly disagree with Rahner’s christological inclusivism as a valid means by which to conduct dialogue with the world’s religious traditions. Kung asserts that if Rahner’s theory were to be employed in a situation of potential dialogue, the “will of those who are after all not Christians and do not want to be Christians, is not respected but interpreted in accordance with the Christian theologian’s interests” (Kung, *Theology* 236). It is, in essence, an assertion, which does not take into account the truth claims of those with whom one is in dialogue and, moreover, is quite an insult to the sincere believer from a non-Christian tradition. In Kung’s words: “But around the world one will never find a serious Jew or Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist, who does not feel the arrogance of the claim that he or she is ‘anonymous’ and, what is more, an ‘anonymous Christian’” (Kung, *Theology* 236). In addition, Kung adds that “this sort of speculative pocketing of one’s conversation partner brings dialogue to an end before it has even gotten under way” (Kung, *Theology* 236).

Ogden, on the other hand, does not have as much of a problem with the terminology of “anonymous Christian” as does Kung; however, he agrees with Kung that, in this case, Rahner’s

basic theological framework concerning christology is flawed. The problem lies in Rahner's conception of salvation. Both Ogden and Rahner would affirm that salvation is freely offered to all with the understanding that humanity must accept this offer for it to be efficacious; however, Rahner adopts what Ogden refers to as a "christocentric" as opposed to a "theocentric" conception of salvation. These two conceptions of salvation are alike in that both "understand Christian faith to be nothing other or less than faith in the one true God in whom alone is salvation, even as they both affirm that the only true God is the God who has in fact acted to save explicitly and decisively through Jesus Christ" (Ogden 84). However, there exists a significant difference between their "respective understandings of the unique saving event of Jesus Christ" (Ogden 84). Concerning the former viewpoint, the Christ event "not only represents the possibility of salvation but also in some way *constitutes* it," whereas for the "theocentric" viewpoint, which is compatible with the aforementioned "fourth option," "this event in no way constitutes the possibility of salvation but only *represents* it" (Ogden 84). Another example will suffice to adequately demonstrate Rahner's adherence to this "christocentric" christology:

Therefore no matter what a man states in his conceptual, theoretical and religious reflection, anyone who does not say in his *heart*, 'there is not God'...but testifies to him by the radical acceptance of his being, is a believer. But if in this way he believes in deed and in truth in the holy mystery of God, if he does not suppress this truth but leaves it free play, then the grace of this truth by which he allows himself to be led is always already the grace of the Father in his Son. And anyone who has let himself be taken hold of by this grace can be called with every right an 'anonymous Christian'. (Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 395)

The question is ultimately where the source for this saving grace is to be found. For those adhering to a "theocentric" view, the source is in God alone. For Rahner, while the source remains in God, saving grace is to be found exclusively through Jesus Christ.

At this point, it is necessary to explicate further Ogden's idea of a "representative christology" in order to show how it relates to his "fourth option" for dialogue. For him, the

“Christ event cannot be the cause of salvation because its only cause, and the cause of this event itself, is the boundless love of God of which this event is the decisive re-presentation” (Ogden 93). The person of Jesus of Nazareth can be seen as a representational sign of the acceptance of the salvation, which is offered to all by God alone, but not as the constitutive cause of that salvation. However, the “event of Jesus Christ” can still be seen as “constitutive of the specifically Christian understanding of this possibility, and thus of all Christian sacraments and means of salvation as well as of the visible church and everything specifically Christian.” As a result, Jesus cannot be spoken of “merely as prophet, sage, or saint” (Ogden 97). Therefore, unlike Rahner’s “anonymous Christianity,” the unique aspects of the Christian confession are retained while also allowing for a “theocentric” as opposed to a “christocentric” view of salvation. For Ogden, there is truly no other logical choice: “Therefore, my conclusion from Rahner’s argument is that one can meet the decisive objection to the constitutive type of christology underlying inclusivism only by opting for a representative type of christology” (Ogden 94). The “fourth option” is the only valid means of enacting a sincere ecumenical dialogue and the “fourth option” is only possible with a “representative christology.”

Now, I would like to offer a brief explanation of Kung’s christology, which, while it does not contain Ogden’s explicit language, is consistent with the other aspects of his aforementioned ecumenical theology in that it effectively avoids an exclusivist stance concerning the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. In explicating his christology, Kung parallels his own christological conception with that of Edward Schillebeeckx. Referring to Schillebeeckx’s terminology of the “two sources,” Kung asserts the necessity of the “two poles” of Christian theology, which are, for both theologians, “the whole tradition of the experience of the great Jewish-Christian movement, and on the other hand the contemporary, new human experiences of both Christians

and non-Christians” (Schillebeeckx 3). That being said, it is necessary to clear up one very crucial aspect before commencing with respective explications of each pole. For both Kung and Schillebeeckx, at both poles, the heart of the matter is the issue of the interpretation of the historical source of the Christian message, the “*living Jesus of history*” (Kung, *Consensus* 6). According to Kung, “Christianity is not based on myths, legends, or fairy tales, and not just on doctrine (it is no ‘book religion’), but primarily on a historical personality: Jesus of Nazareth, who is believed to be God’s Christ” (Kung, *Theology* 196). In the words of Schillebeeckx, “It is not the historical picture of Jesus but the living Jesus of history who stands at the beginning and is the source, norm and criterion of the interpretive experience which the first Christians had of him” (Schillebeeckx 33). Thus, contemporary Christian theology has to take seriously the concept of interpretation and to take into account that what we have in the New Testament witness “does not permit us to reconstruct the biographical or psychological development of Jesus” (Kung, *Theology* 196), but is, instead, the first recorded witness of this personality, which stands at the beginning of one pole, yet, equally influences the other.

Therefore, it is necessary to explicate further exactly what is meant by interpretation, and, in this case, the interpretation of what is seen by the Christian community as God’s revelation. Kung points out that “revelation is not directly and immediately God’s word, but is and remains a human word, which already involves interpretation and bears witness to the word of God that humans experience” (Kung, *Theology* 109). Thus, concerning that which is germane to this study, an analysis needs to be made concerning the significance and function of the interpretation which is manifested at each pole described above. I will begin with the first pole. I have already stated that what we have in the New Testament witness is the first documented witness to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We do not have Jesus in the flesh and blood but only that spirit

which he inspired in the early generations of his followers, who saw in him the key to the salvation of God: “If for Christian faith Jesus is God’s crucial revelation in the history of Israel, then that is because his first disciples experience him (subjectively) in this way, and because he actually was this (objectively) for them. The objective and subjective factors belong together” (Kung, *Theology* 109). Schillebeeckx mirrors Kung’s point here when he asserts that “the experience is an essential part of the concept of revelation” (Schillebeeckx 12). Thus, what we have at the first pole is the unique interpretation by the early Christian community of Jesus of Nazareth, a historical figure who revealed for them the living God.

The question for us now in our contemporary context is whether this first witness is binding concerning our present conception of Christian faith. Ultimately, the question forms a dichotomy for us since the answer is both yes and no. The answer is yes in that the first pole forms “the beginning of the Christian tradition” of which modern Christians are a part. However, the answer is ultimately also no in that this tradition forms for us “not a doctrine but a history of experience” (Schillebeeckx 7). In other words, while the second pole, which consists of our modern, contemporary experience, is inextricably linked to the first pole because of the fact that the latter pole is a continuation of what was begun at the former, in order for our theological interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth to be valid, it must be applicable to our own experience and not dependent on the experience of the first Christian witness. Schillebeeckx is very clear on this point:

People used to think that we had to *apply* what we thought we had discovered from the biblical tradition to our present situation. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, we have become increasingly aware that no one is in a position to rediscover precisely what the message of the gospel now means to us, except in relation to our present situation. (Schillebeeckx 3)

Thus, we cannot “simply ‘adapt’ what we find in the Bible to our own world” due to the fact that the “New Testament writers never give us the gospel neat; it is always coloured by and with the shades of their own world” (Schillebeeckx 15). Both poles share a common source, the living Jesus of history, and a common history, but not necessarily a common interpretation.

Kung is very clear on this point as well. Modern Christian theologians, while still dependent on past Christian tradition, must approach the figure of Jesus of Nazareth from a current context taking into account the “historico-critical research” present in modern scholarship in order to justify our contemporary faith in Jesus Christ and also to protect “against misreadings from outside and inside the Church” (Kung, *Theology* 196). Current Christian theology can depend on the first pole “to get a fresh view of the original outlines of Jesus’ message, his way of life, his fate, and hence of his person, all of which has been so often painted over and concealed” and, consequently, the second pole is dependent on the first for its very existence. However, at the same time, we can neither “simply adopt today all the interpretive means once used to explain the salvific significance of Jesus, nor may we simply make the Jesus of history, his message, his way of life, and his destiny into anything we like...” Instead, contemporary Christian theologians must establish what Kung calls a “‘critical correlation’ between the Christian tradition of experience and our contemporary experiences” (Kung, *Theology* 118).

For the purposes of this essay, this christological explication is significant in that, based on the criteria established above, the christology put forth by Kung and Schillebeeckx is conducive to the implementation of effective dialogue with other religious traditions. It has been stated here that the Christian theologian cannot separate him or herself from the historical-theological tradition of which current Christian theology is a part. However, regardless of how

this tradition may have been perceived in the past, the contemporary expression of Jesus Christ as the sacrament which reveals, for us, the salvation offered by God in no way excludes those of other traditions from this saving grace. A theology, which is true to its past and, simultaneously, cognizant of, to reiterate the words of Schillebeeckx, the “new human experiences of both Christians and non-Christians” (Schillebeeckx 3), effectively avoids all of the detrimental attributes that serve to hinder ecumenical dialogue.

This provides a perfect segue into the issue of how to deal with the historical application of dogmatic/doctrinal expressions and how they relate to the modern Catholic theological tradition. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the heightened view of Jesus, which has been perpetuated in Council and Creed to the detriment of sincere dialogue. With this in mind, it is necessary, at this point, to provide a brief glimpse into the problems contained within the Catholic confession of faith. The following is excerpted from the version of the *Nicene Creed*, which is used in current Roman Catholic liturgy:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. (from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition 49)

It is not difficult to notice which parts of this portion of the Creed will be detrimental to dialogue. The problems here are the problems that I mentioned earlier as being perpetuated in the *Documents of Vatican II*. Jesus is presented as synonymous with the Eternal Word, is explicitly (as opposed to the implicit reference in the *Documents...*) defined as the Second divine person of the Holy Trinity and coeternal and equal in standing with God the Father. How, then,

should modern Catholic theology function with the legacy left in the wake of the Councils and Creeds of the Catholic Church?

The answer, in brief, is basically the same as the one previously offered concerning the two poles of the Christian tradition. The Councils *were*, for the most part, the best possible explanation of the Christian witness at that particular point in time. I do not have the space here to give a complete explication of the history of Church Councils, but let me just say that, in retrospect, it seems that the decisions adopted by the Councils were more tenable than the alternatives present at that particular point in history. In brief, if given the choice between the christological conceptions expressed at the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, respectively, and the alternatives represented, for example, by Arianism or Monophysitism, it is likely that we would make the same choice as those who came before us. However, these are not the only choices offered to us, and we cannot deny the problematic nature of rigidly conforming our modern expression to a past expression given our modern philosophical frameworks. In his article which serves as a conclusion to the Catholic journal *Concilium*'s issue entitled "Jesus, Son of God?", Karl Rahner expresses this very same view:

It is however, obvious that even in Christology history is not at an end and that true orthodoxy does not consist in a mere (desperate and stubborn) repetition of the old Christological formulations which grew up in history and will continue to be part of that history. But their place in history is also the very reason why we cannot pass them over in silence as though they had no force for us any more. (Rahner, "Christology Today" 74)

Unlike Rahner's theory of "anonymous Christianity," I agree with his christology at this point.

The Catholic Church cannot discard that past tradition, which still serves as a permanent part of her identity; however, contemporary tradition has to be careful concerning exactly how the Church is defined by the past. For instance, concerning my example of the *Nicene Creed*, in my opinion, it is not detrimental for this to be a part of current liturgy as long as it is seen as

representative of the past theological tradition of Christian confession in creedal form and not interpreted in a literal fashion.

