

No Salvation Apart from Religious Others: Edward Schillebeeckx's Soteriology as a Resource for Understanding Christian Identity and Discipleship in a Religiously Pluralist World

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NO SALVATION APART FROM RELIGIOUS OTHERS: EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX'S SOTERIOLOGY AS A RESOURCE FOR UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND DISCIPLESHIP IN A RELIGIOUSLY PLURALIST WORLD

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ABSTRACT

No Salvation Apart from Religious Others: Edward Schillebeeckx's Soteriology as a Resource for Understanding Christian Identity and Discipleship in a Religiously Pluralist World

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The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate why the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx provides a worthy and valuable resource for negotiating the question of how Christians can maintain their unique Christian identity and uphold the core tenets of their faith, while recognizing the need for and benefit of dialogue with non-Christian religions. In a world where interaction with religious others is inevitable, a perilous sense of superiority that excludes non-Christians from the possibility of imparting wisdom must be avoided. Yet, as this dissertation illustrates, a theory that all religions are equal and that absolute claims that contradict the beliefs of other religions (such as Jesus as God incarnate and the universal savior of humankind) must be given up, is equally as dangerous. I show that Schillebeeckx, although he never identified himself explicitly with one of the three paradigms of the theology of religions (exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism), maintained an inclusivist position but one that is more radical than that of some of his contemporaries. He upheld the unique role of Jesus Christ in human history while regarding religious pluralism, rather than a problem to be solved, as an opportunity for Christians to learn from and expand upon their conceptions of the *humanum*, or what human wholeness entails.

This dissertation critically examines the three major paradigms used to understand the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions. It argues that the adoption of a

pluralist position that regards all religions to be equal, and relinquishes any absolute claims, is not necessary, and can, in fact, be detrimental to fruitful interreligious dialogue. It traces Schillebeeckx's development of the negative contrast experience and illustrates how it can serve as a universal starting point for interreligious dialogue that does not attempt to essentialize human nature or tie all positive responses to human suffering to a latent Christianity present in every person. This dissertation describes the major components of Schillebeeckx's soteriology: creation as the starting point for soteriology; the unbreakable relationship between fragments of salvation in this world and final, or eschatological salvation; the role of Jesus as the assurance of final salvation; and the communal nature of salvation. It shows how the implication of Schillebeeckx's soteriology, which starts from the premise "there is no salvation outside the world,"¹ is "no salvation apart from religious others." This means that our ability to experience fragments of salvation in our everyday lives is dependent on learning from and collaboration with human beings who do not share our religious beliefs, but does not require us to erase religious differences, or tailor our beliefs to "fit" neatly into others' religious views.

Finally, this dissertation applies Schillebeeckx's soteriology to concrete struggles faced by Muslim women and Catholic women in order to illustrate how interreligious dialogue can bring persons toward the fullness of the *humanum*.

¹ See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 12, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

*In memory of
Thomas and Elizabeth Malia
&
Walter and Anna Mroz*

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INTRODUCTION

Today's Catholic Christian can hardly avoid contact with followers of other faith traditions, not only in one's neighborhood, school, or workplace, but even within one's own immediate family. Therefore, the question of how one can maintain his or her unique Christian identity, faithful to the Gospel and Christian tradition, while also being desirous of learning about and from non-Christians, is an urgent one. Contemporary Catholic theologians have sought to respond to this question in various ways, many of which have been critiqued for not maintaining each of these poles (Christian identity and openness to other religions) adequately. The Flemish Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) is an oft-overlooked voice in theological discussion of this issue, but one that I believe offers a response that sufficiently upholds the uniqueness of Christianity, and not only the benefit, but the necessity, of learning from and cooperating with non-Christian traditions.

A. The Theology of Religions: Three Paradigms for Understanding Christianity's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions

The theology of religions is a branch of Christian theology that seeks to describe the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian traditions, particularly concerning the question of salvation. It is widely accepted that, whether consciously or unconsciously, Christians come to any encounter with another tradition with an understanding that corresponds with one of three paradigms: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The three paradigms were first articulated by Alan Race in 1982, as a "broad typological framework within which most of the current Christian theologies of religion can be

placed.”² While other typologies have been proposed since 1982, this is the one that has remained the most prominent and popular in the theology of religions, and therefore, the one I work with in this dissertation. I will briefly describe each of the three paradigms below.

Exclusivism holds that there is no salvation outside of Christianity. Most simply, salvation is through *solus Christus* and requires *fides ex auditu*. Salvation comes from Christ alone, and to be saved, it is necessary that one hears the Gospel preached and responds in faith. In spite of misconceptions to the contrary, not all exclusivists believe that every person who is not a Christian will necessarily be damned. Gavin D’Costa, for example, identifies two types of exclusivism, restrictive access exclusivism and universal access exclusivism.

Restrictive access exclusivism is linked to belief in predestination. It is also associated with a strong emphasis on the importance of missionary activity, since it holds that those who do not respond to the preaching of the Gospel during their lifetime cannot achieve salvation. Even among Christians, it cannot be known for certain who will

² Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY, 1982), 7. Some theologians present other paradigms in addition to three mentioned, but since they are not as widely recognized, I do not deal with them here. Jeannine Hill Fletcher, for example, identifies four paradigms: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and particularism. Particularism begins with the proposition that all religions speak different languages and thus, shape experience distinctively. She associates this position with George Lindbeck. See *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 51-81. For more about Lindbeck’s position, see *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) and “Fides ex Auditum and the Salvation of Non-Christians: Contemporary Catholic and Protestant Positions,” in *The Gospel and the Ambiguity of the Church*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). Instead of the more common three-point model that I work with in this dissertation, Paul Knitter proposes a four-point model that underlines the positions one can adopt toward other religions. These are the replacement model, the fulfillment model, the mutuality model, and the acceptance model. See Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

necessarily be saved. However, given that God is exclusively revealed in Jesus Christ, it is at least certain that non-Christians are destined for damnation. This position is maintained by many strict Calvinists, as well as by some non-Calvinist evangelical Christians. William Lane Craig is one who argues that exclusivism does not contradict God's justice or mercy. He insists that no one is lost because of lack of information due to historical or geographical accident, since "God in His providence has arranged the world so that anyone who would receive Christ has the opportunity to do so."³

"Universal-access" exclusivism has a more optimistic view of the salvation of those who are not explicitly Christian. While still upholding that salvation is through *solus Christus* and requires *fides ex auditu*, it insists that there are opportunities to confess Christ at the time of death or after death. Catholic theologian Archbishop Joseph DiNoia, O.P. holds this position. DiNoia claims that after death, the non-Christian will have a chance to hear and respond to the Gospel in purgatory.⁴ This position is also associated with the "hypothesis of a final option." As explicated by Ladislaus Boros (1927-1981), in the moment of death, defined as the precise moment when the soul abandons the body, every person is given the possibility of deciding for or against Christ, with complete freedom.⁵ Overall, exclusivists may advocate for toleration of and

³ William Lane Craig, "No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ" *Faith and Philosophy* 6:2 (April 1989), 185.

⁴ Purgatory, in the Catholic tradition, is the state immediately after death in which souls undergo purification before entering heaven. See Joseph DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1992).

⁵ Ladislaus Boros, "Suffering and Death: Question and Answer." *They Way* 7:1 (Winter 1967), 55. See also *The Moment of Truth: Mysterium Mortis* (London: Burns & Oates, 1965).

peaceful co-existence with non-Christian traditions, but see no need for dialogue apart from providing the opportunity for conversion.

Inclusivists also uphold salvation through *solus Christus*, but drop the need for *fides ex auditu*. Since God wills the salvation of all, non-Christians are included in the salvation that Jesus Christ brings, even if *how* this is so cannot be explained. Paul Griffiths thus distinguishes between open and closed inclusivism.⁶ “Closed inclusivism” holds that Christianity is wholly and exhaustively true, so that whatever wisdom or insights are found in another tradition are already known to Christianity in some form, or must be assimilated into Christian terms. “Open inclusivism,” on the other hand, allows for the possibility that non-Christians may have something to show Christians that is not explicitly understood or taught by Christianity. In other words, dialogue with non-Christians may enrich and expand one’s understanding of God. Two theologians who hold this position are the Jesuit theologians Karl Rahner, S.J. and Jacques Dupuis, S.J. I will discuss their views in Chapter One.

The pluralist paradigm is more radical than open inclusivism in stating that non-Christian religions are ways of salvation in their own right, apart from the mediation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, rather than being God’s final and definitive revelation, is one revelation among many different and equally important revelations. Pluralists reject the application of any absolute claims to Christianity. Two theologians who espouse the pluralist position are Paul Knitter and Roger Haight, S.J., whose views will also be discussed further in Chapter One.

⁶ See Paul Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 56-65, 161-69.

There has been considerable debate within the theology of religions over which paradigm is most conducive to fruitful interreligious engagement. It has been argued that inclusivism is simply a more subtle form of imperialism, since it does not enter dialogue with a belief that all religions are equally true, and retains certain absolute claims about the role of Jesus Christ and the church. However, the pluralist position is equally criticized for diluting the truth of the Christian faith in a way that renders Christianity expendable. It has also been accused of tending toward a dangerous erasure of the distinctions between religions. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, after the Second Vatican Council, the position of the Magisterium toward non-Christian religions shifted from an exclusivist to an inclusivist one. In this dissertation I argue that the soteriology of the Dutch theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) provides an inclusivist view of non-Christian religions: one that is neither imperialistic (insisting that Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians) nor relativistic (insisting that all religious truth claims are the same and all religions are, therefore, equal).

B. Schillebeeckx and the Theology of Religions

While Schillebeeckx never explicitly identifies himself with one of the three paradigms, there has been considerable debate over whether or not he is an inclusivist or a pluralist. Some theologians make the case that while the early Schillebeeckx may have been an inclusivist, in his later work, he moved beyond inclusivism into a pluralist position. Paul Knitter, for example cites Schillebeeckx's claim that "there is more

religious truth in all the religions together than in one particular religion”⁷ as evidence that Schillebeeckx has affirmed the pluralist option. According to Knitter, Schillebeeckx is making a bold statement which he believes many Christians inwardly affirm but are hesitant to outwardly express.⁸

Roger Haight, SJ also appears to locate Schillebeeckx in the pluralist paradigm. In his book, *The Future of Christology*, Haight compares and contrasts the methods and soteriologies of Karl Rahner and Schillebeeckx. According to Haight, Rahner’s theology represents a Christology from above, while Schillebeeckx represents a Christology from below. Rahner is clearly an inclusivist, indicated by his statements that all grace is the grace of Christ, that the life of Jesus plays a role in the salvation of all of humanity, and that there can only be one incarnation of the Logos.⁹ Schillebeeckx, in contrast to Rahner, begins with the historical Jesus and then examines his universal relevance. Here, Haight indicates that he is not aware that Schillebeeckx explicitly denies Rahner’s assertions that all grace is the grace of Christ or that the Logos could only become incarnate once. However, Haight argues that Schillebeeckx’s overall Christology and view of other world religions do not fit with such claims.¹⁰ By implication, Schillebeeckx must be a pluralist.

In her 1993 dissertation, *Theology in the Context of Jewish-Christian Relations: The Contribution of Edward Schillebeeckx*, Jacoba Kuikman states that Schillebeeckx

⁷ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 165, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

⁸ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 29.

⁹ Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 114.

¹⁰ Haight, 115.

rejects both exclusivism and inclusivism. She contends that Schillebeeckx does not see Christ as an anonymous cosmic presence in other religions nor does he see Christ as their final fulfillment. More tentative than Knitter, however, she only states that Schillebeeckx “might” fall into the pluralist camp.¹¹ Similarly, John Hick, one of the leading philosophers of religious pluralism, names Edward Schillebeeckx’s work as having the potential to form “the basis for an authentically theocentric development of Christianity which is compatible with genuine religious pluralism.”¹²

In response to hints that Schillebeeckx might have been a pluralist, John Dunn and Lieven Boeve maintain that Schillebeeckx was an inclusivist throughout his theological career. According to John Dunn, the theology of the later Schillebeeckx is theocentric rather than Christocentric, but still inclusivist. God is the universal savior who wills the salvation of all, but Jesus is the normative way to God.¹³ Lieven Boeve asserts that Schillebeeckx never wanted to go so far as to say that the particularity of religion is relative in terms of a universally shared mystical experience. For Schillebeeckx, Boeve insists, “in the end the Christian truth claim is the criterion for all other truth claims.”¹⁴ For Boeve, this means that he is an inclusivist.

¹¹ Jacoba Kuikman, *Theology in the Context of Jewish- Christian Relations: The Contribution of Edward Schillebeeckx* (PhD Dissertation: Toronto School of Theology, 1993), 243-44.

¹² John Hick, “Trinity and Incarnation in the Light of Religious Pluralism” in *Three Faiths One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter*, ed. John Hick and Edmund S. Meltze (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 208-209.

¹³ John Dunn, *Jesus Christ as Universal Savior in Edward Schillebeeckx* (PhD Dissertation: Catholic University of America, 1992), 452-54.

¹⁴ Lieven Boeve, “Experience According to Edward Schillebeeck: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology,” in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, Ed. Lieven Boeve & Laurence P. Hemmeing (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 220-221, footnote 61. See also Schillebeeckx, “Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus,” *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 30 (1990) 259-275

Diane Steele takes a position in between these two groups of theologians. In her estimation, “Schillebeeckx has clearly stated his intention to move beyond inclusivism, but he has yet to work out all the implications of this position.”¹⁵ While theologians have located Schillebeeckx within one of the paradigms, there is no clear consensus over where he truly belongs. Furthermore, most of the references to Schillebeeckx in relationship to inclusivism or pluralism are rather brief and do not strongly defend the position to place Schillebeeckx in one paradigm over the other. This dissertation explicitly situates Schillebeeckx within the inclusivism paradigm and seeks not only to demonstrate why Schillebeeckx’s work is consistent with this position, but also proposes that an inclusivist position holds more promise for the future of interreligious dialogue than does a pluralist one.

C. Edward Schillebeeckx’s Soteriology: An Inclusivist Resource for Interreligious Dialogue

The Second Vatican Council called upon Catholics to “read the signs of the times.”¹⁶ A clear “sign of the times” during and since the Council is that Catholics can no longer take for granted that their neighbors, co-workers, friends, and even family members share the same beliefs. It is inevitable that Catholics will constantly interact with persons from non-Christian traditions and non-believers, and will want to do so in a way that is peaceful and enriching. For some Catholic theologians, the “signs of the

¹⁵ Diane Steele, *Creation and the Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), 370.

¹⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 4.

times” call for us to move beyond all forms of inclusivism and embrace a pluralism that radically asserts the equality of all religious traditions, thereby diminishing the unique role of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. An increasing number of people have left the Catholic Church altogether, skeptical of the existence of any sort of “religious truth” and pessimistic about the ability of religion to foster peaceful co-existence in a diverse world. Some have given up on the possibility that there truly can be a Christianity which is both faithful to the Gospel and Christian tradition, while also being open to and desirous of learning about and from non-Christians. In this dissertation, I will argue that Edward Schillebeeckx provides a resource for understanding Christian identity and discipleship in a religiously pluralist world, demonstrating that one can be both faithful to Christian revelation, while recognizing that such faithfulness requires collaborative interaction with non-Christian traditions.

1. Biographical Sketch

Edward Cornelis Florentius Alfons Schillebeeckx was born on November 12, 1914 in Belgium, a country where nine out of ten Belgians are still baptized as Roman Catholics.¹⁷ As a young man, he was educated by the Jesuits but chose to enter the Dominican Order at the age of twenty. Schillebeeckx was particularly drawn to Dominican life, which strives to hold two mutually complementary activities in creative equilibrium: contemplation and the ministry of preaching.¹⁸ After joining the Dominican Order, he came under the tutelage of the Dominican philosopher Dominic DePetter at the

¹⁷ Philip Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 16.

¹⁸ Kennedy, 17.

Catholic university in Louvain. DePetter was particularly interested in phenomenology and sought to reinterpret the work of Aquinas utilizing modern theories of knowledge, psychology, and sociology. It was thanks to DePetter that Schillebeeckx read philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Edmund Husserl, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

During his postgraduate studies in Paris during the 1940s, Schillebeeckx became acquainted with the work of fellow Dominicans Yves Congar and Marie Dominique Chenu. In particular, Chenu's book *Une Ecole de Théologie: Le Saulchoir*¹⁹ made a deep impression. In this work, Chenu emphasized the importance of history for theology, arguing that speculative theories occupy a secondary place in relation to the realities referred to in formulas of faith. Chenu, besides being a scholar, was also the inspiration behind the French worker priest movement. It was during this time in Paris that Schillebeeckx acquired his lifelong passion for the problem of the tension between world and church, creation and grace.²⁰ From his earliest years as a theologian, one can trace a commitment on the part of Schillebeeckx to remain faithful to the Gospel and Christian tradition, not through mere obedience to Magisterial pronouncements and the repetition of dogmatic formulas, but in expressing what revelation and tradition have to say to the present situation.

Schillebeeckx returned to Louvain from 1947 to 1957 to teach dogmatic theology at the Dominican house of studies. During this time, he was a spiritual guide to around

¹⁹ *A School of Theology: The Saulchoir* was condemned by the Holy Office, a former department of the Vatican, in 1942. It was charged, among other things, with arbitrating doctrinal disputes in the Catholic Church. See Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx*, 22.

²⁰ Ted Schoof, "E. Schillebeeckx: 25 years in Nijmegen," in *Theology Digest* 37: 4 (1990), 315.

fifty students while simultaneously working as a pastor in the prison in Louvain, hearing confessions and celebrating the Eucharist there on weekends.²¹ In 1952, he defended his dissertation on sacramental theology, entitled *De Sacramentele Heilseconomie*. In 1957, he accepted a position as Professor of Dogmatic and Historical Theology at the University of Nijmegen (now known as Radboud University) in the Netherlands. He remained connected to the University of Nijmegen until his death in 2009. At Nijmegen, Schillebeeckx's theology was considered "progressive." In all of his courses and seminars, he told students that, "theologians have to reflect on their present situation, facing the problems which it raises today, otherwise they are wasting their words."²²

The Catholic Church in the Netherlands was experiencing significant changes long before the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Particularly noteworthy were the rise of "critical communities": small groups of Catholics who recognized the primacy of local churches. These communities stressed the belief that wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, the Church is present. Even prior to the Second Vatican Council, these communities began experimenting with new organizational forms and specialized liturgies for different needs for the Catholic population. It is important to note that this movement did not begin with theologians, but with the Dutch people themselves, most especially laity, who were engaged in professions such as journalism and the social sciences.²³ Schillebeeckx sympathized with this growing movement and wanted to, in his

²¹ Schoof, 313.

²² Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 11.

²³ Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 17.

own words, “supervise it theologically.”²⁴ He felt that the future of the Church could be found in this communities.

Early on in his work, Schillebeeckx adopted a method of critical correlation which holds that there are two sources, or poles of Christian theology: revelation²⁵ (which includes the Christian tradition) and experience. According to this method, one must avoid identifying the source of theology with only one of the two poles to the neglect of the other.²⁶ Although present early on in Schillebeeckx’s theology, the explicit affirmation of the relation between these two sources is consistent with his earlier work on the development of dogma. In *God The Future of Man* (1968), this is illustrated by Schillebeeckx’s distinction between a dogma’s unchangeable “essence” and its historical and therefore, variable, “mode of expression.”²⁷ Throughout Schillebeeckx’s career, there is a deep structural continuity in the way that he expresses our access to the faith alongside the interaction between theory and praxis.²⁸ Past Christian tradition must

²⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 82.

²⁵ For Schillebeeckx, revelation includes not only Scripture, but also the whole of Christian tradition. According to Schillebeeckx, although revelation transcends human experience and thinking, revelation can only be perceived in human experience. He speaks of “revelation-in-reality” and “revelation-in-word,” which are both aspects of one and the same divine speaking, or of the word of God. Revelation, therefore, is never given to us in a pure state, but in the language of faith. See “Revelation-In-Reality and Revelation-in-Word,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 25-27, first published as “De dienst van het woord in verband met de Eucharistieviering, in *TL* 44 (1960): 44-61.

²⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 8: Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3, originally published as *Tussentijds verhaal over Jezus boeken* (Bloemendaal, 1978).

²⁷ Schillebeeckx, “Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 6-7.

²⁸ Martin Poulson, “New Resonances in Classic Motifs: Finding Schillebeeckx’s Theology in Translation,” *Louvain Studies* 38 (2014), 378.

continuously be related to “our contemporary socio-historical and existential situation” and “to the concrete praxis of present day Christians.”²⁹

While Schillebeeckx’s theological approach can be termed a “method of correlation,” it is important to distinguish his method from the method of correlation used by Paul Tillich. According to Tillich, “the method of correlation explains the contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence.”³⁰ For Tillich, experience is a medium, but not a source of revelation. Schillebeeckx, however, refers to the situation as a source of theology.³¹ He insists that the situation and tradition are inseparable, as the situation shapes and colors the inherited tradition of faith. According to Schillebeeckx, theology is not concerned with a correlation of human questions and religious answers, but with a correlation of answers. For a human question, only a human answer can be meaningful.³² By the time of his 1990 work, *Church: The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx dropped the term “correlation” and instead chose to speak of an “interrelationship” between the two poles of theology, believing that the term “interrelationship” was broad enough to cover the widespread of possible relations, listing correlation alongside a number of others.³³

²⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Theological Interpretation of Faith in 1983,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 11: Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 60.

³⁰ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 60.

³¹ Aloysius Rego, *Suffering and Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Suffering in the Later Theology of Schillebeeckx* (Dudley, MA: Eerdmans, 2006), 134-35.

³² Lieven Boeve, “Experience According to Edward Schillebeeckx: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology,” in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, Ed. Lieven Boeve & Laurence P. Hemming (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 203.

³³ Poulsom, 377.

Schillebeeckx's reliance upon experience has not been without its critics. In fact, modern Roman Catholic theology has been particularly wary of this concept. In his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, "On the Doctrine of the Modernists," Pope Pius X condemned the Modernist use of experience as a criterion for theology, in which religious truths could be derived and interpreted under the influence of contemporary experience.³⁴ The conciliar document *Dei Verbum* listed three factors in the progress of the tradition: theology, experience, and the Magisterium. The insertion of "experience," however, was opposed by a number of the Council Fathers, including Cardinal Browne and Cardinal Ruffini who insisted that it might suggest that the tradition was made known by merely subjective criteria, or that dogmatic truths could originate with human consciousness.³⁵ After the Second Vatican Council, Belgian priest and theologian Antoine Vergote criticized what he saw as "the too facile appeal to experience in faith theology," and named Schillebeeckx as a prime example of this trend. Accentuating the role of experience in faith, Vergote insisted, runs the risk of reducing the Christian faith to a kind of general human faith. Vergote argued that faith is something in its own right. He believes that it is faith that produces experience, rather than experience that produces faith.³⁶

³⁴ See Pope Pius XI, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, *Encyclical on the Doctrines of the Modernists*, Available from http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html For a better overview of Magisterial teaching on experience, see Allesandro Maggiolini, "Magisterial Teaching on Experience in the Twentieth Century: From the Modernist Crisis to the Second Vatican Council," *Communion: International Catholic Review* 23:2 (1996); 225-43.

³⁵ Maggiolini, 239.

³⁶ Boeve, 219-20.

Schillebeeckx expressed sympathy for the history of Roman Catholic reluctance toward appeals to experience, especially since, in the early twentieth century, experiences were often misunderstood as states of feeling, our purely subjective, inner imitations.³⁷ Schillebeeckx, however, defines experience as “learning through direct contact with people and things. It is the ability to assimilate perceptions.”³⁸ Quoting *Gaudium et Spes*’ assertion that “God reveals himself by revealing man to himself,”³⁹ Schillebeeckx views the appeal to experience as a way of following the Council’s call to “read the signs of the times.”⁴⁰ This is due to the realization that there can be no revelation without experience. Christianity began not with a doctrine, but with an experience: the early disciples’ encounter with Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the fact that revelation comes to us in human language, as in the Old and New Testaments, shows that revelation is essentially concerned with human experience.⁴¹ It is God’s saving action as experienced and communicated by human beings. Therefore, the question of whether to begin with the New Testament or with present day experience is a false alternative.⁴²

³⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 30, originally published as *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (Bloemendaal, 1997).

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 17.

³⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 41.

⁴⁰ There is much evidence to show that historical experience played a major role in shaping the views that prevailed at the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII, who inaugurated the council, spent almost twenty-three years living outside of Europe in predominantly Muslim countries where Catholics were a minority, an experience none of his predecessors had. John O’Malley, SJ asserts that for “Vatican insiders like Cardinal Ottaviani and Cardinal Ruffini, who were not used to having their authority questioned, outreach to other faiths and cultures was likely a more difficult prospect. See *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 103-10. Similarly, John Courtney Murray, SJ, hailed as the leader of the “progressive movement of the Council,” was involved in interfaith organizations during World War II and authored the document “the Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Declaration of World Peace.”

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 31.

⁴² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 59.

2. *Method of this dissertation*

This dissertation utilizes Schillebeeckx's method of critical correlation. The necessary interrelationship between revelation and experience, and theory and praxis, play a prominent role in my evaluation of the various approaches to the question of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions, and explain why this question is crucial today. In Chapter One, I examine the inclusivist and the pluralist paradigms and how each has dealt with Christianity's relationship to non-Christian religions. I discuss Karl Rahner, SJ and Jacques Dupuis, SJ as examples of Catholic theologians who uphold an inclusivist position, and Paul Knitter and Roger Haight, SJ as Catholic examples of the pluralist position. While Rahner and Dupuis' understandings of salvation focus primarily on the eschatological, Knitter and Haight emphasize the this-worldliness of salvation to the neglect of the Christian revelation that holds that Jesus Christ as the promise and cause of Christian hope for eschatological salvation.⁴³ Schillebeeckx's understanding of salvation upholds the constant interaction between revelation and experience, allowing for an inclusivist position that is faithful to the Christian tradition and responsive to the contemporary situation of religious pluralism.

Chapter Two traces Schillebeeckx's development of the concept of "the negative contrast experience." The negative contrast experience holds that within every experience

⁴³ Eschatological salvation refers to a definitive end that has not arrived, but of whom Jesus Christ is the promise and guarantor. Fragments of salvation are here and now, eschatological salvation is reserved for the future. However, eschatological salvation is related to and dependent upon this world. Schillebeeckx insisted that "eschatological or final salvation— let us call it heaven— takes shape from what men on earth achieve as salvation for their fellow men." Without fragments of salvation within our current human existence, belief in final, or eschatological salvation would appear to be a mere illusion. See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 789.

of unjust suffering, human beings have a vague perception of what healing or wholeness must entail. This experience is universally shared among all human beings, whether they are Christians, non-Christians, or even non-believers. Therefore, I argue that it can serve as a starting point for interreligious dialogue. In this chapter, I also take up some critiques of the negative contrast experience and attempt to respond to them.

Since the negative contrast experience is common to everyone, it necessarily follows that fragments of this-worldly salvation can be seen in the praxis of other traditions, including the rituals, practices, and beliefs that motivate such praxis. Chapter Three demonstrates how this can be so by explaining the connection Schillebeeckx makes between creation and salvation. For Schillebeeckx, salvation history begins with creation. Thus, he insists, “there is no salvation outside the world.”⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx’s assertion that “there is no salvation outside the world,” I will argue, implies “no salvation apart from religious others.” This conclusion is necessary because, for Schillebeeckx, salvation is a communal reality and therefore, salvation for one group or person cannot consist of the denigration or neglect of others. Schillebeeckx’s inclusivist soteriology maintains that the wisdom of non-Christians and non-believers is essential for the praxis of bringing about the reign of God, but still insists that Jesus Christ still remains the guarantor of eschatological salvation, one who cannot simply be placed on the same level as other religious figures in history.

⁴⁴ See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 12, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

Chapter Four seeks to explain the meaning of the term “dialogue” and presents Schillebeeckx’s notion of the *humanum* as an essential element in interreligious dialogue. The *humanum*, or what human wholeness entails, has no uniform definition, but all persons can agree that the *humanum*, however they may define it, is threatened and damaged. This acknowledgement allows for persons with different and even contradictory religious beliefs to cooperate in responding to the threatened *humanum* without giving up their beliefs or watering them down to avoid disagreement. I use the example of Islam and Christianity to illustrate this point. I choose to focus on Islam here for two reasons. First, in today’s political climate, Muslims and Christians are often believed to be in opposition to one another. Second, both Islam and Christianity make absolute claims. While Christians believe that Jesus plays a unique role in salvation history, Muslims believe that Muhammad is God’s Prophet and the Quran is literally God’s word.

In Chapter Five, I apply Schillebeeckx’s soteriology to concrete struggles faced by Muslim and Catholic women. Patriarchy is manifest in both Islam and Catholicism, and this represents an example of the threatened *humanum*. Therefore, a comparison of the two traditions cannot make the simple conclusion that one tradition is irredeemably oppressive and the other is enlightened. Neither tradition can be said to contain all that is necessary to bring about healing and wholeness in this world. The response to this situation demands a soteriology that recognizes the necessity of dialogue with non-Christian religions without insisting upon the adoption of a pluralist paradigm that seeks to eradicate religious disagreements.

In the conclusion, I will reiterate why Schillebeeckx's claim "no salvation outside the world" implies "no salvation apart from religious others." I will also clarify some possible misconceptions; namely, that those who do not engage in interreligious dialogue are not destined for eternal damnation, nor are Christians able to "save themselves" through dialogue with religious others. God is always the primary cause of salvation. Human actions always remain partial and fragmentary and therefore, await eschatological fulfillment. Nevertheless, our hope in eschatological salvation is only possible if we witness glimpses of salvation in this world. The world, for Christians today, is one in which members of multiple faith traditions and non-believers are in constant contact. Thus, the salvation we experience in this world can and must be experienced in the encounter with non-Christians.

CHAPTER ONE

IS THE PLURALIST PARADIGM THE ONLY OPTION?

In the introduction, I briefly defined each of the three paradigms in the theology of religions as they have been developed by Christian theologians.⁴⁵ The exclusivist position holds that there is no salvation or religious truth outside of Christianity. Inclusivism holds that there is salvation outside of Christianity, but that all salvation ultimately comes from Jesus Christ. This position insists that there is truth and wisdom found in other traditions from which Christianity can learn, even if Christianity is considered to be the “most true” or “most complete.” Pluralism strives to move beyond inclusivism, stating that all religions are equally true and are ways of salvation in their own right without the mediation of Jesus Christ. These definitions, however, are extremely simplistic. In fact, there is considerable diversity and disagreement among theologians in each of the paradigms.

As was also mentioned in the introduction, after the Second Vatican Council the official position of the Roman Catholic Church toward non-Christian religions can be characterized as inclusivist. However, as I intend to demonstrate in the following pages, the theology of Schillebeeckx illustrates that a Catholic can maintain an inclusivist position, while going further than official Catholic teaching does regarding non-Christian

⁴⁵ When first articulated by Alan Race in 1982, the three paradigms were described as “a broad typological framework within which most of the current Christian theology of religions can be placed.” See Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY, 1982), 7. However, scholars of other traditions have made use of the three paradigms to describe positions among their own communities toward religious others. Both John Makransky, an inclusivist, and Rita Gross, a pluralist, do this with regard to Buddhism. See John Makransky, “Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present,” *Theological Studies Journal* 64:2 (2003) and Rita Gross, “Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

religions. This is why inclusivist theologians, like their pluralist counterparts, have come under suspicion, critique, or condemnation by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.⁴⁶

In this chapter, I will first make some general comments about the shift from modernity to postmodernity and how it relates to issues in interreligious dialogue. I will briefly talk about two feminist theologians who, in light of postmodernism, offer critiques of universal narratives and therefore, believe the inclusivist paradigm is incompatible with any type of liberation theology. Next, I will consider the positions of two major Catholic representatives of the inclusivist position, Karl Rahner, SJ and Jacques Dupuis, SJ, as well as two major Catholic representatives of the pluralist position, Paul Knitter and Roger Haight, SJ. In this section, I will focus particularly on their understandings of salvation, and how each of their positions is problematic for contemporary interreligious dialogue. My observation is that Rahner and Dupuis' inclusivist positions do not go far enough in their openness to non-Christian religions, while the pluralism proposed as a solution to the critiques of inclusivism sacrifices the specifics of various faiths, not letting others be others. Finally, I will place Edward Schillebeeckx within the discussion of these paradigms. I find Schillebeeckx to be a representative of the inclusivist position. Schillebeeckx offers an alternative narrative of inclusivism that demonstrates that inclusivist positions are not, as some claim, incompatible with fruitful interreligious dialogue and cooperation, nor with feminist or other liberationist concerns.

⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx work was investigated, but never officially condemned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith between 1976-1980. Among other issues, Schillebeeckx's work was questioned for its "certain relativization of the ecclesial institution." See *The Schillebeeckx Case: Official Exchange of Letters and Documents in the Investigation of Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx, OP by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976-1980*, Ed. Ted Schoof OP, Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

A. Pluralism as Necessary for Feminism?

There is a general consensus among most scholars that a fundamental shift is occurring, particularly in Western society, from the modern to the postmodern. David Tracy, for example, argues that the defining characteristic of our age, caught between the modern and the postmodern, is its inability to name itself.⁴⁷ Postmodern thought calls into question the modern sense of a unified, individual subject, and is suspicious of narratives or metanarratives of history, culture, or national identity. As a result, the rise of postmodern thinking has created a resistance to unified theories and stable categories. Another mark of postmodernity has been an increased interest in spiritualities that are not anchored within religious traditions. In the postmodern understanding, “spirituality” is no longer tied solely to Christianity, nor exclusively based on an *a priori* theological standpoint; rather it is rooted in search, experimentation, and exploring.⁴⁸ Skepticism toward arguments from authority and universal frameworks, and how these have contributed to the oppression of certain groups of people, has had a tremendous effect on Christian self-understanding in a pluralist world. In particular, a view of inclusivism has arisen that sees this paradigm as incompatible with resistance to oppression, particularly when perceived differences between certain groups turn into a cause for discrimination and violence. To illustrate, I will focus on two feminist theologians who argue that the inclusivist position is not suitable for engagement in the struggle for the liberation of marginalized persons.

⁴⁷ David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 3-24.

⁴⁸ Ursula King, *Faith and Praxis in a Post-Modern Age* (Cassell, 1998), 97.

1. *Marjorie Suchocki*

Marjorie Suchocki is a United Methodist professor *emerita* at Claremont School of Theology. She argues that the use of universal narratives in religion is related to the practice of sexism. In particular, she insists that the idea that Christianity is normative or universal can be related to the oppression of women in two ways. First, she points to “the sense in which masculine experience has been universalized in defining all that is human.” Second, she also finds fault with an approach that instead of erasing women’s experience under male norms, assigns to women those characteristics that men consider problematic such as dependence, emotionality, and weakness.⁴⁹ Relating these two forms of oppression to the three paradigms, Suchocki likens the second to exclusivism and the first to inclusivism, though in the end inclusivism, for her, always becomes a form of exclusivism. She states that the second case stems from an instance of the first, “for the qualities assigned to women are not derived from women’s own testimony but from masculine experience projected upon women.”⁵⁰ Similarly, inclusivist positions seem to assign qualities to non-Christians that are drawn from Christian experience, rather than the experience of the other tradition.

From Suchocki’s perspective, the problem with the inclusivist paradigm is that it makes the particular universal (for Christianity, “the particular” is Jesus). This position allows Christians to maintain an air of superiority, since Jesus Christ is seen as “the

⁴⁹ Marjorie Suchocki, “In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective,” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 150-51.

⁵⁰ Suchocki, 151.

ultimately decisive, definitive, and archetypal” man⁵¹ and therefore, is used as a norm or criterion of judgment by which to evaluate other religions. For Suchocki, this violates the integrity of non-Christian religions and “renders invisible or secondary all those in whom the norm is not found.”⁵² It also, in her view, makes Christians unable to be self-critical when necessary.

Suchocki does not explicitly go so far as to insist that all persons must adopt the pluralist paradigm, but some who read her work may assume that this is implied given her staunch rejection of inclusivism. She proposes that justice be used as a norm for ethical life since this makes more room for the affirmation of religious pluralism and “shifts the focus of dialogue to the concreteness of human well-being.”⁵³ In using justice as a norm, Suchocki makes the case that common agreement could be discovered by all religions if one would look, not to their culture-bound concrete ethics, but to their projected ideals. In other words, religions should be looking at “ultimate rather than penultimate visions of justice.”⁵⁴ This proposal presumes that the projected ideals of each religion are fundamentally the same, an assumption held by pluralists.

⁵¹ Here, Suchocki is referring to the Christian theologian Hans Kung, who has been categorized as a representative of the inclusivist position. See Kung, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 123. While Schillebeeckx’s inclusivism is different from that of Kung, Schillebeeckx makes similar claims about Jesus as a norm of humanity. In Jesus, Schillebeeckx insists, we witness “an unveiling of the true face of God and a disclosure of the true being of man.” Jesus’ humanity thus becomes the measure by which we ought to judge ourselves. *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 6: Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 566, originally published as *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (Blemendaal, 1974).

⁵² Suchocki, 153-54.

⁵³ Suchocki, 160.

⁵⁴ Suchocki, 159.

2. Rita Gross

Rita Gross (1943-2015) grew up in a Lutheran family, converted to Judaism while working on her master's degree at University of Chicago, but finally found her home in Buddhism shortly thereafter. After completing her PhD at the University of Chicago in 1975, she became a leading Buddhist feminist scholar and remained so until her death in 2015.⁵⁵ Like Suchocki, Gross was also critical of the inclusivist position.⁵⁶ While Suchocki took issue with religious imperialism for its indirect relation to sexism, Gross called out feminism itself for being part of the problem. Gross argued that feminist movements often fail to pay attention to religious diversity and thus, tend to universalize women's experience on the basis of white, middle-class, and heterosexual experience. Furthermore, she claimed that feminists tend to equate the term "religion" with Christianity.⁵⁷ In her view, the inclusivist position bears responsibility for this situation. Gross also claimed that the "tendency in Western thinking to turn difference into hierarchy" is inherent in the inclusivist paradigm. Inclusivism, from Gross' perspective,

⁵⁵ See Rita Gross, "Autobiographical Roots to Dialogue," in Rita Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation*, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 25- 47. Given their dialogue may lead one to question why I did not include Rosemary Radford Ruether as an example of a pluralist theologian. Indeed, some, such as Schubert Ogden, have categorized Ruether's work as pluralist. See Schubert Ogden, "Problems in the Case for a Pluralistic Theology of Religions," in *The Journal of Religion* 68:4 (October 1988), 493-507. While Ruether has not explicitly aligned herself with either position, I do not see a strong enough case for her to be labeled as a pluralist. Ruether argues against the notion that maleness is essential to Christ, but this does not necessarily lead her to the claim that Christ is not essential. Jesus' redemptive power, for Ruether, lies not in his maleness but in his ideal humanity. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

⁵⁶ Although Rita Gross, as a Buddhist, identifies as a pluralist and argues in favor of adoption of the pluralist paradigm, she does not represent the view of all Buddhists or all non-Christians. John Makransky, for example, identifies himself as a Buddhist and an inclusivist. See "Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present," *Theological Studies Journal* 64:2 (2003).

⁵⁷ Rita Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61-63.

implies competition and always leads to mutual hostility. Therefore, she concluded that the pluralist paradigm is the only suitable choice for any feminist theology of religions.⁵⁸ In agreement with Suchocki, she held that in evaluating religious phenomena, “ethical behavior is far more important than theological doctrines.” From her study of world religions, it was clear to Gross that many cogent theories exist, and “there is no particular need to rank or evaluate them against one another.”⁵⁹

According to Gross, women, particularly feminists, have thus far played a limited role in interreligious gatherings and have not contributed to literature on religious diversity and interreligious dialogue to the same degree as their male counterparts.⁶⁰ However, she claimed that “women and feminists have kept themselves out of the inter-religious arena almost as much as they have been kept out.”⁶¹ Facing the issue of religious diversity, she insisted, requires each religion to give up any claims to “unique universal and exclusive relevance.”⁶² Gross noted that this is particularly difficult for Christians. She surmised that Christian feminists often feel vulnerable because of opposition to their feminism from their own communities and therefore, need to “prove

⁵⁸ Gross, “Feminist Theology,” 65.

⁵⁹ Gross, “Feminist Theology,” 66.

⁶⁰ Within many religious traditions, women and LGBTQ persons, in particular, are barred or deterred from exercising positions of leadership or authority, which may hinder their ability to participate in interreligious studies or dialogue. Religions have often been construed androcentrically, so that male humanity is taken as the norm. This limits genuine learning across religious borders. See Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “Women in Inter-Religious Dialogue,” *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Wiley&Sons, 2013), 168-183. For more about the distinctive contributions women make to interreligious dialogue, see Mara Brecht, “Epistemology and Embodiment in Women’s Interreligious Dialogue” and Rita Gross, “What Do Women Bring to the Dialogue Table?” in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille & Jillian Maxey (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013).

⁶¹ Rita Gross, “What Do Women Bring to the Dialogue Table?” in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Jillian Maxey (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 236.

⁶² Gross, “What Do Women Bring to the Dialogue Table?” 239.

their orthodoxy to skeptical colleagues.”⁶³ Moreover, in religious communities where women are denied access to positions of authority, interreligious dialogue is often not seen as an issue that is “gender urgent” enough.⁶⁴ Gross argued that this should not be the case, since “the history of the feminist theological movement itself provides the first major feminist reason for being concerned with religious diversity.”⁶⁵

Feminist theology came into being because women’s experience has been excluded by patriarchal religion, and thus it maintains the conviction that the voices of the excluded deserve to be heard. If feminist theology were to silence the voices of non-Christian religions by making itself an exclusively Christian movement, it would contradict itself and participate in the same type of oppression it claims to be trying so hard to resist. Gross’s critiques in this regard appear to be valid. One can legitimately make the case that feminist theology and other theologies of liberation have not adequately recognized the voices of non-Christian religions and what might be learned from them. Gross herself spoke of being questioned about whether Buddhist feminism is a movement in its own right with its own unique voice and contributions, or whether it is simply borrowing from Christian feminist theology.⁶⁶ Oftentimes at feminist gatherings, Gross expressed that colleagues often dismissed her concerns about a lack of religious

⁶³ Gross, “What Do Women Bring to the Dialogue Table?” 239.

⁶⁴ Gross, “What Do Women Bring to the Dialogue Table?” 239.

⁶⁵ Gross, “Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions,” 63

⁶⁶ Gross here was referring to feedback she received at a conference on her book *Buddhism after Patriarchy* held in Toronto in 1995. In a conversation with John Cobb, it was suggested to her that she would not be so outspoken as a feminist had she not had experience with Judaism and Christianity. While Gross does acknowledge the important contributions made by Jewish and Christian feminist theology, she insists that Buddhist feminism is not a direct borrowing from monotheistic feminism nor does monotheistic feminism provide the foundation for Buddhist feminism. See “What Buddhists Could Learn from Christians,” in Rita Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation*, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 164-66.

diversity in feminist movements.⁶⁷ Carol P. Christ speaks of widespread discrimination in the area of feminist theology, highlighting how non-Christian women are often passed over for jobs, and overlooked during the planning of conferences, among other forms of exclusion.⁶⁸

Gross's position raises an important question: would abandoning all forms of inclusivism in favor of a pluralist position provide a sufficient solution to the issue of women's exclusion from interreligious dialogue? Or, does the exclusion of non-Christian women from feminist interreligious dialogue? Is the pluralist position really the only one capable of addressing and dealing with a lack of diversity? It would certainly behoove most people today to engage in more critical self-reflection and learn more about religious others. However, I want to argue that one can do so without giving up all absolute and normative religious claims, and without subscribing to the position that all religions are completely equal. After discussing some major Catholic articulations of the inclusivist and pluralist paradigms, I will argue that Edward Schillebeeckx does just that.

B. The Inclusivist Position- Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner, SJ (1904-1984) was a German Jesuit priest and theologian. During the Second Vatican Council, he was appointed to be a *peritus*⁶⁹ by Pope John XXIII and subsequently chosen as one of the seven theologians who would develop the document

⁶⁷ Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," 60..