In his article on the Council of Chalcedon from the same issue of *Concilium*, Tarsicius van Bavel warns against treating the Councils as representative of any type of eternal, infallible decree: “History shows that every general Council always ends up with a compromise. The final document of each Council always reveals an attempt to maintain unity by making concessions to conflicting trends current in the Church at the time” (van Bavel 55). In language reminiscent of statements cited here from Kung and Ogden, he goes on to emphasize that we can never state absolute truth in relation to the Ultimate, which is, in its entirety, inexpressible: “The letter of dogmatic definition does not quite coincide with the truth it is meant to express. In other words: the truth aimed at always exceeds the limits of human concepts, and certainly the words to express them” (van Basel 61). Essentially, Councils and the dogmatic statements produced by them should be seen, in a sense, as a compass for the journey and most definitely not a final destination.

Therefore, contemporary Christians should view the Councils in two ways. First, modern Christians should recognize their authority at a specific time in history, and, second, they should treat them as signposts along the way and not as the end of the road. In Kung’s “new paradigm” of Christian theology, the Councils “retain their function or, better, they get back to their original function.” They are not seen as dogmatically binding for modern theology and Christian worship; “instead they are seen as what they were intended for: as the official helps, road signs, and guardrails on the way through the centuries, designed to protect the Church and the individual and of course the individual theologian as well from misunderstanding” (Kung, *Theology* 106). For Kung, Councils, as well as any truth claim, must be validated through

sincere criticism because while Councils “*can* be an expression of the truth in the Church...they do not necessarily express it, as if by virtue of the will of those convoked or of the participants, to whom the Spirit of God might be thought of as having given...an a priori guarantee that all their statements would be true” (Kung, *Theology* 58). This validation is only possible if a religion’s theologians are “free” and subsequently “critical.”

By critical, I do not mean an absolute animosity toward any authority on the part of the Church (in this case the Roman Catholic Church), but, on the other hand, in Kung’s words, “A Yes, then, to authority, but—along with many Catholic theologians—an equally decisive No to the sort of *churchly authoritarianism* that makes an idol of authority and rejects and suppresses as uncatholic all criticism of authority, for the sake of a supposed Catholic orthodoxy” (Kung, *Theology* 61). For Kung, it is not a question of where Church authority lies but in what manner it is exercised. He does not wish to question the role of the authority contained within the Church hierarchy but to call for this authority to function in a manner that, while guiding the Church’s doctrinal confession, allows for theological freedom. The “‘magisterium’ too can have a meaningful function in the Church, if it understands its role as one of pastoral preaching, exercised according to the norm of the Gospel, and if it recognizes its own functional limits, especially with regard to theological scholarship” (Kung, *Theology* 61). Theologians must have a role in this process, the freedom to criticize the church when criticism is due, and the security to speak out critically without being reprimanded by an oppressive governing hierarchy bent on maintaining some sort of supposedly sacrosanct traditionalism. In short, what is necessary is a “theological paradigm that allows different methods, theories, schools, and theologies” (Kung, *Theology* 169).

This issue is germane to the present study because since Vatican II, many Catholic theologians, Kung and Schillebeeckx included, have been impelled by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to justify their theological assertions concerning whether or not they were consistent with the “orthodox” faith. I will not elaborate here but both Kung and Schillebeeckx have been questioned numerous times and for some of the views which were cited here as being necessary for the creation of an effective Roman Catholic dialogue with the world’s religions. Shortly after the ascendancy of John Paul II to the Papacy, in a move that could almost be viewed as passive aggressive on the part of the Vatican, Kung had his teaching authority as a Catholic theologian revoked while he continued to remain on as a faculty member at the University of Tubingen and to retain his role as a Catholic priest. In his essay entitled “A Continuous Controversy: *Kung in Conflict*” from the collection of essays, *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?*, Leonard Swidler cites Kung’s “total honesty” as one of the reasons for his continued problems with the Vatican (Swidler 200). In the same volume, in an article entitled “The Endless Case of Edward Schillebeeckx,” which documents Schillebeeckx’s difficulties with the Catholic hierarchy, Ad Willems issues a warning against “the patent efforts now being made to interpret the Second Vatican Council restrictively” (Willems 213). The last sentence of his article reads as follows: “One can only hope that the world’s bishops have the courage and intelligence not to raise this restrictive interpretation of the Second Vatican Council to the level of dogma” (Willems 222). If this were to happen, the effects on Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue with the world’s great religious traditions would be disastrous.

The only hope for effective dialogue is to follow the example set by Vatican II and, with the aid of theologians, Catholic and otherwise, to move forward ever searching for greater truth.

According to Kung,

It will be decided whether the Catholic Church, on the local as well as the universal plane wishes to be hierarchical-bureaucratic...or close to its foundations in the spirit of Vatican II, whether it will face the future centralistically or pluralistically, with dogma or dialogue, naively self-confident or, for all faith's doubts, truly certain.
(Kung, *Theology* 11)

It is ultimately the difference between maintaining a static or a dynamic Church, between moving ahead to meet the future or being stuck rigidly holding on to the past. In order to move forward, the Catholic Church must heed the call of those like Hans Kung who are calling for a new theology, one that is simultaneously “true” not “conformist,” “free” not “authoritarian,” “critical” not “traditionalistic,” and, consequently, “ecumenical,” because, as Kung asserts, “there can be no ecumenical Church without an ecumenical theology” (Kung, *Theology* 162). With this in mind, Vatican II must take its place within the great Catholic tradition as another “road sign” along the way to further and, hopefully, greater realizations of the truth until another Council is called in order to further define the theological message of the Church offering another “official help” to guide us along our way. The Church must never retreat into certainty; instead; “the Church is always to be reformed’ (*Ecclesia semper reformanda*)” (Kung, *Theology*, 268). One thing, however, is certain. In the interim, the Second Vatican Council must be used as the impetus for further theological reflection in order, as Pope John XXIII’s gesture implied, to shed a greater light both within and outside of the Church and must not be used as a tool to perpetuate a rigid traditionalism or as a polemical device against those who are sincerely seeking truth, and, concerning the purpose of this essay, it must not serve as an impediment to religious dialogue in our increasingly pluralistic world.

Chapter 2

Not Seeing God for Jesus: Vatican II, *The Gospel of John* and the catholicity of Scripture

In the previous chapter, I made the assertion that the Second Vatican Council's reference to *The Gospel of John* from the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non Christian Religions" will ultimately serve as a detriment to interreligious dialogue. To reiterate, the portion of this statement, which is applicable to this study, reads as follows: "Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way the truth and the life (John 14:6)" (*Documents of Vatican II* 739). Whether intentional or not, I contended that this statement perpetuates the high christology of the early Councils and Creeds, and, thus, presents a limited view of the Christian community's confession of Jesus as savior. Consequently, it is necessary, at this point, to provide further explication of this Scriptural reference in order to shed more light on its significance.

This study will neither be an exhaustive exegesis of *The Gospel of John* nor a complete explication of the Johannine community; instead, it will be an analysis of the necessity of respecting the catholicity of the Christian New Testament as opposed to a restrictive interpretation, which perpetuates an unnecessarily high christology. *The Gospel of John* provides for a perfect study of this topic as it should be read in light of the evolution of the theology of the community from which it came. Thus, one should not interpret *John* solely in terms of a high christology but as a combination of christological viewpoints as they developed in the Johannine community. In addition, the entire New Testament should be treated as a

unified whole made up of the various reflections of the early Christian community concerning what they perceived as the revelation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and not interpreted out of context in order to promote Christian exclusivism. In other words, the strict and literal interpretation of this high christology will be a hindrance to effective dialogue with the world's religions.

I will begin this explication with the passage that initiated this discussion. The entire verse reads as follows: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him’” (John 14:6). For my purposes here, it is not necessary to go into an intricate analysis of the ways in which *John's* christology is higher than the christologies of the Synoptic Gospels; I will treat that as a given. The Prologue, which contains the reference to Jesus as existing from the beginning, being equal in stature with God (1:1-2) and the one through whom all things “came into being” (1:3), is evidence enough to make the unique conception of Christ by the author of *John* readily apparent. However, the goal, at this stage of this study, is to point out the existence of an evolution in christology found within *John*. Evidence for this can be found later in the 14th chapter: “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you love me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). The difference between the references to Jesus in this passage and in the Prologue is obvious. Here, we do not see a Jesus that is equal in standing with God the Father, but one who is in a position of subordination. This Jesus stands in a different position than does the Jesus in other portions of the Gospel and most definitely in a different position than the Jesus that will eventually emerge in Creedal form from the Great Councils.

Another example of low christology occurs in the verses (1:35-51), which describe Jesus calling his first disciples. John the Baptist refers to Jesus as “the Lamb of God” (1:36); two others refer to him as “Rabbi” (1:38); Andrew, one of the aforementioned two, refers to him as “Messiah” (1:41); and finally, in 1:49, Nathanael is quoted as saying, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.” Referring to the first three of these titles, Bart Ehrman points out in his history, *The New Testament*, that “None of these terms suggests that the author of this story understood Jesus to be divine in any way. Neither Passover lambs nor rabbis were divine, and the messiah was a human chosen by God, not God himself” (Ehrman 170). Raymond Brown expresses a similar sentiment in his book on the Johannine community, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*: “The final Gospel picture of a pre-existent Jesus admittedly goes beyond what Andrew meant when he acclaimed Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) in 1:41, and beyond what Nathanael meant when he acclaimed Jesus as the Son of God in 1:49” (Brown 29). Thus, we have, within the text of *The Gospel of John*, the presence of both high and low christologies.

How, then, do we explain this and what is the significance of these seemingly contradictory conceptions of the person of Jesus of Nazareth? Brown describes a process through which the Johannine community evolved from a lower christology to the eventual higher christology that emerges when the Gospel was written. The period predating the writing of the gospel, a period Brown refers to as “*Phase One*,” “involved the origins of the community, and its relation to mid-first-century Judaism. By the time the Gospel was written the Johannine Christians had been expelled from the synagogues (9:22, 16:2) because of what they were claiming about Jesus” (Brown 22). This would have been a period of the lower christological conception as these early Christians were still willingly attached to their Jewish identity practicing their faith within a Jewish religious structure (Brown 25). However, as the above

citation reveals, this new faith in Jesus as the Jewish messiah would eventually result in these Jewish Christians being expelled from the synagogue and ultimately separated from their Jewish identity. This would lead to what Brown refers to as “*Phase Two*” of the Johannine community, which is dated to the period of the writing of the Gospel and marked both by a higher christology and the vitriolic relationship of the community with both the Jewish community and even other Christian communities:

The expulsion from the synagogue is now past but persecution (16:2-3) continues, and there are deep scars in the Johannine psyche regarding the “Jews.” The insistence on a high christology, made all the more intense by the hard struggles with “the Jews,” affects the community’s relations with the other Christian groups whose evaluation of Jesus is inadequate by Johannine standards. Attempts to proclaim the light of Jesus to the Gentiles may also have encountered difficulty, and “the world” becomes a blanket term for all those who prefer darkness to light. (Brown 23)

The development of a higher christology in this second phase serves both as a point of contention and as an expression of identity against those by whom the Johannine Christians have been ostracized.

In a similar manner, Bart Ehrman refers to the evolution of the Johannine community as taking place in three stages. In the last stage, after their expulsion from the synagogue, he asserts that an “us versus them’ mentality” developed which precipitated the development of a higher christology: “Thus, it appears that the christological focus of this community shifted radically after its exclusion from the synagogue. Jesus, to be sure, was still thought of as a rabbi, as the lamb of God, and as the messiah, but he was much more than that. For these excluded Christians, Jesus was unique in knowing about God; he was the one who brought the truth of God to his people” (Ehrman 172). In other words, there is a direct correlation between the increased animosity between the Johannine community and their contemporaries and the evolution from a lower to a higher christology. Basically, the Gospel text allows us to trace this

christological development from its lower to its higher expression the latter of which would ultimately be manifested in what would become the fourth canonical Gospel.