⁶⁸ Carol P. Christ et al, "Roundtable: Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity: Feminist Theology: Religiously Diverse Neighborhood or Christian Ghetto?" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16:2 (Fall 200), 80.

⁶⁹ *Peritus* is a Latin term for theological advisor or consultant.

Lumen Gentium.⁷⁰ Rahner recognized that the twentieth century was different from previous eras in that, due to the modern pluralism of ideas, faith could no longer be taken for granted. For Rahner, religious pluralism represents the “gravest element” of this pluralism of ideas.⁷¹ In Rahner’s view, pluralism is an unfortunate situation, which ideally should not exist, but nevertheless, must be thought about and dealt with by contemporary Catholics.

Karl Rahner’s engagement with the reality of religious pluralism was quite novel for the time. The Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, was considered revolutionary for addressing itself not just to Catholics, but to “the whole of humanity.”⁷² This marked a break with previous church teaching. In 1832, Pope Gregory XVI called perverse, the claim that “it is possible to obtain eternal salvation of the soul by the profession of any kind of religion, as long as morality is maintained.”⁷³ In the *Syllabus of Errors*, promulgated in 1894, Pope Pius IX condemned “indifferentism,” which included such beliefs as “every man is free to embrace that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true;” “man may, in observance of any religion whatever, find

⁷⁰ See James Corkery, SJ, “Rahner and Ratzinger: A Complex Relationship,” in *Karl Rahner: Theologian for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Pádraic Conway and Fáinche Ryan (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 77-100.

⁷¹ Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions, *Theological Investigations* X.6, Trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroads, 1973), 115.

⁷² See *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 2.

⁷³ See, *Mirari Vos: Encyclical Letter On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16mirar.htm>, 13

the way of eternal salvation, and arrive at eternal salvation;” and “good hope at least is to be entertained of all those who are not at all in the true Church.”⁷⁴

In the face of religious pluralism, Rahner took a clearly inclusivist position. He insisted that there can never be an absolute positive synthesis of Christian belief and all other items of knowledge. Therefore, he argued that a Catholic cannot accept the judgment that all religions are equally justifiable and only differ on inessential points, since such a position would represent “the total overthrow of the Christian and Catholic faith.” The conviction that “Christianity is the unique and absolute religion founded by God through Christ and prescribed by him for all men” is an “intrinsic element” of Christian faith.⁷⁵ Another essential aspect of explicit Christian faith is the assertion that Jesus Christ is the absolute Savior. Rahner held that the title “absolute” must be applied to Jesus since he is

that historical person who appears in time and space and signifies the beginning of the absolute self-communication of God which is moving towards its goal, that beginning which indicates that self-communication for everyone has taken place irrevocably and has been victoriously inaugurated.⁷⁶

According to Rahner, the history of revelation has reached its “absolute climax” in Jesus Christ and is thus, unsurpassable.⁷⁷ It is the final word of God and nothing can be said beyond it.⁷⁸ Rahner also claimed that even during his lifetime, Jesus knew himself to be

⁷⁴ See *Syllabus of Errors Condemned by Pius IX*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>, III.

⁷⁵ Karl Rahner, “Church, Churches, and Religions,” *Theological Investigations X.2*, Trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1973), 31

⁷⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 193.

⁷⁷ Rahner, *Foundations*, 174.

⁷⁸ Rahner, *Foundations*, 280.

the absolute savior.⁷⁹ According to Jesus' own self-understanding, "he is already before the resurrection the one sent, the one who inaugurates the kingdom of God through what he says and what he does in a way that did not exist before, but now does exist through him and in him"⁸⁰

Rahner's declaration that Jesus is the absolute and unsurpassable savior does not mean that non-Christians are unable to attain salvation. Salvation, in Rahner's understanding, is "the supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace."⁸¹ However, this salvation is always dependent on Jesus Christ. Yet, because God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is the "effective salvific design of God for all," every individual must have the possibility of "partaking in a genuine saving relationship to God, and this at all times and in all situations of the history of the human race."⁸² Thus, salvation is universal (communal). The human being "does not seek any heaven from which some other man is excluded from the outset."⁸³

Rahner explained his universal understanding of salvation through the concept of the supernatural existential. According to this concept, God's self-communication is

⁷⁹ Rahner explains how Jesus could have known himself to be the absolute and unsurpassable savior prior to the resurrection while also having a truly human self-consciousness that was nescient of future events, and needed to undergo learning and development. He distinguishes between two poles of knowledge, the transcendental and the categorical. Transcendental knowledge is that which is subjective and foundational. Categorical knowledge is the objective knowledge we receive *a posteriori*. On the transcendental level, Jesus always was God incarnate. However, this subjective and foundational knowledge became apparent in Christ through his own objective self-reflection. See *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 50-53; 249-54. An explanation of Rahner's position on Jesus' self-consciousness can also be found in William Brownsberger, *Jesus the Mediator* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 60-62.

⁸⁰ Rahner, *Foundations*, 254.

⁸¹ Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations XVI.13*, Trans. David Morland, OSB (New York: Crossroad, 1976), 200.

⁸² Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," 128.

⁸³ Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of Anonymous Christianity, in *Theological Investigations XIV.17*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1976), 294.

present in every person, implicitly, as an offer. At the same time, this offer is the necessary condition for a person's acceptance of it, in other words, for an explicit response to God. The supernatural existential enabled Rahner to speak of the possibility of an "anonymous Christian," who, after the Christian mission, "lives in the state of Christ's grace through faith, hope and love, but has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is oriented in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ."⁸⁴

Rahner appealed to the doctrine of the Trinity in order to explain the concept of "anonymous Christianity," or how Christ is present in non-Christian religions through the Spirit. This notion implies that other religions contain some truth and make a positive contribution to one's spiritual well-being. Rahner maintained that "when a non-Christian wins salvation through hope and love, the non-Christian religions cannot be thought to have played no part, or only a negative one, in this winning of justification and salvation."⁸⁵ Therefore, he thoroughly opposed any form of exclusivism, including forms of "universal access exclusivism,"⁸⁶ as expounded by Joseph DiNoia and Ladislaus Boros.⁸⁷ Furthermore, he held that suggestions such as "private revelations and

⁸⁴ Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" 283. Rahner also discusses this concept in "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions."

⁸⁵ Karl Rahner, "Jesus Christ in non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations XVII.5*, Trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 41.

⁸⁶ Rahner himself does not actually use the term "universal access exclusivism" and it was likely not known to him. The term "universal access exclusivism" is used by Gavin D'Costa to describe the positions of DiNoia and Boros, namely in that they hold an optimistic view about the fate of those who are non-Christian during their lifetime. See *Christianity and the World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 29. This type of exclusivism was discussed in more detail in the introduction.

⁸⁷ Joseph DiNoia claimed that after death, the non-Christian will have the chance to hear and respond to the gospel in purgatory. See Joseph DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1992). Ladislaus Boros believed that at the moment of death, defined as the precise moment when the soul leaves the body, every person is given the possibility of deciding for or against Christ, with complete freedom. Ladislaus Boros, "Suffering and Death: Question and Answer."

extraordinary illuminations, especially at the hour of death” are “arbitrary and improbable postulates,” which contradict the basic social character of Christian revelation and human nature. Rahner asserted that, “even in one’s most personal history, the human is a social being whose innermost decisions are mediated by the concreteness of one’s social and historical life, and are not acted out in a realm which is separate.”⁸⁸

In contemporary society, Rahner pointed out, Catholics no longer live in a sphere that is homogeneously Catholic and thus, non-Christian religions “no longer constitute an area of foreign folklore which has no bearing upon the course of life modern man maps out for himself.”⁸⁹ Rather, non-Christians have become our neighbors, neighbors in whom the Christian cannot fail to recognize just as high a degree of intelligence as his or she possesses. Christians must always recognize that “even Christianity and the Church themselves are constantly in process of seeking the perfection of their own nature.”⁹⁰ This puts them in a position to recognize the religiously positive tendencies in other religions, which, though not yet explicitly Christian, the church must absorb. In particular, Rahner proposed that Christian and non-Christian theists can and must learn from one another through their common struggle against atheism.⁹¹

They Way 7:1 (Winter 1967), 55. See also *The Moment of Truth: Mysticism Mortis* (London: Burns & Oates, 1965).

⁸⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 314.

⁸⁹ Rahner, “Church, Churches, and Religions,” 30.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹¹ Karl Rahner, “The Church and Atheism,” in *Theological Investigations XXI.9*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 149. Although Rahner insisted that the Church has a sacred duty to struggle against atheism, the supernatural-existential extends even to those who do not acknowledge God’s at all. Therefore, there must be a non-thematic theism given that the atheist has a genuine chance of salvation as he is true to the promptings of his or her conscience. See “Theological Considerations on Secularization and Atheism, in *Theological Investigations XI.7*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1974). He

However, one must not mistake Rahner's statements as implying that other religions are "on par" with Christianity, or that other religious figures are "on par" with Jesus Christ.⁹² Even though anonymous Christianity is prior to explicit Christianity, it does not render the latter superfluous. Rahner claimed that the church still has a missionary task, though its theology of mission must be interpreted anew. Mission can no longer be regarded as necessary on the grounds that individuals would be lost without hearing the gospel, since such persons can still be saved. However, Rahner explained that the self-realization of a previously anonymous Christianity is still demanded for two reasons. The first is the incarnational and social structure of grace and of Christianity. Grace is incarnational and "of its very nature seeks its historical embodiment in the word and above all in the sacrament."⁹³ Second, all else being equal, the explicit Christian, according to Rahner, has a "still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian."⁹⁴ Non-Christian religions are provisional in character and await their fulfillment in Christianity. They are lawful in different ways and to varying degrees depending on the circumstances without thereby, denying the "error and depravity" contained in them.

Rahner defined a lawful religion as an institutional religion whose use at a certain period of time can be regarded "as a positive means of gaining the right

also acknowledged, along with the Magisterium, that the mediation of the transcendental relationship of the human to God may exist even when not thematized, in an explicitly religious way, for example, in an atheist who is faithful to his or her conscience. Even an objectivity objectively opposed to God may mediate a positive moral act. See "On the Importance of Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," in *Theological Investigations XVIII.17*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 294.

⁹² Rahner, "Jesus Christ in non-Christian Religions," 41.

⁹³ Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," in *Theological Investigations XI.9*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1974), 173-74.

⁹⁴ Rahner, "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions," 132.

relationship with God and thus for attaining salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan and salvation."⁹⁵ Non-Christian religions are only lawful "until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual"⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Rahner always maintained that it is impossible to determine precisely when such a moment occurs and the absolute obligation of Christianity comes into effect for each person.⁹⁷ Even when Christianity is brought to someone through the preaching of the church and he or she rejects it, Christians are never in any position to decide whether this rejection signifies a grave fault or an act of faithfulness to one's conscience.⁹⁸ Furthermore, no one, not even the explicit Christian, can pinpoint with exact certainty whether or not we said "yes" or "no" to God.⁹⁹ Therefore, Christians cannot go around pointing fingers at individuals of other traditions and insist that they are in any way morally culpable.

In response to claims that anonymous Christianity is patronizing to non-Christians who do not identify themselves as such, Rahner clarified, "there is no problem in my treating someone as an anonymous Christian, even if he energetically denies my interpretation and rejects it as false or incoherent." To defend this statement, Rahner referred to an exchange he had with the well-known Japanese philosopher Nishitani. Nishitani asked Rahner what he would think of being called an anonymous Zen Buddhist.

⁹⁵ Rahner, "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions," 125.

⁹⁶ Rahner, "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions," 121.

⁹⁷ Rahner, "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions," 121.

⁹⁸ Rahner, "Church, Churches, and Religions," 48.

⁹⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 101. According to Rahner, freedom is defined as the capacity for the eternal. There is an unthematic "yes" or "no" to God in every free act. Yet, an act in which freedom says "no" to God is a real and absolute contradiction since God is affirmed and denied at the same time. One's freedom to say "no" to God is only possible because of God's "yes" to the human being. See, 97-102.

Rahner replied that Nishitani may refer to him as such and that he would feel “honored by such an interpretation.”¹⁰⁰ For Rahner, the term “anonymous Christian” is meant to help Christian self-understanding and is really the only way to adequately describe how the Christian can maintain both the possibility of supernatural salvation for non-Christians, and the belief that salvation cannot be gained without reference to God and Christ.¹⁰¹ He never posed any objection to those wishing to avoid the terms “anonymous Christianity” or “implicit Christianity” but he did insist that those persons must provide another term.¹⁰²

Karl Rahner’s “anonymous Christianity” has continuously been critiqued.¹⁰³ Edward Schillebeeckx, in his later work, sought to distance himself from the use of the term “anonymous Christianity.”¹⁰⁴ In his 1968 book, *God the Future of Man*, he argued

¹⁰⁰ See “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” *Theological Investigations XVI.13*, trans. David Morland OSB (New York: Crossroad, 1976), 219.

¹⁰¹ Rahner, “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” 218.

¹⁰² Rahner “Atheism and Implicit Christianity,” *Theological Investigations IX.9*, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Crossroad, 1972), 145.

¹⁰³ It is important to note that Rahner’s position can and has been defended. Catherine Cornille suggests that Rahner’s phrase can be understood in a way that does not inhibit fruitful interreligious dialogue. She states, “perhaps the expression may also indicate an awareness of the fact all conceptions of the other are always to some degree determined by one’s own particular and limited set of presuppositions. After all, Rahner always emphasized that the expression was explicitly and self-consciously confession, used only for Christians to come to terms with the possibility of salvation beyond the confines of the Christian tradition.” Given that Rahner accepted the possibility that Buddhists might refer to him as an “anonymous Buddhist,” the notion of “anonymous Christianity” would “represent one of any number of expressions signifying a humble awareness of the historical and conceptual particularity of all religious perceptions of the other. Though this may not necessarily lead to an open and reciprocal dialogue, it does reflect a healthy epistemological realism that constitutes a necessary stepping stone in the dialogue between religions.” See *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 44.

¹⁰⁴ It is important to emphasize that this shift only occurred in Schillebeeckx’s later work. In the 1950s, and early 1960s, Schillebeeckx frequently used the term “anonymous Christianity.” Schillebeeckx’s eventual disowning of the term coincided with a general rise in criticism of anonymous Christianity in Christian theology. For example, in a 1953 talk to young Dominicans, Schillebeeckx’s spoke of “anonymous religion.” In his 1957 book *Christ: The Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, he wrote of the pagan’s “inner yet still anonymous dialogue with God” and even of “unconscious Christianity.” See Stephen Bullivant, “The Myth of Rahnerian Exceptionalism: Edward Schillebeeckx’s Anonymous Christians,” *Philosophy & Theology* 22 (2010): 339-351.

that the church today must understand herself as a church in dialogue. Such dialogue, he insisted, cannot be regarded as possible solely because the church can recognize something of herself in others and can interpret others as anonymous Christians. Schillebeeckx did not wish to deny the reality of what is called anonymous Christianity, but wanted to affirm that “it is necessary, if dialogue is to be sincere, for others to be involved in that dialogue precisely as others and therefore precisely as non-Christians.”¹⁰⁵ Schillebeeckx stated that it would be pointless, for example, to tell an atheist that he or she is an implicit theist or an anonymous Christian, since such a statement would imply that we are not taking the atheist dialogue partner seriously.¹⁰⁶

Catholic theologian Jeannine Hill Fletcher also believes that the term anonymous Christianity inhibits dialogue. She writes, “it seems as though Christians know in advance what to expect in faith perspectives of other religions because they are looking for Christ

¹⁰⁵ Schillebeeckx did not deny the Christian conviction that in every dialogue, Christ is present as ‘le present commun,’ who “personally guides our conversation toward the full truth which he himself is.” See, “The Church as the Sacrament of Dialogue,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 73-74. In 1974, Schillebeeckx stated that it was no longer possible to speak of anonymous Christians, even though it is necessary to express that non-Christians are not deprived of salvation. This is because “man’s history, which is God’s creation, is thus the condition for understanding Christian revelation and at the same time the answer given by revelation. The abundance of meaning which is contained in the meaning man has already discovered in the world is manifest in the light of revelation. See “Correlation Between Human Question and Christian Answer,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 87. In an even later work, Schillebeeckx made the distinction between himself and Rahner even clearer in stating that Christianity must not drop its claim to universality, but must let “both its exclusivist and inclusivist claim to universality go.” Here, he defined exclusivist as the sense that “only Christianity is a true religion” and inclusivist as the notion that “there is truth and goodness immanent in other religions, with their adherents being ‘anonymous Christians.’” Both approaches, he argued, discriminate against non-Christians and are improper. See Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Human Ecumene,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, Ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 182.

¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx still affirmed that Christ is “communally present” in every dialogue. While the non-Christian does not know or accept this, the Christians is, by faith, sure of it. He maintained that all human existence has been touched by Christ. See “Christians and non-Christians: 1. The Theory of Toleration,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 4: World and Church*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 141

present there.” Thus, such a theology “promotes a search for sameness that ignores the distinctive affirmations that might be found in the lives and experiences of persons of other faiths.”¹⁰⁷

C. The Inclusivist Position- Jacques Dupuis

Jacques Dupuis (1923-2004) was a Belgian Jesuit priest who spent thirty-four years of his life in India. His encounter with Hinduism made it clear to him that God had revealed God’s self in the Hindu religion, and prompted his lifelong reflections on religious pluralism. Dupuis’s reflections on non-Christian religions were more grounded in firsthand experience than those of Rahner. Dupuis spent much of his career in direct interaction with the Hindu population in India, which required him to read and familiarize himself with the Hindu Scriptures. Still, Dupuis sought to maintain an inclusivist position, though one which differed from Rahner’s and which ultimately led to trouble with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith later in his career.

While Rahner insisted that pluralism is an unfortunate situation that ideally should not exist, Dupuis sought to defend the claim of “religious pluralism in principle.” As Dupuis explained,

The question raised by the term “in principle” is whether the religious pluralism in which we are living today is simply to be accepted and tolerated as a *de facto* reality of our current world that must be taken into account, rather than as something unwelcome; that is, received gratefully as a positive factor that at the same time attests to the sovereign generosity with which God has manifested himself in many ways to humankind and to the manifold responses that humankind has made to God’s self-revelation in different cultures.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 62.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 255.

Rahner can be described as representing the first position, which merely recognizes religious pluralism *de facto*. Dupuis, on the other hand, aligned himself strongly with the second position, stating confidently that religious pluralism in principle is based on the “immensity of a God who is Love and communication.”¹⁰⁹ According to Dupuis, there is more truth and grace available and discoverable in the entire history of God’s relations with humankind, than in the Christian tradition alone.¹¹⁰ The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith’s 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* explicitly condemned “relativist theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure (or in principle)*.”¹¹¹ Given the timing of its release, some believe that this document was composed in response to Dupuis’s 1997 work *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 255.

¹¹⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 256.

¹¹¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html, 4.

¹¹² See Gerald O’Collins, “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and His Work, in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, ed. Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 18-32. and Terrence Merrigan, “Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism, “ in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, ed. Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 60-71. In 2001, Dupuis received a notification from the CDF regarding his 1997 book. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the Book ‘Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism’ by Father Jacques Dupuis*, SJ Promulgated January 24, 2001. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html. One could also make the case that the document was partly a response to Edward Schillebeeckx, whose work was investigated, but never officially condemned, by the CDF between 1976-1980. Among other issues, Schillebeeckx’s work was questioned for its “certain relativization of the ecclesial institution.” See *The Schillebeeckx Case: Official Exchange of Letters and Documents in the Investigation of Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx, OP by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976-1980*, Ed. Ted Schoof OP, Trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). Edmund Chia states that the declaration was targeted at Asian theologians promoting a theology of religious pluralism. See *Edward Schillebeeckx and Interreligious Dialogue: Perspectives from Asian Theology* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

Nevertheless, Dupuis asserted that the recognition of religious pluralism in principle does not necessarily mean one must place all religions on the same level.¹¹³ He maintained that Jesus is the only mediator between God and human beings.¹¹⁴ However, he departed from Rahner by refusing to call Jesus the “absolute savior.” According to Dupuis, the term absolute can only be predicated of God, never of a finite being. Instead, Dupuis referred to Jesus as the “constitutive” Savior of humankind, meaning that, “Jesus has saving significance for all of humankind and the Christ event (in particular, the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection), is truly the cause of salvation for all human beings.”¹¹⁵

Like Rahner, Dupuis also drew upon Trinitarian theology to explain the presence of Jesus Christ in non-Christian religions, although he does not use the term “anonymous Christianity” and he ultimately reached different conclusions than Rahner. Inspired by the prologue to John’s Gospel, Dupuis claimed that the *Logos* (Word, or Second Person of the Trinity) is not exhausted by the historical reality of Jesus Christ, but rather was present and working in the world prior to the incarnation. According to Dupuis, the mystery of the Son is displayed in the humanity of Jesus but not limited to it; nonetheless, “no one is capable of communicating to human beings the mystery of God with greater depth than does the Son himself, who has become a human being.”¹¹⁶ The revelation of

¹¹³ Jacques Dupuis, “The Declaration *Dominus Iesus* and My Perspectives on It,” in *Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition*, ed. William Burrows (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 30.

¹¹⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 43.

¹¹⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 166. It is important to note that Dupuis cites Rahner’s work in explaining that Jesus Christ is the cause of salvation for all of humankind. See Karl Rahner, “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations XVI.13*, Trans. David Morland, OSB (New York: Crossroad, 1976), 199-224.

¹¹⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. 271.

God in Christ is complete, but not fully achieved. Its fullness is unsurpassable in history, but that does not mean it exhausts the entire mystery of God, which will remain hidden until the eschaton. Using this logic, Dupuis deduced that “the religious tradition of others is indeed for them a ways and means of salvation.” Christians must ascribe a certain mediation of grace to the religious practices and sacramental rites of other religions, even if, as Dupuis held, these “are not on the same footing as the Christian sacraments instituted by Christ.”¹¹⁷

Dupuis proposed that there is a mutual and asymmetrical complementarity between Christianity and other religions. Dialogue, defined as the exchange and sharing of saving values, is where mutual enrichment can take place. Dupuis insisted that, “there are true and authentic aspects of the divine Mystery that are more deeply accented in other traditions than they are in the Christian tradition.” Nevertheless, although other traditions may provide “additional and autonomous values of truth and grace,” he upheld that these traditions cannot be understood as necessary for completing or fulfilling Christianity, since God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is ultimately “unsurpassable.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. 319-21.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001). It should be noted that in his early work *Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis argued for a complementarity between religions, where mutual enrichment and self-transformation can take place. In his later work, he added the terms mutual and asymmetrical, so as not to cancel out his original assertion, but to clarify that Christianity is not in need of fulfillment. This was in response to the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith’s notification on “Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” which insisted that Dupuis’ work was ambiguous on five doctrinal points: 1) the sole and universal salvific mediation of Jesus Christ 2) the unicity and completeness of revelation of Jesus Christ 3) the universal salvific action of the Holy Spirit 4) the orientation of all human beings to the Church 5) the value and salvific function of the religious traditions. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification on the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (January 24, 2001).

Aware of the critiques leveled against the inclusivism of Karl Rahner, Dupuis preferred to label his own position as a “pluralistic inclusivism,” or an “inclusive pluralism,” because it upholds the universal constitutive character of the Christ event, as well as the positive significance of non-Christian religious traditions.¹¹⁹ However, he consistently refrained from adopting a pluralist position due to his firm belief that the authenticity of dialogue requires that partners enter into it with the integrity of their faith.¹²⁰ In dialogue, Dupuis insisted, one cannot bracket his or her beliefs. Dialogue cannot allow a syncretism that attempts to overcome contradictions among the faiths through reduction of their content. Dupuis felt that his position in no way demeaned the non-Christian dialogue partner; rather, “it is in this fidelity to personal, non-negotiable convictions, honestly accepted on both sides, that the interreligious dialogue takes places between equals in their difference.”¹²¹

From Dupuis’s perspective, dialogue with religious others is an end in itself. For neither side does it intend the conversion of one partner to the religious tradition of the other; but rather, its purpose is to bring about “a more profound conversion of each to God.”¹²² Nevertheless, Dupuis rejected Paul Knitter’s proposal to identify the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church with dialogue.¹²³ Although dialogue, which implies learning new truth, is an authentic expression of the evangelizing mission, it

¹¹⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 255.

¹²⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 293.

¹²¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 378-79.

¹²² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 383.

¹²³ Pluralist Paul Knitter insists that in light of religious pluralism, the Christian understanding of mission can no longer include the invitation for others toward conversion, but must be identical with dialogue. See *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 136-64.

cannot exhaust it. For Dupuis, there must remain room, “if God so wishes, for inviting others to become disciples of Jesus in the Church.”¹²⁴ While Knitter sees a contradiction between dialogue and the notion that each religion has its own validity and is an end in itself,¹²⁵ Dupuis believed that ends in themselves can be diversified as stages in a process:

Surely, God’s covenant with Moses was an end in itself; this did not prevent it from being oriented to God’s covenant in Jesus Christ in which it finds its full realization. Similarly, the Kingdom of God already present in history is an end in itself; nevertheless, it remains oriented toward the eschatological fullness of the kingdom of God.¹²⁶

While dialogue’s only or main goal should not be the conversion of others to Christianity, one need not rule out conversion as a possible outcome.

Dupuis adopted what he called a “kingdom-centered model” to explain the relationship between non-Christian religions and the church. Such a model shows how the Kingdom of God includes more than simply the church, explaining that “through opening themselves up to the action of the Spirit, [non-Christians] share in the reality of the Reign of God in the world and in history.”¹²⁷ Therefore, the central focus of this model is building of the kingdom of God, rather than the institution of the church itself.

¹²⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 372-73. In his work, Dupuis explains the difference between dialogue and proclamation. Dialogue aims at a deeper conversion of the partners-Christians and others- toward God. Proclamation, on the other hand, is an invitation extended to others to become disciples of Jesus in the church. According to Dupuis, these do not need to be opposed to one another, and dialogue can leave room for proclamation. Dupuis takes the distinction from the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue’s 1991 document. See *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html, 81.

¹²⁵ See Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 140-42.

¹²⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 372-73

¹²⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 345

Dupuis did not intend for this model to replace the Christocentric (or Christ-centered) perspective. Here, he referenced John Paul II's 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Missionary Mandate*. In this encyclical, the pope declared that the Kingdom of God is the concern of everyone, but it cannot be detached from Jesus Christ or the Church.¹²⁸ At the same time, John Paul II expressed some concerns regarding kingdom-centered approaches such as the one used by Dupuis, which the encyclical stated, "stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the kingdom." While these conceptions contain some positive aspects, the pope insisted that they are silent about Christ and the mystery of redemption, and end up undervaluing the church.¹²⁹ John Paul II's concerns were echoed ten years later in *Dominus Iesus*, which faulted kingdom-centered approaches for denying the "unicity of the relationship which Christ and the Church have with the kingdom of God."¹³⁰ Yet, according to Dupuis, the kingdom-centered and Christocentric perspectives are interconnected since "one cannot separate the Reign of God in history from the Jesus of history, in whom it was instituted, nor from Christ whose present kingship is its expression."¹³¹

Dupuis's combination of the Christocentric and regnocentric (or kingdom-centered) perspectives allowed him to show that "one can attain the reality of the Reign of God without recourse to the sacraments of the Church and without belonging to the

¹²⁸ See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, 18.

¹²⁹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 17.

¹³⁰ *Dominus Iesus*, 19.

¹³¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 345.

Church.”¹³² According to Dupuis, “while the believers of other religious faiths perceive God’s call through their own traditions and respond to it in the sincere practice of these traditions, they become in all truth – even without being formally conscious of it – active members of the Kingdom.”¹³³ However, he still asserted that the Church is necessary. The Church, for Dupuis, remains “the efficacious sign, willed by God, of the presence in the world and in history of the reality of the Reign of God.”¹³⁴ As such, all persons are oriented toward the Church, since the church must be understood as “the point toward which non-ecclesial grace is tending.”¹³⁵ As an efficacious sign, the church is not identical to the Reign of God, but a sacrament of the Reign of God. Its role is not a universal mediatory function, since the mediator of the Reign is not the church, but Jesus Christ. The church’s task is to bear witness to the Reign of God and serve it.¹³⁶ The church is thus a provisional reality, which will exist only until the coming fulfillment of the Reign of God.¹³⁷

So, from Dupuis’ perspective, not only can followers of other traditions belong to the kingdom of God in history without being members of the church, they can also “share in the fullness of the Kingdom without having to be linked at the last stage to an

¹³² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 354.

¹³³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 345.

¹³⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 354.

¹³⁵ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 352.

¹³⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 354.

¹³⁷ Dupuis cites Karl Rahner who maintained that “the Church, if only she be rightly understood, is living always on the proclamation of her own provisional status and of her historically advancing elimination in the coming kingdom of God toward which she is mainly traveling as a pilgrim, because God for his own part is coming to meet her in the Parousia and her own pilgrimage, too, is taking place in the power of Christ’s coming.” See Rahner, “The Church and the Parousia of Christ,” in *Theological Investigations VI* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1969), 298. See Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 354.

eschatological church.¹³⁸ For this statement, Dupuis's theology has been subject to critique along the same lines as Rahner's anonymous Christianity. According to James Fredericks, since other religions do not claim to be building up God's kingdom, to assert that this is what they are doing "distorts the teaching of these religions."¹³⁹ The Magisterium, took issue with Dupuis' claim from a different perspective, insisting that "according to Catholic doctrine, the followers of other religions are oriented to the Church and called to become a part of her."¹⁴⁰

D. The Pluralist Position-Paul Knitter

Paul Knitter is currently retired as the Paul Tillich Professor Emeritus of Theology, World Religions, and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York. At the young age of thirteen, he felt a calling to the priesthood, entered minor seminary, and spent the next fourteen years of his life studying to be a priest. During his college years, he joined the Divine Word Missionaries, whose main invocation was the prayer "May the darkness of sin and the night of heathenism vanish before the light of the Word and the Spirit of grace."¹⁴¹ Yet, upon learning and interacting with Hinduism and Buddhism as a missionary, he found much that was rich and beautiful in these traditions rather than "darkness and sin." By the time he graduated college, he was convinced that "an exclusivist model of Christianity as light and other religions as darkness did not fit the

¹³⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 357.

¹³⁹ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 22.

¹⁴⁰ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Notification on the Book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*," IV

¹⁴¹ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 4.

facts.”¹⁴² After coming to this realization, he came into contact with Rahner’s anonymous Christianity. Knitter has called the inclusivism of Karl Rahner a “bridge” in Catholic theology’s treatment of religious pluralism. While Rahner’s theology allowed for a positive evaluation of other religions, Knitter’s encounter with a Muslim friend during his doctoral studies in Germany made him realize that he could not uphold the belief that his friend needed to be “fulfilled” through Christianity, or was somehow an “anonymous Christian.”¹⁴³ Thus, Knitter became convinced that Catholic theology must go beyond the inclusivist paradigm. Knitter, like Dupuis, has also engaged in comparative theology, in particular, with the Buddhist tradition.¹⁴⁴

Knitter describes his approach to comparative theology as a “globally responsible, correlational dialogue of religions.”¹⁴⁵ It is globally responsible in that it is aware that interfaith encounter must “include a concern for and attempt to resolve the human and ecological suffering prevalent throughout the globe.” It is correlational in that it “affirms the plurality of religions, not because plurality is good in itself but because it is a fact of life and the stuff of relationships.”¹⁴⁶ Knitter insists that this dialogue must take place within an egalitarian community, which means dropping any notion that other religions are subordinated to or fulfilled by Christianity.

¹⁴² Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 5.

¹⁴³ Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁴ See Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian* (London: Oneworld, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ Knitter prefers this term to simply using the word “pluralism.” However, although he is slightly uncomfortable with the term, he acknowledges that he is a pluralist. See *Jesus and the Other Names*, 18. Also see *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 16.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 17.

Although once an inclusivist himself, Knitter now claims that inclusivism is a threat to dialogue, and “a threatened dialogue is (or should be) just as serious a problem as a threatened Christian identity.”¹⁴⁷ Christians, he believes, cannot first work out a Christology and then see how it applies to dialogue, but rather the reality of other religions and interreligious dialogue must be part of the preconditions for understanding who Jesus is.¹⁴⁸

According to Knitter, Christians must give up three terms when talking about Jesus. These are *full*, *final/definitive*, and *unsurpassable*. *Fullness* refers to the belief that in Jesus, Christians possess the totality of divine revelation. This must be rejected, Knitter argues, since identification of the Infinite with anything finite is idolatry. The flesh of Jesus cannot be made into a total container of the divine. *Definitiveness* refers to the belief that there can be no other norms for Divine Truth outside of Jesus. This conflicts with the essentially eschatological nature of the truth Jesus made available to humanity. Knitter insists that the truth Jesus revealed, “while utterly reliable and demanding our full commitment, was not a finished product.”¹⁴⁹ *Unsurpassable* refers to the belief that God cannot reveal more of God’s fullness in other ways at other times. When Jesus is absolutized as unsurpassable, Knitter states, he is often mistaken to be the kingdom of God himself, and Christian existence is seen mainly as a “confession of a personal relationship with Jesus rather than a commitment to work with him for the kingdom of God.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 74.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 76.

Knitter's definition of the kingdom of God focuses less on the eschatological than that of Rahner and Dupuis, and more on the praxis of everyday life. Salvation is not just about getting to heaven. It is "not a transaction that takes place outside us, but an empowering awareness that pervades our entire being, the discovery of our divine nature as "children of God."¹⁵¹ He concludes that if salvation is a matter of revealing and embodying the deepest and already existing truth about ourselves and the world, then it will be "probable and maybe even necessary that there be many teachers, revealers, and saviors, each speaking to different cultural or historical contexts, each making known different and deeper depths of what Christians call the divine."¹⁵² Thus, other religions are ways of salvation in their own right, apart from and not in need of fulfillment by the mediation of Jesus Christ.

Unlike Dupuis or Rahner who understand all religions as somehow oriented toward the Church, Knitter adopts a "soteriocentric perspective." This soteriocentric approach is based on the common ground of global responsibility for eco-human well-being.¹⁵³ For Knitter, this is even more inclusive than "kingdom-centrism." What unites religions, he argues, is not how they are related to the church or how they are related to Christ, but rather to what extent they are promoting *Soteria*, or "ineffable mystery of salvation." One promotes *Soteria* by being engaged in promoting human welfare and bringing about liberation with and for the poor and nonpersons. Knitter proposes that *Soteria* be used as the common starting point for religious encounter, rather than *Theos*,

¹⁵¹ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 117.

¹⁵² Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 122.

¹⁵³ Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 18-19.

or the “ineffable mystery of divine.”¹⁵⁴ For Knitter, orthopraxis, or right practice, has primacy over orthodoxy, or right belief.¹⁵⁵ Knitter still claims that Jesus is unique, but this is a relational uniqueness, in that “Jesus is a Word that can be understood only in conversation with other Words.”¹⁵⁶ Jesus is unique alongside other unique liberators, and the universal savior alongside other universal saviors. His universality and uniqueness is not inclusive, or exclusive, but complementary.¹⁵⁷ This assertion leads Knitter to concede that incarnation extends beyond Jesus of Nazareth, and we must recognize that “Buddha and Muhammad and others may be enfleshments of Ultimate Reality.”¹⁵⁸

Clearly, Knitter’s position contrasts sharply with the inclusivist one taken by Rahner and Dupuis. For Rahner, savior figures in other religions can only be seen as signs that point toward Christ.¹⁵⁹ Dupuis, however, went a step farther than Rahner. Taking Islam as an example, he insisted that Christians could acknowledge Muhammad as a genuine prophet of God. Nevertheless, he still upheld that the Quran and other sacred

¹⁵⁴ Paul Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 187.

¹⁵⁵ As defined by Gerald O’Collins, orthopraxis is defined as “self-critical activity that aims to ‘do the truth,’ practice Christian discipleship, and transform human society. See *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, Third Edition, Ed. Gerald O’Collins, SJ and Edward Farrugia, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 2013). Schillebeeckx makes the same claim as Knitter about the primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy. He wrote, “Not ‘Lord, Lord, Alleluia,’ but praxis is decisive.” See *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 75. However, Schillebeeckx made a stronger connection between the role Christian belief in Jesus as Christ plays in developing orthopraxis. Schillebeeckx refers to Jesus as a norm of humanity. See *Jesus*, 566.

¹⁵⁶ Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology,” 194.

¹⁵⁸ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 125.

¹⁵⁹ “Savior figures in the history of religion can certainly also be viewed as signs that –since man is always and everywhere moved by the Spirit–he gazes in anticipation towards that event in which his absolute hope becomes historically irreversible and is manifested as such.” See “Jesus Christ in non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations XVII.5*, Trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 49.

texts are not perfect and complete, even though they contain some “divine truth.”¹⁶⁰

Although other saving figures may be inspired by the Spirit to “become pointers of salvation for their followers,” they are, for both Rahner and Dupuis, always subordinate to Jesus Christ.¹⁶¹

Knitter vigorously defends his pluralist position against critics who claim that it conflicts with Sacred Scripture. He explains that the “one and only language” conveyed by the use of titles such as Son of God, Savior, and Word of God, which put Jesus in a category separate from and superior to all other religious founders and leaders, can be described as “love language.” Such language, Knitter argues, came from the early Christian community’s experience of and commitment to Jesus and is misused if taken literally. He likens these titles to terms of devotion, to the love between two spouses in marriage, who may tell each other “you are my one and only.”¹⁶²

Knitter’s pluralist convictions have had a deep impact on his own spiritual life. In 2008, he officially became a Buddhist as part of the Dzogchen community in the United States and now calls himself a “Buddhist Christian.” At first, Knitter continued to give primacy to his Christian identity, but he now claims that he cannot attribute primacy to either identity. He uses the Christian term *hypostatic union*¹⁶³ in describing himself as a double-belonging human being. He writes, “two very different spiritual operational principles come together in a single hypostasis or person – but without being confused or

¹⁶⁰ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 245.

¹⁶¹ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 298.

¹⁶² Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 67-68.

¹⁶³ The term *hypostatic union* refers to the explanation of how two natures, human and divine, exist in the person Jesus Christ, without subordinating one of these to the other.

changed or divided or separated for the property of each is preserved.”¹⁶⁴ From Dupuis’ inclusivist perspective, such a state of being would be impossible. Dupuis held that “every religious faith constitutes an indivisible whole and calls for a total commitment of the person. It seems *a priori* impossible that such an absolute engagement might be divided, as it were, between two objects.”¹⁶⁵

E. The Pluralist Position- Roger Haight

Roger Haight is an American Jesuit priest and theologian. Unlike Knitter, he does not claim to do comparative theology, but writes on the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions from the perspective of a systematic theologian working in Christology and ecclesiology. He taught at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology until he resigned in 2003, shortly before the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a notification of his 1999 book, *Jesus the Symbol of God*.¹⁶⁶ Haight then began teaching Union Theological Seminary. Haight never recanted what he wrote in his 1999 work and in 2009, the Vatican barred him from publishing and teaching theology, even at non-Catholic institutions. However, Haight still remains a scholar in residence at Union.

¹⁶⁴ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 220.

¹⁶⁵ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 380. This does not mean that all inclusivists fail to recognize double-belonging, even if they feel this is an impossible position for they themselves to occupy. Knitter states that his decision to become Buddhist was made after careful consideration with his teacher, John Makransky, who is also Professor of Buddhist Studies and Comparative Theology at Boston College. See *Without Buddha*, 216. Makransky describes himself as an inclusivist. See “Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present,” *Theological Studies Journal* 64:2 (2003).

¹⁶⁶ Although the notification was not released until 2004, it did not come as a surprise. Five years prior to its release, Haight had been involved in an exchange with the CDF and his Jesuit superior general over the contents of the book. See Thomas P. Rausch, “The Vatican’s Quarrel with Roger Haight,” in *The Christian Century* (May 3, 2005), 28. See also Bradford Hinze, “A Decade of Disciplining Theologians,” in *When the Magisterium Intervenes: The Magisterium and Theologians in Today’s Church*, ed. Richard Gaillardetz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 26.

The board of directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America, of which Haight was a past president, sought to defend Haight with a public statement to the CDF, but to no avail. Without necessarily agreeing with all that Haight had written, the statement said that Haight's book "has done a great service in framing crucial questions that need to be addressed today."¹⁶⁷

Following the call of the Second Vatican Council to read the signs of the times, Haight strives to work in dialogue with postmodern culture. Pluralism, for Haight, is not necessarily positive or negative, but a given in contemporary society, since one of the main characteristics of postmodernity is "a consciousness of pluralism at every level of thinking about humanity: its nature, its history, its God."¹⁶⁸ According to Haight, this pluralism "spells the loss of any special group identity." It means "the loss of an overarching framework that encompasses the frameworks of others."¹⁶⁹ Postmodernity, therefore, calls for "a new and deeper penetration into the meaning of Jesus Christ that genuinely transcends the past."¹⁷⁰ As Haight shows, this means going beyond exclusivism and inclusivism toward a pluralist position regarding the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions. It was this pluralist position that the CDF found to be problematic in their notification of his 1999 book. Haight's critical correlation between the data of the Christian faith, and the data and norms of postmodern thought,

¹⁶⁷ Thomas P. Rausch, "The Vatican's Quarrel with Roger Haight," in *The Christian Century* (May 3, 2005), 29.

¹⁶⁸ Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 3.

¹⁶⁹ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 333.

¹⁷⁰ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 333.

results, according to the CDF, “in a subordination of the content of faith to its plausibility and intelligibility in postmodern culture.”¹⁷¹

Like Knitter, Haight strives to emphasize the this-worldly dimension of salvation more than Rahner and Dupuis. Haight states that the meaning of salvation remains elusive and cannot be confined in any single definition. He describes Christian salvation simply as “the encounter with God in Jesus of Nazareth.” Yet, taking into account postmodern concerns, he insists, “one must satisfy the demand of historical plausibility in one’s construal of the salvific work of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷² The salvific character of Jesus’s action must be found in his historical, this-worldly activity. Salvation cannot be seen as solely a promise or a future reality, but rather must be something that can be experienced now. This calls for a new understanding of the place of Jesus Christ and of Christianity in the history of religions. Haight argues that in today’s postmodern world, people “have come to appreciate more deeply that God alone effects salvation and Jesus’ universal mediation is not necessary.”¹⁷³

Haight, along with Dupuis, states that, “as the Jewish and Christian Scriptures testify, God as Spirit has been present and at work in the world for human salvation from the beginning without a causal connection to the historical appearance of Jesus.”¹⁷⁴ However, unlike Dupuis, who concludes that Jesus, as constitutive savior, is truly cause

¹⁷¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification on the book *Jesus Symbol of God* by Father Roger Haight, SJ” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20041213_notification-fr-haight_en.html, 1.

¹⁷² Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 338.

¹⁷³ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 405.

¹⁷⁴ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 465. See also Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 319-21.

of salvation for all human beings, Haight asserts that Jesus is constitutive and the cause of salvation for Christians, but not constitutive of salvation universally, or for all persons.¹⁷⁵

Haight describes Jesus as the “symbol of God” who is the “mediation of God’s presence to Christianity.”¹⁷⁶ Jesus still has universal relevance,¹⁷⁷ but Jesus is not the completion of other religions. Haight’s discussion of other religious figures is similar to that of Knitter. While Jesus is truly divine, he is not the only divine mediation and Christians can imagine other religious mediations as “on par” or “on the same level” with Jesus.¹⁷⁸ This insight leads Haight to call for a shift in the Christian concept of mission. Interreligious dialogue, he insists, rules out any sort of proselytism or evangelization. Rather than seeking converts, the overarching mission of the church is to be a public witness to the mission of God manifested in Jesus.¹⁷⁹ Like Knitter, Haight also calls for going beyond Dupuis’s recommendation of dialogue for dialogue’s sake. For Haight, “a concern for human suffering and liberation forms a context for interreligious dialogue.”¹⁸⁰

While Haight does not explicitly affirm religious double-belonging as does Knitter, he seems to imply that it is a very real possibility. He recognizes that critiques of pluralism stem from the widespread affirmation of the principle of non-contradiction, which states, “one cannot affirm as true a particular proposition and its simple negation.”

¹⁷⁵ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 456. See Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 166.

¹⁷⁶ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 14.

¹⁷⁷ Haight explains the universality of Jesus by stating, “because of the nature of Christian revelation as encounter with a personal God, it is impossible that such an experience not be conceived as having a universal relevance. The God of Christians cannot be conceived by Christians as a local, tribal God only for themselves.” See *Jesus Symbol of God*, 406.