Of course, there is little doubt that the author of *John* was promoting anything other than an explicitly high christology. While he includes examples of a lower christology, he does not interpret these examples in the same manner as they were originally intended. Instead, these lower christological conceptions are interpreted in light of his own, higher christological conception. According to Brown, “For the Johannine evangelist, the higher christology of his community has brought out the true, deeper meaning of the original confessions” (Brown 29). Thus, instead of rejecting the lower christological confessions, which were developed earlier, in favor of including only new, higher christological material, the author of the Gospel “has preserved the *terminology* of an older, lower christology, while giving it new meaning” (Brown 53). In other words, “John does not discard the *scenes* of a lower christology but reinterprets them” (Brown 54).

By returning to the aforementioned example of the call of Jesus’ disciples (1:35-51) and examining these verses in context, this issue will become clearer. As has been shown, the christological titles attributed to Jesus in these verses are of a lower christology. However, the fact that these disciples attribute these titles so early in their relationship with Jesus, a phenomenon not directly paralleled in the Synoptic Gospels, holds definite significance (Brown 26). In addition, as Brown emphasizes, the manner in which Jesus responds to these comments is even more significant: “What is more startling, however, than the easy access to christological titles at the beginning of the Johannine ministry is the indication that Jesus regards these titles as inadequate and promises a greater insight—they will eventually see that it is in him that heaven and earth meet” (Brown 26). Consequently, in these verses, we are able to clearly see the way in

which the author of *John* interpreted what was once a lower christological expression through a higher christological framework.

In reference to John's theological framework, Alan Culpepper claims that "one of the major purposes of the Fourth Gospel was to present a corrective view of Jesus. The disciples did not understand Jesus or his words during his ministry (12:16, 13:7). Only later did they understand" (Culpepper 49). Consequently, from our modern vantage point, we can decipher the existence of both high and low christologies, which were present at certain periods during the history of the theological development of the Johannine community; however, we must admit that what we have as the fourth canonical Gospel is the explicit expression of a higher christological conception of the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

This fact did not escape those, in the early Christian community, who were ultimately responsible for the Gospel's canonization as Sacred Scripture. In fact, *John* was recognized as being different from the Synoptics at a very early date by those concerned with what books should be used to properly perpetuate what was considered the "orthodox" faith. In his book, *John Among the Gospels*, D. Moody Smith recognizes the dilemma faced by these early Christians concerning whether or not to include *John* in the New Testament canon: "Probably the differences between John and the Synoptics were a problem in the formation of the canon and had something to do with the apparent hesitancy among some second-century, and later, Christians to accept the Fourth Gospel alongside the other three" (Smith 191). However, these early Christians, while recognizing the differences contained within *John*, chose to include the Fourth Gospel as another expression of what stands at the heart of the New Testament—the one, true God being revealed through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Edward Schillebeeckx asserts that there is reason for assuming “that the starting point of the New Testament is a pluralism of Christian traditions and perhaps even communities with their own well-defined, already ‘open’ christologies” (Schillebeeckx 43). Therefore, the New Testament canon is a compilation of different interpretations of the life and personality of Jesus of Nazareth brought together as a unified whole and, for Christians, pointing toward God through this historical person, who, as was stated in the last chapter, stands at the beginning of the Christian tradition. In Schillebeeckx’s words,

Each individual New Testament book is in fact concerned with the salvation experienced in and through Jesus. The experiences of grace expressed in the New Testament interpret one and the same fundamental event and a common basic experience which all acknowledge, though each New Testament book puts the same basic experience into words in a very different way. (Schillebeeckx 14).

Thus, to reiterate, the canon consists of the multiple interpretations, interpretations being the operative word, of the living Jesus of history. The interpretations often do not perfectly cohere theologically; however, together they form the first recorded Christian witness of that which stands at the beginning of all subsequent Christian tradition—the historical life and ministry of Jesus, known to Christians as the Christ.

What this says about the canonizers of the New Testament is that they chose not to take an overly restrictive view of that which they included as sacred Scripture. To be sure, they were restrictive concerning that which was considered “unorthodox” and detrimental to the perpetuation of the integrity of the faith. However, at the same time, they did not want to confine their view of the saving event of Jesus for the sake of a more compatible, cohesive canon. For Brown, the decision to include *The Gospel of John*, “means that the Great Church, ‘the church catholic’ of Ignatian language, whether consciously or unconsciously, has chosen to live with tension” (Brown 163). However, despite this tension, these, at times, conflicting

theologies must be seen as one since John's Gospel "now inevitably colors the way they (the Synoptic Gospels) are received and read and in turn is colored by them" (Smith 193). In addition, as Brown asserts, this, at times, contradictory relationship serves to protect against a one-sided approach when dealing with the New Testament: "This means that a church such as my own, the Roman Catholic, with its great stress on authority and structure, has in the Johannine writings an inbuilt conscience against the abuses of authoritarianism" (Brown 164). This issue, concerning the necessity of respecting the New Testament as a whole, will be discussed further later in this essay; however, for now, it is necessary to examine the way in which *John*, specifically, has been used to perpetuate the catholic faith.

Ultimately, John's christology was chosen to be the most representative expression of what the Church eventually defined as her own christology. The language contained within John's prologue concerning Jesus being equal with God the Father was used as the basis of the doctrinal definition, concerning the relationship between God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, which emerged in Creedal form from the early Councils, most notably Nicaea (325 CE) and Constantinople (381 CE). In the last chapter, I listed the applicable portion of the creed for this essay; however, it will be helpful to look at part of that portion again here. The following is a portion of the Nicene Creed, which is currently used in Roman Catholic liturgy:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father. Through him all things were made. (from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition).

Thus, what emerged from the Councils were the three equal parts of the divine Trinity, or, in the language of the Cappadocians' definition, "one ousia (being) in three hypostases (distinctions of being)."

Before moving forward in this explication, it is necessary to point out that, although John's christology is definitely among the highest in relation to the rest of the New Testament writings and it is his explicit language that is used to perpetuate the eventual Creedal confession, his christology is not synonymous with that which was ironed out at Nicaea and Constantinople. It has been stated that John portrays Jesus as being equal in status with God the Father (Prologue) and that lower christological expressions made by the disciples are interpreted through the higher christological framework of the Johannine community of the time. However, there are examples within the Gospel in which words spoken by Jesus imply a subordinate position in his relation to God the Father (14:28). According to Brown, "the perdurance of such lower christological statements...shows that the christology of John still stands at quite a distance from the christology of Nicaea wherein the Father is not greater than the Son" (Brown 53). This aside, there is no doubt that the language perpetuated in the Creed is that of the higher Johannine christology.

Brown is very clear about this:

Johannine christology is very familiar to traditional Christians because it became the dominant christology of the church, and so it is startling to realize that such a portrayal of Jesus is quite foreign to the Synoptic Gospels. With justice Johannine christology can be called the highest in the New Testament. (Brown 45)

However, what we have in the creedal pronouncements is John's christology interpreted through the different philosophical framework that was available to those fourth century Christian Fathers, who were attempting to explain the truths of the faith. Referring to this change in philosophical framework in early Christianity, Hans Kung speaks of a shift, brought forth by Hellenistic thinking, "from the cross and resurrection of Jesus to the incarnation and pre-existence of the Logos and Son of God" (Kung, *The Catholic Church* 26). According to Kung, this Hellenistic influence had a negative effect as "the arguments turned less and less on the

practical discipleship of Christ and more on the acceptance of a revealed teaching...And the new *Logos* christology increasingly forced the Jesus of history into the background in favor of a doctrine and finally a church dogma of the Incarnate God” (Kung, *The Catholic Church* 26). Thus, the high christology of *John* was transformed, by being interpreted through a different philosophical framework, into the even higher christology of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed.

Brown provides an explication of the way in which this evolution in christology transpired at the Council of Nicaea. He asserts that the christology of Arius, which would ultimately be deemed heretical, was more conservative concerning its relation to Scripture than the christology of Athanasius, which would ultimately be adopted by the Church. On the one hand, “Arius was content with the scriptural formulations of Jesus’ identity,” while on the other, “Athanasius had to persuade the Council to accept newer, non-Scriptural formulas, e.g., true God of true God, coeternal with the Father” (Brown 80). Arius did not have a problem interpreting the opening of John’s Prologue, “In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1:1), to mean that Jesus (i.e. the Word) was a created being, and, therefore, had a beginning (Brown 80). In contrast, Athanasius’ ultimate concern was not adhering to a strictly Scriptural interpretation but, instead, adapting the message of Scripture in order for it to be compatible with the philosophical framework available to him at that point in history. For him, “the Scripture answers were no longer adequate because now a question was being asked that had not been asked in NT times, and the new answers he proposed were true *to the direction* of the Scriptures” (Brown 80). In the end, despite the fact that Arius’ theology was based more firmly in Scripture, the theology of Athanasius, with its amplified Johannine framework, would ultimately prevail at Nicaea. The result, because of its strict adherence to the language of John’s Gospel, is a very one-sided

interpretation of the person of Jesus of Nazareth in dogmatic form, an interpretation, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, which should be avoided.

However, those advocating the Athanasian formula at Nicaea should not be vilified for their role in distorting the Church's christology. When I dealt with this issue in the last chapter, my conclusion was, briefly, that given the theological alternatives, the early Councils, for the most part, got it right. In other words, the Council at Nicaea was correct in adapting the Athanasian formula as opposed to that of Arius. The issue ultimately boils down to this: given the theological options present at Nicaea, they adopted the view that was philosophically and theologically tenable. In order to accept Christ's divinity, which was not in question at Nicaea, and affirm the Oneness of God, Arius had to be rejected on the basis that his approach implied subordination in the Godhead. In addition, if the Trinitarian manifestations of God are defined by the roles of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, with Jesus occupying the role of the second position, Arius must also be rejected on the grounds that no created, contingent being but only the one, necessary being can fulfill the role of Redeemer. Consequently, despite the fact that the creedal confession that emerges from the early Councils is restrictive in terms of its use of Johannine themes to the exclusion of others, we can only say, in retrospect, that it was the best possible explanation available at the time.

The question for us in our contemporary setting is whether this higher christology, taken from *John* and perpetuated through Church councils and creedal pronouncements, should be normative for us today. In the last chapter I asserted that Christians should view Church Councils in two ways. First, they should recognize their authority at a specific point in history; second, they should be seen as guides along the way instead of a final destination. Ultimately, the question at stake is how does the New Testament witness, both in its original expression and

in its subsequent interpretations, affect the expression and interpretation of our modern Christian faith? First of all, it is necessary to define how and to what extent we are currently bound by the original interpretation(s) of what was witnessed to in the New Testament as the saving event of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Subsequently, it is necessary to examine how the Scriptural witness should be applied to subsequent tradition.

I will begin with first of these. To once again reference the last chapter of this study, I claimed, with the aid of the theologies of Kung and Schillebeeckx, that modern theologians are bound to respect what the former refers to as the “two poles” and the latter the “two sources” of Christian theology. At one pole is the earliest recorded Christian witness, which is contained in the New Testament; at the other is the “contemporary, new human experiences of both Christians and non-Christians” (Schillebeeckx 3). For both poles, the source is the living Jesus of history, who we have only through that first witness, which inevitably is colored by various interpretations unique to these witnesses’ historical experience. The second pole is inextricably linked to the first as the beginning of that Christian tradition of which the second is a part; however, the second pole is not bound by the first for its own interpretation. Consequently, it is important for us to express our own interpretation and not to rely exclusively on the interpretations contained within the New Testament for our modern interpretation. That previous conception of salvation need not be universal or infallible; our conception must meet our experience.

According to Schillebeeckx, “the New Testament theology of salvation and redemption cannot be made to speak to our condition as it stands.” Consequently, “a theological analysis of the New Testament concepts of salvation only has a chance of providing inspiration and orientation for modern man if this theological analysis can be combined with an insight into the

historical conditions of both New Testament times and our own day” (Schillebeeckx 14). If this contemporary expression is too dependent on that which has come before it, he claims that “there is the danger that Christians now may seize on certain interpretive elements from the past rather than on the reality of salvation, which is being interpreted in many languages and by many tongues” (Schillebeeckx 16). The “interpretive elements” of one culture may not remain normative, and, consequently, “interpretations which were once appropriate and evocative can become irrelevant in another culture” (Schillebeeckx 16). Of course, as alluded to earlier, this is also the case for the current interpretation of past tradition.