¹⁷⁸ Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 192-93.

¹⁷⁹ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 143.

¹⁸⁰ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 419.

According to this principle, “the Christian cannot accept that what is contradictory to or less than that mediated through Jesus is true in the same respect or measure.”¹⁸¹ But, Haight asserts that the principle of non-contradiction does not function in matters of religious experience and knowledge, where the object is strictly transcendent, because “the transcendent object is not present and available for comparison with competitive propositions about it.”¹⁸² Therefore, a seemingly contradictory conviction or belief from another need not necessary be contradictory of the Christian vision and can even be, in some measure, true.¹⁸³

F. Edward Schillebeeckx- Answering the Critiques of Inclusivism Without Adopting Pluralism

As stated in the introduction, Edward Schillebeeckx stressed the necessity of recognizing two sources of theology: revelation¹⁸⁴ and experience. Neither can be subordinated to the other. This method bears fruit in Schillebeeckx’s soteriology, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I will just briefly discuss Schillebeeckx in relation to the two paradigms under consideration.

¹⁸¹ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 407.

¹⁸² Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 407.

¹⁸³ Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 407.

¹⁸⁴For Schillebeeckx, revelation includes not only Scripture, but also the whole of Christian tradition. According to Schillebeeckx, although revelation transcends human experience and thinking, revelation can only be perceived in human experience. He speaks of “revelation-in-reality” and “revelation-in-word,” which are both aspects of one and the same divine speaking, or of the word of God. Revelation, therefore, is never given to us in a pure state, but in the language of faith. See “Revelation-In-Reality and Revelation-in-Word,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 25-27, first published as “De dienst van het word in verband met de Eucharistieviering, in *TL* 44 (1960): 44-61.

Grounding salvation in the doctrine of creation, Schillebeeckx insisted that creation is the foundation for redemption.¹⁸⁵ He articulated the interdependence and unbreakable connection between partial experiences of salvation in this world and eschatological salvation, or that which is to come. While the inclusivist positions of Karl Rahner and Jacques Dupuis were welcome alternatives to the pre-Vatican II position of *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*,¹⁸⁶ both of their positions have been subject to criticism. One major argument is that these positions hold on too tightly to revelation and do not speak enough to contemporary experience. On the other hand, the pluralist position, which has been proposed in response to the critiques leveled against inclusivist positions like those held by Rahner and Dupuis, seems to overemphasize experience to the neglect of revelation and tradition. According to Schillebeeckx, through God's divine revelation in Christ, Christians understand that God intended that all persons should be saved through

¹⁸⁵Schillebeeckx's position here can be contrasted with that of Louis Berkhof who insisted that one can only speak of creation from the standpoint of redemption, given that outside of redemption, human nature is corrupt. While Schillebeeckx did not deny that human beings sin, he preferred to take the "fundamental goodness of creation" as his point of departure, insisting that human goodness is not cancelled out by human transgression. See Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 72.

¹⁸⁶ The famous phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) was first used by the third century bishop Cyprian of Carthage as a warning against Christians in danger of falling into heresy. See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 21-22. At the Council of Florence in 1442, it was affirmed that "all those who are outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics or schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless they are joined to the Catholic Church before the end of their lives." See Council of Basel, Florence, and Ferrara, Session 11 February 4, 1442, Available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum17.htm> Accessed May 31, 2016. This statement is also discussed by Schillebeeckx. See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), xvii, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989). While the Church's understanding of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* developed throughout the centuries, it was not until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), that the official position of the Catholic Church shifted from exclusivist to inclusivist, fully affirming that non-Christians are part of God's plan of salvation, though the Church still plays an active role in the salvation of non-Christians. A more thorough history of the Church's development on the issue of the salvation of non-Christians was given in the introduction.

Christ.¹⁸⁷ This aspect of Christian faith cannot be denied for the sake of accommodating all religions under an umbrella of sameness. With regard to their soteriologies, I argue that the inclusivist positions of Rahner and Dupuis place too strong of an emphasis on salvation's eschatological dimension, while the pluralist positions put too much stress on salvation's this-worldly, practical dimension to the neglect of eschatological hope.

From Rahner's description of the supernatural existential and anonymous Christianity outlined earlier, it is clear that he understood salvation in a way that is more eschatological and supernatural, rather than this-worldly and interpersonal. He defined salvation as the supernatural and direct presence of God afforded by grace, but without connection this "supernatural presence" to concrete circumstances that demand healing in this world.

Rahner's focus on salvation as a transcendental concept leaves out the element of praxis, or concrete actions to ameliorate real world problems. For Rahner, salvation meant "the final and definitive validity of a person's true self-understanding and true self-realization in freedom before God by the fact that he accepts his own self as it is disclosed and offered to him in the choice of transcendence as interpreted in freedom."¹⁸⁸ Such a definition fits into what Johann Baptist Metz referred to as a "transcendental-idealist" approach to Christianity, which tries to explain Christianity's historical identity in an exclusively idealist way without recourse to the constitutive function of Christian praxis.¹⁸⁹ According to Metz, the salvation for all people that is grounded in Christ does

¹⁸⁸ Rahner, *Foundations*, 39.

¹⁸⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 2013), 150.

not become universal by means of an idea, but by the power of the praxis of discipleship. It is not a concept, but an invitation. By interpreting faith as an existential choice, Rahner washes away its socially critical power.¹⁹⁰ For Schillebeeckx, salvation “comes about first of all in the events of human history and not [as Rahner claimed] primarily in the consciousness of believers who are aware of it.”¹⁹¹

Dupuis’s theology can also be said to place a stronger emphasis on salvation as an other-worldly concept. Although he asserts that the Reign of God is already present in history, he explains that other religions “contribute in a mysterious manner to the construction of the Reign of God in the world.”¹⁹² In my estimation, a “mysterious manner” fails to provide a way for Christians to truly recognize and label particular instances of healing, and struggles for liberation inspired by other religions, as salvation. Dupuis also promotes interreligious dialogue as an end in itself. Dialogue, he insists, need not serve as a means to a further end, but rather it simply tends to a more profound conversion of each dialogue partner to God.¹⁹³ This is a very individualistic conception of conversion. As we will see, Schillebeeckx points out that a true conversion to God must bear fruit in one’s actions on behalf of suffering others. Instead of grounding salvation in the doctrine of creation, Dupuis insists that salvation must be always be understood in a Trinitarian manner.¹⁹⁴ Schillebeeckx objects to such a use of Trinitarian theologies,

¹⁹⁰ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 154.

¹⁹¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 12, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989). See also Diane Steele, *Creation and the Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), 262.

¹⁹² Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 225.

¹⁹³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 383.

¹⁹⁴ Trinitarian theology is a central part of Dupuis’s theology of religions. According to Dupuis, the mediation of God’s saving grace occurs in three different dimensions: 1) the inclusive presence in the

which he describes as overly speculative and thus, “do not say anything about the mystery of God... they are pure rationalization; perhaps very interesting, but cold.”¹⁹⁵ Thus, for Schillebeeckx, appeals to Trinitarian theology do not do enough to speak to specific instances of human suffering and injustice.

The pluralist positions of Knitter and Haight tend toward the other extreme. They answer the call for a more this-worldly definition of salvation, but fail to adequately connect such a definition with its eschatological dimension. In over-emphasizing experience, they abandon crucial aspects of Christian revelation and tradition. Knitter likens salvation to the Buddhist concept of “Awakening.” Buddhism, for him, provides “an inspiring reminder that when we Christians talk about being saved we’re not simply talking about getting to heaven.” He explains that while in Buddhist terms, Awakening is a matter of realizing one’s Buddha-nature, for Christians, salvation is a matter of “waking up to our own unity with God, or oneness with the Spirit.”¹⁹⁶ “Waking up” is not an individual existential decision in the manner of Rahner, but an empowering awareness. It is a matter of embodying the already existing truth about ourselves and the world. As mentioned earlier, Knitter proposes *Soteria*, or salvation, as a starting point for interreligious encounter. This means that each tradition has its own understanding of

history of the mystery of Jesus Christ; 2) the universal power of the Logos; 3) the unbound action of the Spirit. See *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 316-321. The second of these dimensions is particularly illuminating, since Dupuis establishes a theology in which the Logos, Word, or Second Person of the Trinity, is not exhausted by the historical reality of Jesus Christ, but rather was present and working in the world prior to the incarnation. For Dupuis, the mystery of the Son is displayed in the humanity of Jesus but is not limited to it.

¹⁹⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 53-4. This does not mean Schillebeeckx rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. He said, “I confess the Trinity, but I have to be reticent about rationalizing the relations between the three persons.”

¹⁹⁶ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 117.

Soteria, but what they all have in common, is that *Soteria* concerns a fundamental option for, and commitment to, the oppressed.¹⁹⁷ Praxis, therefore, is always more important than right belief.

Knitter strongly emphasizes Jesus' words in Luke 17:20, "the Kingdom of God is among you" and insists that they serve as a wake-up call for Christians to prioritize "the present already."¹⁹⁸ While Christians believe that the Kingdom of God is both a reality that is here and a reality that is yet to come, he states that Buddhists get along without eschatological hope. Instead of establishing this as a point of difference or disagreement between Buddhism and Christianity, Knitter implies that eschatological hope is not necessary for Christians either. He writes, "we can have hope, but we don't really need it, and certainly our present actions should not be dependent on it. We don't need hope for the future because the not-yet future that we're hoping for is already here, in this moment."¹⁹⁹

While Schillebeeckx wanted to stress that salvation takes place here and now, he acknowledged that "there is human suffering which does not allow itself to be stilled with social and political measures."²⁰⁰ For Schillebeeckx, belief in eschatological salvation, or final salvation that takes place beyond this life, if it is not be a mere illusion, is dependent upon the experience of salvation here and now. Thus, the latter is always only partial or fragmentary. Schillebeeckx wrote, "the liberation of Christian freedom is not identical

¹⁹⁷ Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions," 188-90.

¹⁹⁸ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 192.

¹⁹⁹ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 193.

²⁰⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 810, originally published as *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (Bloemendaal, 1997).

with the emancipatory program and process of human liberation.”²⁰¹ We cannot turn human programs into idols. The Christian belief that “Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is the divine promise that the future can and will be realized in and through our commitment to faith, despite all failure”²⁰² is crucial when faced with the inevitable fact that not all of our efforts to end suffering will be successful. Furthermore, as will be shown in the discussion of Schillebeeckx’s concept of the negative contrast experience in the next chapter, Schillebeeckx maintained that within every experience of unjust suffering lies “at least a vague consciousness” of what “human integrity or wholeness should entail.” Thus, activity designed to overcome suffering is only possible “by virtue of an at least implicit or confused anticipation of a possible meaning yet to come.”²⁰³ Hope is not just something nice to have, it is essential to the work of liberation. Even if one does not have hope for communion with God after death, one must at least have hope in one’s self and one’s fellow human beings. One must be able to envision “something better” in order to be able to work towards it.

Haight actually quotes Schillebeeckx extensively when defining salvation, since he too, explicitly links partial experiences of salvation in this world to eschatological salvation. Haight concurs with Schillebeeckx that salvation must be described in a way that corresponds intelligibly to what people actually experience.²⁰⁴ However, like Knitter,

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 47.

²⁰³ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 6: Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 583-84, originally published as *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (Blemendaal, 1974).

²⁰⁴ Haight, *Jesus*, 51.

Haight seems to downplay the role of the specifically Christian assurance of eschatological hope. While one may insist Jesus is divine, Haight claims that, “he is not the only divine mediation.”²⁰⁵ Haight also seems to imply that the ability of the Christian to see other religions as ways of salvation requires the removal of any absolute claims that may pose sharp disagreement. As was mentioned earlier, Haight insists that the principle of non-contradiction does not apply to matters of religious experience.²⁰⁶ This means that when it comes to religious matters, one can mutually affirm two seemingly contradictory statements, or in other words, a particular proposition and its negation. One must wonder how such a claim would work when applied to concrete comparisons between religions. For example, could a Christian genuinely claim that his or her belief in a personal God is equally as true as the Buddhist affirmation that there is no personal transcendent deity, or vice versa?

Schillebeeckx provides a way for the Christian who does not share Haight’s pluralist approach to see salvation (defined as healing in this world) in another tradition, while still disagreeing with (and perhaps even contradicting) that other tradition regarding the role of Jesus in eschatological salvation.²⁰⁷ Finding a way to see salvation in other traditions even amidst disagreement is crucial. James Fredericks states that besides being unfaithful to the tradition in not honoring the uniqueness of Christ,

²⁰⁵ Haight, *The Future of Christology*, 192.

²⁰⁷ In particular, Haight’s theology can be problematic in dialogue with Buddhism and Islam. Claiming that other saving figures are “on par” with Jesus is incompatible with the beliefs of Buddhism and Islam, which do not attribute the role of “divine mediation” to Buddha or Muhammad. Furthermore, certain beliefs in these traditions, if they are truly to be recognized as they are, are in contradiction with Christianity. For example, Muslims claim that Muhammad is God’s final prophet, while Christians call Jesus the eschatological prophet. Buddhists experience salvation as something that is entirely accomplished by the self without a supernatural deity, while Christians affirm the existence of a personal God.

Haight's position distorts the teachings of other traditions. Almost all Muslims, he insists, would find the claim that Muhammad is a mediation of God, equal to Jesus Christ in his power to save, as very objectionable, if not blasphemous. Looking at the Buddhist Heart Sutra, which erodes the very notion of a Creator-God, as a mediation of God "imposes a religious worldview on the text that is very foreign to it."²⁰⁸ Haight's position also has implications for Christian teaching. As Fredericks asserts, "if there are mediations equal to Christ in other traditions, we might ask if there are other mediations equal to Christ, within Christianity, as well. For example, is Mary, mother of Jesus and mother of God, a mediation of the Divine?"²⁰⁹

Schillebeeckx's theology goes further than Rahner and Dupuis, while not abandoning the inclusivist position in favor of pluralism. Schillebeeckx had a positive view of religious pluralism. He emphasized that there is more religious truth present in all religions together than in Christianity alone.²¹⁰ Christianity, for Schillebeeckx, is not a categorical imperative incumbent upon all who have come into contact with the gospel [as it is for Rahner]; rather, it is an offer, and thus, in its distinctiveness, is also "dialogue with and possible criticism and provocation of other religions, which in turn put equally critical and provocative questions to Christianity in the dialogue."²¹¹ Given that Christianity originated with an experience, namely, the experience of the first disciples of

²⁰⁸ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 24.

²⁰⁹ Fredericks, 25.

²¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 165, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

²¹¹ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 184, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity is historically particular, and therefore, needs to learn from religious others. “God is too rich and too super-substantial to be exhausted in fullness by one distinct and thus limited tradition or experience.”²¹² Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx never indicated that the need for interreligious learning necessarily requires the Christian to give up all absolute claims, nor to hold a position in which other religions and other religious figures are equal to Christianity or Jesus Christ.

In response to Paul Knitter, Schillebeeckx wrote that while the statement ‘all religions are equal’ is understandable to postmodern sensibilities, he believed that it indicates a cheap form of toleration and is therefore, fundamentally wrong.²¹³ According to Schillebeeckx, one cannot completely disregard the confessional language that arose from the New Testament and the Christian tradition. Throughout history, the Christian confession of Jesus’s uniqueness was not merely an expression of a subjective conviction. Rather, the vision that Christians “only find their rescue in Jesus confessed as Christ” has to do with something real. “It is true, although it is an affirmation of faith and not a scientifically provable and verifiable truth; thus it can never be used in a discussion as a weapon against non-Christians.”²¹⁴ Statements in Scripture, which refer to Jesus as the Christ, or God’s only beloved Son, and which stress the essential bond between the coming reign of God and Jesus the Christ, cannot, in the manner of Knitter, be rendered

²¹² Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Humane Ecumene,” 184.

²¹³ Schillebeeckx mentions Knitter by name as an American Catholic theologian who “denies any form of claim to universality of Christianity.” See Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Humane Ecumene,” 181.

²¹⁴ Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Humane Ecumene,” 178.

harmless or reduced to “elegant flourishes of rhetoric, such as when lovers say to one another ‘you are the most beautiful and only one in the world.’”²¹⁵

Along with Dupuis, Knitter, and Haight, Schillebeeckx argued that Jesus is not absolute, since “no historical particularity can be called absolute” and “the risen Jesus keeps pointing beyond himself to God.”²¹⁶ Schillebeeckx also granted that there are intermediaries for getting to God outside of Christ. “In the other religions, one has direct access to God.”²¹⁷ Thus, Schillebeeckx went beyond the Second Vatican Council in affirming non-Christian religions as valid ways of salvation,²¹⁸ while still affirming the “absolute uniqueness of Christ in the history of religions.”²¹⁹ In referring to Jesus as “the one, the definitive eschatological revelation,” Schillebeeckx regarded Jesus as God’s “unequivocal yes” to humankind, since “God hands himself over to us in Jesus and that gift is salvation for us and our salvation.” Thus, what is made clear in Jesus is that God is salvation for all people.²²⁰ It cannot be said that Jesus is the direct cause of all true salvation, but in Jesus, God is eschatologically and definitively revealed in an irreversible

²¹⁵ Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Humane Ecumene,” 179.

²¹⁶ Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Humane Ecumene,” 184.

²¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 59.

²¹⁸ After Vatican II, the question of the role of other religions in the salvation of their followers was left open. Disagreement among scholars has persisted as to whether or not the Council implicitly affirmed other religions as ways to salvation or implicitly refused to acknowledge them as being possible salvific structures. Jacques Dupuis maintained the position that conclusions were never firmly drawn. See Catherine Cornille, “Soteriological Agnosticism in Interreligious Dialogue,” in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley, SJ (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014): 112-24. However, *Dominus Iesus*, in 2000, clearly states, “it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by other religions.” While prayers and rituals of other religions may “assume a role of preparation for the gospel,” one cannot attribute to them “a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments. Furthermore, objectively speaking, non-Christians are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, “have the fullness of the means of salvation.” See *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

²¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 59.

²²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 26-27.

manner. Schillebeeckx, therefore, was unable to concur with the pluralist theologians that Jesus is merely one incarnation among many.²²¹ In other words, Jesus is still necessary, both for Christians and non-Christians, since Jesus's death and resurrection alone is the assurance that amidst a world filled with suffering, God promises salvation for humankind.

Schillebeeckx demonstrated a way to dialogue with non-Christians as they are, without merely regarding them as implicit Christians. The church can enter into such a dialogue, however, without abandoning "her claim to exclusiveness." Although the church may assert that "the fullness of the Promises rests on her, as a service to the world and that she has the task of guarding this and preserving this and of making it historically true, she cannot assert that she is always right."²²² In fact, the church's "claim to exclusiveness on the basis of Christ's promise, is made relative by the fact that she is still eschatologically oriented, still on the way, in history, towards the kingdom of God."²²³ Christians, as members of the church, can hold that the fullness of God's plan of salvation for humankind rests in Jesus, a conviction that is not found in other religions. To the Christian (but obviously not to those of other religious persuasions or those belonging to no religion at all), therefore, Christianity holds a special place over (but not over and against) other religions. Nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that the church is not identical with the kingdom of God but, along with the rest of humanity, still moving toward it, the church is not a complete package containing all the wisdom necessary for

²²¹ See Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 88.

²²² Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man*, 124.

²²³ Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man*, 125.

healing humankind nor for developing a relationship with God. Christianity has much of importance to learn from the perspectives and insights of other religions, which it would not be able to know or figure out on its own. To put it simply, the Christian can declare his or her religion is the best of all possible choices, while also affirming that one cannot, in Christian terms, bring about the kingdom of God on earth, without the unique wisdom of other religions.

As will be explained further in Chapter Three, by maintaining an inclusivist position, Schillebeeckx did not neglect the social justice concerns of pluralists like Rita Gross, Paul Knitter, and Roger Haight. Rather, he insisted upon the unbreakable link between partial experiences of salvation in this world and eschatological salvation. “Eschatological or final salvation – let us call it heaven – takes shape from what men on earth achieve as salvation for their fellow men.”²²⁴ Without such experiences of salvation within human existence, the Christian belief in final salvation from God would appear a mere illusion. Being a disciple of Christ must bear fruit in concrete action to relieve the suffering of the poor and oppressed.

Taking a pluralist position can actually hinder efforts to ameliorate real world problems. For example, S. Mark Heim points out that claims such as the one made by Gross, which insists that all views other than pluralist ones will lead to strife and violence, repeat an exclusivist dynamic.²²⁵ In rejecting that inclusivist positions can also work to overcome religious chauvinism, pluralist theology seems to regard itself “as the

²²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 789.

²²⁵ S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 88.

crown and fulfillment of every religious tradition.”²²⁶ While not requiring conversion to a particular religious tradition, it requires conversion to a particular paradigm, which may not be compatible with one’s deep commitment to his or her faith tradition. The pluralist paradigm has also primarily emerged from Western culture, making it particular in character.²²⁷ According to Heim, such theologies make Western critiques of Christianity the norm for all religion.²²⁸

Religious faith can and should be enlisted in the struggle for liberation. However, according to Heim, “faith can only be expected to have an effect in that struggle if religion is an independent and significant force in its own right to shape individual and social life. And it is such a force presumably only because of the believer’s conviction that it makes a decisive difference.”²²⁹ The socially critical power of religious faith often stems from particular devotions, to Jesus as the eschatological prophet, or to the Quran as the literal Word of God.

Perhaps, the greatest danger of pluralist appeals to justice can be found in Knitter’s theology. Knitter acknowledges his indebtedness to Latin American liberation theology, and he continuously reiterates the importance of the “preferential option for the poor.”²³⁰ However, in the preface to his book *Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian*, Knitter writes, “I do not have major problems with the controversial ethical or practical teachings of my church dealing with matters such as birth control, divorce, the

²²⁶ Heim, 102.

²²⁸ Heim, 101.

²²⁹ Heim, 197.

²³⁰ See Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” 179-81.

role of women, homosexuality, clerical celibacy, episcopal leadership, and transparency.” Instead, he says, he struggles with the “big stuff,” what applies to all Christians, not just the Roman Catholic community.²³¹ Yet, for the Roman Catholic woman feeling a call to the priesthood or the openly gay couple who is seeking acceptance in their parish, such ethical and practical teachings are “big stuff.” The same argument could likely be made for the Muslim woman who is told she cannot pray in the same room as men, or the openly gay Muslim who desires to belong to his community. In a pluralistic society, how individual religious communities treat certain groups of people matters and bears influence on society as a whole. Calling all religions equal does not necessarily lead to affirming all people as equal, and in fact, it can detract from doing so. Likewise, not accepting the premise that all religions are equal does not automatically mean that one rejects the notion that all persons are equal in terms of human dignity.

This chapter has sought to answer the question of whether or not the inclusivist paradigm must inevitably lead to oppression and strife, and if the adoption of the pluralist paradigm is the only or best option for an interreligious dialogue that attentively deals with liberationist concerns, such as feminism. Here, I provided a brief overview of the inclusivist paradigm as represented by Karl Rahner, SJ and Jacques Dupuis, SJ, and the pluralist paradigm as represented by Paul Knitter and Roger Haight, SJ with a particular attention to their understandings of salvation. Sensing the limitations found in all four of these theologians’ articulations of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions, I proposed that Edward Schillebeeckx’s soteriology offers a particularly fruitful

²³¹ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, x.

basis for engaging religious others. Schillebeeckx's soteriology, though it does go further than Rahner and Dupuis, remains thoroughly inclusivist and therefore, demonstrates that maintaining an inclusivist position need not be a hindrance to dialogue and even may be preferable to the pluralist position, which can easily exhibit exclusivist tendencies. In the following chapter, I will specifically focus on the relevance of Schillebeeckx's notion of the "negative contrast experience" for religious pluralism. The negative contrast experience as one that is common to all human beings and can be seen as a starting point for interreligious dialogue that avoids the problems of Rahner's "anonymous Christianity" and Dupuis "anonymous members of the kingdom of God," while also not insisting that religious particulars be abandoned in one's response to suffering.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEGATIVE CONTRAST EXPERIENCE AS INFORMATIVE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

In this chapter, I intend to argue that what Schillebeeckx called the “negative contrast experience” can serve as a universal starting point for interreligious dialogue. For Schillebeeckx, the concept of the negative contrast experience holds that within every experience of unjust suffering lies “at least a vague consciousness” of what “human integrity or wholeness should entail.”²³² Out of this experience, comes a call to protest, leading to a rise of praxis that will work toward building a better future. Such experiences speak to the incredible capacity of every human being, regardless of religious belief or lack thereof, to imagine a better alternative, or, in other words, to *hope*. Erik Borgman notes that this concept emerged in Schillebeeckx’s writing just after Vatican II, though in various formulations.²³³ Its active presence in Schillebeeckx’s work first appears during his engagement with the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School.²³⁴ In other words, this concept did not spontaneously and suddenly arise in Schillebeeckx’s writings, but rather, it had a gradual development that is indicative of an important shift in Schillebeeckx’s thinking during his theological career.

²³² Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 6: Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 583, originally published as *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (Blemendaal, 1974).

²³³ Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 26. McManus cites her personal interview with Professors Ted Schoof, OP and Erik Borgman in Nijmegen in July 1995.

²³⁴ McManus, 27.

I will first trace Schillebeeckx's development of the negative contrast experience, since it illustrates Schillebeeckx's reliance on what he regards as two sources of theology: revelation and experience. Next, I will argue that the negative contrast experience can serve as a universal starting point for interreligious dialogue, since the capacity to hope belongs to all human beings, inclusive even of non-theistic traditions and atheists. I will then deal with some of the major critiques that scholars have made of Schillebeeckx's articulation of the negative contrast experience, and attempt to respond to them.

A. Tracing Schillebeeckx's Development of the Negative Contrast Experience

A constant concern in Schillebeeckx's theology has been the question of how human beings can make cognitive contact with God.²³⁵ The aim of Schillebeeckx's 1952 doctoral dissertation, *De sacramentele heilseconomie*, was to work out a contemporary connection between the church and the world, especially taking into consideration the problem of the relationship between grace and nature. At this time, Schillebeeckx was influenced by the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar. Like Chenu and Congar, he presented the sacraments as "efficacious signs of God's intimate bonds with the world."²³⁶ His presentation would have a major impact on Dutch theology, so much so that he eventually was asked to provide the entry on sacrament for the *Theologisch Woordenboek* (*Theological Dictionary*). Schillebeeckx's earliest sacramental theology

²³⁵ Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus: The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1993), 286.

²³⁶ Ted Mark Schoof, OP, introduction to "Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol. 1*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), xvii.

was expanded into the book *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, which first appeared in 1957.²³⁷ However, Schillebeeckx's mode of thinking about the cognition of faith would undergo a number of shifts throughout his career.

1. *The Early Schillebeeckx: The Dogmatic Period*²³⁸

In his early work, prior to 1965, Schillebeeckx explained human knowledge of God using the ideas of his teacher and mentor, the Dominican philosopher Dominic De Petter. DePetter's philosophy upheld the notion of an "implicit intuition" which maintained that something of the absolute meaning of reality lies implicitly imbedded in the relative meanings of human cognition. Thus, a human being could know something of the totality of reality.²³⁹ Applying this to the question of "divine knowability," Schillebeeckx understood cognitive contact with God in terms of an implicit intuition of reality and an interior life of grace. People come into contact with God in a purely supernatural way, through an inner address, or the impulse of the light of faith. Along with de Petter, in his 1962 essay "The Concept of Truth," Schillebeeckx affirmed that

²³⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol. 1*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), Originally published as *Christus, sacrament van de Godsontmoeting* (1957).

²³⁸ Mary Catherine Hilkert, "The Hermeneutics of History in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," in *The Thomist* 51:1 (1987), 99.

²³⁹ De Petter's philosophy can be contrasted with the school of Joseph Marechal, SJ. Marechal denied that conceptual knowledge could grasp all of reality. The validity of our knowledge of God, which cannot be reached with our human concepts, is based on the "dynamism of the human spirit toward the infinite." The school of de Petter concurred with Marechal that human concepts cannot reach reality or truth, but rather than situating the basis of the validity of knowledge of God in an extra-intellectual element (the dynamism of the human spirit), de Petter spoke of a real intellectual elements, an objective dynamism in the contents of knowledge itself that refers to the infinite. According to Schillebeeckx, Marechal's position was inadequate because it does not explain the distinctive meaning of every conceptual content. The validity of knowledge is based on an extra-intellectual rather than an intellectual element, and it does not establish that the human being really attains "a positive and infinitive end," namely God. See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Concept of Truth," *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof & Sterkens (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 197-98.

concepts cannot reach truth, but rather a non-conceptual aspect is the basis for the validity of our conceptual knowledge. Through this non-conceptual consciousness, which de Petter called an “objective dynamism” in the contents themselves that refers to the infinite, we become aware of the inadequacy of our concepts, and thus transcend our conceptual knowledge and approach reality. Thus, “the value of our conceptual knowledge of God is situated in a projective act in which we reach out toward God via the conceptual contents.” This understanding reasserted Aquinas’ affirmation that the highest human knowledge is to be found in “conscious unknowing.”²⁴⁰ Human beings know truth in an imperfect way that is always open to refinement, but nevertheless they still grasp “objective truth.”

Daniel P. Thompson aptly describes this period of Schillebeeckx’s work (his work prior to and during Vatican II) as “perspectivalism and phenomenological Thomism.” In the 1950s and early 1960s, Schillebeeckx defined knowledge as the noetic connection between a subject and a known object, which is dependent upon the ontological connection of all being with God.²⁴¹ Schillebeeckx’s perspectivalist epistemology, as Thompson names it, led Schillebeeckx to argue for the logical distinction between “the real essence of the dogmatic affirmation—that is, what is necessary if we are to move toward the inexpressible content of faith in a true and authentic way—and the secondary aspects relating to the form in which the definition is couched.”²⁴² Dogmas, in their

²⁴⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Concept of Truth,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 198-99. Originally published in *Katholic Archief* 17 (1962), cols. 1169-1180.

²⁴¹ Daniel P. Thompson, *Theological Dissent and Critical Communities in the Catholic Church* (PhD Dissertation: University of Chicago, 1998), 26.

²⁴² Schillebeeckx, “The Concept of Truth,” 202.

earthly formulations, are never fully sufficient, but they are nevertheless expressions of absolute truth. Thus, this stage in Schillebeeckx's career has sometimes also been referred to as his "dogmatic period," since the starting point for his theological reflection was the dogma of the church.²⁴³ Unlike his later theology, to be discussed further along in this chapter, praxis did not play a significant role in Schillebeeckx's theology at this time. In fact, in 1961, when reflecting on the "appeal to existential experience" as a new development in dogmatic theology, Schillebeeckx affirmed the need for theology to have a certain distance from action and praxis. He wrote,

Faith and reflection about faith are, however, two completely different orientations of the spirit. Although faith is an existential act, theology as a science is not. As reflection, theology is an act which, *as such*, stands outside man's affective and practical attitude toward the reality of faith. Although it does come within the sphere of living faith, it nonetheless preserves a certain distance from life, partly so as to stress the orientation of religious practice toward reality.²⁴⁴

Thompson describes Schillebeeckx's epistemology at this time as having "an idealistic and intellectual bent," separated from both the theologian and ordinary believers. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx still displayed a profound concern for concrete human experience. He pointed out that the devaluation of faith caused by the phenomenon of secularization can have a purifying function, given that "we have tended

²⁴³ Mary Catherine Hilkert, "The Hermeneutics of History in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," in *The Thomist* 51:1 (1987), 99. Some theologians have critiqued Schillebeeckx for moving away from his early theological perspective. Two examples of theologians who praise Schillebeeckx's early work, but criticized the later developments in his theology are Leo Cardinal Scheffczyk and Jean Galot, SJ. See Leo Scheffczyk, "Christology in the Context of Experience: On the Interpretation of Christ by E. Schillebeeckx," *The Thomist* 48 (July 1984), 383-408; and Jean Galot, "Schillebeeckx: What's He Really Saying About Jesus' Ministry?" *The Catholic Register* (October 1983), 1.

²⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx, "New Trends in Present-Day Dogmatic Theology," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 294. Originally published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 1 (1961): 17-46.

to see God too much as a function of our own life, rather than seeing our life as something in his service.”²⁴⁵

Schillebeeckx also expressed a re-thinking of the term “layman,” which, in theological terms, is defined as a “baptized member of the community of faith of the church,” who along with the clergy, shares in the essential function “to give visible form to grace in their whole lives, and thus to be themselves an effective and visible sign of grace in the world.”²⁴⁶ All human beings have a meaningful task to fulfill in this world, which is that of “working for a more humane world order.” However, this is not a task possessed by virtue of one’s baptism, but rather one’s baptism into the Christian community gives one the duty of incorporating one’s worldly task into his or her religious attitude toward life.²⁴⁷ The baptized Christian, in being aware of his or her intimate association with the world, is not prevented from “co-operating with anyone if this co-operation is directed towards the preservation and development of human values and does not involve him in evil.”²⁴⁸ Here, we already see Schillebeeckx expressing Christianity as not simply “belief,” but a responsibility that involves secular concern for the world.

During this period, Schillebeeckx’s methodology takes its starting point in the dogmatic formulations of the Magisterium, rather than experience.²⁴⁹ Yet, it must be

²⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, *New Trends in Present-Day Dogmatic Theology*, 314.

²⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx, *New Trends in Present-Day Dogmatic Theology*, 316.

²⁴⁷ Schillebeeckx, *New Trends in Present-Day Dogmatic Theology*, 316.

²⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, *New Trends in Present-Day Dogmatic Theology*, 315.

²⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx insisted that “the church’s teaching office is the judge of our faith, but it is this because it is itself governed by the norm of scripture.” The Magisterium, therefore, does not stand above Scripture. Here, he upholds the infallibility of the church’s faith, (of which the church’s faith, the charism of the college of bishops, and the official charism of this college form and indissoluble unity) as an implication of eschatological definitive salvation, namely the words of 1 Peter 1:25, “the word of the Lord abides

remembered that Schillebeeckx never identified revelation with dogma, always insisting that dogmas are never fully adequate in expressing the fullness of truth to which they point.²⁵⁰

2. *The Encounter with Secularization and the Hermeneutical Turn*

Schillebeeckx's approach to the reality of secularism highlights important shifts in his theology. In the 1950s and early 1960s, during what was described above as Schillebeeckx's "dogmatic period," he fully recognized the inevitability of the process secularization, particularly in Europe. Many sociologists at this time proposed what Lieven Boeve calls the "zero-sum theory of secularization," which holds that as modernization increases, the role of religion in the construction and legitimization of individual and social identities decreases.²⁵¹ However, the presumption of an essential incompatibility of Christianity and the modern world was not without its fair share of critics, especially from Catholicism. Schillebeeckx's mentor Dominic de Petter, in particular, paved the way for a more critical engagement with the phenomenon of secularization. His project "sought to retrieve and appropriate the Catholic theological

forever." See "Revelation, Scripture, Tradition, and Teaching Authority," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 14-15. Originally published as "Openbaring, schriftuur, traditie en leergezag," *Kerk en Theologie* (1963): 85-99.

²⁵⁰ See Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Hermeneutics of History in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," *The Thomist* 51:1 (1987), 99-100. Also see Schillebeeckx's distinction between "revelation-in-reality and revelation-in-word" in "Revelation-in-Reality and Revelation-in-Word," *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, 25-42. Originally published in *Lumière et Vie* 46 (1960): 25-45.

²⁵¹ Lieven Boeve, "Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005), 100.

tradition precisely by way of a critical conversation with the epistemological developments of modern philosophy.”²⁵²

Schillebeeckx also sought to make theological sense of the modern process of secularization, and turned to the category of eschatology to do so. Concerned with the crisis of faith in Europe, he personally felt accountable to those who denied the existence of God in the face of secularization.²⁵³ Schillebeeckx saw secularization as a “merciful dispensation,” a great opportunity for the church to give up problematic assumptions about God. In particular, Schillebeeckx argued that secularization exposed the myth of an interventionist God of the gaps, used to explain what was, prior to the advancement of science and technology, inexplicable.²⁵⁴ It also revealed a common but unfortunate passivity among Christians in the face of political and social responsibilities. Secularization encouraged a renewal of Christian ways of thinking about God and responding to the problems of the modern world. Steven Rodenborn calls Schillebeeckx’s engagement with secularization at this time (1958-1964) “a project in apologetics.”²⁵⁵

Schillebeeckx’s views on secularization were further influenced by his lecture tour in the United States from 1966-1967.²⁵⁶ By the mid-1960s, Schillebeeckx was convinced that reality is characterized by an illimitable pluralism and thus, he broke with

²⁵² Steven Rodenborn, *Hope in Action: Subversive Eschatology in the Theologies of Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz* (PhD Dissertation: University of Notre Dame), 11.

²⁵³ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 72.

²⁵⁴ See Schillebeeckx “God in Dry Dock,” in *God and Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 3-17. Originally published in *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* 15 (1959): 397-409 and in *Opvpeding* 9 (1959): 90-95. See also Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 73-76.

²⁵⁵ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 76.

²⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx’s visit to the United States was motivated by his desire to dialogue with and respond to “death of God” theology, popular in the United States in the 1960s.

the “implicit intuition” of the school of de Petter.²⁵⁷ This process has often been called his “hermeneutical turn.”²⁵⁸ In a 1968 article “The New Image of God, Secularization, and Man’s Future on Earth,” Schillebeeckx discussed his dialogue with the “death of God movement.”²⁵⁹ Here, Schillebeeckx witnessed a new problem, namely, that of skepticism with regard to the very possibility of revelation. Modern theologians could no longer assume the starting point of belief, rendering de Petter’s Thomistic language unable to provide an intelligible basis to explain Christian faith. The Thomistic- de Petterian language of the “participation of the total meaning in every particular experience” made sense in the medieval society in which Thomas Aquinas lived, where “a single (Christian) destiny for the life of man—the beatific vision of God— was a self-evident social truth.”²⁶⁰ However, it no longer spoke to a society with a plurality of outlooks on life, where not all persons can be assumed to believe in God. Schillebeeckx had come to the conclusion that dePetter’s epistemology, because it lacked roots in everyday life, tended

²⁵⁷ Not all scholars agree with Schillebeeckx’s choice to break with dePetter. Stephan van Erp, for example, argues that DePetter’s metaphysics is thoroughly historical, in contrast to Schillebeeckx’s claims that it leaves no space for time or history. See Stephan van Erp, “Implicit Faith: Philosophical Theology After Schillebeeckx,” in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, ed. Boeve, Depoortere, van Erp (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 218-219.

²⁵⁸ 1967 is the year identified by many Schillebeeckx’s scholars as marking the hermeneutical turn in Schillebeeckx’s theology. See Hilkert, “Hermeneutics of History,” 107 “Death of God” theology describes a movement in American theology during the 1960s, mostly among Protestant theologians. Inspired by the Anglican Bishop JAT Robinson’s famous book *Honest to God*, published during the Second Vatican Council, death of God theology critiques the traditional notion of a transcendent God. However, Robinson was not actually a member of the movement. While death of God theologians abandoned traditional religion, claiming God no longer necessary, Robinson argued for an updating of religion to make it more significant to the modern world. See JAT Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963). See also “Theology: The God is Dead Movement,” in *Time Magazine* (October 22, 1965).

²⁵⁹ See Schillebeeckx, “The New Image of God, Secularization, and Man’s Future on Earth,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 101-102, first published in Dutch in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 8 (1968): 44-66.

²⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 580.

too much in the direction of epistemological idealism.²⁶¹ It lacked appreciation of the historical and social character of human knowledge.²⁶²

During this time, Schillebeeckx's perspective on secularization also shifted. Steven Rodenborn points out that by 1966, Schillebeeckx no longer saw secularization as a theological challenge that merited an apologetic response, but rather he came to view it as a sociological phenomenon, or new interpretation of the world and the human person.²⁶³ In particular, secularization points to a conception of the human person as the subject and author of the future, rather than the passive recipient of a pre-established destiny. Thus, Schillebeeckx no longer defined secularization in negative terms as a "merciful dispensation in which the church is given an opportunity to renew its theological vision" but began to see it as a "latent hope."²⁶⁴ Secularization was no longer merely a corrective force, but a positive development in which "historical progress became a real possibility" and men and women were freed work for a more humane world with a better future.²⁶⁵ In his earlier work, Schillebeeckx held that history was only oriented toward a "God who is to come" prior to the incarnation. While he never wavered from the belief that the salvific character of history was indeed established with the incarnation, in his later work, he emphasized that it was established in the mode of a

²⁶¹ Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus: The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1993), 202.

²⁶² Schillebeeckx also discusses his break with dePetter in his later work. See *Jesus*, 580-81.

²⁶³ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 92.

²⁶⁴ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 92.

²⁶⁵ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 95.

promise. The future is still to come and brought about by human action, but its meaningfulness is guaranteed by Jesus Christ.²⁶⁶

The late 1960s also marked a radical shift in Schillebeeckx's methodology. As noted by Mary Catherine Hilker, "if Schillebeeckx's earlier methodology had been to probe the meaning of dogma in order to point towards the deeper mystery of the human encounter with God (revelation-in-reality), now the theological task was to probe concrete human experience in order to locate the same mystery there."²⁶⁷ In his 1968 essay "Toward a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics," Schillebeeckx thus explicitly rejected his earlier distinction between the "dogmatic essence" and its historical "mode of expression" as an "unassailable datum." This distinction now only functions, for Schillebeeckx, retrospectively. Only over time, after new interpretations have been accepted, can one recognize the historically and culturally conditioned nature of older dogmatic formulations. Furthermore, the "essence" of dogma is never given to us as pure essence, but always concealed within a historical mode of expression. Therefore, it is impossible to make a distinction between the true, unchangeable essence and the changeable modes of expressing it. Schillebeeckx insisted, "the absolute penetrates all relative interpretations, the one is never without the other. Believing always comes about through interpretive understanding."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 106-107.

²⁶⁷ Hilker, "Hermeneutics of History," 107

²⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx, "Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 6-7.

Also at this time, Schillebeeckx turned to the hermeneutics practiced in the humanities. Influenced, in particular, by Heidegger's work on the ontological aspects of language, Schillebeeckx shifted to the view that all experience is interpreted experience. In his 1969 article on "Linguistic Criteria," Schillebeeckx discussed how Heidegger has "defined the act of speaking as a mode of being in which being is so constituted that it can be said or expressed."²⁶⁹ For Heidegger, the linguistic event is identical to the ontological difference, or the distinction between an individual being or beings, and *being*, which is not *a being*, but the ground of all beings. Schillebeeckx explained,

This ontological difference is an event of being itself, an act which allows the being to move into the foreground, which throws light on the being. What is above all remarkable is that there is something rather than nothing and that this appears to us charged with meaning and demanding to be expressed. This presupposes the possibility of appearing, of thinking, and of speaking, and this possibility is man.²⁷⁰

What can be correctly deduced from Heidegger's teaching is the hermeneutical function of language. "Something else is echoed in interpersonal conversation- what is not said and what cannot be said."²⁷¹ Language, therefore, functions as a medium of revelation, the revelation of all being in the world. According to Schillebeeckx, this ontology of language has clear consequences for theological hermeneutics.

There can be no meaningful understanding of Christian revelation without a pre-understanding of the real datum that man lives, in his speech, from a 'revelation.' Christian revelation presupposes a sphere of understanding, an explicit or implicit understanding of what the manifestation of being in the word really means. The

²⁶⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Linguistic Criteria" in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 34. First published in *Interpretation* 57:1 (Bussum 1969): 28-56.

²⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx, "Linguistic Criteria," 35.

²⁷¹ Schillebeeckx, "Linguistic Criteria," 35.

ontological aspect of language is therefore at least implicitly the prior condition for a Christian pre-understanding.²⁷²

Five years later, Schillebeeckx further discussed his break with de Petter in his 1974 book *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, which also demonstrates the impact of secularism and pluralism on his theology. Schillebeeckx asserted that in a society where “divergent ideologies and outlooks on life compete in the common market of world history,” Christian claims of knowledge of the total meaning of history must be replaced by the idea of an anticipation of a total meaning amid history still in the making. What is universal can only be partially anticipated in human actions. Therefore, the thesis of faith must be capable of finding support in the human being’s historical experience.²⁷³ Direct, empirical verification of the claims of faith is not possible, but religion can and must be tested by its own implications.

Already in 1968, Schillebeeckx had publicly declared before Dominican students in Nijmegen that he wanted to give de Petter’s philosophy a more existential basis.²⁷⁴ In the *Jesus* book, the “existential basis” for de Petter’s philosophy took the form of the negative contrast experience, which instigates “types of ethical praxis that can result in a mystical cognizance of God’s reality.”²⁷⁵ In the negative contrast experience, knowledge of reality comes through resistance to what destroys human flourishing. However, the concept of the negative contrast experience does not have a particularly religious origin.

²⁷² Schillebeeckx, “Linguistic Criteria,” 35-36.

²⁷³ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 580-81.

²⁷⁴ Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus*, 362.

²⁷⁵ Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus*, 362.

Rather, its development was deeply influenced by Schillebeeckx's engagement with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

The Frankfurt School comprised a group of German-Jewish scholars from the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, who came to Columbia University in New York to escape National Socialism. Most prominent among them were Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Walter Benjamin (1892-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), and Erich Fromm (1900-1980). These theorists sought to explain the failure of Marxist theory and practice to transform society and attempted a revision of Marxism which they called "the critical theory of society."²⁷⁶ "Critical theory" is also referred to as an expression of Western Marxism. While Classical Marxism sought to explain the driving forces of history mainly in terms of economic production, Western Marxism argued that in order for societies to be altered politically, concepts such as culture, ideology, socialism, consciousness, and subjectivity, must be examined. To do this, critical theory relied upon a wide array of intellectual disciplines including economics, politics, culture, and aesthetics.²⁷⁷

It was Schillebeeckx's contact with the political theology of Johann Baptist Metz that directed him toward the study of the Frankfurt School. Like Metz, Schillebeeckx sought to engage in critical dialogue with modernity. However, Schillebeeckx work was criticized in the late 1960s by a group of young, mostly Belgian and Dutch theologians

²⁷⁶ William Portier, "Edward Schillebeeckx as Critical Theorist: The Impact of Neo-Marxist Social Thought on His Recent Theology," *The Thomist* 48 (1984), 346.

²⁷⁷ Philip Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx* (College, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 49.

known as the “theologians of contestation.”²⁷⁸ These theologians critiqued the theologies of secularization, to which Schillebeeckx and Metz contributed in the 1960s, for creating “a dualism of church and world which accepts the secularized world as a natural result of the historical dynamics of the Christian faith.”²⁷⁹ According to these theologians, Schillebeeckx was not sufficiently critical of the phenomenon of secularization and remained too idealistic.²⁸⁰ Metz’s student Marcel Xhaufflaire echoed these concerns. In his dissertation, published in 1970, Xhaufflaire sought to critique contemporary theologies of secularization for uncritically capitulating to modern culture, thereby offering a reinterpretation of the Christian faith that re-inscribed secular mores and the dominant culture.²⁸¹ While Schillebeeckx never explicitly stated whether or not he agreed with Xhaufflaire’s critique, Rodenborn writes that, “it appears to be through this exchange that Schillebeeckx came to recognize that a hermeneutic retrieval of the faith would need to be critical as well as contemporaneous and creative.”²⁸²

As a result of the influence of the theologians of contestation and Xhaufflaire, as well as his dialogue with the Frankfurt school, Schillebeeckx came to reject his earlier reliance on the hermeneutics of the humanities (particularly Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur) because, in his estimation, such hermeneutics aimed at a purely theoretical grasp of truth. Although the hermeneutics of the humanities take into account the conditions of

²⁷⁸ The “theologians of contestation” emerged in the 1960s. They included, among others, Karl Derksen, OP and Marcel Xhaufflaire. They felt that Schillebeeckx glorified secularization to the extent that he posited it as a natural result of the historical dynamics of Christian faith. See Thompson, *Theological Dissent*, 64-65.

²⁷⁹ Thompson, *Theological Dissent*, 65.

²⁸⁰ Thompson, *Theological Dissent*, 67.

²⁸¹ Rodenborn, 140-41.

²⁸² Rodenborn, 142.

history and language, Schillebeeckx saw that these very conditions also contain the possibility of ideological distortion.²⁸³

This explains Schillebeeckx's particular interest in the negative dialectics of Adorno and Horkheimer. Negative dialectics opposed the dominance of scientific and Enlightenment rationality in favor of a continuous critical posture against any attempt by modernity to provide an ultimate and positive definition of humanity.²⁸⁴ Concurring with Walter Benjamin, it stressed that the universal can only be grasped within the particular. It saw in the Enlightenment a dangerous emphasis on the creation of unity to be achieved at all costs, even through techniques of domination. This totalitarianism of the Enlightenment turned thought into a "thing" or "instrument" and perceived the process of reality as "always decided from the start," thus rendering human beings as mere instruments whose lives were determined by the dominant order.²⁸⁵ For the Frankfurt theorists, "the act of knowing involves the whole person and thus has to encompass the reality of human suffering." Their enduring contribution lies in the "passionate insistence that suffering be given a voice and that other voices be raised in a solidarity of urgent protest against all structures of oppression and domination."²⁸⁶ As gleaned from Walter Benjamin's notion of "redemptive memory," this voice must not only be given to the suffering of the present, but to "all who suffered at the slaughter-bench of history."²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Thompson, *Theological Dissent*, 70.

²⁸⁴ See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1993). For a more complete analysis of the principles of the Frankfurt School, see Susan Buck-Morris, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Free Press, 1977).

²⁸⁵ McManus, 30. See Adorno and Horkheimer, 24-25.

²⁸⁶ McManus, 31.

²⁸⁷ See Marsha Hewitt, "The Redemptive Power of Memory: Walter Benjamin and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10:1 (Spring 1994), 77. See also Walter Benjamin,

Both Schillebeeckx and Theodor Adorno affirmed that in spite of our inability to conceptualize in the present what human life should be, it is nonetheless possible to know what it should not be.²⁸⁸ Influenced by negative dialectics, the notion of the contrast experience first appeared in Schillebeeckx's writing in 1967. Schillebeeckx began to define the negative contrast experience in his 1968 article "The Church, Magisterium, and Politics." According to Schillebeeckx, the term "contrast experience" was first coined by Joseph (later Cardinal) Cardijn, the Flemish founder of Young Christian Workers. Young Christian Workers (YCS) was a youth organization associated with Catholic Action that was prominent throughout Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It sought to integrate the work of Catholic laity with the work of the hierarchy.²⁸⁹

The vocation, the concrete ethical decision of Cardijn (later Cardinal Cardijn) as to what he thought should be done here and now about some social problems, emerged, as he said himself, from such a "contrast experience:" his fellow workers' bitter resentment of the fact that he, a worker like themselves, was lucky enough to get money to study.²⁹⁰

Schillebeeckx, therefore, insisted that negative experiences imply an awareness of values that move the conscience to protest current situations of suffering and injustice.

While Schillebeeckx adopted critical theory's understanding of itself as the self-consciousness of an emancipative, critical praxis, he saw the work of critical theory as

Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, trans. Harry Zohn, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

²⁸⁸ Rodenborn, 130.

²⁸⁹ Cardinal Cardijn is known for his "see judge, act" method of engaging in transformative action for justice. See Erin Bringham, *See, Judge Act: Catholic Social Teaching and Service Learning* (Anselmian Academic, 2013).

²⁹⁰ Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium, and Politics," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 92. See also Rodenborn, 125.

beginning and ending in critical negation. This critical negation was not only materially, but also substantively atheistic. Schillebeeckx warned that Adorno's commitment to negative dialectics was restricted to the deferment of meaning exclusively, and thus he insisted that such purely negative dialectics were "incapable of providing any positive contribution to the improvement of the condition of mankind."²⁹¹ It is eschatology that really distinguishes Schillebeeckx's notion of contrast experiences from Adorno's negative dialectics. According to Schillebeeckx, neither Christians nor non-Christians have any idea of what is worthy of man, either ultimately or here and now.²⁹² Human values are never realized once and for all, but are continuously sought and discovered. The Christian message does not provide a direct program of action, and thus, concrete ethical decisions arise from contrast experiences, which imply an awareness of values that are veiled and not yet articulate, but nonetheless, lead to a vague but real perception of what should be done here and now.²⁹³ However, what differentiates the Christian eschatological hope from purely negative dialectics is that

the Christian is not simply seeking what is humanly desirable, the unknown, what is completely worthy of man- he knows, in his eschatological faith, that the God of promise has bound himself to the realization of this also in Christ, even though the Christian cannot formulate the content of this promise in a positive way.²⁹⁴

The Christian promise is a source of hope and a summons to go forth and make this eschatological future begin to become a reality in our human history. Schillebeeckx warned, "without the dynamism of Christian hope straining toward an absolute future we

²⁹¹ Schillebeeckx, "The New Image of God," 121. See also Rodenborn, 131.

²⁹² Schillebeeckx, "The New Image of God," 116.

²⁹³ Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium, and Politics," 92.

²⁹⁴ Schillebeeckx, "The New Image of God," 116.

are left with an ideological design of man which limits what is humanly desirable in advance.”²⁹⁵ What Christianity brings to the secular world, wrote Schillebeeckx, is the notion that “humanity is possible!”²⁹⁶

Schillebeeckx’s critiques of purely negative dialectics led him to dialogue with the early writings of Jürgen Habermas, the representative of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, which produced what is known as “new critical theory.” Habermas, while committed to carrying on the critical negativity of Horkheimer and Adorno, points out that critical negativity’s inability to make positive proposals for political transformation renders it an ideology in which critical theory becomes the scholar’s only form of praxis.²⁹⁷ Habermas offers the theory of communicative action as a means of transformative praxis.²⁹⁸ For Habermas, the model of communicative action is a process by which individuals achieve common understanding and coordinate group action through reasoned deliberation and consensus, rather than solely through the pursuit of their own interests. This is in contrast to instrumental action and strategic action, which are both oriented to success, rather than understanding.²⁹⁹

Schillebeeckx was particularly drawn to Habermas’ assertion of the “inner bond between theory and praxis, in which praxis determines theory.”³⁰⁰ While Schillebeeckx’s earlier theology proposed that orthopraxis should be a criterion of orthodoxy, it was not

²⁹⁵ Schillebeeckx, “The New Image of God,” 120.

²⁹⁶ Schillebeeckx, “The New Image of God,” 117.

²⁹⁷ Portier, 355.

²⁹⁸ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and *Vol 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

²⁹⁹ Habermas, Vol. 1, 285. Habermas sometimes refers to both instrumental action and strategic action as “teleological action.” See, p. 85.

³⁰⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, 94.

until his engagement with the Frankfurt school in the late 1960s and early 1970s that he began to really consider praxis as a source of knowledge. In 1969, Schillebeeckx concluded that orthopraxis, or action, must be an inner element in the principle of verification of Christian beliefs.³⁰¹ He now explained that a purely theoretical verification of orthodoxy is not possible in this life, but can only be an eschatological event.³⁰² Later, in 1974, Schillebeeckx spoke of the contrast experience, especially in recollection of the human being's actual history of accumulated suffering, as having "a critical cognitive value and force of its own."³⁰³

While Schillebeeckx was obviously influenced by Habermas, there are some crucial differences between them. Unlike Habermas, Schillebeeckx does theology, not social analysis.³⁰⁴ Critical theory was a *tool* in his theological thinking, not his foundational framework.³⁰⁵ Schillebeeckx's main argument with Habermas was that Habermas's theory of communicative action is based on a tacit philosophical anthropology derived from the Enlightenment's commitment to the liberal values of individual freedom, tolerance, etc. Thus, as noted by William Portier, the ideal of

³⁰¹ Schillebeeckx, "Theological Criteria," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 53, first published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 9 (1969): 125-50.

³⁰² Schillebeeckx explained that "although the object of faith has indeed been realized, in Christ, it has only been realized as our promise and our future, and the future cannot be interpreted theoretically, it has to be brought about." This allowed Schillebeeckx to state that while the church's teaching office has the right and duty to "watch over" Christian orthodoxy, it is not a criterion of orthodoxy since it itself is subject to the word of God. See Schillebeeckx, "Theological Criteria," 64-66.

³⁰³ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 582.

³⁰⁴ Schillebeeckx emphasized the right of theology to exist alongside critical theory. As such, theology must be "included within the sphere which is analyzed by critical theory and against which critical praxis can be directed." See "The New Critical Theory," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 107, originally published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 9 (1971): 30-50.

³⁰⁵ See Diane Steele, *Creation and the Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), 85.

freedom toward which Habermas' theory strives remains empty, pointing only to an abstract utopia. Habermas does not identify a concrete historical subject to enact a program of social change. Schillebeeckx, on the other hand, cited "faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ" as "a basis for political proposals which have both a specific direction and a concrete subject or carrier group."³⁰⁶ According to Schillebeeckx, "emancipative or critical praxis is the only way in which what is possible and rational can be realized." While theory and praxis are interrelated, "praxis must be regarded as taking precedence over any theory on which a religious, ethical or philosophical image of man is based."³⁰⁷ Critical theory, Schillebeeckx said, can never be formalized. It is a science without orthodoxy, not measured against any consistent philosophical or utopian values.³⁰⁸

For Schillebeeckx, Christian communities can become the concrete agents for social change. These are the actors missing from Habermas's theory. Here, one can observe how critical theory shaped Schillebeeckx's understanding of the fundamental connection between mysticism and politics, which will become a major theme of Schillebeeckx's later work. This connection involves a re-understanding of the term "mysticism." Schillebeeckx acknowledged that the traditional notion of mysticism involves a void or a nothing of over-determined fullness that cannot be contained in concepts or images. It is a cognitive union with God, which always contains a "dark

³⁰⁶ Portier, 355.

³⁰⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, "The New Critical Theory," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 102.

³⁰⁸ Schillebeeckx, "The New Critical Theory," 107.

night” or “dark light.”³⁰⁹ However, genuine mysticism is never a flight from the world, but rather a resource, from which “out of a first disintegrating source experience arises integrating and reconciling mercy with everything.”³¹⁰ Mysticism is not simply an interior way of knowing that can only be accessed by a privileged class of persons set apart from the rest of society,³¹¹ but rather it is a way of life, or a way of salvation. Prayer and worship are not incompatible with, but in fact, should lead to, a call to social and political action on behalf of those who are suffering. Thus, Schillebeeckx wrote, “mysticism and solidarity with the poor form a single whole! Mysticism on its own, without any socio-political consequences, can come to nothing.”³¹²

For Schillebeeckx, the Christian engagement with the socio-political world requires a balance between the acknowledgement of senseless suffering and the acknowledgment of hope. The influence of Metz, mentioned earlier with regard to Schillebeeckx’s interest in the Frankfurt school, is especially prevalent in Schillebeeckx’s 1980 book *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*. For Metz, salvation history and history cannot be identified, given that there is too little salvation in our history. History is a history of suffering, and therefore, in Schillebeeckx’s words, Metz “seeks a political

³⁰⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 66-67.

³¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith*, 69.

³¹¹ This does not mean that Schillebeeckx did not see a place for professional contemplatives in monasteries or other religious communities. He stated, “If there were no medical specialists, there would be no general concern in society for physical health. Specialists are necessary to remind and admonish everyone constantly. Yes, I think there ought to be centers of both prophecy and of mysticism in the future.” See *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 120-21.

³¹² Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment, in conversation with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 122.

outline of the future from the Christian eschatological remembrance of Jesus Christ.”³¹³

Schillebeeckx was especially intrigued by Metz’s notion of the “past as subversive memory”³¹⁴ as a balance to the idea of the primacy of the future.³¹⁵ Concern for the present must not be neglected in light of either the future or the past. For Metz, Christianity makes the memory of the crucified Lord a dangerous memory, a memory that unleashes new “dangerous” insights for the present. According to Metz, every resistance to oppression is nourished by the subversive power of the memory of suffering. This subversive memory, however, cannot be mere good news to those who are living, but must be salvation for even the most long-forgotten persons in our history.³¹⁶

However, while expressing deep admiration for Metz, Schillebeeckx found Metz’s articulation of the *memoria passionis* as a dangerous memory to be deeply lacking. According to Schillebeeckx, Metz does not reflect on the concept of God as understood in light of Jesus, as the God of pure positivity, as the author of good and enemy of evil. This concept of God is necessary for a correct theory of the narrative communication of the history of human suffering. Thus, Schillebeeckx wrote, “sometimes one can hardly avoid the impression that for Metz, suffering man becomes

³¹³ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 747, originally published as *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (Bloemendaal, 1997).

³¹⁴ Metz’s formation of the concept of “subversive memory” was influenced by his own personal experience of the impact of the Holocaust. The encounter with the *tremendum* of the *Shoah* is the challenge of all theology. Metz writes, “there is no meaning which one could salvage by turning one’s back on Auschwitz, and on truth which one could thereby defend. Theology therefore has to make an about turn, a turn which will bring us face-to-face with the suffering and the victims.” See “The Future in the Memory of Suffering,” in *Concilium* 76 (1972), 16.

³¹⁵ Diane Steele, *Creation and the Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), 86.

³¹⁶ See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980).

something like the universal subject of human history,” leading him to conclude that Metz’s political theology still appears to be “unfinished.”³¹⁷

Rodenborn insists that while Metz held an apocalyptic eschatology, Schillebeeckx held a prophetic eschatology, with a greater hope in the capacity of humankind for future-oriented praxis. For Metz, the purpose of the *memoria passionis* was not to respond to the extant hope of the human person, but to disrupt the human person’s existing consciousness in order that hope might emerge. Schillebeeckx, however, believed that the memory of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ served to give direction to the praxis of the human person’s hope-filled consciousness already operative and revealed through negative contrast experiences.³¹⁸ In fact, Schillebeeckx insisted that Jesus’ address to God as Abba was rooted in a personal awareness of contrast: on the one hand, the “incorrigible, irremediable history” of human suffering and on the other hand, Jesus’ particular awareness of God, his Abba experience, his relationship with God as one who refuses to allow evil to have the last word. It was his religious experience of contrast, Schillebeeckx wrote, that informed Jesus’ conviction and proclamation of God’s liberating rule.³¹⁹ Such experiences of contrast, however, although informative for the Christian understanding of Jesus’ relationship to God, are not limited to Christians nor need they be interpreted religiously. This will be taken up in the next section.

³¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 751.

³¹⁸ Rodenborn, *Hope in Action*, 321.

³¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 237-38.

B. The Negative Contrast Experience: A Universal Starting Point for Dialogue

Not only does suffering, according to Schillebeeckx, have a “critical cognitive value,” but it is also an inescapable reality that transcends age, race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, level of education, moral behavior, and religious affiliation or lack thereof. As a reality to which no one is immune, suffering is a topic for which interreligious dialogue is not only possible but also vital.

In his 1980 book *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, Schillebeeckx provided a brief overview of how various traditions throughout history, both religious and non-religious, have responded to suffering. All religions, Schillebeeckx claimed, have made a “zealous quest” for the causes of suffering precisely in order to remove them.³²⁰ The challenge of suffering is just as strong for non-believers, since they too are called to responsibility in the face of the history of suffering.³²¹ Many have found in their religious faith ways of coping and finding comfort in the midst of suffering, as well as ways of resisting it. While cooperation between members of different religious persuasions is necessary when confronting suffering in the world today, attempts to remove contradictory beliefs and doctrinal disagreements among the world’s religions are not only futile, but threaten to reduce the resources particular religious beliefs and practices have to offer. Not all persons can agree on the existence of a personal God or

³²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 707 According to Schillebeeckx, the history of suffering is a constant theme in every account of life, every philosophy and religion, and even of science and technology. Schillebeeckx provides a brief overview of how various traditions, including the ancient Greeks and Romans, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, the Enlightenment, and Marxism have responded to suffering. See *Christ*, 663-714.

³²¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 713.

the role of Jesus Christ in salvation history, but all persons can and do have negative contrast experiences.

Echoing Adorno, Schillebeeckx asserted that we do not have a pre-existing definition of humanity at our disposal, nor is there any sort of “universal human nature” to which one can appeal.³²² However, Schillebeeckx did affirm that there is a basic pre-religious experience accessible to all human beings, called the “negative contrast experience.” The negative contrast experience consists of a “no” to the world as it is.³²³ Within every experience of suffering, namely due to the fact that we perceive such an experience as harmful or wrong, lies “at least a vague consciousness” of what “human integrity or wholeness should entail.”³²⁴ Believers and non-believers alike experience contingency,³²⁵ but interpret it differently: “one picks up the gratuitousness of God and the other experiences nothing, the void.”³²⁶ Yet, for both, out of this negative contrast

³²² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 725. Instead Schillebeeckx offered what he called anthropological constants, pointers to “permanent human impulses, orientations, values and spheres of value” yet “do not provide us with directly specific norms or ethical imperatives in accordance with which true and livable humanity would have to be called into existence here and now.” Schillebeeckx’s seven anthropological constants include: 1) the relationship of human beings to their own corporeality, to the wider sphere of nature, and to the ecological environment 2) the relationship of the human being to fellow human beings as an essential aspect of human identity 3) the relationship of human beings to social and institutional structures, which nonetheless, are contingent and changeable 4) the relationship of human beings to time and space, and culture 5) the mutual relationship between theory and practice 6) the utopian element in human conscious, with faith as the ground for hope without which human action would be impossible 7) that the healing of men and women lies in the synthesis of these constants which influence one another. For a more in-depth description of each of the seven anthropological constants, see *Christ*, 728-37.

³²³ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

³²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 583.

³²⁵ Schillebeeckx affirms that believers and non-believers have “alternative interpretive experiences.” For example, “the religious man also experiences grace, he does not just interpret it.” Our descriptive language and our experience are mutually determinative. However, at the primordial level, there is some experience of contingency, prior to our use of language and concepts that is shared by both believers and non-believers. See *Christ*, 40

³²⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 57. See also *Church*, 78.

experience, there comes a call to protest and a rise of praxis that will work toward building a better future. In other words, such experiences disclose the possibility of an alternative situation that deserves our “yes.” According to Schillebeeckx,

“Believers see the face of God in the history of human liberation. Unbelievers do not, but at the level of human liberation (the material of God’s revelation)³²⁷ that process can be discussed by both believers and unbelievers in a common language. Here understanding and indeed collaboration are possible. So, the deciding factor is not the explicit confirmation or denial of God, but the answer to the question, ‘Which side do you choose in the struggle between good and evil, between oppressors and oppressed?’”³²⁸

In Schillebeeckx’s work, suffering humanity has a universal authority: “the suffering person raises a challenge to every fellow person.”³²⁹ So, rather than speaking of a “struggle against atheism,”³³⁰ Schillebeeckx preferred to speak of the necessity for dialogue with non-believers. Schillebeeckx noted that some forms of atheism are a justified criticism of traditional concepts of God, even Christian ones. For example, he

³²⁷ In his 1989 book *Church: The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx described the process of liberation in human history as the medium and material of divine revelation. “Facts only become history within a framework of meaning, in a tradition of interpreted facts. This is the first level of meaning: human liberation is achieved and also experienced. Within a religious experiential tradition of belief in God, that element of human liberation is interpreted on a second level of meaning: in relation to God. Believers then confess that God has brought about redemption in and through human beings. The secular event becomes the material of the ‘word of God.’” See, p. 6-7.

³²⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 7. Lieven Boeve explains that while “Schillebeeckx in principle holds to a universal pre-linguistic element in experience, shared by all human beings as a fundamental basic experience, he nevertheless remains de facto within a Christian framework of interpretation.” See Lieven Boeve, “Experience According to Edward Schillebeeckx: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology,” in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, Ed. Lieven Boeve & Laurence P. Hemmeing (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 221.

³²⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Uniqueness of Christ and the Interreligious Dialogue,” *Report to Catholic Academy in Munich, Bavaria* (April 22, 1997), 31.

³³⁰ Rahner, for example, insisted that Christian and non-Christian theists can and must learn from one another through their common “struggle against atheism.” See “The Church and Atheism,” in *Theological Investigations XXI.9*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 149. Although Rahner claimed that the Church has a sacred duty to struggle against atheism, the supernatural-existential extends even to those who do not acknowledge God. Therefore, there must be a non-thematic theism given that the atheist has a genuine chance of salvation since he is true to the promptings of his or her conscience. See “Theological Considerations on Secularization and Atheism,” in *Theological Investigations XI.7*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1974).

alluded to the criticisms made by Ludwig Feuerbach, which have taught us that a concept of God as wholly Other has no liberating and productive significance, and can legitimate oppression and dictatorship.³³¹ Instead of speaking of God as “wholly Other,” Schillebeeckx, starting in 1968, began to refer to God as “Wholly New, the One who is our future.”³³² It is no longer fitting, he insisted, to speak of a “God of the gaps,” invoked to explain baffling phenomena and incomprehensible suffering as if it was “God’s will.” According to Schillebeeckx, “it is better that there should no belief in eternal life than a God should be presented who diminishes people in the here and now.”³³³ Thus, Schillebeeckx believed that concept of God as “Wholly New” was fruitful for a Christian response to the death of God theologians who see the rejection of “divine transcendence” as the necessary condition for liberation. Rather than attacking these theologians as people who undermine the Christian faith, Schillebeeckx insisted that “we would do better to examine what it is in theological theories of redemption as actually proposed that has had such a man-alienating effect as to enable a lot of people to find in a denial of divine transcendence an experience of liberation.”³³⁴

Schillebeeckx’s acknowledgment of atheism here is significant, and distinguishes him from the four other Catholic theologians discussed in Chapter One. Karl Rahner, like Schillebeeckx, did admit that, “the struggle against atheism” reflects “the inadequacy of our own theism.”³³⁵ However, he stressed that an alliance among theistic traditions might

³³¹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 56. See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by Marian Evens (London: Paternoster House, 1893).

³³² Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 181.

³³³ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 129.

³³⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 553.

³³⁵ See Rahner, “The Church and Atheism,” 48-49.

be the impetus for Christianity to reappraise its own theism, rather than emphasizing the need to dialogue with non-believers themselves. Jacques Dupuis also seemed to focus solely on dialogue between religious traditions, all of which, in the process of mutual learning, tend to “a more profound conversion of each to God.”³³⁶ He did not explicitly state where non-believers stand in this dialogue, or whether or not they are “active members of the Reign of God.”³³⁷ The pluralist theologians, Paul Knitter and Roger Haight, similarly focus on the equality between all religions without mentioning atheism. For Schillebeeckx, negative contrast experiences, happen to believers and non-believers alike. He provides a basis for dialogue that is inclusive of non-theistic traditions, even if Schillebeeckx himself, as a Christian, interpreted the negative contrast experience religiously and applied it to the experience of Jesus.

Schillebeeckx took a position in which Christianity has something essential to offer, but without insisting that all that brings about healing or salvation is somehow tied to Christianity in a way that patronizes non-Christians. As was mentioned in the previous section, in his later theology, Schillebeeckx asserted that the negative contrast experience has a “critical cognitive value.” Bringing together both contemplative knowledge and manipulative scientific knowledge,³³⁸ the negative contrast experience comes to be a

³³⁶ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 383.

³³⁷ See Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 357.

³³⁸ According to Schillebeeckx, human suffering has a particular critical and productive epistemological force. It thus has a critical function toward both contemplative knowledge (knowledge that is playful, purpose-free, and dwells on its own object) and scientific and technical forms of knowledge (controlling knowledge). Injustice criticizes the contemplative knowledge, which leads to the perception that universal reconciliation is already experienced. It also critiques the controlling knowledge of science and technology, which presupposes that the human being is merely a “controlling subject” and by-passes the question of the priority which sufferers can claim among us. See *Christ*, 818.

unique force in society that is practical and critical. According to Schillebeeckx, it is “more certain, more evident than any verifiable or falsifiable knowledge that philosophy and the sciences can offer us.” Indignation, which Schillebeeckx admitted is not a scientific term, seems to be a basic experience of our life in this world.³³⁹ Ethical imperatives, therefore, are rarely discovered by philosophers, theologians, or the ecclesiastical Magisterium. As early as the late 1960s, Schillebeeckx insisted that “they arise spontaneously out of the concrete secular experiences of life; they impose themselves with the evidence of experience.”³⁴⁰ This is an important consideration for the Catholic Church. The Church cannot fulfill its prophetic task regarding the problems of society purely in light of divine revelation, but rather “must listen to the ‘foreign prophecy’ addressed to her from the secular situation.”³⁴¹ Thus, healing praxis involves work with non-Christians as true cooperators who have something valuable to offer humanity that stems from their own particular situation, not simply from their status as “implicit” or “anonymous Christians.” In fact, in 1970, Schillebeeckx specifically stated that speaking of “anonymous Christians” was an impossibility. He wrote:

Man’s history, which is God’s creation, is thus the condition for understanding Christian revelation and at the same time the answer given by revelation. The abundance of meaning, which is contained in the meaning man has already discovered in the world is manifested in the light of revelation. It is therefore not really possible to speak of ‘anonymous Christians,’ even though it is certainly

³³⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 5.

³⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, “The Church as a Sacrament of Dialogue,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 84.

³⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, “Church as Sacrament of Dialogue,” 84. For a more recent articulation of the need for Christians to dialogue with and listen to non-believers or “secular voices,” see Gregory Baum, “Interreligious Dialogue Includes Listening to Secular Voices,” in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 32:2 (Fall 2016): 363-68.

necessary to express in one way or another the fact that non-Christians are not, because of their orthopraxis, deprived of salvation.³⁴²

Given the special authority it has, the negative contrast experience can and must shape the meaning of the term “salvation.” Salvation is not simply a future destiny dependent on confession of a certain creed or the practice of moral behavior in one’s earthly life. It is not merely associated with “heaven” or something beyond this world. Rather, it is healing from concrete situations happening right now. Given that experiences of suffering vary based on one’s historical and cultural context, salvation must be understood as a fluid concept, whose definition is always dependent upon our experience of its opposite. Salvation is safe refuge for those fleeing violence, proper medical care for those struggling with illness, and nourishment and shelter for those who are homeless. In other words, it is a response to any situation that should not be, and can never be given one ultimate definition.

For the Christian, such earthly instances of healing are only partial experiences of salvation, since salvation’s fulfillment lies in the eschaton. However, Schillebeeckx insisted that, without at least partial experiences of salvation within human existence, Christian belief in final salvation from God would appear to be a mere illusion. The question of salvation, therefore, is not just the theme of Christianity and other religions, but is “more than ever the great stimulus throughout the whole of present-day human existence, even explicitly outside religion.”³⁴³ Yet, the topic of “salvation” can still serve

³⁴² Schillebeeckx, “Correlation Between Human Question and Christian Answer,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 87, first published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 10 (1970): 1-22.

³⁴³ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 787.

as a common basis for dialogue, even for those who do not affirm an afterlife, since all human beings have the capacity to hope.

C. Critiques of the Negative Contrast Experience

If the negative contrast experience is to be upheld as a universal starting point for dialogue, then one must address how other theologians have engaged with this aspect of Schillebeeckx's theology. While the negative contrast experience has been regarded as useful for navigating issues from sexism and racism, to climate change and sexual abuse, some scholars have found the concept to be lacking in important respects. I will address these critiques here.

1. Schillebeeckx's Use of "Tradition"

Although Schillebeeckx insists that experiences of contrast are pre-religious and that faith is not necessary for praxis (or actions that can be described as "fragments" of salvation), some scholars pose that Schillebeeckx is not inclusive enough. This is due to the fact that he is often described as a "modern theologian" in a culture that has become increasingly "postmodern." According to Lieven Boeve, "it seems that the late-modern manner of theologizing has lost some of its credibility and that the plausibility of a theological project of engaging in critical dialogue with modernity has somehow lapsed."³⁴⁴

Dutch Professor Erik Borgman is the author of the first initial biography to be written about Schillebeeckx. Borgman re-affirms Schillebeeckx's theological approach,

³⁴⁴ Lieven Boeve, "The Enduring Significance and Relevance of Edward Schillebeeckx? Introducing the State of the Question in Medias Res," *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, ed. Boeve, Depoortere, van Erp (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 1.

which is based on the intuition that the Catholic tradition can become “surprisingly significant” in confrontation with the contemporary situation and culture.³⁴⁵ Nevertheless, according to Borgman, Schillebeeckx’s theology does not penetrate to the concrete level of human existence. In other words, he is unable to make the Christian tradition relevant for contemporary readers.³⁴⁶ Borgman takes issue with Schillebeeckx’s unquestioned presupposition of church and tradition. Precisely here, argues Borgman, is where Schillebeeckx’s theology becomes problematic in a postmodern society.³⁴⁷ According to Borgman,

Theologians need to abandon the fiction that the truth of the tradition and the authority of the church form a firm foundation on which they can build further, up to and including the last remnants and traces. Theology has no other foundation than the God of salvation, whose mystery it may and must constantly decipher and clarify. If it takes that completely seriously, it will inevitably change fundamentally, time and again.³⁴⁸

Australian theologian similarly Dennis Rochford raises the question of the adequacy of Schillebeeckx’s approach given the postmodern rejection of grand narratives.³⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx strives to develop the Christian tradition in light of new experiences, yet, for Rochford, this creates a dilemma since Schillebeeckx still subjects new experiences to existing Christian frameworks of interpretation. According to

³⁴⁵ Erik Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History. Volume 1: A Catholic Theology of Culture (1914-1965)*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 2004), 371. Originally published as *Edward Schillebeeckx: Een theoloog in zijn geschiedenis. Deel 1: Een katholieke cultuurtheologie (1914-1965)* (Baarn: Nelissen, 1999).

³⁴⁶ Lieven Boeve, “The Enduring Significance,” 5. Original citation found in Borgman, “Van cultuurtheologie naar theologie als onderdeel van de cultuur: De toekomst van het theologisch project van Edward Schillebeeckx,” *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 34 (1994), 358.

³⁴⁷ Boeve, *The Enduring Significance*, 5.

³⁴⁸ Borgman, 381.

³⁴⁹ Dennis Rochford, “Schillebeeckx, God, and Postmodernity,” in *The Presence of Transcendence: Thinking ‘Sacrament’ in a Postmodern Age*, Ed. Lieven Boeve and John C. Ries (Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001), 79.

Rochford, while Schillebeeckx intends to maintain the primacy of experience, “he remains accountable to the role of tradition and its frames of reference, especially the New Testament language and conceptuality that, after secularization and de-traditionalization, shows increasingly less overlap of with present-day cultural experiences.”³⁵⁰

In the last book of his Christological trilogy, *Church: The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx argued that there is an experience that applies to all human beings universally and does not necessarily demand a religious interpretation. This is the experience of radical finitude and contingency.³⁵¹ Yet, the agnostic’s experience of contingency is fundamentally different from that of the believer. For Schillebeeckx, this means that there is no uninterpreted experience of contingency. While a pre-linguistic element of experience is universally human, this experience is ultimately experienced and interpreted in a religious way by Christians and in an agnostic way by humanists.³⁵² For Schillebeeckx, the term tradition includes both believers and non-believers, both stand within a tradition with which their personal convictions are connected.³⁵³

Rochford disagrees with Schillebeeckx’s assessment here that all of our experience exists within a pre-existing framework of interpretation. This notion makes the tradition of interpretation “too independently, potentially adrift or even out of touch, from the experience-receiving human persona and community.”³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ Dennis Rochford, “Theological Hermeneutics of Edward Schillebeeckx,” in *Theological Studies* 63 (2002), 267.

³⁵¹ See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 82.

³⁵² Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 78.

³⁵³ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 80.

³⁵⁴ Rochford, “Hermeneutics,” 261.

Because of what he detects in Schillebeeckx's work as "an unconscious intellectualism" and "strong bias toward connecting experiences with the existing tradition," Rochford argues that Schillebeeckx appears to be unable to analyze a wider range of human experience outside Christian interpretation.³⁵⁵ Thus, he concludes, Schillebeeckx remains part of "the grand Catholic hegemony that struggles to retain its identity through an interpretation of human experiences."³⁵⁶ The Flemish philosopher Leo Apostel maintains that Schillebeeckx's thought can ultimately only be fulfilled by putting it into a Christian perspective. What Schillebeeckx should have done, in Apostel's view, was define religious experience in itself (and in a quality of its own), rather than binding the interpretation of experience so closely to the Christian framework and thus, hindering the possibility of real dialogue.³⁵⁷ Lieven Boeve locates Apostel's position as representative of a pluralist standpoint in which

all religions would seem to be partial, incomplete cultural mediations or expressions of a universally shared (mystical) experience. This implies that the truth of a religion can only be accounted for in relation to this experience. To the extent that religion is able to completely express this experience, no religion can claim absolute truth. In other words: the particularity of religion is relative in terms of the universality of the (mystical) experience. Schillebeeckx is not ready to go that far, and does not want to go that far.³⁵⁸

What seems to be the major issue for these critics is Schillebeeckx's articulation of the relationship between the universal and the particular. Schillebeeckx maintains that the negative contrast experience is universal and non-theistic interpretations of human

³⁵⁵ Rochford, *Hermeneutics*, 266.

³⁵⁶ Rochford, *Hermeneutics*, 267.

³⁵⁷ Boeve, *Experience According to Schillebeeckx*, 219.

³⁵⁸ Boeve, *Experience According to Schillebeeckx*, 220-21.

limitations and contingency are not only plausible, but also capable of producing praxis that exhibit fragments of salvation in this world. Yet, ultimately, for Schillebeeckx, the belief that through Jesus Christ, God's definitive position is revealed (namely, that God is universal salvation for all people) is the only interpretation that is totally meaningful.³⁵⁹ He is not willing to intimate that humans can get along just as well without the eschatological hope found in Jesus Christ as they could without it.

John Dunn, in his essay, "Negative Contrast Experience and Edward Schillebeeckx: Critical Reflections" asserts that Schillebeeckx's claim that the negative contrast experience is both fundamental and universal needs further examination. Schillebeeckx speaks of a fundamental human experience from which every human "no" arises in the face of suffering and evil. Dunn asks what difference it makes if one is contemplating one's own experience of suffering, or that of another person or group. While it would seem self-evident in the case of one's own experience that the "no" would arise every time, in the case of the suffering of others, it would seem to depend on whether one is an observer or participant in the event. According to Dunn, it is clear that all observers of suffering do not experience it in the same way or arrive at the same "no." The "no" to suffering can be subverted or oppressed, or at the very least, denied, repressed, or ignored. Dunn draws upon three examples to illustrate this

Apartheid in South Africa was sustained for decades by a society which overlooked the suffering that its policies inflicted. In Europe, the question of how the holocaust eventuated in Christian societies can also be asked. In colonized countries, colonists could long overlook the negative contrast between their lifestyle and that of those they colonized and accept the contrast as a given.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ See Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 26-27. See also Rochford, *Hermeneutics*, 263.

³⁶⁰ John Dunn, "Negative Contrast Experience and Edward Schillebeeckx: Critical Reflections," in *Southern Scholars Engage with Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Helen F. Bergin (Australia: ATF, 2013), 76.

Given that Schillebeeckx claims the negative contrast experience is fundamental and true, one must ask: “how long is a reasonable time to wait for the ‘no’ to emerge?”³⁶¹

According to Dunn, there is no guarantee that people will respond in the same way in different contexts to a particular phenomenon of suffering, and this raises the question of how to evaluate specific responses to suffering. For example, Dunn mentions cultures in which the practice of revenge is a common expectation in the face of evil, or cultures in which the death penalty is seen as a moral response to evil, to illustrate that not all responses to suffering are capable of creating a better future.³⁶² It is certainly conceivable, from Dunn’s perspective, that the “no” to suffering can be co-opted by the interests of those who caused the suffering, preventing the revelation of a situation that deserves our “yes.” Since one person’s data and resulting ethical response may not correspond with those of another, Dunn expresses that there are limitations to the application of the negative contrast experience as articulated by Schillebeeckx to concrete situations of suffering or injustice.

As was shown above, scholars have questioned whether Schillebeeckx’s use of tradition is inclusive enough of non-Christians and non-believers, although Schillebeeckx would certainly claim it to be. Mary Catherine Hilkert raises the question of whether Schillebeeckx’s use of tradition is inclusive enough of marginalized persons and movements within Christianity itself. Schillebeeckx’s later theology, as mentioned in the first section of this chapter, recognized the historically and culturally conditioned

³⁶¹ Dunn, *Negative Contrast Experience*, 76.

³⁶² Dunn, *Negative Contrast Experience*, 77.

nature of dogmatic formulations and subsequently, the possibility of dogma being formulated or used ideologically. While his later writings clearly insisted upon the necessity of ideology critique, Schillebeeckx's critical method was certainly not turned against the dogma of the church. In fact, his method identifies ideology critique with the "critical perspective of faith" and "locates the critique within a more fundamental hermeneutical perspective of the critical retrieval of living tradition."³⁶³ However, Hilbert still asks "by whom is authentic tradition determined? And if tradition is ultimately a tradition of lived experience, whose experience counts?"³⁶⁴

The question of what constitutes "the great Christian tradition" is vital, especially since, as Schillebeeckx himself admits, history has too often been told by the "authority of the victors."³⁶⁵ The narratives we receive about the past are not "pure stories" handed down in perfect form from generation to generation, but are shaped by the perspectives of those who tell them. This means that the views and contributions of marginalized or oppressed groups can easily be forgotten or pushed aside as irrelevant. Christianity is by no means immune from this phenomenon.

Hilbert acknowledges that Schillebeeckx includes the writings of Tertullian in his pre-Montanist period as part of his historical development of the church's living tradition of ministry. Yet, she asks, "why not the Montanist period? Who is to say that the naming of Montanism as heretical is not the result of ideological distortion of the tradition?"³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Hilbert, *Hermeneutics of History*, 141.

³⁶⁴ Hilbert, *Hermeneutics of History*, 142.

³⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Magisterium and Ideology," in *Authority in the Church and the Schillebeeckx Case*, ed. Leonard Swindler and Piet Fransen (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 11.

³⁶⁶ Hilbert, *Hermeneutics of History*, 142.

The same question can be posed regarding any person, movement, or position that was labeled heretical or erroneous. Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether speaks of “usable tradition,” which encompasses traditions that can be drawn upon as foundations for the formation of more egalitarian communities and the development of attitudes that value the full humanity of women. In her definition of “usable tradition” here, Ruether includes: Scripture, both Hebrew and Christian; marginalized or “heretical” Christian traditions, such as Gnosticism, Montanism, Quakerism, Shakerism; the primary theological themes of the dominant stream of classical Christian theology- Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant; non-Christian Near Eastern and Greco-Roman religion and philosophy; and critical post-Christian world views such as liberalism, Romanticism, and Marxism.³⁶⁷ One’s notion of “tradition” includes what one has been taught to consider tradition. What constitutes the living Christian tradition, however, may include elements that have been suppressed and therefore, remain unknown by many. Schillebeeckx, according to Hilbert, does not satisfactorily answer the question of how to determine what in the past was truly a harmful distortion of the faith, and what was labeled as such due to historical and cultural biases. He does not tell us whose experience counts now, nor whose experience can be considered part of tradition.³⁶⁸

2. *The Negative Contrast Experience and Human Sin*

Another set of critiques avers that Schillebeeckx does not take the reality of human sinfulness sufficiently into account. In his articulation of the negative contrast

³⁶⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 22.

³⁶⁸ Hilbert, *Hermeneutics of History*, 142.

experience, Schillebeeckx appears to endorse an optimistic view of humanity. In 1967, he stated that, “mankind as a whole is at this moment experiencing an almost irresistible desire to make this world a better place.”³⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx’s contemporary Johann Baptist Metz did not have this same optimism, describing modernity as a “golden age of apathy.”³⁷⁰ While Metz shared Schillebeeckx’s turn to the concrete suffering of humanity as a necessary starting point for theology, he did not share Schillebeeckx’s confidence in the spontaneous resistance that arises in response to the violation of the human.³⁷¹ Other theologians since Metz have critiqued Schillebeeckx for paying too little attention to human apathy and participation in oppression.

Gabriel Fackre, in his assessment of Schillebeeckx’s concept of the negative contrast experience, critiques Schillebeeckx for focusing too much on “the problem of evil” to the neglect of human sin and guilt. He is troubled that the question raised by the contrast experience is not “given our guilt how are we to find forgiveness but, rather, given our suffering, how are we to find assurance?”³⁷² He finds Schillebeeckx’s description of the early disciples’ Easter experience as incomplete.