That tradition forms for us a part of the current Christian identity but it is not the entirety of that identity. The Church cannot deny that which has defined her identity in the past, but, at the same time, she also cannot depend on her past identity to completely define the identity of her future. Schillebeeckx sums this up beautifully:

What was experience for others yesterday is tradition for us today; and what is experience for us today will in turn be tradition for others tomorrow. However, what once was experience can only be handed down in renewed experiences, at least as living tradition... Without constantly renewed experience a gulf develops between the content of experience in on-going life and the expression in words of earlier experiences, a gulf between experience and doctrine and between people and the church. (Schillebeeckx 50)

In other words, for our expression of Christianity to be valid, it must be expressed with our contemporary experience in mind.

It is necessary, at this point, to address the second issue raised earlier concerning the manner in which Scripture should be used in the process of developing subsequent tradition, which is compatible with our experience. It has been asserted that we cannot adopt the interpretation(s) of the New Testament witness as our own; however, it has also been stated that the “second pole” of Christian theology cannot exist independent of the first. We are inextricably linked to this first Christian witness, the witness to the life and personality of Jesus

of Nazareth, the source of all subsequent Christian tradition. In *Theology For The Third Millenium*, Kung clarifies this issue: “The original witness to Jesus, the New Testament, must remain the *norma normans* (normative norm) for all postbiblical traditions. These traditions can certainly likewise acquire a normative character, but by their very nature only in a derivative way, as a norm that has itself been shaped...by the Gospel” (Kung, *Theology* 59). For Kung, Christians should not believe in the literal interpretation(s) of the New Testament witness but “the Jesus originally attested to” in the scriptures of the New Testament (Kung, *Theology* 63). Scripture, as the first recorded witness to Jesus, must be the source for all subsequent Christian theology. Therefore, it is necessary to explicate the manner in which the New Testament witness should be applied in order to most effectively relate it to our modern experience.

Obviously, we cannot accept the perpetuation of a narrow interpretation of the New Testament canon. While we can accept interpretations of Scripture such as those made at Nicaea as being the best option available at that historical moment, we cannot, if Christianity is to be a dynamic as opposed to a static religion, accept, as normative for our current interpretation, the restrictive and exclusive nature of the christology, which resulted from these interpretations. What is necessary is an interpretation that respects the entirety of the New Testament canon. Like those early Church Fathers who chose to include divergent theologies in the canon in order to provide for a more expansive view of the experiences had by those early Christians who saw, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the key to God’s salvation, we must also respect this “catholic” approach when applying Scripture to current theology.

Kung calls for the Catholic Church to do this very thing. In his words, “We Catholics are convinced that we do well to join the ancient Church in looking upon the whole of the New Testament as a *fitting* testimony of the revelation event in Jesus Christ...” (Kung, *Theology* 82).

Therefore, Catholic theology cannot promote a christology heavily biased toward a certain New Testament theology (i.e., John) but must be aware and willing to examine all of the different christological viewpoints contained within the canon: “The catholic stance is to be open on principle in all directions. This liberates the New Testament, excluding no line of thought, whether as a matter of principle or of fact, that is in it. The catholic attitude tries to take the New Testament seriously, without bias, viewing it from all sides. It tries to be catholic, open, and free for the whole, comprehensive truth of the New Testament” (Kung, *Theology* 77). Consequently, in Kung’s view, his “new paradigm” of Christian theology, which I addressed in the last chapter, is only possible with this “open” approach to the Christian Scriptures.

For Schillebeeckx as well, “the whole of primitive Christianity must be taken seriously” (Schillebeeckx 48). If this catholic approach is taken seriously, modern Christians can be relieved from the notions of dogmatic rigidity in matters of christology. By opening their eyes to the fact of the variety of Christian confessions in the early Church, he believes that contemporary believers can be set free from the adherence to a supposed infallible decree: “A recognition of this pluralism is liberating for Christians because it does away with the impression which is such a burden to many modern Christians, that everything ‘in its present form simply came down from heaven’” (Schillebeeckx 38). In addition, Schillebeeckx contends that approaching Scripture in this manner will provide for us an avenue through which we can interpret our own conception of what Jesus means in our current setting:

The New Testament feels free to talk of the experience of salvation with Jesus in a variety of ways, though in fact these differing interpretations simply articulate what has really come into being with Jesus. This also gives us the freedom to express in a new form the experience of salvation in Jesus that we may have and to describe it in terms taken from our modern culture with its own particular problems, expectations and needs... (Schillebeeckx 16)

In effect, accepting the New Testament as a catholic whole effectively fulfills what is, for Kung and Schillebeeckx, the goal of the second pole of Christian theology. The first witness to the Christian kerygma is respected, in its entirety, as the starting point of theology, and, consequently, this witness provides the opportunity for the adequate expression of the contemporary Christian confession. According to Brown, “because of the church decision about the canon, attempts at simple resolutions of these theological tensions into a static position on one side or the other are unfaithful to the whole NT” (Brown 164). Therefore, any modern expression of Christian theology that does not regard the different interpretations present in this first witness, either through the rigid promotion of a past interpretation in a modern context or through a new restrictive interpretation, is disrespectful to both the New Testament text and to those who brought it together into what they correctly perceived as multiple interpretations of that saving grace of God, which each New Testament writer saw manifested in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

However, as Kung points out and as has been shown here with examples such as the amplified Johannine theology manifested in creedal form, the catholic approach to the New Testament is not always respected. Kung admits that no one “can maintain that we Catholics have set a sufficient example of catholicity in interpreting the New Testament” (Kung, *Theology* 78). In his view, problems arose when “Christians did not take seriously the *one* New Testament canon (one despite all its disunity) and strive for a *comprehensive* understanding of it—for all the difficulties standing in the way. Rather they used the disunity of the one canon to make a selection from it” (Kung, *Theology* 74). Of course, these problems were not unique to Catholic Christianity, but that issue is beyond what is applicable to this study. Also, the nature of the Catholic hierarchy is unique and, as I stated in the previous chapter, has been a point of

contention for Catholic theologians and exegetes alike. Therefore, before criticizing Catholic exegetes for a lack of catholicity in Scriptural interpretation, it is necessary to recognize the hindrances that have been placed upon Catholic Biblical scholars by the governing hierarchy.

The criteria for Kung's aforementioned "new paradigm" of Christian theology were the establishment of a theology that was, as stated in the last chapter, "true" not "conformist," "free" not "authoritarian," "critical" not "traditionalistic," and "ecumenical" not "denominational" (Kung, *Theology* 162). These criteria apply equally to the exegete as they do to the theologian for just as there can be "no free Church without a free theology" (Kung, *Theology* 162), there can also be no free Church without a free exegesis. Kung makes it clear that "our exegetes were often not allowed full Catholic freedom and openness for dealing with the whole New Testament" (Kung, *Theology* 79). In this chapter, I do not intend to provide a complete analysis of the limitations the Church has placed on her exegetes; that will be addressed further in another portion of this study. However, for my present purposes with this material, it will suffice to insist that an open, catholic exegesis cannot be implemented unless the Catholic Biblical scholar has the freedom to do so. Kung is adamant regarding this issue: "Exegesis and dogmatics can meet their great Catholic responsibility not in an atmosphere of anxiety, of totalitarian supervision, and the hypocrisy and cowardice that result from it, but only in an atmosphere of freedom, of sober theological integrity and undaunted objectivity and, precisely because of this, of loyal attachment to the Church" (Kung, *Theology* 79). There can be no catholic interpretation of Scripture if modern theologians and exegetes are not allowed, in the spirit of the New Testament authors, the freedom to express, among themselves, a multiplicity of interpretations.

That being said, with the freedom to be catholic in interpretation comes the responsibility to be, to use another of Kung's criterion, "critical" as well. Catholic theologians must embrace

the historical-critical method in order to provide for the best possible analysis of the New Testament text. The goal here is not to demean the Scriptural witness but to gain as much knowledge as can be gained from it concerning the source of the first and all subsequent Christian witnesses. Kung describes this method as follows: “Projections by belief or unbelief are subject to critical comparison with what the historical Jesus really was...A believing interpretation of Jesus that has no need at all to hide the interests of faith has to be a historically plausible interpretation” (Kung, *Theology* 112). Schillebeeckx mirrors this sentiment when he states that he decided “to follow the strict historical-critical method in order to discover what can be said with scientific certainty, or at least a high degree of probability, about the historical phenomenon of Jesus” (Schillebeeckx 31). However, Schillebeeckx is quick to point out that this historical-critical exegesis can really say nothing meaningful about the revelation of God through the person of Jesus Nazareth, but, on the other hand, it can shed some light on the nature of the recorded witness, which is our only link to the historical source of the Christian tradition (Schillebeeckx 32). In other words, by further understanding the historical circumstances involved in the creation of the various New Testament witnesses, we can better interpret the Scriptures in relation to our position at that “second pole” of Christian theology.

In turn, this historical-critical method has to be applied to the history of dogma as well: “Like the Bible...dogma too must be interpreted historico-critically. Like modern exegesis, modern dogmatic theology too must follow and adhere to a strictly historical approach: its truth too must always be anchored in history” (Kung, *Theology* 87). We must understand the interpretation of the first and all subsequent Christian witnesses if we are to effectively interpret this tradition for the edification of our contemporary lives. We must be able to recognize when

dogma has faltered in expressing the fullness of the New Testament message so that we are not led astray by our current “road sign” or “official help” (Kung, *Theology* 106).

At this point, I must return to the issue of Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue with the world’s non-Christian religions, an issue which was addressed at the beginning of this chapter and which is the primary concern of this overall study. In this chapter, I have offered a simultaneous explication of both New Testament Scripture and, to a lesser extent, dogmatic confessions made throughout Church tradition. I have done so because John’s Gospel is a prime example of the manner in which one particular Scriptural interpretation has been picked up by Church tradition and perpetuated through dogmatic statements to the exclusion of the other interpretations—in this case concerning christology—which exist, in the canon, alongside the favored interpretation. Ultimately, this confined, restrictive view is perpetuated at the expense of the entirety of the New Testament kerygma. The significance of the complete Gospel message, which for Kung is not only those books defined by genre as Gospel but the entire canon, which attests to the saving grace of God revealed for Christians by Jesus, must be respected: “The Catholic Church...has a New Testament orientation when it tries to embrace the *opposite* (not all of them, but those that belong to the New Testament) in a good sense and to understand the *whole* New Testament as Gospel” (Kung, *Theology*, 78). This orientation is compromised by a strict and literal interpretation of the dogma that has come to be defined by subsequent tradition’s treatment of a singular aspect of canonical witness, in this case Johannine christology. As a result, it is far too common for this strict and literal interpretation to be used as a polemical device, in the name of the integrity of Church tradition, against those who would speak out in favor of a new interpretation. As I have stated here, the modern Christian theologian or exegete should not deny that which has come before, but he or she also must not be bound by it if a free

and open theology in the spirit of the multiplicity of views included in the canonical text is to be preserved. The point of this explication is to simply assert that the continued promotion of the higher christology found in *John* is unnecessary for our modern setting.

It is my contention that the Second Vatican Council's reference to the Johannine Gospel contributes to this promotion. I would be remiss if I did not recognize that Vatican II marks a sincere and profound development in the history of Catholic tradition, and, consequently, its achievements should not be ignored or denied. However, whether intentional or not, this reference implicitly supports that tradition which chose the christology of the fourth Gospel over the other christologies present in the New Testament, glossing over the existence of a variety of expressions in favor of a unified devotion to one. In order to liberate, to use Schillebeeckx's language, both the New Testament and the modern Christian, *John* must be seen as one example of the christological interpretation of what was viewed by those early witnesses as the saving event of Jesus of Nazareth. It should not be interpreted as the representative example.

Regardless of the way past tradition has interpreted the New Testament witness, we must not be passive in our adherence to or static in our interpretation of dogmatic decrees, which promote a singular christological perspective. Rigid devotion to past dogmatic pronouncements limits the enormity of the original witness, which has been passed down to us in the New Testament.

Quoting K. H. Schelkle, Kung affirms the necessity for respecting the unified whole: "In its entirety the New Testament witness to the comprehensive, that is, catholic, truth lies in abundance. To allow only a part of it to count is choosing—that is heresy" (Kung, *Theology* 83).

Only by being open to the complete expression of the New Testament canon can the Catholic Church be sincere and respectful to her Sacred Scripture.

In relation to dialogue, one need not relinquish his or her own truth claim solely to satisfy those with whom he or she is in dialogue. However, as I have attempted to prove here, in the Church's attempt to reach out to those of other traditions in our pluralistic society, she need not adhere to the rigid conception of the higher christology that was eventually adopted by the Church as dogma when there are valid alternatives that are more conducive to dialogue. Of course, these higher christological views cannot be simply discarded but must be viewed as being a part of the history of that ongoing interpretation, which has attested to the religious significance of Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church should take her place at that "second pole" of Christian theology, conscious but not bound by her past, exerting authority without authoritarianism, and respecting the will of those responsible for the canonization of sacred Scripture by promoting a catholic view of the New Testament accepting once again a multiplicity of confessions. As a result, canonical Scripture will assume a dynamic aspect, which can lead to the edification of current Christians seeking to develop our own interpretations of the saving event of Jesus of Nazareth and lead us forward, free to conduct dialogue with those both inside and outside of the tradition we call our own.

Chapter 3

Dialogue and Dogma: John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Non-Christian Religions

In the previous two chapters, I examined certain aspects of the theology and biblical exegesis related to Roman Catholic dialogue with the world's great religious traditions, and, subsequently, offered some suggestions concerning what I see as prerequisites for perpetuating an effective ecumenical dialogue with these traditions. As a result, due to the nature and significance of authority within the Roman Catholic communion, it is necessary to turn now to an explication of the expressions, which are germane to this discussion, of those individuals who most clearly represent this structure of authority. In order to be more specific, the majority of my explication in this chapter will focus upon the writings of the previous and current Popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI respectively. Concerning the latter, formerly Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, a significant amount of my analysis of his theology will be devoted to his work before his ascendancy to the Papacy. The purpose of this chapter will be twofold: 1) to provide an analysis of these two men in their dual capacity as leaders of the world's largest religious body and as theologians in relation to the criteria established in the previous chapters for effective interreligious dialogue and 2) to shed further light on the significance of the unique conceptions that each puts forth concerning ecumenical theology. I intend to offer criticism where I think criticism is due while maintaining a respect for these persons and the offices and tradition represented by them.

I will begin by providing a separate analysis of these two religious figures in an attempt to explicate the individual merits of the ecumenical theologies of each. However, in researching for this chapter, I have found that attempting a parallel discussion of their respective approaches to the world's non-Christian religions provides for an interesting study. In one sense, John Paul II and his successor exhibit clear differences. In a February 2006 article in the Catholic journal, *First Things*, Avery Cardinal Dulles goes as far as stating that the “contrast between Pope Benedict and his predecessor is striking” (Dulles, “From Ratzinger” 29). On the other hand, while the two are most definitely distinct, they are also inseparably related to each other in their presentation of the Roman Catholic faith to the world at large. After all, before his election to the Papacy, Cardinal Ratzinger served as John Paul II's leading theological advisor in his role as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Consequently, I will make the distinction between emphasis and concern regarding the primary thrust of their respective ecumenical theologies. For instance, I believe that John Paul II's primary emphasis in conducting interreligious dialogue was to perpetuate world peace whereas Benedict XVI is far more interested in the issues of theological and philosophical truth in his approach to non-Christian religions. It is not the case that Benedict XVI has no concern for peace or that John Paul II had no concern for theological truth; instead, each has a different primary interest, which becomes apparent when one observes the specific emphases placed on particular issues which are applicable to this study. Nevertheless, distinctions aside, it is my contention that, when taken to a logical conclusion, the ecumenical theologies of both the current Pope and his predecessor will produce similar results when applied to an actual dialogue with non-Christian religions. The implications of the applicable writings of each renders any type of

dialogue, in which the meaning and truth of each religion engaged is subjected to equal, critical analysis, very difficult to realize.

John Paul II has often been lauded, and deservedly so, for his outreach to the world's non-Christian religions. As the public face of diplomacy and outreach for the Roman Catholic Church, he did an unprecedented job promoting good will in his meetings with various world leaders presenting himself as "a brother" (Fitzgerald 217) while receiving those from other traditions "with brotherly courtesy" (Cassidy xii). As Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow assert in their Preface to *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, which was published before the former Pope's death, "The Pope appears convinced that interfaith dialogue can serve as a potent path to combined efforts on behalf of furthering the causes of peace, understanding, and human dignity" (Sherwin and Kasimow xv). From a personal perspective, as someone who only recently joined the Roman Catholic communion, I found the former Pope's willingness to publicly acknowledge and speak with respect for other traditions to be an integral part in my final decision to enter the Catholic Church. In other words, there is no doubt that John Paul II had a sincere concern to enter into conversation with those of other traditions and his irenic personality served to make much of this dialogue a success in terms of promoting world peace.

In fact, some of his pronouncements even seem very favorable to the perpetuation of an effective dialogue similar to the one called for previously in this study. The following is excerpted from the "Message for the World Day of Peace" presented in Rome on December 8, 1982: "It [dialogue] therefore demands first of all *openness and welcome*: that each party should explain its thoughts, but should also listen to the explanation of the situation such as the other party describes it and sincerely feels it, with the real problems which are property to the party, its rights, the injustices of which it is aware, the reasonable solutions which it suggests"

(John Paul II, “John Paul II” 32). This statement has some of the characteristics, which are necessary for promoting and sustaining a critical dialogue with other traditions. However, upon closer look, his theology does not live up to the aforementioned previously established criteria.

As I have asserted, for John Paul II, the most important goal in participating in interreligious dialogue was the establishment and sustenance of peace between the world religions. While this is a noble goal, peace is not the aspect of interfaith dialogue that I am most concerned with in this project. My primary goal is to promote a dialogue which will support a critical examination of all traditions, Christian and non-Christian, in the search for the theological truth contained within these traditions. This is the aspect of John Paul II’s ecumenical theology which renders his Papacy, regarding the relationship of the Church to non-Christian traditions, dichotomous. In his requisite affirmation of the uniqueness of Christian tradition, he makes the same mistake that I pointed out previously from the Second Vatican Council’s statement on non-Christian religions. In approaching other traditions concerning the issues of “saving” truth, he takes a clear position of superiority subordinating other traditions to the truth claims of the Christian tradition, a practice, which I think has been adequately demonstrated here to be a detriment to effective dialogue.

A perfect example of this is found in the following passage from *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* in which he tries to affirm the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth against the “founding” figures of other religions: “*Christ is absolutely original and absolutely unique*. If He were only a wise man like Socrates, if He were a ‘prophet’ like Muhammad, if He were ‘enlightened’ like Buddha, without any doubt He would not be what He is. He is *the one mediator between God and humanity*” (John Paul II, *Crossing* 42-43). The implication of this statement for possible dialogue is apparent. Dialogue is effectively shut off before it can be begun as the superiority of

one tradition has been assumed before any discussion can commence. In response to the Pope's comments, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk who has been an active participant in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, made the following statement: "Of course Christ is unique. But who is not unique? Socrates, Muhammed, the Buddha, you, and I are all unique. The idea behind the statement, however, is the notion that Christianity provides the only way of salvation and all other religions are of no use. This attitude excludes dialogue and fosters religious intolerance and discrimination. It does not help" (Nhat Hanh 193). Basically, it should be sufficient to state the saving grace offered by God through the person of Jesus of Nazareth without denigrating other traditions in order to more completely affirm the originality of the Christian witness. The reaction of Nhat Hanh is evidence enough of the results that such a statement can have on potential dialogue.

This dichotomy marks the landscape of the papacy of John Paul II. For instance, his concern and respect for the Jewish people did much to heal what has all too often been tension between Jews and the Catholic Church. Symbolic gestures of respect for the Jewish faith such as his visit to the Synagogue of Rome in 1986 carried with them positive, concrete results for Jewish-Christian relations, and actions such as these have led to many positive reactions from the Jewish community. In "John Paul II and the Jews," David M. Gordis claims that "No Pope in all of the history of the Papacy has focused on the Church's relationship to Jews and to Judaism as has John Paul II" (Gordis 125). However, there is also the other side of John Paul II's dichotomous relationship with the world's non-Christian religions. In the same article, Gordis states that he repeatedly finds himself "both grateful for the Pope's words but disappointed" (Gordis 133). In this case, Gordis' disappointment stems from the Pope's comments, which condemn forced conversion but not all missionary activity with the intention of converting Jews

to belief in Christ as the sole mediator of the salvation of God. I will analyze this aspect of John Paul II's theology more thoroughly later in this chapter; however, for now, it is adequate to state that the preceding evidence points to the mixed reaction from non-Christians to the former pontiff's work in interreligious dialogue.

The following example, excerpted from an interview with the Dalai Lama, exemplifies the point that I am attempting to make here and provides further significance for this discussion in that it involves the reaction from a prominent figure from not only a non-Christian but also a non-theistic tradition. When asked about his personal impressions of the pontiff, the Dalai Lama spoke with unmitigated praise for his dialogue partner:

Oh, very good! Right from the beginning of our relationship I feel, and the reason for this is because of his personal background, that is, coming from a Communist, totalitarian, and antireligious sort of situation. So, you see, his history is very similar to my own. Therefore, right from the beginning, at once, there has existed some kind of personal close feeling that developed between us.
(Teasdale 86)

However, when asked to comment on statements made by John Paul II in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* in which he refers to Buddhism as having a “negative soteriology” and supporting “the conviction that the world is bad, that it is the source of evil and of suffering for man” (John Paul II, *Crossing* 85), the Dalai Lama's reaction was not so laudatory: “I have not felt that his view of Buddhism was very deep. His remarks about the Dharma in his book are both sad and amusing. They are sad because his approach moves in the direction of polemics, and amusing because so superficial” (Teasdale 87). The point here is clear. In affirming the uniqueness of one's own tradition, there is no need to provide, as a part of that affirmation, a perfunctory and somewhat dismissive interpretation of another tradition. Kasimow provides the following explanation for the Pope's mal-informed comments: “I do not believe that John Paul II intended to anger the Buddhist world. Buddhism is an extremely complex and diverse religious tradition, and it seems

that the Pope's knowledge of Buddhism is based predominantly on Christian interpretations rather than on Buddhist sources" (Kasimow 12). As was alluded to earlier, it seems as though the issues of existential truth in non-Christian traditions were of secondary importance to the issue of peace as they both relate to interfaith dialogue. Consequently, any truth claims from other religions are subordinated at the outset of dialogue by truth claims that are accepted as revealed, "saving" truth from the Christian tradition, and for John Paul II, the goal of peace through dialogue was not contingent on a preceding critical analysis of Christian tradition along with the tradition with which the Church was in dialogue.

I think that the Dalai Lama's reaction is very representative of those with whom John Paul II dealt closely concerning matters of interfaith dialogue. He was a kind and compassionate man who ultimately wished the best for all and, thus, his emphasis on striving for peace. However, an approach such as his concerning issues of "saving" truth can ultimately be disastrous for the perpetuation of mutual dialogue to which the reactions of those mentioned above attest. Gordis claims that his dichotomy existed because John Paul II was "constricted by theological rigidity, and more important, by the nature of traditional religious assertions of truth compounded by a hierarchically structured church and the implicit and explicit doctrine of infallibility," and, consequently, was "therefore unable to make certain critical leaps in his formulation" (Gordis 128). To a certain degree, I think that there is truth in this statement; however, I do not think it is the case, as the previous statement implies, that John Paul II wished to expand his theology concerning non-Christian religions but was hindered from doing so by the nature of his position as successor to the See of Peter. On the contrary, I think that he was perfectly sincere and comfortable in perpetuating the Catholic position, which had been handed

down to him. As a result, it is necessary to explicate exactly what that position is and how it relates to his conception of theological truth.