Schillebeeckx describes the Easter experience in terms of a contrast experience for the disciples. The death of Jesus left Peter and the disciples in doubt and disarray, especially since many of them abandoned Jesus at the time of his crucifixion. However,

³⁶⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Religious Life in a Secularized World,” in *The Mission of the Church* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 135. Originally published as *Zending van de Kerk* (Bilthoven: Nelissen, 1968).

³⁷⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2013), 81.

³⁷¹ Mary Catherine Hilkert, “The Threatened *Humanum* as *Imago Dei*: Anthropology and Christian Ethics,” in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, Ed. Boeve, Depoortere, and Van Erp (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 132.

³⁷² Gabriel Fackre, “Bones Strong and Weak in the Skeletal Structure of Schillebeeckx’s Christology,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21:2 (Spring 1984), 270.

according to Schillebeeckx, the disciples, in their abandonment of Jesus at the cross, did indeed fail, “but had not in the end lost their faith in Jesus. They had been thrown off balance rather than been deliberately disloyal.”³⁷³ Jesus’s appearance to the disciples, he insists, can be understood along the lines of a Jewish conversion model. What happens in the Easter appearance is “a conversion to Jesus as the Christ, who now comes as the light of the world.”³⁷⁴ The disciples were reconciled with Jesus whom they had let down. In the re-gathering of the disciples after the horror of the crucifixion, the early Christian church began. Schillebeeckx believes that all Christians can and must have their “own Easter experience.” The resurrection is not a formula to be believed, but an invitation and appeal to us to attain this experience personally in our own life.³⁷⁵

Fackre adds that there is another dimension to the experience presupposed in the disciples’ Easter encounter that needs be emphasized. As a conversion vision, it entails repentance. Here, the contrast problem is “neither suffering inflicted by other persons nor events colliding with good experienced or expected, but the sin done by oneself over against the good experienced from and expected by Another.”³⁷⁶ According to Fackre, Schillebeeckx underemphasizes the disciples’ experience of guilt and their need for forgiveness. Schillebeeckx’s references to our own Easter experience, Fackre states, are consistently made in terms of the framework of hopelessness and hope. Jesus is to be understood and interpreted along the lines of the threat of meaninglessness and its resolution, rather than the peril of guilt and its reconciliation. While Fackre acknowledges

³⁷³ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 352.

³⁷⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 352 .

³⁷⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 315.

³⁷⁶ Fackre, 269.

that themes of meaningless and meaning, and despair and hope, are familiar in modern theology, he challenges the perception that the questions a culture asks should determine the answer faith gives. Certainly, the Christian community cannot simply give answer to questions that are not asked, but “it is equally true that profound questions may never be asked by a culture because they are too threatening to it.” For Fackre, the negative contrast experience does not push human beings to “come to the unasked question of our own complicity in the cause of suffering, both human and divine.”³⁷⁷ Faith cannot just address human pain and suffering, but also the sins of omission and commission that contribute to it.³⁷⁸

LaReine-Marie Mosely also critiques Schillebeeckx’s concept of the negative contrast experience for not giving enough account of human sin. In her article “Negative Contrast Experience: An Ignatian Appraisal,” Mosely focuses specifically on the sin of omission, or human inaction. According to Mosely, the concept of the negative contrast experience retains the problematic assumption that human beings will be naturally outraged in the face of suffering and automatically be prompted to work toward ending it. However, in reality, she writes, “people often do not perceive human suffering and may even participate it.”³⁷⁹ This is often due to unconscious or implicit bias. Implicit bias consists of “attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, decision making and behavior, without our even realizing it.”³⁸⁰ All human beings have been tainted by

³⁷⁷ Fackre, 270.

³⁷⁸ Fackre, 273.

³⁷⁹ LaReine-Marie Mosely, “Negative Contrast Experience: An Ignatian Appraisal,” in *Horizons* 41:1 (June 2014), 75-76.

³⁸⁰ Mosely, 84.

implicit bias, and these biases cloud our ability to say, “this should not be” in the face of suffering.

Mosely names anti-black racism as one of the most prevalent and pernicious examples of implicit bias today. She points out that while most people do not consider themselves to be racist persons, the implications of unconscious bias are real and demand our attention. For example, Mosely mentions that legal analysts have shown that human lives are at stake if judges and members of juries are influenced by unconscious bias.³⁸¹ In other words, a choice does not have to be conscious in order to do a great deal of harm. Unconscious bias may prevent humans from recognizing particular situations as negative contrast experiences, or may inhibit them from responding to the suffering of others in ways that do not exacerbate their suffering. Therefore, Mosely asserts, “without ways of providing an account for humanity’s inaction in the face of evil and suffering, the negative contrast experience risks losing its important role.”³⁸²

Mosely proposes the consciousness Examen as a way forward. The Examen, a prayer attributed to the sixteenth century founder of the Jesuits St. Ignatius of Loyola, is described as a way of focusing on the manner in which God is leading a person. It consists of five steps, though these may vary slightly in different versions of the prayer. In the first step, the individual focuses on gratitude to God. This should be extensive, not only including the obvious major things like life, health, and loved ones; but also the beauty of the sunrise when waking up in the morning or the smile given by a young child

³⁸¹ Mosely, 86.

³⁸² Mosely, 89.

when walking down the street that brightened one's spirits. The second step consists of asking for God's guidance so that one may see as God sees. The third step is a prayer review of the events of one's day, focusing on times when one may have been particularly open to God and times when one was not. This may be discerned by paying attention not only to particular events and actions, but also to one's feeling and inclinations at different moments. Step four asks the individual to express sorrow for the times one was not choosing God or acting in accordance with God's will. At this time, one may also ask God for healing and strength. In the last step, the individual prays to acquire a spirit of availability to God in the future, so he or she may be better able to discern and choose God's will. For many practitioners of the Examen, this part concludes with the Our Father. According to Mosely, through praying the Examen, especially Step Three, one may come to recognize unconscious thoughts and inclinations against certain persons or groups that are harming their relationships.³⁸³ Such an examination, Mosely concludes, "can deepen the efficacy of Schillebeeckx's concept of negative contrast experiences as an important pathway to the amelioration of suffering and evil."³⁸⁴

D. The Enduring Strength of the Negative Contrast Experience: Responding to Schillebeeckx's Critics

Scholars have raised some very important and interesting questions in response to Schillebeeckx's use of the negative contrast experience. Certainly, as Schillebeeckx himself would admit, the idea of the negative contrast experience will need to be articulated differently in response to historical and cultural shifts, and in its application to

³⁸³ Mosely, 92-93.

³⁸⁴ Mosely, 95.

particular issues and instances of suffering in today's world. However, I do not see any of the critiques given above as reason to discredit or discount the negative contrast experience as a universal starting point for interreligious dialogue. In this section, I will attempt to answer some of these critiques.

1. Does Schillebeeckx Acknowledge Human Sin?

Schillebeeckx, in his work, does acknowledge the reality of human sinfulness and speaks about the truth of the Christian dogma of "original sin." In his later reflections upon dogma, Schillebeeckx asserted that "any infallibility that a dogma may possess derives solely from infallible divine revelation, which is, however, expressed in language by humans and ecclesiastic authorities." This phrasing in human language is never infallible.³⁸⁵ Therefore, dogma always demands redefinition and reformulation of the truth it presents. Schillebeeckx cites the dogma of original sin as an example to prove this point. The Council of Trent expressed this dogma with the assertion that the personal sin of Adam and Eve was passed on to all of their descendants. Today, due to advances in science as well as biblical studies, the notion of sin inherited by birth seems absurd to most of us. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx explains, the dogma of original sin says "something quite real about our human condition."³⁸⁶ Every human being is born into a society which is "in a state of sin" and therefore, "the sin of the world precedes our free will. Even before we embark on a voluntary act we are already in a situation that willy-

³⁸⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Discontinuities in Christian Dogma," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 11: Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 87, Originally published as "Breuken in christelijke dogma," in *Grenservaringen en zoektochten. 14 Essays voor Ted Schoof bij zijn afscheid van de theologische faculteit Nijmegen*, ed. Schillebeeckx et.al (Baarn 1994), 15-49.

³⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Discontinuities*, 101.

nilly prompts—but does not compel—us to sin.”³⁸⁷ Schillebeeckx recognized sin as a pervasive reality, whose effects no one can fully escape. However, Schillebeeckx favors an understanding of sin as a social reality that manifests itself in oppressive systems and social structures, rather than the result of innate corruption of the human soul.

Schillebeeckx’s understanding of original sin here captures the reality of implicit bias. As Jesuit scholar and activist Dean Brackley explains, “our cultural formation (by family, school, church, and the media), our location, experience and past choices circumscribe our imagination and intelligence. Along with many benefits, we also inherit the biases and blind spots of our social class, race, age group, sex, religion, and nation.”³⁸⁸ Every human enters the world hearing messages from their surroundings about who or what is considered valuable, beautiful, or holy. Our limited perceptions can block our ability to consider the feelings and needs of others prior to our actions, and therefore, we may behave in ways that are harmful toward ourselves, or other individuals or groups.

While sin and bias are real and need to be addressed, the persistence of racism, sexism, or other types of oppression cannot be used to disprove the value of the negative contrast experience, or the “no” that persists in the human heart in response to suffering. According to Schillebeeckx, contemplative and liberating action always stands under “the finite conditions of our history of suffering.”³⁸⁹ In other words, human action cannot nor is expected to ameliorate all human suffering. No political project of liberation be laid out perfectly once for and all as a universal solution to current issues and issues to come.

³⁸⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Discontinuities*, 101.

³⁸⁸ Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 158-59, Cited by Mosely, 91.

³⁸⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 815.

Suffering will still persist, and the praxis that responds to suffering will constantly need to be critiqued and developed. As Schillebeeckx states, “we experience redemption and liberation only in finite fragments, in a history that stands open towards eschatological consummation.” Any positive experience of meaning, or fragment of redemption that occurs in this life “takes place in ‘unredeemed’ conditions.”³⁹⁰ In other words, there are fragments of salvation taking place, even amidst a world where human bias still persists and demands further attention. These fragments of salvation do not lessen the urgency for bias to be addressed, but the reality of bias and the occurrence of horrific events do not necessarily discredit the notion that in the face of suffering, there exists fundamental human “no” to what threatens the *humanum*. For Schillebeeckx, human beings are never able to fulfill a role he reserves for God, that of total redemption. Schillebeeckx says that our reactions to suffering contain “glimpses of what human wholeness entails.” The key word here is “glimpses.” We never arrive at a perfect vision of the *humanum*, which explains why human praxis is never flawless, and can be filled with errors and influenced by biases that need correction in the future.

As La Reine Mosely points out, engagement in practices like the Examen are certainly worthwhile and should be strongly encouraged. However, I would hesitate to argue that such a practice is *necessary* for the negative contrast experience to be an effective motivator for liberating praxis, although it can certainly help in guiding a person’s actions in response to suffering.

³⁹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 815.

As Schillebeeckx states, total redemption is beyond human capabilities, and even the most devout practitioner of the Spiritual Exercises will never be rid of his or her biases, even if he or she has perhaps come to a better recognition of some of them. Also, biases often shape our spiritual practices and the communities with whom we choose to pray and worship. While there are some persons who engage in spiritual practices of multiple traditions simultaneously, for many, the choice to pray the Examen reflects one's Christian social location and preference for the resources of the Christian tradition. One may ask, for example, what about Shamatha-Vipashyana Meditation (Open-Awareness Meditation) or Tong-len meditation³⁹¹ from the Buddhist tradition? I am not saying that Mosely herself, or all Christians for that matter, would be opposed to meditations from other traditions. However, we must recognize that persons who engage in religious practices, Christian or otherwise, often do so in a state of ignorance about the realities of other traditions or with assumptions about which religious traditions and practices are more powerful, effective, intellectual, etc. Second, just as persons may be inactive in the face of suffering, there is no guarantee that one will be not also remain inactive once becoming aware of bias.

Schillebeeckx himself recognizes that experiences which call into question the status quo are often manipulated and their critical force is blocked by forces who fear change. However, new experiences can never have authority simply because they are new. He maintains, "we have no guarantee at all that the history of human experience is

³⁹¹ See Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living* (Boston: Shambala, 2011), 5-6; 38-43.

only progressive and not at the same time also regressive.” He acknowledges that the discerning of spirits is, therefore, an essential part of what we call the authority of experiences.³⁹²

While Fackre argues that Schillebeeckx places too little emphasis on guilt and forgiveness, I would reply that these themes are necessary aspects of Schillebeeckx’s theology, given that our human praxis is never fully sufficient and we are incapable of anything more than “glimpses” of salvation. As was stated in Chapter One, Schillebeeckx held that the Christian belief that “Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is the divine promise that the future can and will be realized in and through our commitment to faith, despite all failure”³⁹³ is crucial when faced with the inevitable fact that not all of our efforts to end suffering will be successful. Schillebeeckx recognized that just as Jesus’s ministry ended with the cross, so too will our efforts to address and ameliorate suffering meet with resistance, which can turn harsh and violent. He claimed that to follow Jesus, we must become “the partisan of the oppressed and humiliated,” knowing that in doing so, we run the risk of becoming “oppressed and done away with by this world.”³⁹⁴ This statement shows Schillebeeckx’s awareness that not all will respond to the negative contrast experience in the same way, and that human beings themselves are not only complicit in but may exacerbate conditions of suffering by opposing efforts at change or

³⁹² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 24.

³⁹³ Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 47.

³⁹⁴ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 8: Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 54, originally published as *Tussentijds verhaal over Jezus boeken* (Bloemendaal, 1978).

reform. Yet, true salvation cannot simply be a defeat or disregard of the position of those who disagree with us, or whose actions have been the cause of a great deal of a pain, but rather must be a reconciliation. As Schillebeeckx states, Jesus clearly refused any messianic ideology that “liberates the oppressed” but “mercilessly annihilates the oppressor.”³⁹⁵ Praxis for human wholeness at some point requires forgiveness of ourselves and of others for our complicity in suffering.

It is perhaps true that Schillebeeckx does not stress guilt and repentance very much in his theology. Yet, this does not mean that he believed they should be absent from human experiences of contrast. When one experiences a radical “no” to the current situation, this does not preclude that one might see him or herself as part of the problem, although we are sometimes blocked from recognizing this, at least right away. Praxis for the *humanum* can include self-improvement or at least an openness or vulnerability to letting one’s previous actions and thoughts be critiqued and expanded. Indeed, feeling like we have done wrong, or have failed to stand up for those in need, or that we are not fully in communion with another person or group of people, is itself an experience of suffering. For Schillebeeckx, however, the guilt itself cannot be the main focal point, but rather the meaning that comes from one’s experience of guilt. Feeling guilty in and of itself does not bring healing. Guilt needs to move beyond shame and remorse into action. Jesus did not want the disciples to sit and feel guilty for abandoning him, he wanted them to go out and preach the good news. The disciples did need to repent and experience

³⁹⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 123.

forgiveness from Jesus, but their reconciliation with him would be futile if it did not produce further action to demonstrate their commitment to Jesus.

2. *Is the Negative Contrast Experience Universal or an Example of Catholic Hegemony?*

Borgman, Rochford, and Dunn problematize Schillebeeckx's negative contrast experience in light of the rise of postmodernism, which is strongly suspicious of grand narratives on the basis of any tradition or authority. Schillebeeckx never denied that Christianity is historically particular. Recalling Chapter One, Schillebeeckx argued that Jesus is not absolute, since "no historical particularity can be called absolute" and "the risen Jesus keeps pointing beyond himself to God."³⁹⁶ Yet, according to Schillebeeckx, the absolute can only be revealed through the particular. This is apparent in Schillebeeckx's understanding of revelation, namely, that revelation can only be perceived in human experience, and humans experience the world through their own historical and social context. Schillebeeckx insisted that "if there is a unique universality in Jesus, then it must lie in Jesus' actual being-as-man, not above or behind it." In other words, God's offer of salvation to humankind is revealed through the historically particular person Jesus, in his life and ministry, although this "truth" is one that can only be apprehended by faith.³⁹⁷

Schillebeeckx does not set out to "prove" the universality of Jesus or of Christianity, nor is the purpose of his work to convince the world that all must accept

³⁹⁶ Schillebeeckx, "The Religious and Humane Ecumene," 184.

³⁹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 560-61.

Jesus as the guarantor of total salvation or meaning in light of our history of negative contrast experiences. We can only know Jesus as such by faith, not empirical evidence. “The Christian claim to universality will have to prove itself in the phenomenon of ‘being human’ as that actually transpires.”³⁹⁸ Nevertheless, what is known by faith is not necessarily unable to contain what is universally true. This must give the Christian both confidence and humility. One may consider the way Schillebeeckx ultimately interprets the negative contrast experience to be hegemonic, yet there is no stopping non-believers or religious others from interpreting contrast experiences in another way. Would it not also be considered hegemonic to attempt to enforce a position in which all religions must rid themselves of any beliefs that resemble “grand narratives?”

Given his Christian faith convictions, Schillebeeckx cannot see Jesus in any other way but as the one who reveals God’s promise of salvation in light of the inevitable imperfections of human praxis. For him to say otherwise would be inauthentic. Schillebeeckx maintained that, “truth is not to be found in a system, but in a dialogue,” since the truth “transcends all our thoughts and yet lives among us.”³⁹⁹ Therefore, “existential problems are rightly subjected to the criticism of Christianity, but in the same way Christian forms of life are subject to criticism in the light of new existential experiences.”⁴⁰⁰ What Schillebeeckx believes is not that Christianity is the truth, but that Jesus manifests the universal truth of God-for-us in his praxis on behalf of the kingdom

³⁹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 567.

³⁹⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” 40

⁴⁰⁰ Schillebeeckx, “Secular Worship and Church Liturgy,” *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 56-57.

of God. This gives Christians a hope that Schillebeeckx regards as indispensable, but it does not give them access to the truth or even make them better responders to human suffering.

Furthermore, Schillebeeckx's articulation of the *humanum* seems to take seriously the postmodern rejection of absolute visions or narratives. The *humanum*, described as what human wholeness entails, is never given an actual definition. We receive glimpses of what the *humanum* entails through the witness of the human being "who has already been damaged."⁴⁰¹ Suffering, which tells us what "should not be" provides impetus for our discovery of what should. The meaning of history remains open, still has to be created.⁴⁰² Of course, for Schillebeeckx, the *humanum* is not disconnected from Christian revelation. According to Schillebeeckx, "Jesus unmasked a concept of God which enslaves people; he fought for a view of God who liberates mankind, a view which has to be expressed in specific action." Jesus, he states, simultaneously shows in word and deed, both what it can mean to be a truly human being, and who and how God is.⁴⁰³ For the Christian, indeed, the *humanum* may be identified with the kingdom of God spoken of by Jesus. Yet, this means that the kingdom of God cannot be positively identified once and for all, but what the kingdom of God entails is still being worked out by human beings in their responses to concrete instances of suffering. A non-believer or non-Christian may object to the term "kingdom of God," but this does not prohibit Christians and non-Christians from working together, or signify that their visions of human wholeness are

⁴⁰¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 45.

⁴⁰² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 654.

⁴⁰³ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 114.

opposed. No person is in possession of the fullness of what human wholeness entails now or in the future. If negative contrast experiences belong to all human beings regardless of religious tradition or lack thereof, then this means that the voices of various traditions must contribute to the building up of the *humanum*. The special authority of the negative contrast experience is not hierarchical. Christianity has no special privilege in defining the *humanum* over non-Christians.

Elizabeth Johnson characterizes Schillebeeckx's soteriology as "postmodern." She describes postmodern thinking as being "conscious of the ambiguous character of progress advanced through so much suffering and defeat and it questions the claim to universality of thought patterns that are in reality the result of privilege."⁴⁰⁴ As opposed to the "totalizing historical narrative" characteristic of the modern mentality and associated with Karl Rahner, Johnson says that Schillebeeckx, along with Metz, as well as other liberation and feminist theologians, construe a "contingent historical narrative."⁴⁰⁵ The contingent historical narrative, according to Johnson, does not claim to

⁴⁰⁴ Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus and Salvation," in *CTSA Proceedings* 49 (1994), 9

⁴⁰⁵ According to Johnson, current work in soteriology can be classified into three types of narratives: 1) the mythological narrative (premodern), which begins and ends beyond time. 2) the totalizing historical narrative (modern), which attempts to interpret all of history in an intelligible way 3) contingent historical narrative (postmodern), which acknowledges the contingency of history. Johnson names Karl Rahner as "an example par excellence of soteriology in the modern framework." Rahner, she says, interprets Jesus as the absolute bringer of salvation within the thought patterns of transcendental Thomism. There is a unity of the human race founded on a common origin, history, and goal. Through the three-part event—God's self offer, human free acceptance, and God's endorsing acceptance—"the human search for salvation is brought to a new and final phase: Christology is fulfilled anthropology." Echoing Metz, Johnson states that "Rahner's optimism of grace is so strong (so modern) that the tragedy, disruptiveness, and radical open-endedness of real history are not taken adequately into account as functioning elements in his system." See "Jesus and Salvation," in *CTSA Proceedings* 49 (1994), 8-9.

know an ideal pattern of the whole even though it expresses desire for it. It “expresses hope beyond the disruptions of history, which it cannot tame.”⁴⁰⁶ Johnson says,

Contingent historical narrative tells the story of the joyous, Spirit-filled ministry of Jesus, his unjust suffering and death, and his rising to new life in such a way that God can be seen to draw near in the midst of historical discontinuities, rather than bypassing them. Historically there is no discernible pattern that makes either Jesus’s life or its outcome either preordained or absolutely predictable. It happens. Indeed it happens amid the confluence of historical forces as all lives happen. But this narrative generates such hope because it signals divine mystery unpredictably present in the very midst of contingent events of suffering, community, struggle, and joy, present where least expected, even with the disinherited and brokenhearted, irrepressible in vitality.⁴⁰⁷

Schillebeeckx’s use of a Christian interpretive framework need not be considered incompatible with postmodern thought, unless one wanted to make the claim that postmodernity and religious commitment are irreconcilable. As Johnson explains, the contingent historical framework, “reveals a deep structure of being within history whereby life and communion remain possible even in the midst of discontinuity, repression, and suffering because of God who comes in historical contingency, ineffable but close, bringing forth being.”⁴⁰⁸ The negative contrast experience is not meant to be a theory about suffering or a prediction of what will happen in the future, nor is it meant to be an illustration of “history as a march of progress, from darkness to light.” Rather, it illustrates the universal human experiences of suffering and the universal human capacity to hope. The negative contrast experience does not belong to Schillebeeckx alone. Interpretations outside the Christian framework are not only possible, but necessary and worthy of being heard.

⁴⁰⁶ Elizabeth Johnson, “Jesus and Salvation,” in *CTSA Proceedings* 49 (1994), 9.

⁴⁰⁷ Johnson, “Jesus and Salvation,” 9.

⁴⁰⁸ Johnson, “Jesus and Salvation,” 9-10.

The question Hilkert raises about who gets to determine authentic tradition and whose experiences counts is a fair and vital one. Schillebeeckx conception of what constitutes “the great Christian tradition” does not appear to be as vast as the “usable tradition” articulated by Rosemary Radford Ruether above, which comprises sources deemed heretical in the past. Yet, Schillebeeckx’s position on alternative and dissenting communities during his own time makes me believe that he would not be closed off to the possibility brought up by Hilkert that perhaps the naming of some marginalized traditions, such as Montanism, as heretical, is the result of ideological distortion of the tradition.⁴⁰⁹

In a 1980 article entitled “The Christian Community and Its Office-Bearers,” Schillebeeckx remarked that at present, “we are witnessing within the Church throughout the world a wave of alternative praxis and this in itself is a clear indicator that the existing order in the Church has lost its credibility and is in urgent need of revision.”⁴¹⁰ There is a dynamism to be found in this alternative praxis, writes Schillebeeckx, not because it is alternative, but because Christians can identify themselves with it, and it inspires the lives of many. Therefore, Schillebeeckx concludes, we cannot claim that such alternative praxis does not possess an “inherent apostolicity even before it is recognized publicly by the official church” nor that “it will only acquire that apostolicity when it has been sanctioned by the Church.”⁴¹¹ According to Daniel Thompson, Schillebeeckx’s

⁴⁰⁹ Hilkert, “Hermeneutics of History,” 142

⁴¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, “The Christian Community and its Office-Bearers,” in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 156.

⁴¹¹ Schillebeeckx, “The Christian Community,” 157.

ecclesiology “provides a way for seeing dissenting or alternative communities as part of the nature of the sacramental church itself.”⁴¹²

While Schillebeeckx’s treatment of contemporary alternative praxis may not apply directly to alternative praxes during early Christianity, one could argue that such movements are part of Christian tradition if they, like more modern movements, resonate with and animate Christian praxis today. Montanism, for example, understood the prophetic gifts of the Spirit as being poured out on men and women alike, and thus gave women not only equal prophetic authority but also equal participation in the ordinary ministry.⁴¹³ Shakerism taught that the creation of humanity, male and female, in the image of God points to the androgyny of God.⁴¹⁴ Ruether herself acknowledges that these traditions cannot be considered simple substitutions for Christianity in its current form, since “neither orthodox nor heretical Christianity brings together the wholeness of vision that feminist theology seeks.”⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, these traditions may belong to the “usable past,” and a deeper study of them may reveal the connection between heresy and women’s roles.

Throughout his career, Schillebeeckx displayed a sense of openness to learning from the critiques not only of secularism, but of movements like feminism and liberation theology.⁴¹⁶ Schillebeeckx would not see the questions of “what constitutes tradition” and

⁴¹² Daniel P. Thompson, “The Church as Sacrament: Schillebeeckx’s Contributions to the Construction of Critical Ecclesiology,” in *Religious Studies and Theology* 17 (1998), 42.

⁴¹³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 34.

⁴¹⁴ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 36.

⁴¹⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 37.

⁴¹⁶ Schillebeeckx discussed feminism and its influence on his work in his 1983 conversations with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen. See “The Feminist Movement and the Peace Movement,” in *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 75-82. See also “The Liberation of the Poor,” 95-105 for Schillebeeckx’s views on liberation theology.

“whose experience counts” as ever being capable of having a definitive answer, since we are continuously in the process of learning more about the past and gaining more insight into how certain experiences have been forgotten or not given enough attention throughout the history of Christianity.

E. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to explain how Edward Schillebeeckx’s notion of the negative contrast experience might be an appropriate starting point for interreligious dialogue. Rather than relying on an understanding of all persons as anonymous Christians or persons oriented toward the Church, Schillebeeckx starts with the basic reality of human suffering and how this reality brings forth the human capacity for hope. In this chapter, I provided a brief overview of how the concept of the negative contrast experience developed during Schillebeeckx’s career. Some scholars have critiqued Schillebeeckx’s articulation of the negative contrast experience, particularly with regard to his use of tradition and his treatment, or lack thereof, of the themes of sin and guilt. I sought to demonstrate how these critiques should not disqualify the negative contrast experience from being a universal starting point for dialogue across religious boundaries, as well as between believers and non-believers.

Schillebeeckx’s strikes an important balance in his approach to the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions. Namely, he refuses to regard Christianity as dispensable or irrelevant, but also strongly insists that what is necessary for human liberation cannot be found by looking to the Christian tradition alone. He does not strive to abandon the Christian tradition, but demonstrates how devotion to a particular religious tradition can co-exist with a more postmodern way of thinking that

does not simply accept arguments from authority, and rejects absolute visions or narratives that attempt to make sense of history. For Schillebeeckx, the future is not to be theorized, but brought about by the performance of human praxis. In the next chapter, I will focus specifically on Schillebeeckx's soteriology as informative for Christian engagement with non-Christian religions.

CHAPTER THREE

EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX'S SOTERIOLOGY: CREATION AND SALVATION AS ONGOING PROJECTS

As was discussed in Chapter Two, Schillebeeckx regarded the negative contrast experience as having “a critical cognitive value and force of its own.” The knowledge implicit in our reactions to suffering anticipates a better future and leads to new action.⁴¹⁷ Given his recognition of suffering humanity as a source of knowledge for the development of human praxis, it is no surprise that soteriology is the driving question behind all of Schillebeeckx's theology.⁴¹⁸ According to Schillebeeckx, the question of salvation has expanded in recent history, even beyond theological interest. No longer solely the preoccupation of the world's religions, it has become the concern of a variety of humane sciences, technologies and activities. Although other disciplines may not specifically refer to this concern as “salvation,” it is “more than ever the great stimulus throughout the whole of present-day existence.”⁴¹⁹ Thus, Schillebeeckx wanted to define salvation in a way that could incorporate the whole person, not just one's soul or one's state of existence after his or her earthly life.

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a deeper understanding of Schillebeeckx's soteriology. Each section of this chapter will be devoted to discussing a particular aspect

⁴¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 6: Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 582, originally published as *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (Blemendaal, 1974).

⁴¹⁸ One of the first works on Schillebeeckx's soteriology claims that Schillebeeckx's entire theological enterprise is soteriological. See Tadahiko Iwashima, *Menschheitsgeschichte und Heilserfahrung: Die Theologie von Edward Schillebeeckx als methodisch reflektierte Soteriologie* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1982).

⁴¹⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 787, originally published as *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (Bloemendaal, 1997).

of Schillebeeckx's soteriology. It will cover: 1) creation as the foundation of Schillebeeckx's soteriology; 2) Schillebeeckx's articulation of the relationship between fragments of salvation in this world and eschatological, or final, salvation; 3) the role of Jesus in Schillebeeckx's soteriology, in which Jesus himself becomes the assurance of eschatological salvation; 4) the communal nature of salvation. In the last section, I will explore how Schillebeeckx's soteriology might aid interreligious dialogue. Here, I will propose that it allows one to maintain the uniqueness, universality, and definitiveness of Jesus Christ while still affirming non-Christian religions as necessary for becoming a true disciple of Jesus in the contemporary world. If, as Schillebeeckx asserted, "there is no salvation outside the world," and the world is religiously pluralist, then a Christian understanding of salvation must include relationships of mutual learning and exchange with non-Christian traditions.

A. No Salvation Outside the World: The Indissoluble Link Between Creation and Salvation

As was outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, each of the three paradigms of the theology of religions deals with the question of salvation in its own way. These paradigms provide ways of answering the question of whether or not there is salvation outside of Christianity and if so, how. The exclusivist position maintains that there is no salvation outside of Christianity. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the pluralist position holds that there is not only salvation outside of Christianity, but that other religions are ways of salvation in their own right, apart from the mediation of Jesus Christ. The inclusivist position lies in between these two. It affirms the possibility of salvation outside of Christianity, but that this salvation comes, in some way, through

Jesus Christ. From these simple definitions, one can sense a preoccupation with salvation in each of these paradigms, since all three strive to form a theoretical explanation of salvation both inside and outside of Christianity.

The paradigms can also be used in describing the evolution of the Magisterium's attitude toward non-Christian religions. The Second Vatican Council shifted the Magisterium's position from an exclusivist to an inclusivist one. However, even when tracing the very long development of the Magisterium's position on non-Christians⁴²⁰, one can see that much of the focus is on salvation as something that is given to human beings by God, and this is believed to be experienced in the afterlife. According to Kevin Considine, *Gaudium et Spes* provides a vision of salvation and reconciliation with God that is "primarily eschatological and connected to the mystery of death."⁴²¹ While Schillebeeckx also affirms this eschatological dimension of salvation, his soteriology aims to avoid a one-sided emphasis on the other-worldliness of salvation and therefore, lead us beyond the question "who is saved and who is not?" Without giving up belief in the necessity of Jesus Christ for salvation, Schillebeeckx shifts from the phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the Church) to *extra mundum nulla salus* (no salvation outside the world).

⁴²⁰ For a survey of the Catholic Church's teaching on this issue from the New Testament up until just before the Second Vatican Council, see Louis Capéran, *Le Problème du salut des infidels* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1912).

⁴²¹ Kevin Considine, *Salvation for the Sinned-Against: Han and Schillebeeckx in Intercultural Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 19.

1. What Does *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* Mean?

The well-known phrase *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* or “no salvation outside the Church,” was first used in the third century by Cyprian of Carthage as a warning against Christians in danger of falling into heresy or who had already been separated from the church. Cyprian conceived of the church as a unity of love. Therefore, he felt that anyone who violated this unity was guilty of a sin against charity and could not be saved. It was not until the fourth century, after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* shifted from being simply an admonition, made out of pastoral concern, for erring Christians, to being a warning to members of other religious traditions.⁴²² St. Augustine argued that even unbaptized infants and those who had never heard of Christ were included among the condemned and this was justified due to the reality of original sin.⁴²³ In 1442, the Council of Florence issued the following decree:

[The Church] firmly believes, professes, and preaches that all those who are outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics or schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless they are joined to the Catholic Church before the end of their lives.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Robin Ryan, *Jesus and Salvation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 170.

⁴²³ Ryan, 171 See also Augustine of Hippo. *A Treatise on the Soul and Its Origin*, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1886), Book II, Chapters XIII-X.

⁴²⁴ Council of Basel, Florence, and Ferrara, Session 11 February 4, 1442, Available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum17.htm> Accessed May 31, 2016. This statement is also discussed by Schillebeeckx. See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), xvii. This expression of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* was originally authored by the sixth century North African bishop and disciple of Augustine, Fulgentius of Ruspe. See Fulgenius of Ruspe, *De fide, ad Petrum* 38 (79), cited in Ryan, 171.

Even as late as 1863, Pope Pius IX, in his encyclical *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore* (*On the Promotion of False Doctrines*), still declared that it is a well-known Catholic dogma that “no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church.”⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, it was at this time that the church began to *hint* (it is important to emphasize the word “hint” here since these were not explicit affirmations) at the possibility of salvation for those who have no knowledge of the Christian religion. Thus, in the same encyclical, Pius IX also stated that “sincerely observing the natural law and its precepts inscribed by God on all hearts and ready to obey God, [non-Christians] live honest lives and are able to attain eternal life by the efficacious virtue of divine light and grace.”⁴²⁶ However, this ability to attain salvation through obedience to natural law strictly applied to those who lacked proper knowledge of the Gospel. In 1864, Pius IX explicitly condemned the beliefs that “every man is free to embrace that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true” and that “man may, in observance of any religion whatever, find the way to eternal salvation, and arrive at eternal salvation.”⁴²⁷

Almost a century later, in 1943, Pope Pius XII stressed the strict identity between the Mystical Body of Christ and the Catholic Church. While Catholics could be considered members of the Mystical Body, Pius XII suggested that non-Christians might be related to the Mystical Body by an implicit desire. The notion of implicit desire was not new to Catholic thought in the twentieth century. Pius XII was likely influenced by the sixteenth century Spanish Jesuits Francisco Suarez and Juan De Lugo. Suarez argued

⁴²⁵ Pope Pius IX, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore: Encyclical Letter on the Promotion of False Doctrines*, Promulgated August 10, 1863, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quanto.htm>, 8

⁴²⁶ Pope Pius IX, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore: Encyclical Letter on the Promotion of False Doctrines*, 7.

⁴²⁷ See *Syllabus of Errors Condemned by Pius IX*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>, III.

that a person's faith in God and sincere repentance for sin constituted an implicit faith that entails an implicit desire for baptism, enabling him or her to be saved.⁴²⁸ De Lugo went even further by stating that implicit desire may also belong to those who do not believe in Christ or hold unorthodox views about him, such as Jews and Muslims. Such persons, he argued, may have "invincible ignorance" of the truth. They may have heard about the message of Christ, but were not convinced of its truth.⁴²⁹ Nevertheless, Pius XII's attitude toward these persons is still pessimistic. In the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, he insists that "from a heart overflowing with love," Catholics must ask non-Christians to

seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed by the Catholic Church.⁴³⁰

In 1950, Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* lamented that "some reduce to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation."⁴³¹ Thus, prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Magisterial position toward non-Christian religions could be best described as exclusivist. Even when the possibility of salvation was acknowledged for those who remain ignorant of the "true

⁴²⁸ Francisco Suarez, *De fide theologica*, disp. 12, sect. 4, n22, ed. Vives, vol. 12 (Paris, 1858), 359, cited in Ryan, 173.

⁴²⁹ Juan De Lugo, *De virtute fidei divinae*, disp. 12, nn50-51, cited in Ryan, 173.

⁴³⁰ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi: Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ*, Promulgated June 29, 1943, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html, 103.

⁴³¹ Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis: Concerning Some False Opinions Threatening to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine*, Promulgated August 12, 1950, Available from http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html, 27.

faith,” non-Christians were still considered to be in a state of deprivation and the positive characteristics of their traditions were not formally recognized.

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, one notices a Magisterial shift from an exclusivist position to an inclusivist one. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was considered revolutionary, as the Church began to recognize its responsibility for “reading the signs of the times.”⁴³² The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, was addressed not just to Catholics, but to “the whole of humanity,” admitting that the Church alone cannot respond to the problems of the modern world.⁴³³ In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Church explicitly declared that all human beings have the right to religious freedom and that this right is “based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.”⁴³⁴ In just the century prior to Vatican II, Gregory XVI had condemned as “absurd and erroneous” the proposition that “liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone.”⁴³⁵

⁴³² Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 4. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss this issue, it is important to recognize that there was and still to this day is no unanimous consensus as to what reading “the signs of the times” should mean. A more traditional view held that the church’s current issues stemmed from the rise of secularization in the world and a decreased respect for authority. Thus, they believed that the Council’s task was “to repeat and clarify the traditional teaching.” A more progressive group held that the church needed restricting and reform because it was too detached from humanity. Thus, the church bore the responsibility to “reclothe the church’s teachings and disciplines to meet the modern world and its needs” and to “reform the liturgy.” See Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II 1878-1993* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), 63-7.

⁴³³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 2.

⁴³⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Liberty*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), I.2.

⁴³⁵ Gregory XVI, *Mirari Vos: Encyclical Letter On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16mirar.htm>, 14.

At Vatican II, for the first time, the Magisterium officially recognized the many positive qualities found in non-Christian religions, and put forth the possibility that members of these traditions (and even non-believers) may experience salvation in Jesus Christ. *Gaudium et Spes* asserted that “since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.”⁴³⁶ *Nostra Aetate* encouraged Christians to “enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions,” and to “acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians.”⁴³⁷ It reproved “as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion.”⁴³⁸

Nevertheless, the Second Vatican Council did not relinquish the belief that the Church has a privileged place in the economy of salvation. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, taught that all people are “called to belong to the new people of God.”⁴³⁹ Yet, it distinguished those who “belong” (*pertinent*) to this new people of God from those who are “related” (*ordinatur*) to it. The Catholic faithful and all those who believe in Christ are said to belong to the people of God, while all others are

⁴³⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 25.

⁴³⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, , in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 2.

⁴³⁸ *Nostra Aetate*, 5.

⁴³⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 13.

related to the people of God. *Lumen Gentium* mentioned five groups of people who are included in the latter group: 1) Jews; 2) Muslims; 3) “those who in the shadows and images seek the unknown God,” which likely refers to traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism; 4) those who sincerely seek God; and 5) those who, through no fault of their own, have never arrived at explicit knowledge of God.⁴⁴⁰ It still insisted that those who “refuse to enter the church, or to remain in it, while knowing that it was founded by God through Christ as required for salvation” cannot be saved.⁴⁴¹ However, recalling the words of Karl Rahner mentioned in Chapter One, the time at which the absolute obligation of faith in Jesus and Christianity comes into effect for each person is impossible to determine.⁴⁴² What it means for a person to truly know that the church is required for salvation remains ambiguous.

The Second Vatican Council also did not de-emphasize the need for missionary activity, “the gospel must be preached to all everyone before the Lord comes.” It recognized “elements of truth and grace” among non-Christian religions that are a “secret presence of God.”⁴⁴³ It urged missionaries to immerse themselves in the social and cultural lives of the people to whom they are sent. Missionaries should familiarize

⁴⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 16, cited in Ryan, 175.

⁴⁴¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁴⁴² According to Rahner, a non-Christian religion is considered to contain “supernatural elements arising out of grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift of Christ” up until the moment when the gospel really enters the life of an individual. “Whether this point is the same, theologically speaking, as the first Pentecost, or whether it is different in chronological time for individual peoples and religions, is something which even at this point will have to be left to a certain extent an open question.” See, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions, *Theological Investigations X.6*, Trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroads, 1973), 121.

⁴⁴³ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus: Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 9.

themselves with the surrounding national and religious traditions to uncover “those seeds of the word which lie hidden among them.”⁴⁴⁴ These “seeds of the word” are brought to fulfillment with the preaching of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council demonstrated an openness to and appreciation of non-Christian religions. It affirmed the possibility of salvation for those outside of the Roman Catholic Church. However, *Lumen Gentium* still maintained that “this pilgrim church is required for salvation” and that “Christ alone is mediator and way of salvation.”⁴⁴⁵ Thus, the church, as “universal sacrament of salvation,”⁴⁴⁶ plays an active role in the salvation of non-Christians. The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, proclaimed that the Church’s role in the redemption of non-Christians takes place in the liturgy, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist.⁴⁴⁷ The prayers “Lord, may this sacrifice which has made our peace with you, advance the peace and salvation of all the world,” and “we offer you his body and blood, the acceptable sacrifice which brings salvation to the whole world” are seen to justify describing the church as an efficacious sign of the salvation of non-Christians even when it cannot play a more directly instrumental role by preaching the gospel to them.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁴ *Ad Gentes*, 11.

⁴⁴⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁴⁴⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 48.

⁴⁴⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 13

⁴⁴⁸ Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 76.

Even as non-Christian religions, cultures, and philosophies are viewed as capable of “working against evil and serving life and everything that is good,”⁴⁴⁹ they are still regarded as deficient and in need of fulfillment by Christianity. Shortly after Vatican II, in his 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI stated that other religions are “impregnated with innumerable seeds of the Word” that can constitute a “true preparation for the Gospel.” The church, he insisted, must keep her “missionary spirit” alive, as Christianity “establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they have, as it were, their arms outstretched toward heaven.”⁴⁵⁰ Fifteen years later, in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, Pope John Paul II expressed the belief that “Christ endowed the Church, his body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation.” John Paul II affirmed the presence of the Holy Spirit outside the church’s visible boundaries, even insisting that the Spirit affects not only individuals, but also “society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”⁴⁵¹ However, he reiterated the church has a “specific and necessary role” and a “special connection with the kingdom of God.”⁴⁵² The possibility of salvation for all must be maintained, but salvation can only come through Jesus Christ, the “one, universal mediation” between God and humankind. Although, John Paul II insisted, “participated forms of mediation of

⁴⁴⁹ See John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Ecclesia in Asia*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html, 15.

⁴⁵⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html, 53.

⁴⁵¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, 10.

⁴⁵² *Redemptoris Missio*, 19.

different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel and complementary to his."⁴⁵³

In 1991, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples released a reflection on interreligious dialogue entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation*. It insisted that

concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that members of other religious traditions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their savior.⁴⁵⁴

Yet, this 1991 document was not a sign of an increasingly positive attitude tone and attitude toward other religions. The 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (hereafter referred to as DI), mentioned in Chapter One, was not received as well as previous documents that addressed the Church's relationship to other religions. It sought to respond to what are described as "relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure (or in principle)*" by reiterating "certain truths that are part of the Church's faith."⁴⁵⁵ The document's main concern was upholding the "universal salvific

⁴⁵³ *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

⁴⁵⁴ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html. Accessed 4 February 2017, 2.

⁴⁵⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html, 3-4. Given the time of its release, it is believed that *Dominus Iesus* was written in response to Jacques Dupuis, SJ. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the Book 'Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism' by Father Jacques Dupuis, SJ Promulgated January 24, 2001*. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis

mediation of the church,” a truth which theologians such as Roger Haight and Paul Knitter have called into question.