In a previous chapter, I stated that it is a certain type of christology that inevitably leads to the hindrance of dialogue between Christianity and the world religions. The case is no different here. For John Paul II, salvation comes exclusively through the grace offered by Jesus Christ. In his own words, “Everyone who looks for salvation, not only the Christian, must stop before the Cross of Christ” (John Paul II, *Crossing* 73). In addition, he claims that the “Church is guided by the faith that *God the Creator wants to save all humankind in Jesus Christ*, the only mediator between God and man, inasmuch as He is the Redeemer of all humankind” (John Paul II, *Crossing* 81). As these statements exhibit, he obviously was not taking an exclusivist stance in which “salvation” is withheld for only those within the Church. Kasimow compares the former pontiff’s approach to dialogue, which seems to be a form of Christian inclusivism, to that of Karl Rahner without the latter’s use of the term “anonymous Christian”: “The Pope explains that people are saved not only in the Church but also through the Church; thus there are different forms of relation to the Church, but people are ultimately always saved by the grace of Christ” (Kasimow 7). As I have argued before, while inclusivism is a more favorable approach to exclusivism in that it extends the possibility of salvation to those practicing within non-Christian traditions, it is hardly more flattering to the traditions, which represent these non-Christians, in that the possibility of the existence of “saving” truth within these traditions, as they are perceived by those within them, is denied before any dialogue has taken place. However, as the case of Rahner exhibited earlier, if the Vatican II statements concerning non-Christian religions are taken to a logical conclusion, this inclusivist view is ultimately the result.

Consequently, for John Paul II, there is no distinction to be made between dialogue and mission. According to Kasimow, the “Pope’s position seems quite clear: salvation comes through Christ. Therefore, the Christian has a duty to make these truths known to every human being on earth...” (Kasimow 6). In his own writings, he is very clear concerning this matter as the following quotation from the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* demonstrates: “Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions” (John Paul II, “John Paul II” 34). The implications for an open-minded, mutual, and critical dialogue between religious traditions are obvious. The possibility for any such dialogue has been negated before either side has the chance to make a case, based on reason and experience, in defense of their tradition. The search for peace becomes linked with mission since the Christ event is accepted as ultimate and constitutive of the “saving” truth of God. Kasimow sums up the situation perfectly: “John Paul II, who is sincerely dedicated to interfaith relations as a means of promoting justice and peace and mutual understanding between religions, is at the same time the most devoted and influential Christian missionary of our century” (Kasimow 6).

It is necessary to state that the dialogue for which I am calling in this study does not preclude the universal applicability of the Christian tradition. However, this tradition should be seen as representative and not constitutive of “saving” truth. In other words, while Christianity can still be seen as a universally available religion, other traditions are not denied the possibility of also being able to attain that “saving” truth which is offered freely to all by God alone. That being stated, what we are dealing with here are two types of dialogue, a dialogue with the purpose of establishing peace and social justice and a dialogue with the purpose of explicating,

through mutual, critical discussion, the truth claims of distinct traditions. The first was pursued diligently by the former Pope. However, if one accepts that the person of Jesus of Nazareth is the *sole* mediator between God and humanity, there is no reason to pursue the latter. Such, I contend, was the case for John Paul II. In assessing his writings on interreligious dialogue from a Catholic perspective, Michael L. Fitzgerald asserts: “His theological position regarding Christ as the only Savior is uncompromisingly firm, yet he has contributed to expanding the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the role of religions in the divine plan of salvation” (Fitzgerald 219). The late Pope’s sincerity cannot be questioned, and one thing that Fitzgerald’s statement points out is that John Paul II’s willingness to address non-Christian religions in his friendly demeanor did much to open up the Christian worldview to a greater awareness of many of these traditions. However, one must ultimately admit that his theological position will inevitably lead to the hindrance of the dialogue for which I am attempting to argue here.

Later in this chapter, I will address further the reasoning behind and significance of the theological view of John Paul II examined above. However, at this point, it is necessary to move toward a discussion of the positions of the current Pope, Benedict XVI formerly Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, on these matters. In order to do this, I will examine the text of the Magisterium’s “Declaration ‘*Dominus Iesus*’: On The Unicity And Salvific Universality Of Jesus Christ And The Church.” The text provides the perfect segue between the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI in that it was approved by the former and signed by the latter in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It will also serve as an excellent introduction to the theological viewpoints of the current Pope, then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, and, due to the fact that his was the predominant theological mind behind the drafting of the document, it will provide further insight into the subsequent explication of his interpretation of

the manner in which the Roman Catholic Church approaches dialogue with non-Christian traditions. Many of the themes, which appear in this document, appear elsewhere in his other works. Also, *Dominus Iesus* will also shed some light on the nature of that aforementioned certain type of christology, which has surfaced time and again in this study as the main obstacle toward a genuine dialogue between Roman Catholicism and the world's great religious traditions. In addition, it should be stated that I have no intention of attempting a complete and exhaustive explication of this document but intend to use it as a springboard toward a greater understanding of the interpretation of the ecumenical theology of those in authority within the Vatican hierarchy. Reactions to this declaration are widespread and many of them are negative in nature; however, I will limit my discussion here to how this text relates to the ecumenical theology put forth by those aforementioned authority figures.

Similar to what we saw above in the views John Paul II, this document links dialogue with mission and attempts to exempt the critical inquiry of one's own tradition from dialogue by accepting it as universal:

Equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ—who is God himself made man—in relation to the founders of other religions. Indeed, the Church, guided by charity and respect for freedom, must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ...(*Dominus Iesus* 14).

Passages from Scripture and the *Documents of Vatican II* (*Dominus Iesus*, 14) are carefully chosen in order to perpetuate an explicitly high christology and the tendency to neglect the treatment of Scripture as a Catholic whole, an issue which I dealt with in the previous chapter. Consequently, the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who “is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (Jn. 14:6), is considered “the full revelation of divine truth” (*Dominus Iesus* 3). The inclusivism

presented above in the work of both Rahner and John Paul II also seems to be present:

“Furthermore, the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity” (*Dominus Iesus* 7). However, there is a very important distinction to be made between the inclusivism as we have seen it before, especially concerning Rahner’s version, and as it is presented here. The inclusivism of *Dominus Iesus* does not seem to be inclusivism in the Rahnerian sense of Christ’s salvific grace flowing efficaciously across and through cultures and religions but one which is inextricably bound to the concept of salvation history. Those non-Christians, who are touched by the grace of Christ, are not “anonymous Christians” but future Christians in waiting. Therefore, truths and practices of other religions can be spoken of as assuming “a role of preparation for the Gospel” (*Dominus Iesus* 14). Christ is “‘the true lodestar’ in history for all humanity” (*Dominus Iesus* 15). All of history culminates in the Christ event, which is considered the fullness of revelation, and subsequently leads toward the ultimate fulfillment of salvation history, which characterizes the “eschatological dimension” of the kingdom of God (*Dominus Iesus*).

I will return to this idea of historical inclusivism momentarily; however, it is worth noting that this distinction does not imply that there is a contradiction within the writings of John Paul II on this issue. In accepting *Dominus Iesus*, he placed his Papal authority and support behind its content. The point here is that Ratzinger, the primary author of *Dominus Iesus*, provides more of an emphasis on the finer aspects of theological and philosophical truth than does his predecessor. Consequently, it is necessary to turn now to a more detailed explication of his writings, which are applicable to this discussion.

Ratzinger’s ideas concerning issues germane to this discussion are more thoroughly discussed in *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and the World Religions*. In this text, he

addresses the three methods of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism all of which I claimed, previously in this study, are inadequate means through which to conduct dialogue. Ratzinger also finds them inadequate in that he is “persuaded that they are based on too hasty an identification of the problems associated with religion with the question of salvation and too indiscriminate a view of these religions as such...” (Ratzinger 53). Of all the usual options, he has the most affinity for the inclusivism of Rahner, his former mentor. However, he proposes the version of historical inclusivism, which was introduced above in my examination of *Dominus Iesus* and shown to be a departure from Rahnerian inclusivism. In his article, “From Ratzinger to Benedict,” Avery Cardinal Dulles claims that Ratzinger came to realize that he and Rahner “lived, theologically speaking, on different planets. Whereas Rahner found revelation and salvation primarily in the inward movements of the human spirit, Ratzinger finds them in historical events attested by scripture and the early church fathers” (Dulles, “From” 29). As alluded to earlier, this alternative form of inclusivism is concerned with the history of religions and how this history relates to Christian salvation history. Therefore, before discussing the validity of various religious traditions for the existence of “saving” truth, Ratzinger believes that “we should first of all try to see whether there was any kind of continuous historical development here and whether any basic types of religion could be recognized, which we could then more easily evaluate.” Additionally, “we should have to ask how these basic types relate to one another and whether they present us with any basic alternatives, which could then be the subjects of philosophical and theological reflections and verdicts” (Ratzinger 18).

For Ratzinger, this reflection leads to the conclusion that the Christ event, “the only real salvation of man,” is the definitive salvation event (Ratzinger 19). The classical Alpha, Chi, Omega conception of salvation history is re-presented here and applied to the plurality of

religions. All of history points toward the constitutive nature of the Christ event, which, in turn, points toward the culmination of salvation history at the end of time. Consequently, Christians may approach non-Christian religions in two ways: “one may address them as provisional and, in this respect, as preparatory to Christianity and, thus, in a certain sense attribute to them a positive value, insofar as they allow themselves to be regarded as precursors. They can, of course also be understood as insufficient, anti-Christian, contrary to the truth, as leading people to believe they are saved without ever truly being able to offer salvation” (Ratzinger 19). Therefore, according to Ratzinger, if non-Christian religions have any positive value at all, it is only in the manner in which they are leading toward the acceptance of the Christ event as it is interpreted by the Church.

However, Ratzinger is most definitely not proposing any type of coerced conversion, and he very adamantly opposes any type of religious imperialism, which would force the “truth” of the Christ on other cultures and religions. He is very explicit in stating that he is concerned “with the question of how true universality is possible in this multiplicity of cultures, without one culture setting itself as the only valid one and repressing the others” (Ratzinger 57-58). Christianity is necessarily considered universal as a representation of the constitutive salvation event, and, as such, has to be carried to all. However, it should do so “not as a specific religion that overcomes and displaces others, not on the basis of some kind of religious imperialism, but as the truth that renders mere appearance superfluous” (Ratzinger 170). In other words, while mission cannot be separated from dialogue, it is to be conducted in a manner that will not destroy one religion for the sake of replacing it completely with the “true” religion.

Instead, “Christian mission will doubtless have to understand other religions far more profoundly and accept them at a deeper level than has been the case hitherto...” (Ratzinger 78).

It is at this point that the significance of Ratzinger's use of truth and tolerance in his title becomes apparent. For Ratzinger's historical inclusivism, tolerance is a compassionate waiting for others to realize the truth. Non-Christians, "in order for their best elements to survive, need to recognize their own adventual character, the way they point forward to Christ" (Ratzinger 79). As I said earlier, these non-Christians are not seen to be "anonymous Christians" but those who are in the process of becoming Christians through Christ who "is drawing us to him" (Ratzinger 71). However, for Ratzinger, Christianity, while it contains absolute "saving" truth through historical revelation, is not static but is dynamic and ever moving forward in the history of religions: "Christian faith is not a system. It cannot be portrayed as a complete, finished intellectual construction. It is a path, and it is characteristic of a path that it only becomes recognizable if you enter on it and start following it" (Ratzinger 145). Essentially, while the Christ event is the culminating event of the constitutive "saving" truth in history, Christianity will move forward and change as it moves toward the fulfillment of the eschatological hope of salvation history. As Christian tradition, the protector of the constitutive, "saving" truth of the Christ event, moves forward, "the dynamic of conscience and of the silent presence of God" will lead "religions toward one another" and guide "people onto the path to God, not the canonizing of what already exists, so that people are excused from any deeper searching" (Ratzinger 54). In other words, the Christian religion is ever moving forward carrying with her the definitive, historically revealed "saving" truth and ever drawing those from other traditions toward her center by the grace of Christ. While existing as separate traditions, these non-Christian religions can only retain validity in the ways in which they are preparatory of the Gospel and can only retain "saving" truth by being drawn toward the revealed truth of the saving grace brought by Jesus of Nazareth. The negative implications of this view for dialogue are painfully obvious.

However, Pope Benedict XVI is not alone among the Vatican authorities in disseminating this view. In his article, "Jews and the Covenant," published in November 2005 in *First Things*, Cardinal Dulles makes the assertion that the Old Covenant does not stand alone in salvation history but is valid only in the ways in which it is fulfilled in the New: "There is nothing incomplete in Christ's fulfillment of what is promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament" (Dulles, "Jews" 20). He goes on to add that "Judaism, in this view, does not point to possibilities Christ failed to fulfill. But the witness of the Jews to their tradition helps Christians understand the foundations of their own faith" (Dulles, "Jews" 20). The fact that this is a direct insult to the Jewish faith is compounded by the fact that it is supported by a typological reading of Holy Scripture, a practice, which, among Biblical scholars, is widely considered to be fallacious. Judaism is understood to be efficacious only in the ways in which it is a witness to Christianity and one of its most integral functions is seen as its role in the edification of Christians wishing to be more knowledgeable of their religious roots. Toward the end of his paper, he turns to statements made by the current Pope in order to support his argument. The Pontiff's comments offer the same sentiment in his role as Successor to the See of Peter as they did in his role as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: "The Jews 'still stand within the faithful covenant of God,' and, we believe, 'they will in the end be together with us in Christ.' 'We are waiting for the moment when Israel, too, will say Yes to Christ,' but until that moment comes all of us, Jews and Christians, 'stand within the patience of God,' of whose faithfulness we can rest assured" (Dulles "Jews" 21). We see here again that tolerance, in the form of compassionate waiting for non-Christians to be led to the revealed truth, which can be definitively deciphered from a careful study of the history of religions. With this in mind, it is

now necessary to turn to a more thorough discussion of that “saving” truth as it is perceived by those representatives of the authority structure of the Roman Catholic Communion.

Of the aforementioned three most common methods of conducting dialogue, Ratzinger is most concerned with what he sees as the dangers of relativistic pluralism. Relativism, which he refers to as “the most profound difficulty of our age” (Ratzinger 72), undermines the search for truth in that it grants a priori truth to multiple religions without any proper analysis of truth claims:

The dominant impression of most people today is that all religions, with a varied multiplicity of forms and manifestations, in the end are and mean one and the same thing...The man of today will for the most part scarcely respond with an abrupt No to a particular religion’s claim to be true; he will simply relativize that claim by saying “There are many religions.” And behind his response will probably be the opinion, in some form or other, that beneath varying forms they are in essence all the same; each person has his own. (Ratzinger 22-23)

As a result, he claims that the assertion of truth claims becomes seen “as a threat to tolerance and freedom” (Ratzinger 114). In other words, if all religions contain a priori truth, and even “saving” truth, what is the reason for raising questions concerning necessary and ultimate truth?

The subsequent result of this view, what he refers to as “the dogma of relativism,” is that the universal applicability of Christianity is seen as a threat. Christian mission ceases to be seen as “a good meant for everyone” and “becomes the mere presumptuous attitude of a culture that imagines itself to be superior...” (Ratzinger 73). Consequently, he sees this method of approaching the plurality of religious traditions in our modern world as a crisis. For Ratzinger, relativism is not the final answer; the search for necessary truths must be maintained: “Man cannot come to terms with being born blind, and remaining blind, where essential things are concerned. The farewell to truth can never be final” (Ratzinger 165). On this point, I adamantly agree with him. The belief in the existence of necessary truths must be conserved. As I argued

in the opening chapter, granting a priori truth to religions with no justification based in reason and experience is a fallacious method of dialogue and a complete waste of time if the ultimate goal is to decipher theological and philosophical truth claims in the world's great religious traditions. In addition, the Christian message should be seen as a universally applicable faith in the one Necessary Being, by whom salvation is offered freely to all, who is represented by the person of Jesus as Nazareth. However, this sacramental representation cannot be seen as constitutive regarding salvation; consequently, the possibility of attaining this "saving" truth of God is not withheld for Christianity alone and is available apart from the mediation of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Ratzinger is not willing to go this far as, for him, "saving" truth is dependent upon and necessarily related to the event behind the New Testament representation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

In fact, Ratzinger either fails to address or fails to recognize all of the options available for dialogue. In rejecting relativism, he cites the Kantian frameworks of the theologies of J. Hick and P. Knitter as representative examples. He recognizes the Kantian distinction between "phenomenon and noumenon" (Ratzinger 119), which ultimately results in the rejection of any type of metaphysics. However, he offers no alternative between a Kantian rejection of metaphysics and his own historical inclusivism: "On the basis of our ability to perceive and to know things, according to Kant, the things the Christian faith asserts cannot exist, cannot happen: it is crazy to believe in miracles, mysteries, and channels of grace..." (Ratzinger 131). It seems as if he fails to see the middle way between these options, a way representative of theologies such as Kung and Ogden. This middle way, as I have called it, will seek to subject the traditional interpretation of miracles, mysteries, etc. to modern scholarship in order to critically analyze whether or not they should continue to be taken literally in our position as contemporary

practitioners of the Christian faith. In some cases, the traditional conception may be found to be no longer valid for our current interpretation; however, this middle way will most definitely not reject metaphysics as a method by which to measure religious truth claims. The omission of this alternative is a major problem in Ratzinger's theology as it relates to the primary concern of this study.

In my opinion, the reason for this omission stems from the fact that, for Ratzinger, relativism is rejected through the acceptance of the absolute truth of historically revealed revelation. Like Christian tradition, this historical revelation is also dynamic, and therefore, definitively revealed historical truth can be extended, for example, to Creedal pronouncements. For instance, he makes the claim that the early Council's "definitive" declaration that Jesus *is* God, is *homoousios*, one in being with the Father, can be seen as evidence of "why the encounter between the faith of the Bible and Greek philosophy was truly 'providential'" (Ratzinger 94-95). Thus, that which has been revealed in history and recorded in Church tradition as dogmatically binding must be protected as it was understood at the time of revelation while the Church is ever moving forward in salvation history. Any reinterpretation of this would be seen as an aberration from the Catholic faith and would be confusing for Christian and non-Christian alike. Consequently, according to Ratzinger, in order to "avoid misleading people in such ways demands that the Christian's faith in the uniqueness of God and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ the Savior of all mankind be not obscured for the non-Christian" (Ratzinger 109). A reinterpretation of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, which departs from the classical doctrine, would not be compatible with his acceptance of revealed truth, which has been passed down by the Catholic tradition, and with his role as Bishop of Rome, the representative authority

whose role it is to protect that tradition: “For it would then be pointing in the wrong direction, backward instead of forward, in the history of the way of God” (Ratzinger 109).

Unfortunately, a byproduct of his acceptance of this particular traditionally conceived truth is an aversion to the historical-critical method in Biblical exegesis. His definition of relativism is expanded to include the historical-critical method thus denigrating it as a valid means through which Catholic theologians and exegetes can search for truth. For instance, he moves directly from a discussion of the pluralism of Hick and Knitter into a polemic against this form of exegesis. After accusing exegetes such as Hick and Knitter of bringing their own philosophical presuppositions into the exegetical process (Ratzinger 132), he makes the following statement: “The historicocritical method is a marvelous instrument for reading historical sources and interpreting texts. But it does include its own philosophy, which generally...hardly effects anything” (Ratzinger 133). However, he claims that this is not the case if it is applied to the Biblical text:

If you apply it to the Bible, then two factors you would otherwise scarcely notice are clearly manifest: the method seeks to know about the past as something past. It seeks to know what happened then, in the form it took then, at the point at which things stood right then. And it assumes that all history is in principle the same kind of history: man, in all his different manifestations, the world in its manifold variety, are yet determined by the same laws and same limitation, so that I can eliminate what is impossible. (Ratzinger 133-134).

Consequently, according to Ratzinger, this method of exegesis “does not transmit the Bible to today, into my present-day life. That possibility has been excluded. On the contrary, it distances it from me and shows it as firmly set in the past” (Ratzinger 134). In addition, his primary point of contention with this argument is that he believes that “it can never show Christ yesterday, today, and forever, but only (if it remains true to itself) Christ as he was yesterday” (Ratzinger 134). In other words, any type of scholarship that questions what has been traditionally upheld

as historically revealed truth, especially concerning the person of Jesus of Nazareth, becomes vilified as relativism. In his article “Defaming the Historical-Critical Method,” Georg Schelbert asks the following question in response to this attitude: “But is it not also in the nature of truth and completeness, veracity and honesty, to recognize that not everything is so clear, that much is still open, and that much could and can quite legitimately be other than what it has become?” (Schelbert 121). There seems to be an unwillingness by those in authority at the Vatican to address such questions as anything other than a direct threat to Church tradition, which is seen as the caretaker and unerring interpreter of historically revealed divine revelation.

Ratzinger goes on to equate the problems in exegesis to the problems in philosophy referring to these problems as “the desperate situation into which reason obsessed by positivism has maneuvered itself” (Ratzinger 135). And, as a result, the historical-critical method is equated with a rejection of metaphysics: “Faith cannot be set free unless reason itself opens up again. If the door to metaphysical knowledge remains barred, if we cannot pass beyond the limits to human perception set by Kant, then faith will necessarily atrophy, simply for lack of breathing space” (Ratzinger 135). However, historical-critical exegesis should not necessarily be equated with a rejection of metaphysics through the perpetuation of a positivistic rationalism. If, on the other hand, this method is combined with a metaphysical framework based in reason and experience, a new option could be opened up, which would be much more conducive to dialogue with the world’s religions. A theological system, which supports a “theocentric” view of salvation through the perpetuation of a representative Christology, can still retain Jesus as the focal point, the greatest icon, the “lodestar” for the Christian tradition. This does not need to and ultimately cannot change if the religion is to remain Christian. For Christianity, Christ must always be the “lodestar.” Yet, truth as it is historically revealed and passed down through

Catholic tradition is not to be reinterpreted, according to those in authority at the Vatican, and is, ultimately, the reason for Ratzinger's theological stance concerning this point.

This issue ultimately boils down to the matters of tradition and authority. Cardinal Dulles, referring to views put forth by the current Pope, asserts that "the historical-critical method is only the first stage of exegesis. It helps to illuminate the text on the human and historical level, but to find the word of God the exegete must go further, drawing on the Bible as a whole, on tradition, and on the whole system of Catholic dogma" (Dulles, "From" 26-27). As it stands, the significance of this quotation does not pose much of a problem. Problems arise when dogma is expected to be translated literally into our contemporary setting and tradition is seen as infallible and thus not subject to reinterpretation and, potentially, to change. I propose that this is exactly what is happening concerning the Catholic Church's current relationship with non-Christian traditions.

Concerning authority, there have been noticeable signs of a pulling in of the reins against those who would wish to continue in a progressive manner what was begun at Vatican II. For example, in his article concerning the applicability of the Old Covenant, Cardinal Dulles refers to the major contributions, which have been made to covenant scholarship since the closing of the Council. Among the names listed are Pope John Paul II, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), and Walter Cardinal Kasper. In addition, he claims: "With these contributions, together with some less authoritative writings, we may find a path through the thickets of controversy" (Dulles, "Jews" 17). In a reference from *Dominus Iesus*, included in "certain presuppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature, which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth," is "the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church" (*Dominus Iesus* 2-3). I

do not mean to deny the teaching authority of the Church; however, these assertions are presented as if those in authority within the Vatican hierarchy could not be informed by those outside of the Magisterium. At the very least, these statements imply that the statements of those within the Magisterium are a priori more authoritative than those who may be just as informed and committed to the faith but exist outside of this governing structure. However one looks at this situation, one gets the impression of an increasingly top heavy governing structure, which seems to be at odds with John XXIII's symbolic gesture of opening the windows of the Catholic Church at the commencement of Vatican II.