Dominus Iesus sought to emphasize the distinction between theological faith and belief. Theological faith, defined as the “the acceptance of grace in revealed truth,” which is a “gift of God” and “a supernatural virtue infused by him” belongs, according to DI, only to Christianity. Other religions are merely “religious experience still in search of absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself.”⁴⁵⁶ Still, the document expressly denied that other religions, even Judaism and Islam, can be considered ways of salvation alongside the Church. While the prayers and rituals of other religions can be viewed positively as preparation for the Gospel, one cannot attribute to them a divine origin or an *ex opere operato*⁴⁵⁷ salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments alone.⁴⁵⁸ Thus, the followers of other religions are “in a gravely deficient

[en.html](#). One could also make the case that the document was partly a response to Edward Schillebeeckx, whose work was investigated, but never officially condemned, by the CDF between 1976-1980. Among other issues, Schillebeeckx’s work was questioned for its “certain relativization of the ecclesial institution.” See *The Schillebeeckx Case: Official Exchange of Letters and Documents in the Investigation of Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx, OP by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976-1980*, Ed. Ted Schoof OP, Trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). Edmund Chia states that the declaration was targeted at Asian theologians promoting a theology of religious pluralism. See *Edward Schillebeeckx and Interreligious Dialogue: Perspectives from Asian Theology* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012). For more about the reception of *Dominus Iesus*, see Edmund Chia, *Towards A Theology of Dialogue: Schillebeeckx’s Method as Bridge Between Vatican’s Dominus Iesus and Asia’s FABC Theology* (PhD Dissertation: University of Nijmegen, 2003), 21-29.

⁴⁵⁶ *Dominus Iesus*, 7. According to Francis Sullivan, it is clear that the use of the term “the other religions” is not meant to include Judaism and Islam, since their followers can have a faith that is based, at least in part, on biblical revelation. He believes that a clear statement to that effect at the beginning of the document would have eliminated some of the negative responses it received. See “Vatican II and the Postconciliar Magisterium on the Salvation of the Adherents of Other Religions,” in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James Heft and John O’Malley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 93.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ex opere operato* is Latin for “from the work worked.” With regard to the sacraments, it signifies that these derive their power from Christ’s work, rather than the work of human beings. This is why the Catholic Church teaches that a sacrament is valid independently of the personal morality of the priest administering it.

⁴⁵⁸ *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”⁴⁵⁹

Strongly insisting upon the necessity of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all people, *Dominus Iesus* emphasized that the kingdom of God, although it is a concern of everyone, cannot be separated from Christ or the church. It condemned “kingdom centered” approaches which “stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the kingdom.” Such conceptions, it said, are silent about Christ and put great stress on the mystery of creation, while keeping silent about the mystery of redemption, thereby undervaluing the Church.⁴⁶⁰ *Dominus Iesus* affirmed that terms like “unicity”, “universality”, and “absoluteness” cannot be avoided when describing the significance and value of Jesus Christ in relation to other religions.⁴⁶¹ Interreligious dialogue is mentioned toward the end of the document as part of the church’s “evangelizing mission.” Equality is upheld as a presupposition of interreligious dialogue, but this refers “to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, not even less to the position of Jesus Christ- who is God himself made man- in relation to the founders of other religions.”⁴⁶²

From this review of official Catholic teaching, it may seem as though the Magisterium abandoned the dogma of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. However, that is not the case. Rather than dropping the phrase altogether, the Magisterium’s interpretation of

⁴⁵⁹ *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

⁴⁶⁰ *Dominus Iesus*, 19. In this section, DI has in mind theologians like Jacques Dupuis and Paul Knitter, discussed in Chapter One. Dupuis refers to his perspective as kingdom-centered, or regnocentric. Knitter, seeks to go beyond Dupuis’ kingdom-centric position and describes his perspective as “soteriocentric.”

⁴⁶¹ *Dominus Iesus*, 15.

⁴⁶² *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

it has expanded so as to apply more aptly to a historical context in which people of different religions encounter one another on a daily basis. Cyprian's main concern in third century was bringing those who had apostatized back into the community of the Church. Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, defended Cyprian's formulation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Cyprian, speaking about apostates and schismatics, said not to "think they are still in the way of life and salvation, if they will not obey the bishops and priests.... They cannot have life out of [the Church] because the house of God is one, and there cannot be salvation for any, except in the Church."⁴⁶³ Ratzinger saw the true meaning of Cyprian's statement as "the positive assertion that the episcopal structure is absolutely essential to the Church, rather than the negative statement that the majority of mankind is lost."⁴⁶⁴

Francis Sullivan further explains that one must take into account the historical conditions previous articulations of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* were addressing. The limits of geographical location convinced the early Christians that "everyone had ample opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel." Likewise, "the limits of their grasp of human psychology led them to the conviction that all those who had heard the message of the gospel and did not accept it must be guilty of sinning against the truth."⁴⁶⁵ This enables Sullivan to affirm that the "substance" of the doctrine still endures, namely that

⁴⁶³ St. Cyprian of Carthage, "Epistle LXI," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, Trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), 356.

⁴⁶⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, "Salus Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Est," *Documentatie Centrum Concilie*, Series I, no. 88 (1963), 1, cited in Matthew Ramage, "Extra Ecclesian Nulla Salus and the Substance of Catholic Doctrine: Toward a Realization of Benedict XVI's Hermeneutic of Reform," in *Nova et Vetera* 14:1 (2016), 312.

⁴⁶⁵ Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 201.

“God has assigned to the Church a necessary role in the divine economy of salvation.”⁴⁶⁶

For even though the possibility of salvation for those outside of the Church is now affirmed, this salvation still comes to non-Christians through the Church as its mediator. According to Matthew Ramage, this contemporary enunciation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (namely that there is no salvation outside the Church but non-Christians may be mysteriously oriented to the Church and therefore, be saved) would likely have met the approval of Cyprian and other early Christian figures, had they been given the knowledge we have today.⁴⁶⁷

While the affirmation of a shift from exclusivism to inclusivism is clear in the documents, the question of whether or not the Second Vatican Council’s position on the status of other religions in the process of salvation was “optimistic” has been the subject of debate. Karl Rahner held “optimism concerning salvation” as “one of the most noteworthy results of the Second Vatican Council.”⁴⁶⁸ Following Rahner, Sullivan interprets the attitude of the Council as involving “a presumption of innocence” and an “absence of culpability” on the part of those who are outside of the church.⁴⁶⁹ This presumption of innocence coupled with God’s universal salvific will would mean that the salvation of those outside the church is a probability rather than a mere possibility; and the idea that all persons are indeed saved is a likely proposition. However, more conservative interpreters, such as Ralph Martin, believe that none of the Council sources

⁴⁶⁶ Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church*, 199.

⁴⁶⁷ Matthew Ramage, “*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* and the Substance of Catholic Doctrine: Toward a Realization of Benedict XVI’s ‘Hermeneutic of Reform’” in *Nova et Vetera* 14:1 (2016), 315.

⁴⁶⁸ Karl Rahner as quoted in Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 9.

⁴⁶⁹ Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church*, 151.

indicate such a “presumption of innocence” and thus, optimists are taking too huge of a leap in assuming that the possibility of salvation means that everyone will be saved.⁴⁷⁰

Avery Cardinal Dulles also railed against “a kind of thoughtless optimism” that has prevailed since Vatican II. “Unable to grasp the rationale for eternal punishment, many Christians take it almost for granted that everyone, or practically everyone, must be saved.”⁴⁷¹ According to Dulles, “the constant teaching of the Magisterium has been that unrepentant sinners are sent to eternal punishment.” However, Dulles also held that just because it is highly improbable that all will be saved does not mean we cannot and should not hope and pray that it will happen.⁴⁷²

Even after Vatican II, discourse surrounding salvation in mainline Catholic theology is often focused on the eschatological element. It sees salvation in terms of something that is given to certain people at the time of death, rather than something

⁴⁷⁰ Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 55. The belief in universal salvation is called *apokatastasis*. Third century theologian Origen of Alexandria argued for *apokatastasis* based on 1 Cor 15:27-28, “For all things must be made subject to him” to explain his theory. Ultimately, “the goodness of God through Christ will restore his entire creation to one end.” See Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles*, Ed. John C. Cavadini and Henri de Lubac (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2013), Book I.6, p. 69-76. *Apokatastasis* also appeared in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. See Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993). While some may claim that Karl Rahner’s theology supports the theory of *apokatastasis*, Rahner remarked that “true eschatological discourse must exclude the presumptuous knowledge of a universal *apokatastasis* and the certainty of salvation of the individual before his death, as well as certain knowledge of a damnation which has actually ensued.” See Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol.4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1966), 339. However, in a 1979 interview, Rahner remarked that he wished to write about a teaching on *apokatastasis* which would be orthodox and acceptable. See Leo O’Donovan, “Living into Mystery: Karl Rahner’s Reflections at 75,” in *America* (1979), 179. Theologians John R. Sachs and Carmel McEnroy have attempted to develop Rahner’s principles into a modified form of *apokatastasis*. See John R. Sachs, “Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell,” in *Theological Studies* 52 (1991). See Carmel McEnroy, *A Rahnerian Contribution Towards an Orthodox Theology of Apokatastasis* (PhD Dissertation: University of St. Michael’s, 1984).

⁴⁷¹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, “The Population of Hell,” in *First Things* (May 2003), 40.

⁴⁷² Dulles, 40.

present in their lifetime. Such discourse has a theoretical or mechanical understanding of salvation, seeking to provide theological explanations for how salvation can be given to certain people, in spite of various so-called “impediments,” such as not being an explicit Christian. According to Dulles, “more education is needed to convince people that they ought to fear God who, as Jesus taught, can punish soul and body together in hell.”⁴⁷³ Here, Dulles is appealing to Matthew 10:28, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Such a statement may perhaps encourage some Christians to be more cautious of avoiding sin so as to escape the terrifying thought of damnation. However, it is not likely to resonate with those who no longer find plausible the notion of a God who sends people to a purely supernatural realm called heaven or hell.

Contemporary liberationist and feminist theologians challenge mainline Catholic visions of salvation by highlighting that salvation is a this-worldly reality, not merely one to be realized in the future. Liberationist theologians assert that the good news of salvation in Christ must speak to the experience of the economically impoverished. In his book *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez insists that the Christian message of salvation must be one of liberation. Liberation includes three levels: 1) social and political liberation 2) psycho-social liberation, empowering people to assume conscious responsibility for their lives and destiny 3) liberation from sin, which is the ultimate root of oppression. All three levels, he states, entail “a single, complex process, which finds

⁴⁷³ Dulles, 41.

its deepest sense in the saving work of Christ.”⁴⁷⁴ Salvation is not just about freeing people from bonds of oppression in the next life, but dealing with the causes and effects of oppression in this one. Thus, Gutierrez argues for the need to move from a “quantitative” view of salvation to a “qualitative” one. In other words, he proposes a shift away from theological speculation about the salvation of those outside of the church toward a consideration of what salvation in Christ means for this world and the next.⁴⁷⁵

Likewise, feminist theologians insist that the good news of salvation in Christ must speak to oppressed women. According to feminist theologians, androcentrism, or the attitude that men are inherently superior to women, has been prevalent throughout the development of the Christian tradition, leading to a dangerous silencing of women’s voices and concerns both in the church and society as a whole. Rosemary Radford Ruether identifies the “critical principle of feminist theology” as “the promotion of the full humanity of women.” Therefore, “whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive.” On the positive side, “what does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy, it does reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of things, the authentic message of redemption and the mission of redemptive community.”⁴⁷⁶ Clearly, in a liberationist perspective, the definition of salvation has something to do with what is happening in this life, and it must speak to the most marginalized among us.

⁴⁷⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 37, in Ryan, 137.

⁴⁷⁵ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 150-152, in Ryan, 137.

⁴⁷⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 18-19.

In line with feminist and liberationist theologies, Schillebeeckx favors narrative over theory when dealing with the topic of salvation. Instead of attempting to construct a theory about the saving work of Christ and if, how, and in what circumstances, it reaches outside of the Church, he attempts to tell the life story of Jesus as the liberating story of God to demonstrate how salvation from God has and continues to reach human beings in their concrete situations. Salvation is not merely the result of Jesus's death and resurrection, but rather salvation from God is present in the entire ministry of Jesus, the teachings, healings, exorcisms, and table fellowship with the outcast.

Rather than a theoretical and mechanical view of salvation, Schillebeeckx provides a more personal one, where salvation is a reality that touches the whole person in their embodied life. For Schillebeeckx, "there is no salvation outside the world." This notion represents an optimistic standpoint with regard to salvation, but not one that is, as Dulles would accuse, "thoughtless optimism." God's offer of salvation is a gift freely given even beyond the visible bounds of the church, but it is still one that places demands on every human being. For Schillebeeckx, how salvation from God is present amidst the sufferings of the world is a more urgent question than who is saved in the afterlife and how.

2. *From Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus to Extra Mundum Nulla Salus*

Schillebeeckx first made the declaration "outside the world, there is no salvation" in a 1989 essay honoring Gustavo Gutierrez.⁴⁷⁷ However, this statement captured what

⁴⁷⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Religious and Human Ecumene," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 180. The phrase "outside the world of men and women, there is no salvation" was used as a subtitle in Schillebeeckx's in another 1989 work where Schillebeeckx discusses the conflicts between the

has been found in Schillebeeckx's theology of creation from the beginning of his career. Indeed the nascent conception of "no salvation outside the world" can be found in one of Schillebeeckx's earliest works, *Christ The Sacrament of The Encounter with God*: "God's saving activity makes history by revealing itself, and it reveals itself by becoming history."⁴⁷⁸ Schillebeeckx defined grace as "a personal encounter with God." In doing so, he took issue with impersonal, mechanical approaches to grace that make human beings out to be merely passive recipients. Schillebeeckx insisted that while "it is only by grace, and not in virtue of our own merits" that we can truly serve God, grace still requires a human response.⁴⁷⁹ In other words, the only way we come to awareness of God's salvific action is through our embodied selves, there is no salvation outside the world.⁴⁸⁰

For Schillebeeckx, creation is the "foundation of all theology."⁴⁸¹ According to Martin Poulson, Schillebeeckx's theology expressed the need to "restore a balance between creation and redemption."⁴⁸² As mentioned earlier, the Catholic tradition has

Magisterium and Dutch Catholicism. See *For the Sake of the Gospel* (SCM Press, 1989). This phrase is also used in the last book of Schillebeeckx's Christological Trilogy. See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

⁴⁷⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 1: Christ The Sacrament of Encounter with God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3.

⁴⁷⁹ Schillebeeckx, CSE, 2-3.

⁴⁸⁰ It is important to note that Schillebeeckx's writing during this period was influenced by his encounter with existential phenomenology, which upheld that the human person can only create meaning in the world and history if the future is an open question and a personal risk. Schillebeeckx sought to argue against French existential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who claimed that only apart from Christian theology of history could the freedom of the human person be secured in history with a genuine future. See Steven Rodenborn, *Hope in Action: Subversive Eschatology in the Theologies of Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz* (PhD Dissertation: University of Notre Dame, 2009), 76; 87. See also Schillebeeckx "The Intellectual's Responsibility for the Future," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, vol 4: World and Church*, ed. Schoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 1966), 207-16. originally published as *Wereld en Kerk* (Bilthoven: Uitgeverij H. Nelissen, 1966).

⁴⁸¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 47.

⁴⁸² See also Martin Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation: Creation and the Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-2.

tended to over-emphasize the supernatural and eschatological dimensions of salvation. Oftentimes, salvation is understood as something human beings only “need” due to some kind of lack or failure on their part, and this something, rather than being graciously gifted to humanity, is reserved for certain persons who fit certain categories, even if such categories have expanded since Vatican II to account for phenomena like “anonymous Christianity.” Such a view of salvation stems from a literal reading of Genesis 3 and a theological anthropology in which death or human finitude is seen as punishment for Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God. Thus, God’s work of redemption has historically been tied to the “fall of humanity.” In the third century, Athanasius asserted that the disobedience of humanity is the reason for the incarnation. A century later, Augustine claimed, “God foreknew that the first man would sin” and “He at the same time foresaw how a large multitude of godly persons would by His grace be translated to the fellowship of angels.”⁴⁸³ Certainly, most contemporary Christian theologians no longer read Genesis as a historical account of creation.⁴⁸⁴ However, Schillebeeckx believed that too strong of a connection between redemption and human sin still persists. For example, Schillebeeckx strove to distinguish his position from that of the Dutch Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof (1873-1957). Berkhof insisted that it is only possible to talk

⁴⁸³ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dodds (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014), Book XII, 21.

⁴⁸⁴ For example, Karl Rahner stated that “the biblical story about the sin of the first person or first persons in no way has to be understood as an historical, eyewitness report.” Original sin, therefore, “expresses nothing else but the historical origin of the present, universal and ineradicable situation of our freedom as co-determined by guilt.” See *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (Crossroad, New York, 1990), 114.

about creation from the standpoint of redemption, since outside of the redemption human nature is corrupt.⁴⁸⁵

Schillebeeckx reversed Berkhof's argument and instead claimed that we can only speak of redemption from the standpoint of creation. According to Schillebeeckx, the beginning of the history of human liberation coincides with the beginning of creation. Schillebeeckx firmly rejected the notion of a "fall" of humanity and his preferred point of departure was "the fundamental goodness of creation." This does not mean that Schillebeeckx denied the existence of human sin, but rather he wanted to emphasize that human goodness is not cancelled out by human transgression.⁴⁸⁶ Finitude, he believed, is not a punishment for human sin, but rather the logical outcome of creation. If God is Creator, God creates what is not divine, what is finite.⁴⁸⁷ Human finitude is what distinguishes humanity and God. Departing from Augustine, Schillebeeckx declared that it is mistaken to view finitude as a wound. Salvation from God is not a salvation *from* finitude but the reality that God "is concerned to be our God in our humanity and for our humanity, in and with our finitude." Humanity is not an error or failure. Rather than lamenting our condition, we "recognize the divinity of God in the recognition and acceptance of our limits and those of nature and history."⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 72.

⁴⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 72.

⁴⁸⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 8: Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 100, originally published as *Tussentijds verhaal over Jezus boeken* (Bloemendaal, 1978). Karl Rahner also affirmed that "it is to be taken for granted that man without guilt would also have lived out his life in and through freedom and into something final and definitive, and in the sense would have "died." Though he did believe that toil, ignorance, sickness, pain and death would not be present in an existence without guilt in the same way as we actually experience them. See *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 115.

⁴⁸⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 101.

In declaring that there is “no salvation outside the world,” Schillebeeckx wanted to illustrate that it is in “the history of human beings and the life of human beings who hold on to one another or let one another go” that the cause of salvation or damnation is decided.”⁴⁸⁹ According to Schillebeeckx, the process of liberation in human history is the medium and material of divine revelation. Believers then interpret that element of human liberation in relation to God, which enables them to confess that “God has brought redemption in and through human beings.”⁴⁹⁰ Prior to considering whether or not there is salvation with or without the church, it must be affirmed that without the material of the created world through which God reveals God’s self to us, there can be no salvation. Since history is the material in which and through which God prepares our salvation, there can be no demarcation between sacred and secular. Secular history is the place where God is revealed. While believers see the face of God in this history and unbelievers do not, “at the level of human liberation (the material of God’s revelation) that process can be discussed by both believers and unbelievers in a common language.”⁴⁹¹ Schillebeeckx maintained that God’s initiative in salvation is a constant reality, one that is independent of our human consciousness of it.⁴⁹² Human existence is a promise of salvation, regardless of whether one accepts or denies it.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ Schillebeeckx, *For the Sake of the Gospel*, 152.

⁴⁹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 7.

⁴⁹¹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 7.

⁴⁹² Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 12.

⁴⁹³ Schillebeeckx, Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 47.

Schillebeeckx's understanding of creation rests on his absolute opposition to the dualism often assumed between "above" (what comes directly from God) and "below" (what arises from human choices).⁴⁹⁴ Creation is not a past action by God that has been passively received by humanity once and for all. Neither can creation be viewed as a divine blueprint for humanity, with pre-determined expectations and results. Rather, the relationship between God and humanity in the act of creation can be described as a partnership. Creation is still ongoing, and humans are called to participate in it. There is no rivalry here between God the Creator and human creativity, and thus creation presupposes contribution, freedom and initiative from both sides.

Schillebeeckx referred to creation as "a blank cheque for which God himself and God alone stands surety. It is God's vote of confidence in mankind."⁴⁹⁵ By creating human beings with their own finite and free will, God voluntarily renounces power. In this sense, although God is always present to save us beyond the limits of our finitude, God is dependent on human beings and, to a certain degree, vulnerable. Schillebeeckx asserted that the historical future is not known, even to God.⁴⁹⁶ Created in the image of God, human beings are not conservers or discoverers of what is already given, but rather "the principle of their own human lives" who through their actions develop and realize the world and its future in contingent, chance, and specific situations. With free will, of course, humans are left with the opportunity to choose between many alternatives,

⁴⁹⁴ See Mary Hines, "Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ," in *Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert J. Schreiter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 151.

⁴⁹⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 110.

⁴⁹⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 88.

including between good and evil, a distinction which Schillebeeckx insisted “does not precede this freedom but which human beings, by their free choice, bring to light without being its source.”⁴⁹⁷

Therefore, creation cannot be regarded as an explanation for the origins of the world. If God were to be considered an explanation of the way things are, any attempt to change the status quo would be rendered “blasphemous.”⁴⁹⁸ God’s act of creation is unconditional and absolutely free, it is pure gift.⁴⁹⁹ Nevertheless, it is also a responsibility. God cannot be a stop-gap expected to solve all of humanity’s problems or explain everything that happens as if it is God’s will. The transformation of the world lies in the hands of finite humanity. God can never be an excuse for our lack of action in the face of oppression and injustice, and building a better society. In the midst of suffering, humans often ask where God is. Schillebeeckx saw this as the wrong question. Rather, he insisted that it is God who asks human beings, “where are you? What have you done with your history?”⁵⁰⁰

While Schillebeeckx held that we experience and feel God’s presence, we cannot make direct contact with God in either nature or in ordinary human history. This realization is not an argument in favor of atheism, but “in a certain respect an expression of reverence towards God; namely, a growing recognition of the fact that God transcends this world.”⁵⁰¹ God is not the world and nothing we come into contact with in this world

⁴⁹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 229.

⁴⁹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 228.

⁴⁹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 228.

⁵⁰⁰ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 112.

⁵⁰¹ Schillebeeckx, “The Search for the Living God,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*, Ed. Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York:

can ever be God, though certain signs may help direct our attention toward God, whose superabundant reality is ultimately beyond all names and symbols.

B. Salvation: Both This-Worldly and Reserved for the Future

If creation is a continuous activity in which humans are called to participate, so is salvation. Salvation, for Schillebeeckx, cannot be regarded merely as “the salvation of souls,” a destiny put off until the afterlife. Rather, it must be the healing and making whole of the entire person in this world and therefore includes, though is not exhausted by, ecological, social, and political aspects. It requires not only inner renewal, but a renewal and improvement of social structures.⁵⁰² This means that salvation, like creation, is never defined and determined once and for all, but rather takes shape as a response to ever-changing situations that arise in our finite and contingent world.

In Christianity, the term salvation is associated with the “kingdom of God.” According to Schillebeeckx, the “kingdom of God” was the main content of Jesus’ preaching and ministry. Jesus enacted the kingdom in his person during his time on earth, yet also affirmed that the fulfillment of the kingdom lay in the future, beyond this world. The Our Father prayer that Jesus taught his disciples makes explicit that the kingdom of God is a reality that is both already here and still to come.

Our Father, hallowed be they name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins; for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation (Luke 11:2-5, cf. Matthew 6:9-13).

Bloomsbury, 2014), 44. Originally “Op zoek naar de levende God,” [Lecture on acceptance of the post-ordinary professor of dogmatic theology at the R.C University of Nijmegen on Friday 9 May 1958], Utrecht, Nijmegen: Deeker van de Veget, 1959.

⁵⁰² Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 50.

The words “Thy kingdom come” and “Hallowed be thy name” are, what Schillebeeckx called, eschatological prayer formula, looking forward to the end time, or fulfillment. However, the words “give us this day” signal that the kingdom of God breaks through now. Schillebeeckx maintained, “[the kingdom of God] is already here and it is manifested in the fact that others forgive us our guilt and sin and that we forgive others.”⁵⁰³

The kingdom of God is not simply good news that we can passively await, but something that we are supposed to work to bring about here. Therefore, echoing Gustavo Gutierrez, Schillebeeckx saw salvation from God as both a gift and a task. To illustrate this, Schillebeeckx pointed to the New Testament understanding of grace. Grace is not dependent on the human will or human exertion, as if we bring it about ourselves. “So it depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy (Romans 9:16).” However, this grace must become fruitful for us in moral and religious action. “Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that *we may bear fruit for God* (Romans 7:4).” The apostle Paul urged the early Christian community not to “accept the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6:1).” Paul, illustrating the cooperation between divine and human creativity, exclaimed, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me (1 Cor 15:10).”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰³ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 41.

⁵⁰⁴ See Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 519.

The kingdom of God, for Schillebeeckx, implies liberation. Yet, Schillebeeckx insisted that before it is possible to understand what Christians mean by liberation, it is necessary to have already experienced some form of it. He asked, “for what can love of God mean to anyone who has never been the object of a liberating love from a fellow man, who has never experienced human love?”⁵⁰⁵ During Jesus’ time, his personification of the kingdom of God came through healing diseases, exorcisms, table-fellowship with prostitutes and tax collectors, and opposition to government authority that oppressed the poor and marginalized. Schillebeeckx stressed that it is Jesus who redeems us, not the Christological titles applied to him.⁵⁰⁶ We cannot discover the meaning of Jesus’s career solely through these terms. The personal career of Jesus of Nazareth interprets what titles like Messiah, Son of God, and Lord mean.⁵⁰⁷ That salvation from God is found in Jesus, and Jesus confessed as Christ, is not an abstract idea but is grounded on Jesus’s concrete actions on behalf of the kingdom of God in response to the problems and anxieties of his socio-historical context.⁵⁰⁸ In other words, the belief that God’s salvation was brought about definitively in Jesus Christ only came about because of the earliest disciple’s experience of being touched and healed by Jesus. Hope and belief in eschatological

⁵⁰⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 740.

⁵⁰⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Human Ecumene,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 185.

⁵⁰⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 106. In the book *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Schillebeeckx asserted that Jesus saw himself not in a messianic role, but as an eschatological prophet. See *Jesus*, 217. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith took issue with this presentation of Jesus by Schillebeeckx. See, “Questions on the book *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* addressed to Reverend Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, in *The Schillebeeckx Case*, ed. Ted Schoof (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 28-29.

⁵⁰⁸ See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 176.

salvation are only possible if salvation is experienced in the real lives of human beings.

This was true for the earliest Christians, and it is true for our own context here and now.

Eschatological salvation still ultimately remains a mystery., but “a mystery is not an entirely unknown quality. Enough of it is revealed in a veiled manner for us to be able to live from it.”⁵⁰⁹ Eschatological salvation must be more than the human mind can possibly conceive, but it also must bear some relation to what human beings experience to be salvific or healing in this world. Citing the Dutch Calvinist theologian Harry Kuitert, Schillebeeckx asserted that we must have a “lowest limit” of the Christian concept of salvation, “it must at least be earthly salvation.”⁵¹⁰

Thus, there is an interdependence and unbreakable connection between the partial experiences of salvation in this world and eschatological, or final salvation.

Schillebeeckx averred, “eschatological or final salvation-let us call it heaven-takes shape from what [human beings] on earth achieve as salvation for their fellow [human beings].”⁵¹¹ For Schillebeeckx, there can be no question of a theory of salvation detached from any practice.⁵¹² Belief in eternal life is no longer taken for granted as it was in previous eras. So, eternal life needs to be based on earthly, temporal presuppositions and beginnings in order to be experienced as meaningful and capable of being discussed today in human terms. In contemporary society, “we cannot really trust God over our

⁵⁰⁹ Schillebeeckx, “What is Theology?,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 73, first published as “Theologie,” in *Theologisch Woordenboek III* (Roermond and Maaseik, 1958), cols. 4485-542.

⁵¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 751.

⁵¹¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 789.

⁵¹² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 33.

hereafter if we cannot build on him here and now on earth for the immediate future.”⁵¹³

No longer is the foundation for eternal life the spiritual soul, but rather the theological life, the life of communion with God.⁵¹⁴

In grounding salvation in creation, Schillebeeckx took his definition of what creation means from the second-century bishop St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus declared, “The glory of God is the happiness of living humankind; but the happiness of humankind is the living of God.”⁵¹⁵ Human beings are intended by God to have God as their ultimate end and happiness, but God desires human flourishing not just in the afterlife, but also in this one. Neglect of salvation as a this-worldly phenomenon not only turns eschatological hope into a delusion or mythical fantasy, but also dangerously absolves humanity of its responsibility to bring about healing and liberation where it is needed now.

C. Jesus Christ as the Assurance of Eschatological Salvation Even in a Pluralist World

If the this-worldly dimension of salvation is so crucial, one may wonder if belief in a final or eschatological salvation is even necessary or worthwhile. In other words, one may ask, could we not get along just as well, or even better, without it? Furthermore, in a religiously pluralist world, one may inquire if it is still possible to claim that Jesus Christ plays a definitive role in eschatological salvation without discriminating against non-Christian religions. Can Jesus still be declared a universal Savior?

⁵¹³ Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 139.

⁵¹⁴ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 63.

⁵¹⁵ Philip Kennedy, “God and Creation,” in *Praxis of the Reign of God*, ed. Hilkert and Schreier (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 47. See Schillebeeckx, *For the Sake of the Gospel* (SCM Press, 1989), 58.

Schillebeeckx's position on the role of Jesus Christ and the Church in eschatological salvation shifted throughout his career in response to the increasing concerns of the modern situation of religious pluralism. However, it is important to note that Schillebeeckx, even in his earliest writings, was never an exclusivist. Schillebeeckx also never moved to a pluralist position that abandons belief in the universal and definitive role of Jesus Christ. That is to say, Schillebeeckx always remained representative of an inclusivist standpoint.

In his early work, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*, Schillebeeckx described Jesus as the "primordial sacrament." As the personal visible realization of the divine grace of redemption, Jesus "is intended by the Father to be in his humanity the only way to the actuality of redemption."⁵¹⁶ Jesus, for Schillebeeckx, is the norm and source of every encounter with God. Jesus, he wrote, "is not only the offer of divine love to man made visible but, at the same time, as prototype (or primordial model) he is the supreme realization of the response to human love to this divine offer." Religion, he concluded, "can only be understood in the context of the incarnation of God the Son."⁵¹⁷ In this early work, there is little to no mention of what these statements might mean in relation to non-Christians and non-believers. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, Schillebeeckx's work prior to the Second Vatican Council has been described as his "dogmatic period," where he placed much more emphasis on the church and its teachings. He described the church as the visible realization of God's saving reality in

⁵¹⁶ Schillebeeckx, CSE, 11.

⁵¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, CSE, 11.

history. He did affirm that “not only the hierarchal Church but also the community of the faithful belong to this grace-giving sign that is the Church,”⁵¹⁸ but did not consider the church’s relationship to those who are not members. This began to change after the Second Vatican Council and during Schillebeeckx’s lecture tour in the United States in the late 1960s.

In his 1968 lecture, “Toward a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics,” given three years after the close of Vatican II, Schillebeeckx wanted to assert the need for a hermeneutics of history, in which the past is interpreted in light of the present. Each person must be conscious that he or she approaches biblical texts with a certain pre-understanding and that the possibility of understanding is accomplished in the possible correction of our pre-understanding. Even here, Schillebeeckx still insisted that for a Christian, “the eschatological kerygma of Christ is a situation that is constant and cannot be superseded.”⁵¹⁹

In another lecture given that same year, Schillebeeckx explained that fundamental changes have taken place with regard to the church’s understanding of herself. Among these are the recognition that the idea of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has been superseded, the recognition of the ecclesial character of non-Catholic communities, the recognition of the authentic religious aspect of non-Christian religions, and the awareness of that God’s

⁵¹⁸ Schillebeeckx, CSE, 33.

⁵¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 17-21

saving presence is experienced in secular, political, and social events.⁵²⁰ The church's existence as a sacrament is still maintained, but the church's role as a sacrament is now expanded to include and reach those outside of the church. The church is the sacrament of dialogue, of communication between human beings. As such, the church may still assert that the fullness of God's promise of salvation rests on her, but cannot claim that she is always right. The church needs to dialogue with the world and human society in order to fulfill her role and present her unique message to the world.⁵²¹ This dialogue must also be reciprocal, it cannot be the communication of a "teaching church" to a "learning world" but an interrelationship in which both listen to one another and make a mutual contribution.⁵²²

In the first book of his Christological Trilogy, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Schillebeeckx asked the question, "what does salvation in Jesus mean for us now?" This question is prompted by the recognition that the notion that all true salvation comes from Jesus alone is problematic in the context of secularization and religious pluralism, since "apart from Jesus Christ, there are a number of factors in our lives which, as a matter of historical truth, do induce well-being and do indeed heal a person or make him whole."⁵²³ Jesus cannot be the monopoly of Christian churches, and non-Christian interpretations of Jesus remind us that Jesus has and must have something to say at the

⁵²⁰ Schillebeeckx, "The Church as a Sacrament of Dialogue," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 72-73.

⁵²¹ Schillebeeckx, "The Church as Sacrament of Dialogue," 75.

⁵²² Schillebeeckx, "The Church as Sacrament of Dialogue," 76.

⁵²³ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 7.

human level.⁵²⁴ Here, Schillebeeckx is not denying that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have universal significance for the salvation of all humankind. However, he does articulate that our understanding of what constitutes the salvation Jesus brings is impossible without taking into account how it relates to us here and now. “The material content of what, ‘good news,’ salvation and gospel, is concretely for us will change according to our concrete experience of its opposite.”⁵²⁵

In his sequel to the *Jesus* book, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, Schillebeeckx lamented that Jesus is too often explained to us as salvation in grace in terms which are no longer valid from our world of experience. Nevertheless, the Christian must hold on to the conviction that “in Jesus Christ is experienced decisive salvation from God.”⁵²⁶ This conviction does not come about simply because past authorities tell us so, but because people in their own particular situations still continue to experience God’s salvation in Jesus. Jesus’s eschatological significance, therefore, is not something the Christian can prove theoretically. It is an act of faith, whose “proof” is shown through Christian praxis that builds up the kingdom of God. Yet, this praxis does not come from Christians alone. It can and must be enhanced by those who belong to different traditions, as well as by politics, science, and the social sciences. Schillebeeckx insisted that, “believers begin to catch a glimpse of new dimensions to their own Christian tradition, precisely as a result of the introduction of new stimuli from outside, stimuli which in fact may have been alien to their tradition.”⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 10.

⁵²⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 92.

⁵²⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 49.

⁵²⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 770-71.

What can be witnessed in the evolution of Schillebeeckx's theology thus far is the continuous movement toward what he refers to as a "negative ecclesiology, church theology in a minor key, in order to do away with the centuries-long ecclesiocentrism of the empirical phenomenon of the Christian religion." Schillebeeckx explicitly stated this intent in his 1987 work *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions*, saying that the church as an institution never exists for itself.⁵²⁸ Salvation from God comes about in the worldly reality of history, not primarily in religions. Here, Schillebeeckx moves from calling the church the sacrament of salvation to referring to "religions and churches" as "the sacrament of salvation." They are not salvation themselves, but churches and religions have an indispensable function. Churches, as well as synagogues, mosques, pagodas, all prevent the universal saving presence of God from being forgotten.⁵²⁹ Nevertheless, while acknowledging that encounters with God take place outside of Christianity, Schillebeeckx still affirmed that Jesus is the place where God has revealed himself in a decisive way as salvation of and for human beings. However, Jesus's decisiveness does not make him absolute. Jesus, as fully human, is a particular and therefore, limited manifestation of God's presence. Therefore, the incarnation alone does not capture the fullness of God's riches. No historical particularity, including Jesus, can be called absolute. "The risen Jesus of Nazareth keeps pointing beyond himself to God."⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, xix.

⁵²⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 31-33.

⁵³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *The Religious and Human Ecumene*, 183-84.

In his later theology, we can see that Schillebeeckx concerned himself more and more with the question of how Christianity can maintain its own identity and uniqueness and at the same time ascribe a positive value to the diversity of religions in a non-discriminating way.⁵³¹ Schillebeeckx, however, did not view the plurality of religion as a problem that needed to be solved. For him, religious pluralism was not an evil that goes against the will of God, but rather “a fructifying richness to be welcomed by all.”⁵³² This reality creates a tension between the church’s previous declarations of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* and the tone of the Second Vatican Council, which affirms that those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or the church, may achieve eternal salvation. While Schillebeeckx acknowledges that some theologians try reconcile these two positions, he maintains that they are “diametrically opposed.”⁵³³ This intimates that he believes the church can and does need to change and adapt in response to historical and cultural movements.

In the final book of his Christological Trilogy, *Church: The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx’s main interest is the need for Christians to be able to explain why Jesus is the only way of life for them, even though God leaves other ways of salvation open for others.⁵³⁴ By the time of the publication of *Church* (the Dutch edition *Mensen als Verhaal van God* was released in 1989), Schillebeeckx seems to have been aware of the rise of postmodern thinking, asserting that in contemporary society, it is now impossible to live with “the unshaken certainty that one continues to possess the truth oneself while

⁵³¹ Schillebeeckx, *The Religious and Human Ecumene*, 183.

⁵³² Schillebeeckx, *The Religious and Human Ecumene*, 184.

⁵³³ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, xvii.

⁵³⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 43.

others are mistaken.”⁵³⁵ In other words, “modern believers know that there is also truth about other convictions about life.”⁵³⁶ It is no longer culturally possible to adhere to *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. For many Christians, especially the younger generation, the uniqueness of Jesus must be expressed in a way that does not discriminate against other religions.

For Schillebeeckx, one’s faith, even if one believes wholeheartedly that one’s religion is the fullest expression of truth, can never be used as an imperialistic tool. Faith is not based on rational arguments meant to show the superiority of one religion to other solution. A responsible faith, wrote Schillebeeckx, “is not a matter of looking for rational proofs for faith, but of making understandable to fellow-believers and non-believers what is meant by talk about God.”⁵³⁷

Earlier, I mentioned that Schillebeeckx referred to creation as God’s “vote of confidence in humankind.” For Christians, Jesus is the one in whom “God’s risky trust in human beings is not put to shame. Despite everything — despite even the execution of the eschatological prophet — God’s kingdom does come. Jesus’ person, his life, death and resurrection, are the kingdom’s inauguration.”⁵³⁸ Thus, for Christians, “Jesus has a normative or essential relationship to the universal kingdom of God for all men and women.”⁵³⁹ Nevertheless, making the Christian claim that Jesus is the universal redeemer endows Christians with the responsibility of bringing forth the fruits of the kingdom of

⁵³⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 50.

⁵³⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 49.

⁵³⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 80

⁵³⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 141.

⁵³⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 142.

God.⁵⁴⁰ Christians are not supposed to merely preach “the good news,” but enact it. Salvation founded in Christ as a promise for all becomes universal not because of an abstract, universal idea, or a message from on high, but “by the power of its cognitive, critical and liberating character.”⁵⁴¹ Therefore, the uniqueness of Jesus is not a purely speculative or theoretical universality, but one which can be realized in fragments in our history.

The church’s mission is not dependent on the conviction that Christianity is superior to other religions. The church, writes Schillebeeckx, is not salvation, but a sign of it. “The church is an actual minority which is there to serve a majority and is not concerned with winning as many as souls as possible for itself.”⁵⁴² The purpose of the church is not to gain the most converts or to make everyone else come to the same convictions and beliefs, but to make salvation from God in Jesus Christ present to the whole world through service to humankind. According to Schillebeeckx,

This means that Christianity with its message and own way of life is not a categorical imperative for men and women but an ‘offer,’ and in this way, in its distinctiveness, is also dialogue with and possible criticism and provocation of other religions, which in their turn put equally critical and provocative questions to Christianity in the dialogue.⁵⁴³

Some of the statements made in Schillebeeckx’s later work, may, at first glance, appear to be shifting to a pluralist position.⁵⁴⁴ In 1994, Schillebeeckx wrote that

⁵⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 167.

⁵⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 174.

⁵⁴² Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 182.

⁵⁴³ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 184.

⁵⁴⁴ Some theologians have made the case that Schillebeeckx, in his later work, moved beyond inclusivism into a pluralist position, including John Hick, Paul Knitter, Dorothy Jacko, and Roger Haight. See John Hick, “Trinity and Incarnation in the Light of Religious Pluralism” in *Three Faiths One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter*, ed. John Hick and Edmund S. Meltze (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 208-209; Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global*

“salvation is not exclusively linked to Jesus himself, for the God he confessed was experienced by him as love of all people. God did not become that only with the coming of Jesus; that would have spelled the end of the value and meaning of all other world religions.”⁵⁴⁵ Yet, this does not mean that Christians would do just as well without Jesus, or that Jesus’s unique role in salvation history can be downplayed. Even as late as 1997, Schillebeeckx still upheld that eliminating the Christian claim to absolute truth cannot and should not mean denying the eschatological character of Jesus. “God’s final or eschatological form of salvation-bringing revelation is mediated through Jesus, the Christ.”⁵⁴⁶ Jesus of Nazareth is historically and culturally limited, and therefore, not the only way through which one can encounter God. Nevertheless, Jesus is the historically and culturally limited, situated expression of salvation for *all people*.⁵⁴⁷

While Schillebeeckx became increasingly open to other religions throughout his career, he never abandoned his confession of Jesus’s unique role in eschatological

Responsibility (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 29. John Dunn rejects this interpretation and insists that Schillebeeckx does not move beyond inclusivism. See *Jesus Christ as Universal Savior in Edward Schillebeeckx* (PhD Dissertation: Catholic University of America, 1992), 453. Lieven Boeve also insists that Schillebeeckx maintains an inclusivist position throughout his career: in the end the Christian truth claim is the criterion for all other truth claims. See, for example, Schillebeeckx, “Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus,” *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 30 (1990) 259-275. See Boeve, “Experience According to Edward Schillebeeckx: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology,” in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, Ed. Lieven Boeve & Laurence P. Hemmeing (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 220-221, footnote 61. Diane Steele takes a position in between. She insists that “Schillebeeckx has clearly stated his intention to move beyond inclusivism, but has yet to work out all of the implications of this position.” See *Creation and the Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), 369-70.

⁵⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, “Theological Quests,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*. Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 130. Originally published in *Theologisch testament. Notarieel nog niet verleden* (Baarn: Nelissen, 1994), Part 2.

⁵⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx, “The Uniqueness of Christ and the Interreligious Dialogue,” *Report to Catholic Academy in Munich, Bavaria* (April 22, 1997), 12.

⁵⁴⁷ Schillebeeckx, “Uniqueness of Christ,” 31. When Schillebeeckx states that Jesus is the expression of salvation for all people, this includes both the living and the dead. This is the meaning of the mention that Jesus “descended into hell” found in the Christian creed. See *Interim Report*, 118-19.

salvation. Schillebeeckx certainly wanted to affirm that human beings' ability to perform acts of liberation is neither dependent on belief in God, nor based on belief in an eschatological fulfillment of world history. Indeed, the work done by atheists and agnostics for the betterment of humankind can be just as fruitful and sometimes, even more efficacious, than that of an avowed believer.⁵⁴⁸ But, this does not mean that belief in the eschatological dimension of salvation does not contain any truth or value for the contemporary world. Schillebeeckx's response to the question raised at the beginning of this section would be that human beings are better off living with eschatological hope rather than without it.

While we may experience glimpses of salvation in this world, it is crucial to remember that any and all forms of earthly salvation are and always will be only partial. Due to our finitude and contingency, all human actions inevitably fall short. Time and resources are limited, unforeseen events occur, and positive efforts sometimes meet with harsh, and even violent, resistance. Everyday life is filled with the unexpected, from the simple cancellation of outdoor plans due to a thunderstorm, to the more disturbing realities of sudden illness or the tragic loss of a loved one.

Salvation, defined by Schillebeeckx, is "the conquest of all human, personal and social alienations." It is human wholeness. Yet, "alienation in human life cannot be completely overcome either personally or socially." There is human hurt for which no social or political cure exists.⁵⁴⁹ Even with the best of plans and intentions, not all human

⁵⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, *For the Sake of the Gospel* (SCM Press, 1989), 164

⁵⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 810. See also *Jesus*, 585.

problems can be solved by human action alone. Ultimately, human finitude is inescapable. Social and political action may work to make people's quality of life better and may even prevent premature death or illness, but it cannot take away the loneliness and anguish that all humans face at the prospect of their own mortality, nor can such action erase the traumatic scars of past suffering.

Even Jesus, Schillebeeckx pointed out, had to cope with the bitter experience of failure.⁵⁵⁰ Jesus's preaching and ministry met with opposition, so much so that he was publicly condemned and executed. However, according to Schillebeeckx, "Jesus was successful by virtue of his living communion with God, which is stronger than death."⁵⁵¹ From God's standpoint, there is no failure. "Religious communion with God robs purely human experience of its presumption to have the last word." Entrusting one's failures to God does not whitewash human pain and suffering, but rather affirms one's faith that God is present in and greater than our human weaknesses. Human action is risky, and when plans do not go as we hoped or expected, it can easily lead to despair. Yet, "as that intrinsic consequence of the radicalism of its message and reconciling practice, the crucifixion of Jesus shows that any attempt at liberating redemption which is concerned with humanity is valid in and of itself and not subsequently as a result of any success which may follow."⁵⁵²

Redemption, in this sense, can still be seen, in the words of Gutierrez, as a task imposed upon us. Yet, it is a task that still remains "a reconciliation to be realized, which

⁵⁵⁰ See *Christ*, 820

⁵⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 821.

⁵⁵² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 832.

will constantly be molded by failure, suffering and death in the refractoriness of our history- by a love which is impotent in this world but which will never give in.”⁵⁵³ That final salvation has not arrived, and is still yet to come, serves a reminder that no human person, group, institution, or program of action can be identified with the fulfillment of human history. If any socio-political liberation claims to be total, “it essentially becomes a new form of servitude and slavery.”⁵⁵⁴ Human projects are always subject to critique, and must be amended in order to better serve an ever-changing world. New ideas in response to new problems and insights are unavoidably essential. Although human effort is required for pushing humanity toward the kingdom of God and certainly plays a role in shaping the future for better or worse, the future is never completely the product of human planning and achievement. God alone, Schillebeeckx claimed, is the Lord of history.⁵⁵⁵ For him, “God is new each day” and “is a constant source of new possibilities.”⁵⁵⁶

Although God’s saving presence is co-existent with creation and precedes the incarnation, this does not detract from the unique role of Jesus Christ as expressed by Christians. Logically, Schillebeeckx wrote, “should there be a definitive and decisive saving action of God in our history, then it will be achieved in experienceable, historical events, interpreted and enunciated in the language of faith.”⁵⁵⁷ In the human life of Jesus, a decisive sign of definitive salvation did appear in our history. Here, the ultimate point

⁵⁵³ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 832.

⁵⁵⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 741.

⁵⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 104.

⁵⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 31.

⁵⁵⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 596.

of human existence has been disclosed in word and action. Of course, this is only revealed in “the interpretive act of faith” of those who understand and accept Jesus as definitive for their understanding of themselves and of reality.⁵⁵⁸ This explains why Christians may make claims about Jesus that are not shared by members of other traditions. God’s revelation in Jesus is neither a scientifically verifiable fact nor a supernatural truth forced upon humanity from on high, but one which comes to Christians in and through their own experience and requires a response in faith.

In light of humanity’s inability to bring about total liberation, for Christians, Jesus becomes the “positive guarantor” of the kingdom of God in its final form, in which all forms of oppression, pain, and suffering shall be no more.⁵⁵⁹ Death is an inescapable and incomprehensible human reality, which shows that “men and women are beings who in the end cannot by themselves realize their own nature, promised and in the future.” In going before us, Jesus makes possible our confidence that “God’s living presence is stronger and penetrates further than the absurdity of death.”⁵⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx thus referred to Christology as “concentrated creation” or the “belief in creation as God wills it to be.” Only through Christ, wrote Schillebeeckx, “do we begin to realize that there is more to God than might otherwise have been expected. God, the creator, the one in whom we can trust, is liberating love for humanity, in a way that fulfills and transcends all human, personal, social, and political expectations.”⁵⁶¹ Thus, even in the midst of

⁵⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 596.

⁵⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 108.

⁵⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us*, 146-47.

⁵⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 112. For a more in-depth study of Schillebeeckx’s theology of creation, see Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus: The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1993).

religious pluralism, the Christian should not give up the deepest conviction of his or her life, since it is precisely this that is the source of eschatological hope.

When Schillebeeckx insisted that no human program or institution can be equated with eschatological salvation, he meant the Catholic Church, as well as all other churches and religions. However, even though salvation does not primarily come about through churches and religions, they still have an indispensable function, as sacraments or signs of salvation. Churches, in particular, are called to be “places where salvation from God is expressed, explicitly confessed, proclaimed prophetically and celebrated in liturgy, with the aim of also in fact realizing salvation for men and women in everyday life.”⁵⁶² This communal celebration, which consists of an openness to eschatological liberation and salvation that entails more than individual and socio-political liberation, is a fragmentary and partial actualization of the kingdom.⁵⁶³

According to Schillebeeckx, the universal and definitive significance of Jesus’ message and way of life demands the existence of the church. Jesus’s earthly mission had to be continued by his disciples beyond Jesus’ lifetime. Thus, the origin of the church may be seen by believers “as the work of God, who in Jesus through the Spirit is establishing his eschatological people.”⁵⁶⁴ Yet, this does not mean that particular forms of the church, as they have become structured and developed throughout history, go back

⁵⁶² Edward Schillebeeckx, *For the Sake of the Gospel* (SCM Press, 1989), 152-53.

⁵⁶³ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Towards a Rediscovery of the Christian Sacraments: Ritualizing Religious Elements in Daily Life,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 208, Originally published as “Naar een herontdekking van de christelijke sacramenten,” in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 40 (2000): 164-87.

⁵⁶⁴ See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 153-55.

to Jesus. It does mean, however, that the church is constantly in need of renewal, and strict adherence to certain rules, structures, and practices may indeed be causing harm. This is especially the case when the church has, at times, failed to be a “sacrament of salvation.” Schillebeeckx observed that instead of bearing “prophetic witness to Jesus,” the church often “invests itself with royal power.” Seeking to increase its own authority, it often places emphasis on “the exalted Jesus who sits in power” rather than the Jesus who came to serve the poor and to serve sinners.⁵⁶⁵

In spite of these failings, Christians need not lose all hope in the church nor leave it altogether. According to Schillebeeckx, “God fulfills his promise of faithfulness to his church throughout the centuries in and through man’s imperfection.”⁵⁶⁶ God’s fidelity to the church is not dependent on human perfection, nor is it an empirical fact. Rather, it is an experience that requires the assent of faith. The church, as a sacrament of salvation, does not magically produce an experience of God from out of nothing. Rather, the liturgy of the church presupposes the existence of religious experiences within ordinary human life, for it is in these experiences that revelation comes to us. Schillebeeckx asserted, “We cannot suddenly experience God in the church’s liturgy if we never perceive God outside the church in our everyday experiences of our fellow human beings and the world.”⁵⁶⁷ In other words, the affirmation of “no salvation outside the world” is compatible with

⁵⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 58-59. Here, Schillebeeckx also admits that the Church can at times even be “an obstacle to salvation.”

⁵⁶⁶ Schillebeeckx, “The Interpretation of the Future,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 18, originally published in *Concilium* 5:1 (Jan 1969): 22-29.

⁵⁶⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 25.

Christian devotion to the unique role of Jesus Christ in the history of salvation, and the indispensable role of the church in carrying forth that belief in today's world.

D. If it is Truly Salvation, It Must Be Communal

Salvation, both in its this-worldly and eschatological dimensions, is not something to be sought selfishly for one's own personal gain, but rather a communal reality, a vision of wholeness that encompasses all of creation. Yet, just how communal salvation is meant to be accomplished presents a challenge to us in a world where our fellow human beings are the cause of so much pain and suffering. When salvation is spoken of eschatologically, it is typically associated with heaven, a happy destiny that some earn and others are denied based on their actions in this world. Schillebeeckx cited sociologist Peter Berger, who claimed that "there is so much evil crying out to heaven that there must be something like a hell."⁵⁶⁸ It can seem unfathomable that those who have committed the most heinous acts in history are not somehow separated from their victims in the afterlife. Common notions of justice would lead one to conclude that the mass murderer is bound for a future life of pain and separation, while the devoted humanitarian deserves an eternity of peaceful bliss.

While Schillebeeckx could sympathize with positions like Berger's, he saw things differently. According to Schillebeeckx, heaven and hell are, in the first place, anthropological possibilities, or, decisions made by human beings themselves. Hell is not an actual place with fire and brimstone that God invented to punish wickedness. Not God, urged Schillebeeckx, but human beings "are the inventors of hell, precisely by the way

⁵⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 134.

they behave.”⁵⁶⁹ Instead of a physical place, Schillebeeckx defined what the religious traditions call hell as “a failure that man cannot and will not any longer entrust to the living God; resolute insistence on success, which finds its strength only in tyranny and dishonoring fellow men, on a larger or smaller scale.” It is a “reluctance and inability to love” that is at the source of all definitive evil.⁵⁷⁰ Hell is the agony of frustration with our finitude, an inability to accept our limits that results in physical and emotional violence toward the self and others.

However, Schillebeeckx warned that we cannot demythologize heaven in the same way we do hell, since we should not “look for heaven in the joy of virtue on earth without any perspective on eternal life.”⁵⁷¹ To do so would be dangerous since there is no salvation on earth that is not somehow partial or anticipates a future completion. From an eschatological standpoint, Schillebeeckx argued, there is only heaven. However, hell is not simply erased as an eschatological possibility because it is unpleasant to ponder. Schillebeeckx was not, as Avery Dulles accused, “naively optimistic.” Schillebeeckx explained his reasoning on this matter quite cogently.

Schillebeeckx’s theology displays a relational ontology. All human beings participate in the divine reality because all human beings participate in creation.⁵⁷² “There is no situation in which God is not near to us to save and in which we will not be able to find him.”⁵⁷³ The existence of a “hell” beyond this world, for Schillebeeckx,

⁵⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 134.

⁵⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 827.

⁵⁷¹ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 138.

⁵⁷² Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 109.

⁵⁷³ Schillebeeckx, *For the Sake of the Gospel*, 152.

would have to be defined as the state of having no theological⁵⁷⁴ relationship with God.

The theological relationship with God, as mentioned earlier, is the foundation for eternal life. Schillebeeckx insisted that we simply do not know if there really are people who do evil in a definitive way, totally separating themselves from communion with God. If there were, however, they would be headed for the annihilation of their own being, rather than a realm of damnation separate from “the saved.”⁵⁷⁵

According to Schillebeeckx, “it is against the nature of the God, who is love, for human beings to be punished for all eternity.” Unlike human beings, God does not have feelings of revenge. Rather, God “leaves evil to its own, limited logic.”⁵⁷⁶ Evil, in contrast to good has no need of a transcendent factor. The internal logic of evil “terminates in the finite mortality of human beings, while the internal logic of the good culminates in the eternal love of God.”⁵⁷⁷ St. Augustine, when inquiring into the origins of evil, discovered that evil is not a substance. It is simply the privation of what is good.

⁵⁷⁴ “The concept ‘theological’ is used by Schillebeeckx in his theology to denote the relationship between humanity and God that is creative, salvific and sanctifying: it is constructive of humanity’s existence; it is the fulfillment of this existence; and it begins the work of fulfillment within history ... The vocation to be human is a vocation to dialogue with God, where this dialogue is intimacy with God; furthermore, because of the nature of this intimacy, it is constitutive of humanity’s relation to the world itself.” See Jennifer Cooper, *Humanity in the Mystery of God: The Theological Anthropology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 9.

⁵⁷⁵ Schillebeeckx soteriology differs slightly from Origen’s notion of *apokatastasis*, the theory that none are damned and all go to heaven. While the doctrine of *apokatastasis* precludes the possibility of damnation, Schillebeeckx leaves it open, as we “cannot judge whether there are people who persist in their evil deeds until death and reject love altogether.” He admits, however, that his soteriology converges with Origen, in the sense that Schillebeeckx believes that “in reality there are probably no such wholly evil people.” See “Theological Quests,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 137..

⁵⁷⁶ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 64.

⁵⁷⁷ Schillebeeckx *Church*, 136.

No person has an evil nature.⁵⁷⁸ Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas insisted that wherever there was any question of negativity, the “first cause” lies with creatures, while the good finds its first cause in God.⁵⁷⁹ Based on these beliefs about evil versus good, and the nature of God, Schillebeeckx drew the conclusion that there is no “negative eschaton.” It only makes sense that “good, not evil, has the last word.”⁵⁸⁰

Schillebeeckx claimed, “it is an unimaginable scenario for me as a Christian, familiar with the gospel, that while there is said to be joy among the heavenly ones, right next to heaven people are supposed to be lying forever, gasping for breath and suffering the pains of hell,” however one might imagine them.⁵⁸¹ Heaven could not be the fulfillment of anyone’s salvation if it means separation and division, and watching others suffer endless torment.

Salvation, for Schillebeeckx, means wholeness. It can never mean achieving happiness for some at the expense of others, nor can it ever encompass an attitude of indifference toward others, even to those whom are not amongst our family, friends, and neighbors. As a Western theologian, Schillebeeckx asked himself, “What can it mean that I, as a Westerner who believes in God, claim to find salvation in my belief in God when two-thirds of humankind is unfree, enslaved and starving to death?”⁵⁸² The conviction that there is an eschatological fulfillment is not meant to simply provide a sense of

⁵⁷⁸ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, Trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014), XIV.11, p. 413 See also *Confessions*, Trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), XII (18), p. 124-25.

⁵⁷⁹ “Defectus gratiae prima cause est ex nobis,” *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 112, a.3.ad. 2. See also Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 136.

⁵⁸⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 137.

⁵⁸¹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 135.

⁵⁸² Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 53.

comfort to each individual who possesses faith, but should spur us on to want to discover and help ameliorate situations in which the opposite of salvation prevails. Situations of poverty and oppression rightly pose a scandal to any belief in God. Christians themselves, according to Schillebeeckx, must “also go in Jesus’ direction of life if that which we proclaim is to be worthy of belief for others.”⁵⁸³ As Matthew’s Gospel makes clear, the “relationship to the other” is decisive for the salvation of every person.⁵⁸⁴

Of course, one may ask how we are to know if our praxis is liberating and salvific. According to Schillebeeckx, praxis must meet at least three criteria. It must 1) establish justice for the disadvantaged and exploited; 2) entail a viable reconciliation with society after the liberation struggle is ended; and 3) avoid creating hierarchies of oppression and exclusion.⁵⁸⁵ Salvific praxis is not just about lifting up particular individuals, but must include historical movements and events of structural emancipation. However, salvation for marginalized persons can never be equated with the destruction of any person or group, even those responsible for their marginalization. Jesus, during his lifetime, clearly refused any messianic ideology that “liberates the oppressed” but “mercilessly annihilates all of the oppressors.”⁵⁸⁶ Even upon the cross, he cried, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34).” Indeed, the desire for

⁵⁸³ Schillebeeckx, “The Uniqueness of Christ and the Interreligious Dialogue,” Address to the Catholic Academy in Munich (April 22, 1997), 28.

⁵⁸⁴ Schillebeeckx bases his conclusion on Matthew 25:31-46, in particular Jesus’ famous words, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.” See “The Uniqueness of Christ,” 20.

⁵⁸⁵ Derek Simon, “Salvation and Liberation in the Practical-Critical Soteriology of Schillebeeckx,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002), 510.

⁵⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 124.

retaliation and segregation is a manifestation of salvation's opposite. A salvation for some and not others is not salvation at all.

E. No Salvation Apart From Religious Others: Non-Christians as Necessary for the Fulfillment of Christian Praxis

It is interesting to observe that in the three criteria mentioned above, the words Christianity and religion are absent. Strictly speaking, liberating movements and events are salvific when they strive to achieve those three goals, regardless of whether or not they are religiously interpreted.⁵⁸⁷ Christians, therefore, are not the sole originators of salvific praxis. This is especially true considering that throughout history, Christians were at times, and continue to be, counted among the oppressors. While the name of God has been praised and glorified in words throughout the centuries, it has also been abused to justify inhuman practices as divine will.

In insisting that "there is no salvation outside the world," Schillebeeckx does not mean the world as we wish it to be, or the way we think it should be, but the world just as it is. The world in which we live is and always will be a religiously and culturally pluralist one. Therefore, if, as Schillebeeckx says, salvation is concerned with human wholeness and integrity, salvific praxis cannot be seen as the sole property of Christians, nor is salvation something Christians can desire just for themselves. As Schillebeeckx stated, "the critical solidarity of Christians with the emancipation process of liberation must not be made dependent on the real chances of Christian proclamation and evangelization. Even when the church itself has no use for it, it has the duty to espouse

⁵⁸⁷ Simon, 511.

the cause of [people] deprived of their rights, to press for a minimum of human well-being.”⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, given that no earthly community or movement of liberation is identical to eschatological salvation, the praxis of Christians and the works inspired by Christianity cannot be taken as inerrant and flawless, but rather can always be subject to challenges and improvements over the course of time. Thus, the praxis of bringing about the reign of God cannot be undertaken apart from non-Christians and even non-believers.

In fact, Schillebeeckx affirmed that “without being specifically Christian, an emancipatory process of liberation can still be essential for Christianity, i.e, it can be a specific and historically necessary form of Christian love, faith, and hope.”⁵⁸⁹ Jesus was a finite human being and as such, lived and spoke in a particular time and culture, which means he could not possibly have left specific instructions on how to deal with many of the circumstances that confront human beings today. Likewise, the apostles and later Christian communities were also finite human beings conditioned by time and space. Christian praxis, therefore, cannot expect to rely solely on what is explicitly Christian and still be considered true praxis for the kingdom of God.

Jean-Louis Souletie applies Schillebeeckx’s soteriology to the need for interreligious dialogue. According to Souletie, salvation must be understood as “the dynamic of love which enables the meeting of those who do not understand each other.” Other religions, while they may contain similarities to Christianity, cannot simply be reduced to what is familiar. There is always a strangeness or newness in encountering the

⁵⁸⁸ Schillebeeck, *Christ*, 765.

⁵⁸⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 765.

religious other. Yet, Souletie insists that “even when the distance cannot be completely overcome and when misunderstandings cannot be entirely ruled out, other religions do nevertheless deepen and change the Christian self-understanding.”⁵⁹⁰ Dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers is not simply a matter of Christians being nice, but rather the wisdom offered by non-Christian perspectives is regarded as truly imperative for Christian living in a pluralist world. If salvation is for all, all must have a voice in building it. As Schillebeeckx stated early on, “There is more religious truth in all the religions together than in one particular religion.”⁵⁹¹

However, affirming that other traditions are required for the fulfillment of Christian praxis does not amount to admitting that the salvation guaranteed to us in Jesus Christ is somehow incomplete or that Christianity is in need of fulfillment by other traditions. For Schillebeeckx, “the New Testament is the covering letter of salvation that has been definitively completed.”⁵⁹² If salvation in Christ were not “a definitive reality that will never be surpassed,”⁵⁹³ Jesus could not function for Christians as the divine promise of an eschatological future, a divine promise that thoroughly motivates Christian praxis.

The necessity of dialogue also does not mean that Christians must adhere to the pluralist position that all traditions are totally equal. Faith is not a choice in the manner of

⁵⁹⁰ Jean-Louis Souletie, “Which Christological Tools for the Interreligious Dialogue?,” in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, ed. Boeve, Depoortere, van Erp (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 108.

⁵⁹¹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 165.

⁵⁹² Schillebeeckx, “Revelation, Scripture, Tradition, and Teaching Authority,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13, first published as “Openbaring, schriftuur, traditie en leergezag, *KT 14* (1963): 85-99.

⁵⁹³ Schillebeeckx, “Revelation, Scripture, Tradition, and Teaching Authority,” 13.

how one chooses a favorite color or ice-cream flavor. It is not a simple matter of personal preference, in which any option will suffice. Faith has serious implications. It does not only matter in the context of prayer and liturgy, but permeates one's whole existence. Furthermore, the inner act faith is not something we fashion ourselves (although we outwardly express our faith using our limited human language), but it is a response to the experience of God in our own history. Christians experience Jesus to be God Incarnate and the insurer of salvation. Therefore, Jesus cannot be simply placed by among other religious figures in history, and the choice to be Christian cannot merely be seen as accidental.⁵⁹⁴ Thus, it is understandable that a Christian may not be able to declare that other religions, who either do not know Jesus or do not understand him in the same way, are fully "equal" to Christianity.

This belief, however, should be a constant source of humility, rather than pride. The special place accorded to Christianity is not due to a superior intelligence possessed by Christians. Given the history of atrocities committed by Christians and in the name of Christianity, we know that Christians are not "better people" than non-Christians. Rather, the pre-eminence of Christianity, for Christians, stems from the content of the faith, from the significance of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, which make Jesus like no other human being whom ever lived. Of course, people can and will always argue that Christians are mistaken about or have overestimated Jesus's eschatological significance, since it has no compelling historical or rational proof.⁵⁹⁵ However, Christians, through

⁵⁹⁴ Here, I am referring to a person's own choice to be or remain Christian. Infant baptism can be considered a result of historical circumstance, namely, whether or not a person is born to Christian parent(s).

⁵⁹⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 799.

their actions, have the power to influence others about whether or not their belief appears to be credible and gives hope to the world. Schillebeeckx wrote

The question whether Christian belief in the resurrection, through which death unmistakably takes on another meaning, opens up a real future for man, will have to be proved again and again, here and now, from corresponding behavior on the part of Christians, from their activities in this world. Without such consistency, what Christians assert is in fact incredible; it has no power of attraction, and above all gives no hope to the world.⁵⁹⁶

In Jesus, Schillebeeckx averred, “we have an image of God that we have not produced; we are simply deciphering the image of God that is given to us.”⁵⁹⁷ Still, since God Incarnate is a reality that is given to us, rather than constructed by us, Christians cannot arrogantly presume that God only gives the gift of God’s self to Christians through the incarnation. Rather, Christians, while not denying the irreplaceable role their faith plays in their lives, must recognize that others may be responding to God’s gifts in their own lives and experiences, and expressing this in their own rituals and practices. According to Schillebeeckx, “the rise of a multiplicity of religions can be explained from the same source from which religion as such comes into being: the multiplicity of human experiences of human beings and the world within particular divergent human traditions of experience.”⁵⁹⁸ The plurality of religions is not a flaw of humanity that must be overcome, but a positive reality. Therefore, true reconciliation can never be viewed as uniformity, but must entail mutuality and cooperation.

⁵⁹⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 797. This does not mean that Jesus’s eschatological significance only stems from human actions. Jesus, as “God for us” always remains, but human actions can and often do impact how the Christian message is received by others.

⁵⁹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 178.

⁵⁹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 25.

F. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a more thorough overview of Schillebeeckx's soteriology. In particular, I focused on four aspects of Schillebeeckx's soteriology: 1) creation as the foundation of salvation 2) the relationship between this-worldly and eschatological salvation 3) the place of Jesus in Christianity as the assurance of eschatological salvation, and 4) the communal nature of salvation. I argued that Schillebeeckx's understanding of salvation is especially fruitful for navigating what it means to be a Christian in a religiously pluralist world. Religious pluralism, in Schillebeeckx's theology, is an inevitable fact that is neither to be lamented nor used as a reason to reduce all religions to a least common denominator in an effort to erase their differences. No person, movement, or tradition, whether Christian or non-Christian, embodies the kingdom of God by itself. Therefore, religious pluralism is a reality that should be celebrated, since human wholeness cannot be achieved without the contributions of non-Christians and non-believers. Christians cannot be Christians in isolation, but need the world with its religious diversity to be true disciples of Jesus. If "there is no salvation outside the world," salvation cannot take place apart from religious others.

In the next chapter, I will continue to discuss the implications of Schillebeeckx's soteriology for interreligious dialogue, using the relationship between Islam and Christianity as a primary example. Salvation, as a dynamic concept based on the negative contrast experience, must include healing the tensions between these two religions. For true healing to occur, however, it cannot be said that one tradition "saves" the other but

rather that fragments of salvation are found in both traditions. I hope to show that finding fragments of salvation through interaction with another religious tradition need not be dependent on adopting a pluralist position; in fact, it might even hinder the process of mutual learning and cooperation.

CHAPTER FOUR

SALVATION AS A DYNAMIC CONCEPT: DIALOGUING WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

As was established in Chapters Two and Three, the meaning of term “salvation” must be relevant to contemporary experiences of suffering and anxiety. Chapter Three discussed four aspects of Schillebeeckx’s soteriology: 1) creation as the foundation of Schillebeeckx’s soteriology; 2) Schillebeeckx’s articulation of the relationship between this-worldly and eschatological salvation; 3) the role of Jesus in Schillebeeckx’s soteriology, in which the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus himself becomes the assurance of eschatological salvation; 4) the communal nature of salvation. It then explored how Schillebeeckx’s soteriology might aid interreligious dialogue. According to Schillebeeckx, “the material content of the ‘good news,’ salvation and gospel, is concretely for us will change according to our concrete experience of its opposite.”⁵⁹⁹ All ways of envisioning salvation therefore, are culturally conditioned. Salvation is also a communal reality, meaning that salvation only for Christians, or any other group, to the neglect of all others, is not truly salvation. Salvation involves reconciliation and care for the well-being of all, not just members of one’s own religious or cultural group. Therefore, reconciliation between Christianity and non-Christian religions, including non-believers, is a necessary component of what Christians call “salvation.” Working

⁵⁹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 6: Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 92, originally published as *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (Blemendaal, 1974).

toward such reconciliation will unavoidably entail interreligious dialogue so that persons can come to better understand one another and work alongside one another.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate that salvation, as a dynamic concept based on the negative contrast experience, must always be defined by our experience of its opposite. Given that we live in a pluralistic world, non-Christians and even non-believers must have a role in defining salvation. For example, if salvation includes mending tensions between, for example, Islam and Christianity, then in order for true healing to occur, it cannot be said that only one of these traditions “saves.” It also cannot be said that one tradition must try to conform its unique beliefs and practices to those of another.

The structure of this chapter will be that I will first, provide a brief discussion of the possible meanings of the term “dialogue.” Second, I will then propose that Schillebeeckx’s notion of the threatened *humanum* be used as the criterion for interreligious dialogue in order to avoid the dangers of a religious or cultural relativism that permits oppression or violence in the name of respecting differences. Third, I will present Schillebeeckx’s articulation of the relationship between religion and ethics in order to show his belief that Christians are not the sole possessors of ethical values. Ethical values can and do originate outside of Christianity, and even outside of religion as a whole. Fourth, in order to illustrate the relevance of Schillebeeckx’s work for a contemporary example of interreligious dialogue, I examine Schillebeeckx’s own brief treatment of Islam, a tradition that, like Christianity, makes absolute claims that conflict with beliefs held by persons outside of its adherents. Fifth and finally, by not requiring the adoption of the pluralist position, I argue that Schillebeeckx’s soteriology provides an inclusivist way of accepting the existence of salvation in other traditions. If salvation is a

dynamic concept that changes in response to our awareness of various types of suffering, one can and must find *fragments* of salvation through interaction with other faiths traditions, but can still maintain that his or her own tradition is the most full or complete.⁶⁰⁰

A. What is Dialogue? More Than Just Talking

Dialogue is a rather vague term. An exhaustive analysis of the different types and purposes of interreligious dialogue is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Alan Race, the scholar who first proposed the threefold paradigm of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, points out that the word dialogue comes from the Greek *dia* (across) and *logos* (reasoning). Interreligious dialogue means “reasoning across worlds of religious difference.” It presumes that something is to be gained from dialogical encounter that is both “more than simply another context for self-assertion and more than simply observing differences.” According to Race, dialogue requires “both transcending the self-sufficiency of individual traditions and also refusing the fate of relativism or indifference.”⁶⁰¹ In other words, dialogue does not mean abandoning one’s own religious tradition or changing what one believes in order to make the differences between traditions less apparent. However, dialogue does require a certain sense of vulnerability, in that one must surrender the position that he or she is always right, or that his or her

⁶⁰⁰ The term “tradition” for Schillebeeckx, includes both believers and non-believers. In 1989, he wrote, “the believer and the non-believer need not be judged here in different ways: the personal convictions of both are connected with the tradition in which they respectively stand.” See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 79-80, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

⁶⁰¹ Alan Race, “Interfaith Dialogue: Religious Accountability between Strangeness and Resonance,” in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race & Paul Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 155.

tradition, even if one believes it is the fullest approximation of the truth, has all of the answers.⁶⁰² All parties to dialogue have a valuable contribution to make, even if they do not all agree with one another on matters of doctrine and religious practice.

The 1991 Vatican document *Dialogue and Proclamation* identifies four types of interreligious dialogue that are informative for a Christian understanding of the term. The *dialogue of life* deals with day-to-day life, where people strive to share their joys and sorrows with one another as neighbors. The *dialogue of action* deals with collaboration between members of different religions on social justice issues. The *dialogue of theological exchange* is the type of dialogue done by university specialists, in which both parties strive to deepen their understanding of one another, and compare values and practices. The *dialogue of religious experience* is the sharing of personal spiritual experiences and practices, such as prayer and contemplation. These types of dialogue are not mutually exclusive and often overlap.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰² Schillebeeckx himself writes, “for, even though the Church of Christ may assert that the fullness of the Promises rests on her, as a service to the world, and that she has the task of guarding and preserving this and of making it historically true, she cannot assert that she is always right.” See “The Church as a Sacrament of Dialogue,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 75.

⁶⁰³ See Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Promulgated May 19, 1991*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html, 42. See also Alan Race, “Interfaith Dialogue: Religious Accountability between Strangeness and Resonance,” in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race & Paul Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 162-63. Paul Knitter sees six types of dialogue, which are all related to the four categories proposed by the Pontifical Council. They are reading texts; comparing doctrines or themes; comparing founders; story telling; sharing or appreciating experience; and his own approach which he refers to as “liberative or globally responsible dialogue.” The last approach relates to the dialogue of religious experience, while the first four relate to the dialogue of theological exchange. The fifth approach relates to religious experience. See Paul Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 151. See also Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and The Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010). In 1974, religious studies scholar Eric Sharpe identified four types of dialogue: discursive dialogue (theological exchange), human dialogue (dialogue of life), secular dialogue (dialogue of action), and interior dialogue (dialogue of

While it may seem as though the type of dialogue that is most relevant to this dissertation is the dialogue of action, I believe that all four types are equally necessary and important. It is certainly true that Schillebeeckx's concept of salvation shows the need for collaboration among members of different religions, including those who are not religious, for dealing with social justice concerns. However, I argue that the mutual and genuine engagement in any of these forms of dialogue between two or more parties ultimately contributes to the building up of salvation in this world. In a world where religious conflict is prevalent, the practice of taking time to learn about another tradition, whether more formally through the dialogue of interreligious exchange, or less formally through the dialogue of interreligious experience or the dialogue of day-to-day life, serves to work toward eliminating fears, biases, and negative stereotypes people may have of the religious other. It is also here where persons may find themselves in awe at the beauty and complexity of another tradition's beliefs and rituals, and thereby discover that the other tradition has something to offer in addressing life's most pressing questions.

At the time of his encounter with secularization in the late 1960s, Schillebeeckx began to refer to the Church as the "sacrament of dialogue," insisting that "dialogue is the proper and distinctive mode of existence for the unique witness of the pilgrim Church."

religious experience). See Eric Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship Between World Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), 78. Lebanese Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub also identifies four types of dialogue similar to those proposed by the Pontifical Council: the dialogue of life; theological dialogue; the dialogue of witnessing to one's faith; and the dialogue of faith. However, according to Ayoub, "the dialogue of witnessing to one's faith," often turns into an invitation to conversion and therefore, is used to "cover up a non-dialogical agenda." See "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Goals and Obstacles," *The Muslim World* 94 (2004), 316-18.

According to Schillebeeckx, the Church exists for the sake of giving Christ's Good News of the kingdom of God which is to come, but in order to communicate this, "she must also receive from and listen to what comes to her from the world as foreign prophecy." Both the Church and the world must make "a mutual contribution and listen sincerely to each other."⁶⁰⁴ Dialogue, therefore, can never simply be "dialogue as method." Nor do all interactions between members of different traditions count as true dialogue.

Dialogue cannot be self-serving. It is not the simple addition of non-Christians to one's organization or group for the sake of boasting "diversity," or the reading the texts of religious others solely for the purpose of becoming a more learned scholar. Dialogue must always encompass a basic openness to the other as "other." It is not one-sided, but rather a reciprocal process of teaching and learning. Being conscious of pluralism, says Schillebeeckx, means implicitly transcending it, since "one does not regard one's own frame of thought as exclusive."⁶⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the avoidance of such exclusivity does not mean the adoption of an "anything goes" attitude for the sake of honoring differences. Some type of standards or criteria are needed, and these are provided by Schillebeeckx's concept of the *humanum*.

B. The *Humanum* as Criterion for Interreligious Dialogue

Humanum is a Latin term that Schillebeeckx uses to express the not-yet-seen fulfillment of all that it means to be human and the articulation of the promise of

⁶⁰⁴ Schillebeeckx, "The Church as a Sacrament of Dialogue," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 76.

⁶⁰⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Theological Criteria," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 49, first published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 9 (1969): 125-150.

humanity's positive potential.⁶⁰⁶ Influenced by his encounter with secularization in the late 1960s, Schillebeeckx began to speak of his conviction that a global ethics cannot be based upon religious or confessional claims, including Christianity. In "Church, Magisterium, and Politics," Schillebeeckx asserts that the Christian message does not directly provide us with a concrete program of action.⁶⁰⁷ This statement, he avers, was recognized by the Second Vatican Council in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the World, *Gaudium et Spes* with its declaration that, "in every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel."⁶⁰⁸ As was mentioned in Chapter Three, *Gaudium et Spes* was considered revolutionary because it was addressed not just to Catholics, but to "the whole of humanity," admitting that the Church by itself cannot respond to the problems of the modern world.⁶⁰⁹ In dealing with certain social and political issues, the Church cannot rely directly on revelation; human experience and "nontheological" factors play a very important role.⁶¹⁰ In this essay, Schillebeeckx insisted that "there is only one source of ethical norms, namely, the historical reality of the value of the inviolable human person with all its bodily and social implications."⁶¹¹ Ethical norms arise out of negative contrast experiences: "the absence of what ought to be is experienced initially, and this leads to a

⁶⁰⁶ Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1.

⁶⁰⁷ Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium, and Politics," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 89.

⁶⁰⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 4.

⁶⁰⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 2.

⁶¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium, and Politics," 88.

⁶¹¹ Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium, and Politics," 91.

perhaps vague, yet real, perception of what should be done here and now.”⁶¹² In other words, ethical norms must be related to and respond the sufferings actually experienced by human beings today. This means that our understanding of salvation will continuously shift and develop.

Schillebeeckx was not the first thinker to use the term *humanum*. According to Rosino Gibellini, Schillebeeckx’s soteriology is guided by two preoccupations: in the negative sense, by what the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch calls “the threatened *humanum*” and the stories of the suffering and death of human beings; and in a positive sense, by what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls “the desirable *humanum*,” or the fullness and integrity of the *humanum*.⁶¹³ The dynamic interplay between the positive and the negative was a theme of Schillebeeckx’s earliest philosophical theology, and it takes on a new expression after his encounter with critical theory and hermeneutics.⁶¹⁴ Yet, the contents of the desirable *humanum* have only been articulated in plural, fragmentary, and mutually contradictory forms. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx argues that these disparate visions all have something in common, the universal pre-understanding of the experience of *humanum* as threatened. Citing Ernst Bloch, Schillebeeckx claims that in all positive views of humankind, humankind can be seen as seeking to address the threatened *humanum*. Here, “a sphere of meaning is revealed in the

⁶¹² Schillebeeckx, “Church, Magisterium, and Politics,” 93.

⁶¹³ Rosino Gibellini, “Introduction: Honest to the World: The Frontier Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx,” cited in Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian: Conversations with Francesco Strazzari* (London: SCM Press, 1994), ix-xiv. For Paul Ricoeur’s discussion of the desirable *humanum*, see “Taches de l’educateur politique,” in *Espirit* 33:340 (1965): 78-93.

⁶¹⁴ Martin Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation: Creation and Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 131. For a discussion of how the early Schillebeeckx speaks of knowledge of God in terms of an interaction between positive and negative moments. See Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus* (Switzerland: University Press, 1993), 112-19.

negative experiences of contrast in our personal and social life.” This sphere of meaning, however, is only revealed in our opposition to what is inhuman in our situation.⁶¹⁵

Humans are not in possession of a definitively formulated conception of the *humanum*, but they develop some vague sense of it through their experience of and resistance to suffering. According to Schillebeeckx,

human life includes particular experiences which are signs or glimpses of an ultimate total meaning of human life. All our negative experiences cannot brush aside the ‘nonetheless’ of trust which is revealed in man’s critical resistance and which prevents us from simply surrendering man, human society, and the world entirely to total meaninglessness. This trust in the ultimate meaning of human life seems to me to be the basic presupposition of man’s action in history.⁶¹⁶

Thus, he holds that among different world religions and even among those who do not believe in the existence of God, there exists a common trust in the meaning of human history, without which resistance against that which is unworthy of humankind would be impossible.

In *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, Schillebeeckx illustrates how ethical demands and imperatives arise not from a pre-existing order of laws, but from the *humanum*, threatened and already damaged. Therefore, “ethical invitation or demand is not an abstract norm but historically, an event which presents a challenge: our concrete history itself, man in need, mankind in need.”⁶¹⁷ The *humanum* resists any uniform

⁶¹⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Theological Criteria,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 58, originally published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 9 (1969): 125-150.

⁶¹⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Correlation Between Human Question and Christian Answer,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 84, originally published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 10 (1970): 1-22.

⁶¹⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 649, originally published as *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (Bloemendaal, 1997).

definition, since one's understanding of it shifts along with new contexts and experiences. What is ethical does not come to us as some timeless truth from on high, discovered by specialists in contemplative isolation, rather what is ethical only becomes apparent in human action toward healing what is inhuman. In other words, there is no transhistorical ethics.

This means that for Schillebeeckx, there is no pre-existing definition of humanity at our disposal, nor can one claim the existence of some sort of "universal human nature." What we do have, he claims, is a set of seven anthropological constants which "point to *permanent* human impulses and orientations, values and spheres of value, but at the same time do not provide us with *directly* specific norms or ethical imperatives."⁶¹⁸ According to Schillebeeckx, these anthropological constants at least provide us with the conditions which must always be presupposed in any human action. When taking into account both the various socio-historical forms of a particular society and the spheres of values recognized as constant, Schillebeeckx argues that it is possible to establish specific norms for human action over time.⁶¹⁹ In *Christ*, he names and describes these seven constants which I will briefly summarize below.

The first anthropological constant is the relationship of the human being to his or her own corporeality, and by means of this corporeality, to the wider sphere of nature and the ecological environment. Christian salvation, therefore, is concerned not only with the individual person, but with all of nature, including non-human creatures.⁶²⁰ The second

⁶¹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 727 (emphasis in the original)

⁶¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 727.

⁶²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 728-30.

anthropological constant is that human identity involves relationships with other people. The human face, as a part of one's body that one does not see (unless looking in a mirror), indicates that the human being is directed toward and destined for others. According to Schillebeeckx, "this also implies that well-being and wholeness, complete and undamaged humanity, must be universal, must apply to each and every individual, not only a few privileged ones."⁶²¹

The third anthropological constant is the relationship of the human person to social and institutional structures. Schillebeeckx explains that while human beings "bring these structures to life in the course of our history, they become independent and then develop into an objective form of society in which we live our particular lives and which again also deeply influence our inwardness, our personhood." However, Schillebeeckx warns that even though these structures form a part of human identity, they are contingent and changeable. In fact, we have a duty to change them if they enslave and debase human beings rather than contributing to their well-being.⁶²² The fourth anthropological constant is the conditioning of peoples and cultures by time and space. Therefore, while there are some forms of suffering that human beings can relieve by themselves, there are also forms of suffering and threats to life over which human beings can have no influence through technology or social intervention.⁶²³ This leads Schillebeeckx to describe humanity as a hermeneutical undertaking, in which concrete demands arise from one's own particular historical and social context.

⁶²¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 731.

⁶²² Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 731-32.

⁶²³ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 732-33.

The fifth anthropological constant is the mutual and essential relationship between theory and praxis. Human culture, as a hermeneutical undertaking, or an undertaking of changing meaning and improving the world, needs permanence. This combination of theory and praxis, Schillebeeckx insists, “will be the only humanly responsible guarantee of a permanent culture which is increasingly worthy of man.”⁶²⁴ In order that history not devolve into the survival of the most powerful, the commitment to human justice requires both reflection and action.⁶²⁵ The sixth anthropological constant is what Schillebeeckx calls “the utopian element in human consciousness.” This utopian element manifests itself in “a variety of different conservative or progressive totalitarian conceptions which make it possible for man in society in some way to make sense of contingency or finitude, impermanence and the problems of suffering, fiasco, failure and death which it presents, or to overcome them.” In most of these utopias, humankind is seen as an active subject shaping the future, but also as a subject who is not totally in control of nor personally responsible for all of history. In other words, there is something bigger and greater than humanity at work. For some, this is fate, or evolution, or nature. For religious persons, this is “the living God, the Lord of history.” What all these different forms have in common, however, is that each represents a form of faith, a utopia which cannot ever be scientifically demonstrated or completely rationalized. Therefore, faith, the ground for

⁶²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 734.

⁶²⁵ Mary Catherine Hilker, “The Threatened *Humanum* as *Imago Dei*: Anthropology and Christian Ethics,” in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, ed. Boeve, Depoortere, and van Erp (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 137.

hope, is “a constant without which human life and action worthy of men and capable of realization becomes impossible.”⁶²⁶

Finally, the seventh anthropological constant is what Schillebeeckx calls “the irreducible synthesis of these six dimensions.” The reality which heals human beings, according to Schillebeeckx, lies in this synthesis.⁶²⁷ Although the full definition of the *humanum* eludes us, humanity is not completely left in the dark in its search for what is worthy of humankind. Thus, the anthropological constants serve as guideposts in our quest the *humanum*.

1. *The Independence but Interrelatedness of Religion and Ethics*

As mentioned above, in the late 1960s, Schillebeeckx began to identify negative contrast experiences as the source of ethical norms. This means that ethical norms do not arise directly from revelation, or from Church doctrines and teachings, although, as will be discussed later, these are not irrelevant or unrelated. Thus, Schillebeeckx, in *Jesus*, describes ethics and religion as interrelated but not identical.⁶²⁸ In *Christ*, Schillebeeckx elaborates upon this relationship further by saying that ethics must be given priority over religion “for ethics has the character of a really pressing urgency which cannot wait until there is unanimity among men over the ultimate questions of life.”⁶²⁹ The reality of the threatened *humanum* demands that we respond to it now, even though human beings hold different and even, at times, conflicting religious views. Schillebeeckx also observes in the contemporary world, ethical concerns have become more globalized. Until recently,

⁶²⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 734-35.

⁶²⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 735.

⁶²⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 601.

⁶²⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 649.

he notes, ethical norms related only to the private and micro-sphere of human life, concerned only with the level of family, town, or country. Today, ethical norms are more attentive to what Schillebeeckx calls “the macro-sphere,” or the effects of our activity on the whole of humankind and the future of humankind. One example of this shift can be seen in our increasing awareness of the issue of climate change. The impetus for our present-day resistance to what threatens the natural environment is a concern not only with the present state of the world, but with what life will be like for future generations.

Schillebeeckx writes,

for the first time in human history, mankind as such sees itself confronted with the task of taking responsibility as a whole for the consequences of its action. The international solidarity, binding on all mankind, therefore calls for universally valid *ethical norms or basic principles which apply to all men*, if this situation is not to turn into a farce of world catastrophe. The need for this combined responsibility is, of course, matched by the demand for an ethic of world-wide responsibility.⁶³⁰

Clearly, the demand for an ethic of world-wide responsibility requires the ability to speak to one another across religious boundaries. The reality of the *humanum* as threatened and already damaged does not allow us to wait for the conversion of others to our own religious or philosophical views, nor should this be a desired goal. Ethics must focus on the immediate healing on human beings as they are in response to current situations of suffering, not some abstract ideal that only makes sense for persons who hold certain beliefs.

In the final book of his Christological trilogy, *Church: The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx explains that because both believers and non-believers have negative

⁶³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 651-52. (emphasis in the original)

contrast experiences and such experiences are the source of ethical norms, “we do not need God as the direct foundation of our ethical action.”⁶³¹ Therefore, Schillebeeckx appreciates the value of atheistic secular humanism. Human history has shown that one’s ability to respond to the threatened *humanum* is not dependent upon belief in God, nor is belief in God a guarantee of right ethical action.