With the above explication of the acceptance of historically revealed revelation as absolute truth by way of traditionally defined dogmas in mind, the implication regarding the Magisterium's interpretation of Vatican II and conciliar pronouncements as a whole becomes apparent. Instead of being treated as an impetus for further theological inquiry, the Council documents are used as the dogmatic criteria to which all subsequent theology must adhere. For example, Cardinal Dulles uses documents produced by the Council to justify the following statement: "The Second Vatican Council taught with great emphasis that there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ. All salvation comes through Christ, and there is no salvation in any other name" (Dulles, "Jews"16). The Church does not seem to be denying the Council, but she is apparently unwilling to move beyond a strict and literal interpretation of its pronouncements. In his aforementioned article concerning the development of the current Pope's theology, Dulles states the position of Ratzinger ten years after the closing of the Council: "The only viable course, he contended, was to interpret Vatican II in strictest continuity with previous councils such as Trent and Vatican I, since all three councils are upheld by the same authority: that of the pope and the college of bishops in communion with him" (Dulles,

“From”25). According to Dulles, later, after his ascendancy to the status of Cardinal and the further development of his views concerning the Council, Ratzinger came to the following conclusion: “Traditionalists and progressives, he said, fell into the same error: They failed to see that Vatican II stood in fundamental continuity with the past...Particularly harmful was the tendency of progressives to contrast the letter of the council’s texts with the spirit. The spirit is to be found in the letter itself” (Dulles, “From” 25). Therefore, one can neither deny a conciliar statement after it has been revealed nor renounce a conciliar statement if it is found to be problematic. In addition, Kung’s call for a new paradigm in the “spirit” of Vatican II is rejected for the dogmatically interpreted literal interpretation of Vatican II statements. Any hope for a critical dialogue with the world’s great religious traditions through which all sides are scrutinized and held to the criteria of reason and experience is lost. The resultant ecumenical theology, while not static in that it is ever moving forward, is inevitably bound to remain compatible to past tradition at the expense of failing to meet the criteria for applicability at the second pole, to use Kung’s terminology, of Christian faith.

Like his predecessor, I believe that the current Pope is sincere in his convictions and confident in his interpretation of the Catholic tradition, and though they differ in emphasis, the consequences of the respective ecumenical theologies of these two Successors to the See of Peter are ultimately the same. As Dulles states, “Although the Polish philosopher and the German theologian differ in outlook, they agree that the council has been seriously misinterpreted. It needs to be understood in conformity with the constant teaching of the Church. The true spirit of the council is to be found in, and not apart from, the letter” (Dulles, “From” 29). Of course, if the presuppositions of Benedict XVI and John Paul II are accepted, then the type of dialogue for which I am calling is pointless. If that which is deemed historical revelation is held as definitive

and that which has been declared dogma as a part of tradition, is held to be universally binding for all at all times, then there is no reason to engage in dialogue for the purposes of critically exploring the possibility of the “saving” theological truth of one’s own tradition in comparison with other traditions. There is no reason for critical analysis because “saving” truth is assumed to have already been guaranteed, through historically revealed truths, by one’s own tradition, and the only dialogue worth approaching would be something similar to what we see from the ecumenical theologies of the two pontiffs presented above.

However, I do not think this is the case because I believe that the ecumenical theologies of the current and the former Bishops of Rome are based on a misinterpretation of historically revealed truth and the manner in which the historical-critical method relates to this truth. I do not maintain, with Benedict XVI, the view that the historical-critical method renders Scripture and Tradition such that it can only speak to its relationship in the past. On the contrary, it offers the possibility of opening our eyes to that tradition, which has come before and will ever be a part of us, so that we may understand more clearly how to express our Christian faith as we move forward. Obviously, it must be augmented by theological reflection in order for current Christian theology to be applicable to both poles of the Christian faith. However, if critical interpretation is not allowed, the Church will continue being bound to the literal interpretation of past interpretations, which may ultimately serve as debilitating for the future. For the critical dialogue for which I am calling to be implemented and perpetuated, reinterpretation of the Catholic Tradition would be required. As a start, Magisterium authoritarianism would have to be renounced in favor of an open theology. Although authority would be limited, it would not be renounced in the sense that the Magisterium would and should retain the status of teaching authority, albeit a teaching authority that is willing to tolerate and be influenced by those outside

of the Vatican hierarchy. Consequently, this would serve to benefit and enrich the lives and understanding of those for whom this authority structure is meant to exist. For example, a neo-classical Christology, based in reason and experience and informed by the historical-critical method, could be truly liberating. Christianity would retain its universal applicability while perpetuating the view that, while the Christ event is constitutive for the specifically Christian conception of God's universally available saving grace, the person of Jesus of Nazareth is only a representative of it, and consequently, it could be realized elsewhere (i.e., in other traditions). The integrity of tradition would be maintained while allowing freedom for alternative views that are applicable to our current historical setting. Concurrently, Catholic theology would be able to perpetuate an expression of Christian, and Catholic, faith that, while truly unique, would be open to dialogue and not hindered by the dichotomies presented in this chapter.

Conclusion

In the Preface to *Truth and Tolerance*, then Cardinal Ratzinger invokes an oft quoted comment made by Martin Buber in order to introduce the discussion of his interpretation of truth: “The Catholic Christian could only, in all humility, put the question that Martin Buber once formulated to an atheist: But what if it is true? Thus it becomes apparent that, beyond all particular questions, the real problem lies in the question about truth” (Ratzinger 10). As I addressed in the last chapter, if we take the conciliar pronouncements and all of tradition as literal truth, if we agree with Ratzinger in accepting the creedal formula that Jesus literally *is one in Being with the Father* and the *only Son of God*, then it is unnecessary to speak of the possibility of a plurality of true religions.

But, what if it is not true? I do not mean here to question the likelihood of truth in the Christian tradition but to question Ratzinger’s conception of that truth. I believe that the current Pope is guilty of blurring the lines between historical and theological truth. I think that it is apparent that he is very concerned by those who seek to demythologize the New Testament witness and to interpret its mythical and symbolic language. In his defense, some of this concern is most definitely warranted as some exegetes do go too far in their attempts to reveal the meaning behind the text. However, there is ample evidence present, some of which is cited in this study, that what we have in the New Testament are not historical depictions, in our modern sense of these words, but theological accounts, expressed in the linguistic forms of the time, of various Christian communities, which were in existence in the first century of the Common Era. We truly have little through which we can definitively reconstruct the life and personality of this

historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. What we have are the first recorded witnesses to this person and the life he led. We do not have uninterpreted history, but what we do have is the belief, expressed by all of these communities which are depicted in the New Testament accounts, that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the one, true God is, in some way, revealed. This does not bind us to an acceptance of their interpretation of that revelation any more than we, as contemporary Christians, are bound to declare that the Creedal expressions of the faith contain complete and literal historical truth.

Consequently, we need the implementation of the historical-critical method in order to interpret this mythical and symbolic language in order that we may more clearly decipher what those who came before us were attempting to convey. In cases, the literal nature of the theological statement will not coincide with what has been traditionally upheld. However, we need not perpetuate mythical or symbolic language as historical fact; it needs to be interpreted. The literal understanding of what happened in historical time may change, but the theological truth claim concerning Jesus of Nazareth as the representative of the salvation of God will remain. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church will have to decide whether she wishes to rigidly perpetuate the Christian mystery as it has been handed down through tradition as literal fact or whether she will be willing to interpret certain aspects of that tradition as a symbolic expression of the conception of God and God's saving grace that emerged from the influence of the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, an expression which is not tied to exclusivist claims concerning "saving" truth and allows for dialogue with those who posit other claims to truth. Will she opt for a "cosmic Christ" or the historical witness to the person who was seen by the first Jewish/Christian community as the sacrament, which revealed God?

This brings us to the question of infallibility, an issue which inevitably arises in any lengthy discussion of Roman Catholic theology. However, for the purposes of this study, I will be brief. The doctrine of infallibility, whether papal or conciliar, must be relinquished. As I stated earlier, authority is necessary and can be used positively; however, I believe it is the case that the Roman Catholic hierarchy has far too often failed to make the distinction between authority and infallibility. Kung, whose book, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, contributed to the process, which led to the aforementioned revocation of his right to teach as a Catholic theologian, has this to say concerning this issue:

It has now become quite clear that the conception of continuity, authority, infallibility of the Church and the Church's teaching, on which there has not been sufficient reflection, has led the Catholic Church into a dangerous tight corner. If we have the strength (and humility) to make an effort to get out of that impasse, in the end the profit may be greater than the loss. For there would then be opened up to us a free area where we could talk without constantly going wide of the mark and without the constant need to reassure ourselves. (Kung, *Infallibility* 28-29)

In other words, by admitting that the Church is fallible and has and will, at times, err, the Catholic Church opens herself up to a freedom, which cannot be experienced if certainty is already defined by written dogma.

I admit that this study raises more questions than it answers. However, as I stated in my introduction, the purpose of this study is not to provide an exhaustive explication of this topic but to provide a framework and suggest a method that will point in the right direction in order to perpetuate the most fruitful dialogue. This framework must consist of a freedom to honestly explore all of the evidence available through the criteria of reason and experience. What conclusions, then, can be drawn as this study draws near to its end? I will close with this. Last Spring, when this project was still in its very early stages, I was talking with a Religion professor, whose focus is in a non-Christian religion, about my intended project. It was shortly

after the death of John Paul II and the subsequent election of Cardinal Ratzinger to the papacy as Benedict XVI. I made the comment that, since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has been more willing to grant salvation to those outside of the tradition, albeit with the inclusivist language contained in the Catechism and elsewhere. He commented, and I paraphrase, that he thought that the Catholic Church needed someone like Ratzinger in the papacy, because if you start letting water in the boat, how are you going to stop it? In response, I said that if water began to come in, you had to allow it. The difference between my stance on the issue and his was that he believed the boat would eventually sink if water was allowed in and I did not. I still stand by that position at the end of this study and still believe in the truly tremendous potential contained within the Catholic tradition. However, if current trends continue in which the honest theological reinterpretation of tradition is suppressed for the sake of a supposed definitive and absolute revelation, the Church will perpetuate a position contrary to the apparent intentions of John XXIII at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and begin to drift away from a position of applicability not only in relation to those outside of the Roman Catholic communion but to many of those within as well.

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Beyond Vatican II: The Church at a New Crossroads by Abbe Claude Barthe. Treasure and Tradition by Lisa Bergman. Beyond the Prosaic ed. It does not seem to matter that the traditional liturgy and the integral Catholic life it sustains is, in fact, profoundly in harmony with the best and greatest teachings of the Council—one need only think of Lumen Gentium, Dei Verbum, and even Sacrosanctum Concilium. It does not matter that Pope Benedict XVI, the greatest theologian to sit on the Chair of Peter for centuries, saw continuity between his own liturgical doctrine and praxis and that of the Council to which he made significant contributions. the teaching of the sixteen official documents of Vatican II supports rather than dismantles traditional Catholic theology and piety. Catholic moral theology is a major category of doctrine in the Catholic Church, equivalent to a religious ethics. Moral theology encompasses Roman Catholic social teaching, Catholic medical ethics, sexual ethics, and various doctrines on individual moral virtue and moral theory. It can be distinguished as dealing with "how one is to act", in contrast to dogmatic theology which proposes "what one is to believe". The Roman Catholic Church affirms the creeds, Holy Scripture and the orthodox faith. They preach that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who died for us, and who rose again. The Roman Catholic Church has changed a lot since the Reformation, especially since Vatican II. There is a conscious movement and effort to move away from semi-pelagianism (human achievement as a part of salvation). I appreciate your charitable take on our ecumenical relationship with Rome, and I agree with your core thesis. I was reminded at several points of Richard Hooker's comments on whether Rome is a true church, contra the Puritans of his day, in his Learned Discourse on Justification.