Without adopting an atheistic worldview himself, but remaining fully committed to his Catholic faith, Schillebeeckx grants that an atheistic conception of humanity may very well yield fundamental insights for Christianity. Some forms of atheism, he writes, “are a justified criticism of traditional concepts of God.” As an example, he cites the atheist German philosopher Ludwig von Feuerbach who taught us that “a concept of God as the wholly Other is not only logically incoherent but in social and personal terms has no liberating, critical, and productive significance. The wholly Other can legitimate oppression and dictatorship as well as human liberation.” Therefore, to speak of God’s transcendence without ever talking about God’s immanence is, for Schillebeeckx, dangerous and absurd.⁶³²

Furthermore, Schillebeeckx recognized that “believers from many religions have all too often misused the name of God” to the detriment of human wholeness and happiness. Too often, says Schillebeeckx, “the existence of God is denied because people hold completely wrong, humanly foolish ideas about precisely who God is.”⁶³³ Thus, he

⁶³¹ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 29, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

⁶³² Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 56.

⁶³³ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 54.

concludes that “it is better today not to think that there is a God than to adhere to an inhuman God who enslaves men and women, and thus appeal to radicalism.”⁶³⁴

Certainly, while ethics does have a certain independence from religion, religion still has an important role to play in ethical decision-making; thus, a believer can proclaim that religion is still needed. One can recognize the valuable contributions made by non-believers, but still remain unconvinced that ethics can be done just as well without religion, or, even more specifically, without his or her own particular religion.

2. *The Valuable and Vital Role of Religion in Ethics*

Schillebeeckx insisted that while the concrete principles for ethically responding to evil and injustice in this world cannot be provided by revelation, the inspiration and moral spirit necessary for their construction can be.⁶³⁵ Faith and ethics are not same, but faith can and does manifest itself in ethics. Just as our ways of envisioning salvation are culturally conditioned, one cannot neatly separate one’s religious life from one’s ethical tasks, since responding to the threatened *humanum* is a demand of Christian discipleship. One easily may be able to publicly talk about ethical action without using explicitly religious terms, but one cannot simply forget or put aside their religion when reflecting upon the issues that face society and how to deal with them.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 32. For more on how Christian humanism and atheistic secular humanism are distinct but related, see Martin Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation: Creation and the Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 129-34.

⁶³⁵ Schillebeeckx, “Church and World” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 4: World and Church* Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 79, first published as “Kerk en wereld” in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 4 (1964): 386-99.

⁶³⁶ It is my belief that Schillebeeckx would not accept the proposal made by John Rawls that all deliberations must be made from the “original position.” In the original position, all parties are under a “veil of ignorance” in which they are “not allowed to know the social positions or the particular comprehensive doctrines of the persons they represent. They also do not know peoples’ race and ethnic

Returning to the example of climate change and ecological concerns, it is science that has provided us with evidence that such change is occurring, and such evidence on its own can and has motivated human efforts toward building a more sustainable future. The Christian holds that the natural world and all that is in it is God's creation. This does not mean that the Christian rejects the theory of evolution, or that the Christian remains unpersuaded by or uninterested in the findings of modern science. In fact, some scientists studying climate change are devoutly Christian! However, the Christian may very likely see environmental activism as his or her responsibility toward God's creatures, and that a Christian's duty is to read and respond to the "signs of the times," all the while, fully recognizing that this responsibility for the world and its future inhabitants has also been accepted by non-Christians and non-believers.

The valuable and indispensable role of religion, and, in particular, Christianity, is a consistent theme in Schillebeeckx's considerations of the *humanum*. While he claims that the *humanum* resists any uniform definition, as a Christian, he insists that "the *humanum* which is sought, but always threatened, is proclaimed and promised in Jesus Christ."⁶³⁷ He identifies the *humanum* with the kingdom of God, a reality that is both already, and not yet. It is conceivable for us and experienced in fragments here and now, but it awaits future fulfillment. According to Schillebeeckx, "the power to realize this *humanum* and to bring about an individual and collective peace is reserved for God, the power of love." He refers to this as the "eschatological reservation." Humanity has the

group, sex, or various native endowments such as strength and intelligence, all within the normal range." See John Rawls, *Justice As Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁶³⁷ Schillebeeckx, "Theological Criteria," 59.

power and responsibility to shape the future, but lacks the ability to provide total and universal salvation for all beings in all contexts. Not only are humans unable to address every possible instance of suffering due to the limits of time and space, but human beings throughout history have, at times, caused great harm in their appeals to the threatened *humanum*. A striking example of this, Schillebeeckx writes, was Nazism in Germany, which claimed to protect the *humanum* but in fact, led to a greater degradation of humanity.⁶³⁸ Human beings are imperfect, and Schillebeeckx does not deny that they often get it wrong, sometimes tragically so.

According to Schillebeeckx, “evil has clearly been a datum of such great proportions in human history that neither man nor society can offer us any guarantee at all that we shall ever be able to overcome it.”⁶³⁹ As was mentioned earlier, Schillebeeckx still maintains that “all our negative experiences cannot brush aside the ‘nonetheless’ of trust which is revealed in man’s critical resistance and which prevents us from surrendering man, human society, and the world entirely to total meaninglessness.”⁶⁴⁰ Atheists can live a meaningful life and find plenty of strong reasons for investing in the betterment of society. However, a Christian cannot help but make the claim that God will ultimately have the last word and good will triumph over evil. Such a position, which stems from a faith conviction, has a stronger impetus, than the position that history may or may not be meaningful in the end. In a 1983 conversation with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen, Schillebeeckx reiterated this conviction,

⁶³⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Correlation Between Human Question and Christian Answer,” 82.

⁶³⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Correlation Between Human Question and Christian Answer,” 83.

⁶⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, “Correlation Between Human Question and Christian Answer,” 84.

God does not want a history consisting of a confusion of sense and nonsense. He wants pure sense, pure meaning, to be ultimately achieved and by men. That knowledge, based on faith, is, I think, the ultimate and most powerful driving force enabling men to work for a better world.⁶⁴¹

Furthermore, our human efforts to ameliorate suffering are brought about amidst conflict and friction. Every contribution to the building up of society risks new possibilities for discord. Movements for social change are rarely accepted without threats of violence and ridicule. Human beings often find themselves caught in the dilemma of whether to do what they believe is right or to do what is safe and does not endanger their security or reputation. Our human finitude also means that human beings cannot escape eventual death, even with advances in science that have helped us live longer, healthier lives. Even the greatest and strongest humanitarian people, programs, and organizations cannot reach everyone. People still die homeless and hungry on the street. Diseases, even those for which a cure or vaccination exists, kill people each day. Without God, the lives of the dead may have meaning in that they lived in order that future generations may be spared from the same fate. However, from this point of view, the dead themselves do not experience any liberation or redemption.⁶⁴² For the Christian believer, this is not a cause for despair, but a push to keep working, because while the fullness of the *humanum* eludes us, its eventual fulfillment has been promised in Jesus Christ. Now promised in

⁶⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment, in conversation with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 114.

⁶⁴² Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 61. In an atheistic setting, in which the only source of meaning is found in human beings, there is no guarantee that evil will not have the last word on our existence. See also Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation*, 140-43.

Christ, that reality is “made conceivable and assured for us in grace.”⁶⁴³ Christ’s promise is not only for the living, but also for the dead and forgotten.

Finitude, according to Schillebeeckx, can never be completely secularized, otherwise human beings would have already discovered a way to eradicate our own mortality. For the Christian, the futility of such a project points to a God who is greater than all our human endeavors. Within the Christian experience, the believer has the insight that “finitude is not left in solitude but is supported by the absolute presence of the creator God.”⁶⁴⁴ Instead of being an irremovable blemish on humanity, finitude has an extraordinary power and depth.⁶⁴⁵ Finitude, for believers, is the never-failing source of all religion.⁶⁴⁶

Schillebeeckx’s later work speaks to some of dangers of totally removing religion from ethics, and specifically expresses a deep suspicion toward “human rights” as a substitute for spirituality. In *Christ*, he presents some historical background as to the development of a purely ethical, non-religious, secular foundation for morality. This

⁶⁴³ Schillebeeckx, “Theological Criteria,” 59.

⁶⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 8: Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 106, originally published as *Tussentijds verhaal over Jezus boeken* (Bloemendaal, 1978).

⁶⁴⁵ For Schillebeeckx, the finitude of the atheist might be called a “neutered finitude,” or finitude “deprived of its power and depth by the process of secularization taken to its extreme.” See Poulsom, *The Dialectics of Creation*, 139. This means Schillebeeckx rejects the notion that finitude is a punishment for human sin. See *Interim Report*, 114. See also *God Among Us*, 93.

⁶⁴⁶ See *Church*, 231. According to Schillebeeckx, even atheists are believers, but their belief has a different content. Theists and atheists experience contingency, but through this experience, “one picks up the gratuitousness of God and the other experiences nothing, the void. The experience of contingency confronts human beings with a choice: either belief in the gratuitousness of God or the rejection of a God who keeps silent.” See *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 57. See also *Church*, 77-78. Schillebeeckx affirms that believers and non-believers have “alternative interpretive experiences.” For example, “the religious man also experiences grace, he does not just interpret it.” Our descriptive language and our experience are mutually determinative. However, at the primordial level, there is some experience of contingency, prior to our use of language and concepts that is shared by both believers and non-believers. See *Christ*, 39-40.

occurred during the process of secularization, and also coincided with the rise of completely new issues that were not the concern of Christian morality in the past, namely, the problems caused by the industrialization and technological development of social life. Thus, with the emancipation of ethics from theology, “an autonomous ethics came to the fore in contrast to and in opposition to the earlier Christian morality, with its bias toward the sphere of the private individual.” While the older Christian morality could be described as a micro-ethics, human ethics is a macro-ethics. Ethical questions were now discussed outside the realm of Christian moral theology.⁶⁴⁷

Schillebeeckx does not view this emancipation of ethics from religion in an entirely negative light, even though he affirms that religion cannot be reduced to ethics. “Religion is something more, something different, though at the same time it is ethical.”⁶⁴⁸ In other words, we cannot define a religion simply based on its ethical claims or moral imperatives. Religion offers persons more than rules or guidelines for living a moral life; it provides believers with comfort, hope, a sense of a community or belonging, and specific prayers or practices for developing a relationship with the Transcendent.

Schillebeeckx observes that the total detachment of ethics from religion began to turn into an emancipation of the human being from ethics itself, particularly in the form of the contemporary call for an ethics which is free of norms. He states that “we may certainly welcome a norm-free ethics if that is taken to mean that ethical norms may not have any alienating, external function, but must rather open up possibilities and

⁶⁴⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 647.

⁶⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 647.

perspectives which enable us to be as far as possible true men in specific historical situations.”⁶⁴⁹ We must remain constantly vigilant of the need for ethics to take into account the specific concerns that arise from particular times and places; but ethics cannot merely be left to the whim of human minds without undermining the basic structure of the world. Schillebeeckx warns against a position that insists upon trying to discover human limits simply by experimentation. For him, such an attitude bears dangerous consequences such as the elevation of biological laws or ideals of capitalist society to unchangeable norms.

At the end of *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Schillebeeckx specifically states that no earthly ideology can rival Christianity, since the death of Jesus has universal significance for the living and the dead. In Jesus, God gives a future even to those whose lives have been forgotten, to those who know no more future, since Christianity affirms that “for God, no human being is a reject. What the modern age calls ‘human rights’ is a weak, though authentic, secular residue of this Christian view.”⁶⁵⁰ In a later work, Schillebeeckx explained that without religion, ethics often becomes eager for revenge, rather than reconciliation.⁶⁵¹ Fighting for a particular party, institution, or system, often takes prominence over human welfare. It is easy to only seek the well-being of those whom we feel “deserve” to be saved. Salvation is not about one group or idea winning an earthly battle over and against another, but, as a communal reality, it must be about ending such divisions.

⁶⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 648.

⁶⁵⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 120.

⁶⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith*, 52.

Schillebeeckx elaborated upon the weakness of “human rights” toward the end of his career, writing that “a human rights culture is a minimum and the beginnings of love, but it’s not enough.” People long for more than simply justice in terms of protection from discrimination or harm, and compensation for pain endured, but rather, they want to be accepted by others unconditionally for their own sake. Justice, Schillebeeckx insists, is cold and forbidding. “A human culture is a culture of love, and that cannot be pinned down in statutes and codified.”⁶⁵² Justice and the law make necessary and positive contributions to human society, but the human person is in search of something more, which these things cannot provide. For Schillebeeckx, this explains why religious movements and religions remain dynamic forces in the world today, even though more and more people have begun to separate from religious institutions.⁶⁵³

3. *Why is the Humanum a Useful Concept for Interreligious Dialogue Today?*

As Chapter One pointed out, there is a general consensus among most scholars that in Western society, a fundamental shift is occurring from the modern to the postmodern. The major marks of postmodernism are a consciousness of pluralism at every level of thinking about humanity, and skepticism toward arguments from authority and universal frameworks. While Schillebeeckx, as was mentioned in Chapter Two, has

⁶⁵² Edward Schillebeeckx, “Culture, Religion, and Violence: Theology as a Component of Culture,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*. Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 174, originally published as “Cultuur godsdienst en geweld: Theologie als onderdeel van een cultuur,” in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 36 (1996): 387-404.

⁶⁵³ According to Schillebeeckx, “secularization may alienate people from the institutional church, synagogue, temple or mosque, giving rise to peripheral membership, nonreligiosity and alternative lifestyles; on the other hands its specialized fragmentation drives people toward a new, resurgent ‘religiosity’ and ‘holism’ in diverse (and sometimes bizarre) directions. See “Culture, Religion, and Violence,” 173.

often be categorized as a modern thinker, his articulation of the *humanum* takes seriously postmodern concerns, namely in its insistence that any uniform positive definition or identification of the *humanum* must be avoided. All human beings have negative contrast experiences, in which suffering tells us what “should not be” and provides impetus for our discovery of what should. Human history is a history of suffering, yet there is no past “golden age” to look to as a model or norm. Rather, people seek “the kind of society that has never yet been.” The meaning of history remains open, and still has to be created.⁶⁵⁴

No human being or religious community is in possession of the knowledge of what human wholeness fully entails now or in the future. The theologian who wrestles with the questions plaguing humanity provides a valuable service, but he or she cannot also do the job of the scientist seeking a cure for harmful diseases. Meanwhile, the doctor administering urgent care to those physically afflicted may not be able to provide the mental and spiritual counseling of a minister or social worker. The person working in Africa or Latin America cannot at the same time be providing care for impoverished persons in American cities. Limited time, resources, and energy mean that, in order for society to progress further and further toward the *humanum*, we must rely on one another even across religious boundaries.

For Schillebeeckx, the universal experience of the *humanum* as threatened and damaged provides a foundation and criterion for dialogue among persons who hold and even contradictory views. Whatever threatens and degrades humanity must be rejected. A religion or religious belief that humiliates other human beings is a mistaken way of

⁶⁵⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 654

believing in God.⁶⁵⁵ The gospels portray Jesus himself as embodying a commitment to the *humanum* when he rejected the Pharisees' strict observance of the Torah and welcomed tax collectors, prostitutes, and other "undesirables" to dine with him. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he put suffering humanity before the Law. "The Sabbath was made for mankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath."⁶⁵⁶

No religion, not even Christianity, is above the need for self-critique in response to the threatened *humanum*. Schillebeeckx reminds us that throughout history, Christians have not always recognized and responded to injustice. For example, Christians accepted slavery for centuries. Even St. Paul did not conclude that slavery was an evil. It was the human conscience, not Christians, which finally said no to slavery.⁶⁵⁷

In one of his later essays on the relationship between religion and violence, Schillebeeckx discusses how the concept of *religio* was adopted by Christianity in the fourth century and then applied to the Christian relationship with God. *Religio*, in Roman law, was seen as the first, supreme patriotic or civic duty. Therefore, for centuries in the West, the Christian God became the upholder of the established socio-political order and all deviant ideas were considered punishable as heresy. Thus, Schillebeeckx states, "subsequently the church's adoption of the ancient Roman concept of *religio* permitted the Crusades, in which Muslims were slaughtered, and the Inquisition, in which

⁶⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 59.

⁶⁵⁶ Mark 2:27. In Jewish law, breaking the Sabbath was only permitted to defend one's own life or that of another. Jesus acts of healing on the Sabbath were scandalous, in that he cured people who were not in danger of imminent death. The gospels report Jesus' transgression of the Sabbath law in Mark 3:1-6, Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-40. While we cannot establish with absolutely certainty the historical accuracy of each particular episode, it is quite certain that Jesus did break the Sabbath to cure the sick. See José Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation* (Convivium, 2015), 245-47.

⁶⁵⁷ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 69.

dissidents from orthodoxy—the guarantee of political wellbeing—were handed over to the civil authorities as traitors and burned at the stake.”⁶⁵⁸ He concludes that no religion, even Christianity, can ever be considered the guarantor of human well-being. No religion has a special privilege with regard to the development of the *humanum*. The rejection of a direct link between Christian confession of God and a humanly established political order “allows Christians to engage in interreligious dialogue on equal footing with all dialogue partners in the face of real religious differences and rejection of the view that all religions are ‘equal’ (known as indifferentism).”⁶⁵⁹

The *humanum* also provides a way for Christians to see dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers as something more than just “being nice” or “keeping the peace.” Here, in contrast to Karl Rahner, Schillebeeckx holds a positive view of religious pluralism. In his later work, he even regards religious pluralism as “not an evil which needs to be removed but rather a wealth which is to be welcomed and enjoyed by all.”⁶⁶⁰ Therefore, Christians really need the wisdom provided by other traditions, including dialogue with what Schillebeeckx refers to as “the vast world of atheism” and “the exponents of that form of religiousness, so widespread today, whose outlook is purely of this world.” As early as 1959, Schillebeeckx affirmed that religious thought must include

⁶⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Culture, Religion, and Violence,” 181.

⁶⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Culture, Religion, and Violence,” 182.

⁶⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 165. See also, “The Religious and the Human Ecumene,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 184. In contrast to Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner viewed religious pluralism as an unfortunate situation that should ideally not exist, but must still be dealt with by contemporary Christians. See “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions, *Theological Investigations X.6*, Trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroads, 1973), 115.

secular thought in its reflections on the meaning of salvation.⁶⁶¹ It must also incorporate insights from philosophical ethics, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.⁶⁶²

The *humanum* serves as a criterion for dialogue that does not patronize non-Christians, but welcomes and relies on their contributions as religious others, not merely valuing what makes them similar to Christianity. Without erasing the uniqueness of different religious and philosophical views, it also insists that there is an experience that is common to all of us as human beings, namely, the experience of the *humanum* as threatened and damaged. Nevertheless, the recognition of this common universal experience does not mean people's individual beliefs become irrelevant or must be disregarded. Schillebeeckx not only affirms that Christianity is still significant, but even continues to hold on to the belief that Jesus Christ provides the strongest impetus for investing in the *humanum*. In other words, there is room for one to still uphold his or her religion as "best." While, at first glance, this may seem problematic, one must remember that this remains an option not just for Christians, but for all traditions. Therefore, the Muslim may say the strongest impetus is provided by the example of the Prophet Muhammad, and the atheist may claim that stronger impetus stems from belief in humanity or the world without a transcending figure. Conflicting beliefs may remain but this need not be an obstacle to fruitful dialogue and engagement. As was discussed in

⁶⁶¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Search for the Living God," in in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*. Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 46, originally published as "Op zoek naar de levende God [lecture on the acceptance of the post of ordinary professor of dogmatic theology at the R.C. University of Nijmegen on Friday 9 May 1958], Utrecht, Nijmegen: Dekker van de Vegt, 1959. Translated by Edward Fitzgerald and Peter Tomlinson as: "The Search for the Living God," in *God and Man* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969), 18-40.

⁶⁶² Bradford Hinze, "Ethics and Eschatology," in *Praxis of the Reign of God*, eds. Hilkert and Schreiter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 181.

Chapter One, advocating that Christians must adopt a pluralist position inevitably means that all other religions must also adopt such a position, and thereby turns dialogue into an imperialist endeavor that tells others how they must believe. Furthermore, the socially critical power of religious faith often stems from particular statements of faith, such as Jesus as the eschatological prophet, or the Quran as the literal Word of God.

In the following sections, I focus on the relationship between Christianity and Islam to illustrate the importance of interreligious dialogue in valuing the contributions of the other, but which does not make the other water down his or her beliefs to avoid points of disagreement. While this point could certainly be demonstrated via comparison with another world religion, I choose to concentrate on Islam for two main reasons. First, in today's political climate, Muslims and Christians are often perceived to be in opposition to one another. Islam has often been labeled as an inherently violent and misogynistic religion by persons who have never studied the tradition in depth. Fear of Islam is rampant in the United States and Western Europe, and this has caused a great deal of suffering for individual Muslims and Muslim communities. Second, the solution to this issue cannot lie with the attempt to explain away all of the differences between Islam and Christianity in an effort to show that they are essentially the same. While Islam and Christianity share some significant similarities that it may be useful to emphasize, certain Muslim beliefs and Christian beliefs inevitably conflict with one another.

C. Schillebeeckx's Engagement with Islam

Before delving into Schillebeeckx's engagement with Islam in his own work, it is important to point out that Schillebeeckx is not a scholar of Islam. Thus, the title of this section "Schillebeeckx's engagement with Islam" is already a bit of a misnomer.

Schillebeeckx's only real discussion of Islam appeared in the book *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* as part of a chapter called "Critical Remembrance of Suffering Humanity."⁶⁶³ In what he called a "survey of human history," Schillebeeckx attempted to show how various cultures, religions, and philosophical movements have dealt with the question of suffering in search of ways to overcome it.⁶⁶⁴ He did this to illustrate that the history of suffering in the world has been a constant theme of every account of life, whether religious or not. It also speaks to the fact that the problem of suffering is so immense that no person, religion, or movement has been able to solve it, or even speak adequately enough about it so as to have the final authoritative word. A roughly three and a half-page section on suffering in Islam is included as a part of this survey.

The significance of discussing Schillebeeckx's brief consideration of Islam is not so much for its informational value or even accuracy, but to get a sense of how Schillebeeckx perceives Islam in relation to Christianity and to venture how Schillebeeckx might approach current issues affecting the relationship between the two religions. It is also crucial to note that Schillebeeckx mostly talked about "Islam" as a whole, although he did once bring up the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a, and also makes mention of the development of Sufism in the eighth-century (though, of course, this distinction alone does not cover the diversity within the tradition).

⁶⁶³ See *Christ*, 663-714.

⁶⁶⁴ Schillebeeckx admitted that this survey was naturally limited and, perhaps, even elitist. In this survey, "the voices we hear are of philosophical and religious, Marxist and humanist thinkers, and not the suffering multitudes. Yet it cannot be claimed that these do not give evocative expression to precisely what is a living experience among all men." See *Christ*, 664.

Schillebeeckx begins his discussion of Islam with the significance of Islam's sacred text, the Quran. Even more so than for Jews and Christians, writes Schillebeeckx, Muslims see the Quran as "God's word for man." Stressing how Islam places a strong emphasis on God as "one," he insists that for Muslims, there is but one revelation of God, which is found in the Quran. Although the Quran sees itself as a continuation of the tradition of Abraham and Jesus of Nazareth, Islam holds that Jews and Christians, with their different religious interpretations, have, in certain ways, corrupted the "one unfalsified revelation of God." Here, Schillebeeckx seems to indicate that for Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, the universal is revealed in the particular. He describes the Quran as, "the Arab version of the one divine revelation; a timeless message, albeit bound with the specifically Arab character of the life of the prophet Muhammad." Like the Bible, the Quran has a universal message relevant for all time periods, though it was revealed in a particular language, culture, and historical context. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx asserts that, unlike the Bible, the Quran is concerned only with particular situations of suffering relevant to seventh century Arabia, and not suffering as a theoretical problem. Thus, he concludes, Muslims and Christians approach the question of suffering differently.

For Muslims and Christians, as believers in God, suffering presents a problem that demands some sort of resolution. However, according to Schillebeeckx, Christians tend to focus more on suffering as a problem for God's love, whereas Muslims tend to focus on God's omnipotence. Citing various passages from the Quran that appear to establish

God's omnipotence,⁶⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx states that, for Muslims, suffering must always be under God's control and "therefore Moslems look for the many ways in which suffering can be fitted meaningfully into God's purposes." Islam gives two explanations for why suffering exists. Suffering is either a punishment for wrongdoing, or a test to determine whether one has true faith. In this context, Schillebeeckx insists, lamentations of despair and quests for human rights do not have a rightful place. The Islamic conception of God, writes Schillebeeckx, "leads to the only possible attitude, *sabr*, i.e., affirmative tolerance, the patience to bear it."

However, Schillebeeckx does not say this to attack or condemn Islam. He points out that this attitude is not fatalism, but rather is representative of "a personalistic relationship of trust in God through which all things are possible to the believer." Here, he makes a brief reference to the tension between Islam and the West.

Such a belief in God does not seem to exercise any 'criticism of society' of the kind that would improve it. But why should one have to *change* a society in which one felt happy? Islam is critical of society in this sense; in other words, it is a criticism of the concern of others- Westerners- who, without being asked, want to Westernize Arab society, or, in Western eyes, make it better. For the orthodox Muslim, this means acceptance of the *bad* things from Western culture.⁶⁶⁶

In contrast to Judaism and Christianity, Schillebeeckx states that Islam gives a "supernatural solution to the problem of suffering." Because, according to the Quran, God produces exact eschatological rewards for good and punishments for evil, the hereafter is a forceful motivator for one's deeds in this life. Yet, Schillebeeckx recognizes

⁶⁶⁵ Here, Schillebeeckx cites Surah 2:115, which states "God's is the east and west, wherever you turn, there is God's countenance"; Surahs 6:95, and 22:5-6, which speak of God's power over life and death; Surah 3:25 on how "each soul will be compensated for what it earned;" and Surah 36 on the creation of humankind.

⁶⁶⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 694.

that Islam too “knows both protest against suffering and the duty to alleviate human suffering as far as possible,” especially given Islam’s emphasis on God’s mercy. He also seems to sense that what he and other Christians may perceive as a lack of “criticism of society” in Islam is a Muslim repudiation of the particularly Western critiques of society. This does not mean Muslims do not desire social improvement, but that they do not want the West to dictate to them what progress should look like.

To further contrast Islam and Christianity, Schillebeeckx discusses the Islamic view of Jesus of Nazareth: “another characteristic of Islam is its assessment of the crucifixion of Jesus: it has no significance whatsoever.” This means Islam does not hold a notion of “redemptive suffering” as does Christianity in its interpretation of the meaning of the crucifixion. However, Jesus is still revered as a prophet in Islam. Schillebeeckx compares Jesus and Muhammad, saying that Jesus chose the cross, while Muhammad chose “the *Hijrah*, the way of success and power, the instrument of God in the fight against evil.”⁶⁶⁷

Schillebeeckx concludes this brief section by identifying the split between Sunni and Shi’a as the first great schism within Islam, caused by debates over the legitimate successors to the Prophet. This gave rise to the murder of Ali, and his sons Hasan and Hussein, who are revered as martyrs in the Shi’a tradition. Schillebeeckx regards these three murders as “the foundation of the theology of Shi’a Moslems.” This event shows “saving significance of innocent sufferings.” These martyrs have become a “universal mediator” and “the heavenly intercessor for all sinners.” This is a view which is foreign

⁶⁶⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 695.

to the understanding of Sunni Islam, and which Schillebeeckx calls “a kind of Arab *apokatastasis*.”⁶⁶⁸

In a 1983 conversation with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen published as *God is New Each Moment*, Schillebeeckx articulates his understanding of some commonalities between Islam and Christianity in the context of a general distinction between Eastern and Western religions. In this context, Schillebeeckx categorizes Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism as Eastern religions, and classifies Judaism, Christianity and Islam as Western.

Eastern religions, he argues, are primarily “religions of the inner life.” The divine is a personal reality communing with human beings. Schillebeeckx interprets Eastern religions as holding the position that the commitment to work for a better world has only a relative value. He describes the prototype of these religions as “the yogi, sitting in the lotus position, silent, passive, turned inward on himself and away from the world and at one with the power that reconciles everything with itself.” The mysticism of Eastern religions, therefore, is one that has no connection to the socio-political order.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 695. *Apokatastasis*, or the doctrine of universal salvation, is the belief that all creatures will be saved and none will be damned, given that all things must be restored to God. Schillebeeckx soteriology differs slightly from Origen’s notion of *apokatastasis*, the theory that none are damned and all go to heaven. While the doctrine of *apokatastasis* precludes the possibility of damnation, Schillebeeckx leaves it open, as we “cannot judge whether there are people who persist in their evil deeds until death and reject love altogether.” He admits, however, that his soteriology converges with Origen, in the sense that Schillebeeckx believes that “in reality there are probably no such wholly evil people.” See “Theological Quests,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 11: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*, Ed. Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 137. Origen cites 1 Cor 15:27-28, “For all things must be made subject to him” to explain his theory. Ultimately, “the goodness of God through Christ will restore his entire creation to one end.” See Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles*, Ed. John C. Cavadini and Henri de Lubac (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2013), Book I.6, p. 69-76. *Apokatastasis* was also appeared in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. See Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993).

⁶⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 118.

Western religions, of which Islam is one, are characterized by their “emphasis on a personal God who speaks to man, questions him, and challenges him.” The human being, created in God’s image, is responsible for history. Therefore, it can be said that all three Western religions- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam- are oriented toward ethical action and “all have the task of establishing the kingdom of God as a kingdom of justice among men.” Yet, each of these religions is also mystical, deeply rooted in the personal experience of God. It is within this context that, Schillebeeckx speaks of a similarity between Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad had numerous encounters with Allah’s angels who communicated the Quran to him “directly from heaven.” Jesus, too, had a mystical experience of God as his Abba, or Father, which “was the source of the whole of his life in service to the poor and the enslaved people of this world.”⁶⁷⁰

Schillebeeckx makes his comparison of Eastern and Western spiritualities in response to the situation where many people were no longer finding meaning in the Western traditions and have turned to the Eastern ones. Here, Schillebeeckx is very critical of the West. Although the West has a supposedly more ethical and this-worldly orientation, Western society’s consumerist tendencies have stunted its ability to experience the world. He states, “there are certain thing—things that are there to be seen—which we simply no longer see. We are just incapable of seeing then because we have learned to see only from the point of utility.”⁶⁷¹ Oftentimes, when the West tries to be self-critical, it offers only “a criticism that leaves our society as it is and looks for

⁶⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 118-19.

⁶⁷¹ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, 117.

salvation in the inner life.” Schillebeeckx believes that this increasing Western turn toward Eastern spirituality is due to a growing despair over the possibility of changing prevailing social structures. People began to think of themselves as individuals and focus more on the renewal of the inner life through meditation. Certainly, one may dispute Schillebeeckx’s characterization of Eastern versus Western religions. However, what Schillebeeckx has successfully shown is that religious beliefs do have a profound effect on how the way one lives as a human being among other human beings in this world. When it comes to the addressing the misery that pervades this world, what at one believes, or does not believe, about God is not irrelevant.

Schillebeeckx speaks of an additional noteworthy distinction between Islam and Christianity in his 1987 work, *On Christian Faith*. Discussing how a religious tradition can never be reduced to its ethics, Schillebeeckx remarked, “one can even say of the Christian tradition that the specific character of the ethics of Christians (as opposed to some other religion, e.g Islam) lies in the fact that it has no ethics of its own and is therefore open to the *humanum* that is sought by all men and women, here and now and ever anew.”⁶⁷² In a 1993 interview, Schillebeeckx reaffirmed his view that “there is no such thing as a Christian ethic,” while “Islam is another matter, that has its ethics.” Schillebeeckx explained that for the Christian, neither revelation nor faith impose ethical norms, even if they may inspire their formation.⁶⁷³ This would then imply that for

⁶⁷² For Schillebeeckx, this position is nothing new to Christianity. The position that morality is autonomous from religion was defended by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 107, a. 4. Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 50.

⁶⁷³ Schillebeeckx, *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 70.

Muslims, faith and revelation do dictate certain ethical norms. It would also indicate that Muslims and Christians view the relationship between religion and ethics differently.

D. Is there a Significant Difference Between Islam and Christianity on the Relationship Between Religion and Ethics?

Although Schillebeeckx is not a scholar of Islam, it is important to evaluate his perception of the differences between Islam and Christianity. Particularly, I believe it is necessary to focus on three of Schillebeeckx's claims. First, Schillebeeckx's comparison of the Bible and the Quran, including the assertion that unlike the Bible, the Quran only deals with instances of suffering particular to seventh-century Arabia, rather than the issue of suffering as a whole. Second, Schillebeeckx's articulation of the differences between Islam and Christianity with regard to how they approach suffering, particularly the belief that in Islam, the only attitude one can take to suffering is submission, or the patience to bear it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is Schillebeeckx's insistence that while Christianity does not have an ethics per se, but Islam does. I will take up each of these claims in the order they are listed.

Regarding the Bible and the Quran, Schillebeeckx is correct in emphasizing that these Scriptures are viewed differently by their respective traditions. Both are considered the "Word of God," but in distinct ways. The Bible is inspired by God, but it is not the literal word of God.⁶⁷⁴ It was composed by many different authors over a span of

⁶⁷⁴ Here, I am focusing in particular on the Catholic vision of the Bible. The majority of Christians, even non-Catholics, do not take the Bible to be the literal word of God and accept modern forms of biblical exegesis. However, there are Christians, in particular fundamentalist groups, who still uphold that the Bible is the literal word of God and therefore, for example, rejecting the theory of evolution in favor of the Genesis creation story which depicts God as creating the whole universe in seven days. See Second Vatican

thousands of years. Schillebeeckx insist that when Christians refer to the Bible as “God’s word,” it is a “metaphoric expression.” The Bible is a “human, historical, and, as such, contingent transmission.”⁶⁷⁵ On the other hand, Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed solely to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel over a period of approximately twenty-three years. Here, the teaching that the Prophet was illiterate is fundamental, since the Quran is not the words of the Prophet, but the words of God. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains, “before the Divine Message can be received, the human receptacle must be pure and clear.”⁶⁷⁶

For many Sunni Muslims, the Quran is considered to be uncreated and therefore, co-eternal with God. This belief originated with the Hanbali school in the ninth century, which sought to emphasize the transcendent unity of God and God’s unlimited omnipotence. It upholds the priority of revelation over the use of reason, emphasizing the insufficiency of reason in the quest for religious truth. The belief in the eternal, uncreated Quran has led some scholars to posit that the Quran, in Islam, rather than the Prophet Muhammad, is what is parallel to Jesus in Christianity. This assertion is made in light of the profession made in the Nicene Creed, “begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father,” and the association of Jesus with the Word, or *Logos*, in the prologue of the Gospel of John.⁶⁷⁷ However, not all Muslims would subscribe to this view, and this is

Council, “Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996).

⁶⁷⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Theological Quests,” 121.

⁶⁷⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Muhammad: Man of God* (Chicago: ABC International, 1995), 24. This is also in contrast to what Islam teaches about Jesus. In the Quran, Jesus is not illiterate, but learned and full of wisdom. Quran 3:48, “And God will teach Jesus the book, the wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel.” See Zeki Saritoprak, *Islam’s Jesus* (University Press of Florida, 2014), 9.

⁶⁷⁷ John 1:1-2 reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

true in particular of Shi'a traditions. In the eighth century, the Mu'tazila emerged as an example of "theology from below." In contrast to the later Hanbali school, Mu'tazila gave a central role to the gift of human reason as bestowed by God in order to aid the search for divine truth. They argued that the Quran was not the eternal, uncreated word of God, but created in time and therefore, subject to human interpretation and authority.

However, those who uphold the view that the Quran is uncreated do not necessarily deny the importance of Quranic exegesis. While the doctrine of the Quran's inviolability rules out the possibility that it is alterable, there are alternative ways of reading the text.⁶⁷⁸ Also, according to some scholars, there is no neat analogy between the Christian concept of Christ and the Islamic concept of the Quran. Muzammil Siddiqi points out that such an analogy is often proposed by Christian scholars, not Muslim scholars. The Quran, whether eternal or created, is still the Word of God, not God. Muslims do not worship the Quran, nor do they direct prayers to the sacred text in the same way that Christians pray to Jesus.⁶⁷⁹ As Amina Wadud explains, "The Quran is not God. Words are fallible."⁶⁸⁰ For both Catholics and Muslims, God's presence cannot be limited to their sacred texts.

A second claim that Schillebeeckx makes is that the Quran, unlike the Bible, is concerned only with instances of suffering particular to seventh century Arabia, rather than suffering as a theoretical problem. However, such a statement is rather simplistic. It

⁶⁷⁸ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 36.

⁶⁷⁹ Muzammil H. Siddiqi, "God: A Muslim View," in *Three Faiths-One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter*, ed. John Hick and Edmund S. Meltzer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 73.

⁶⁸⁰ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 208.

also appears to limit the Quran's contemporary liberating potential. Schillebeeckx fails to explain how the Bible, composed of texts written in specific historical time periods, is any different. Schillebeeckx was correct, however, in asserting that in Islam, it is commonly held that Jews and Christians have corrupted divine revelation.⁶⁸¹ The Quran is seen as the revelation that corrects and replaces the earlier revelations in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. However, just as Jesus the Jewish Nazarene did not intend to found a new religion, neither does Islam claim to be a new religion. According to the Quran, all of God's prophets were *Muslims*, and preached only Islam, including Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Jesus. In his treatment of Islam, Schillebeeckx also neglects to bring up a significant similarity between Islam and Christianity, which is that both regard their scripture as fulfilling earlier ones, although to a different degree. Muslims regard the prophets of Israel and Jesus as important, but the Old and New Testaments are not considered a part of their sacred scripture or used in Islamic prayers or rituals. For Christianity, the New Testament is said to fulfill Jewish revelation,⁶⁸² but the Hebrew Bible remains an integral part of the Christian tradition and is used in Christian liturgy.

⁶⁸¹ Mahmoud Ayoub adds, "it must be emphasized that Muslim thinkers do not reject the Gospels out of hand as complete distortions of the truth. They are regarded, on the contrary, as containing clear evidence of the essential truth of God's Oneness and the humanity of Jesus." See "Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion," in *The Muslim World* LXX:2 (April 1980), 112.

⁶⁸² Some Christians who adopt a pluralist position reject the view of the New Testament as fulfillment of the Old Testament. For example, see Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 174, fn. 6. Schillebeeckx's perspective on the Old Testament is indicative of an inclusivist position. He says, "the Old Testament has, as an expression of religious faith, a certain independent value of its own, but this Old Testament revelation must ultimately be seen principally as the prehistory of Christian revelation, as a growth towards the mystery of Christ, which is the center and the *telos*, the end and goal, of the whole of revelation. The entire salvation history of the Old Testament was directed towards this final stage of revelation, and the first word of revelation can only be fully understood when it is considered in the perspective of this definitive revelation in Christ. See "The Bible and Theology," in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 2: Revelation and Theology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 122, first published as "Exegese, Dogmatik und Dogmenentwicklung," in *Exegese und Dogmatik*, ed. H. Vorgrimler (Mainz: 1962), 91-114.

The fundamental nature of the Christian corruption of the Bible, according to Islam, was that the Prophet Jesus was turned into the Son of God and made to die on the cross. Thus, Schillebeeckx is right to point out that for Islam, the crucifixion of Jesus has no significance. This is because Islam denies that the crucifixion ever actually occurred.

The Quran states,

and for their saying: ‘We have surely killed the Christ, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God.’ They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; rather it was made only to appear so to them. And those who have differed concerning him are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of conjecture. They did not kill him with certainty. Rather, God took him up to Himself, for God is Mighty and Wise.⁶⁸³

Generally, this verse has been interpreted to mean that another was made to look like Jesus and died in his place. The crucifixion, from the Islamic point of view, would automatically rule out Jesus’ status as prophet, since God does not allow God’s prophets to be humiliated and tortured by their opponents.⁶⁸⁴ In one sense, it is completely logical for Schillebeeckx to conclude that Islam does not have a notion of “redemptive suffering.” Unlike Christianity, the concept of sin is not central in Islam. A comparison between Genesis 3 and Quran 2:35-39 reveals that the latter does not contain a story of the “fall” of humankind. In both Genesis and the Quran, the human being is tempted by the devil and eats fruit from a forbidden tree. Genesis 3 ends with a list of consequences of sin: enmity between the man and the woman, pain in childbirth, the woman’s desire for her husband who shall rule over her, the human need to toil for their daily bread. In the Quran, “Adam received from his Lord some words, and He accepted his repentance.”

⁶⁸³ Quran 4:157

⁶⁸⁴ Zeki Saritoprak, *Islam’s Jesus* (University Press of Florida, 2014), 38.

In Islam, there is no concept of “original sin” as an explanation for human wrongdoing, although Islam certainly acknowledges that human error occurs. In contrast to the writings of St. Paul in the New Testament, in the Quran, sin has not corrupted or altered humanity in such a way that it is in need of a savior who is both human and divine.⁶⁸⁵

However, the difference between Christianity and Islam is not as simple as claiming that Jesus is a savior figure for the former, and not a savior figure for the latter. Jesus as Savior cannot be central in Islam because Islam lacks a concept of sin analogous to the Christian view of fallen humanity and its need for redemption. Yet, Islam can and does say that Christ was a savior in that “he, by his message, helped save humanity from error and to guide its steps further on the path to God, to whom we all belong, and to whom we shall all return.”⁶⁸⁶ Jesus is a “messiah,” but not a divine messiah. In this regard, there is an alignment between Jews and Muslims in contradistinction to Christianity, in that neither consider their messiah to be divine. With regard to Jesus, Muslims consider themselves to be followers of the “middle way,” between one group of people who denied Jesus and another who exaggerated his status.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁵ Robert Simon, “Natural History of Sin: Remarks on the Origins of Sin in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 56: 1 (2003), 24. See 1 Cor 2:6-8 “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Romans 1:16,, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also the Greek;” and Romans 3:22-24, “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

⁶⁸⁶ Mahmoud Ayoub, “Toward an Islamic Christology: An Image of Jesus in Early Shi’i Muslim Literature,” in *The Muslim World* LXVI:3 (July 1976), 167.

⁶⁸⁷ Saritoprak, 5-6.

It also crucial to mention that Jesus is not just simply tolerated or appreciated by Muslims, but rather belief in Jesus is an essential part of Muslim faith. The *shahada*, or the Muslim profession of faith, is the first of the five pillars of Islam.⁶⁸⁸ When proclaiming the *shahada*, a Muslim says the words, “I testify that there is no deity but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger.” However, it is often not acknowledged that the *shahada* includes the belief in Jesus and in all of the pre-Islamic prophets.⁶⁸⁹ For Muslims, the message of Jesus was nothing but the true religion of Islam. The real spirit of both the Torah and the Gospels is *tawhid*, the oneness of God.

In the Quran, Jesus is presented as one of the signs of the Final Hour, or the Hour of Judgment. The Quran speaks to the role of the prophets as heralds of the path of God, although it is strictly God alone who can bestow eternal salvation. However, Jesus, Muhammad, and the other prophets can act as intercessors, pleading to God for the salvation of others on their behalf.⁶⁹⁰ In many ways, the Muslim view of Jesus is similar, though not identical to, the Catholic view of saintly intercession.

Evaluating Schillebeeckx’s claim that Islam and Christianity approach suffering differently is a complicated task. Due to Islam’s focus on God’s omnipotence, Schillebeeckx insists that for Islam, everything must be under God’s control and therefore, suffering can be explained one of two ways: either as a punishment for some sort of wrongdoing or as a test of faith. Schillebeeckx’s contrasted this position with

⁶⁸⁸ The five pillars of Islam are 1) *shahada* 2) *salat*, performing ritual prayers five times a day 3) *zakat*, giving alms to the poor and needy 4) *sawm*, fasting during the month of Ramadan 5) *hajj*, making a pilgrimage to Mecca, if possible, at least once during one’s lifetime.

⁶⁸⁹ Saritoprak, 15.

⁶⁹⁰ Saritoprak, 51. It is important to note that some Muslims completely reject any notion of intercession, as it gives too much power to human actions. Among these are the Mu’tazalites.

Christianity, which, he claims, makes suffering a problem for God's love, rather than God's omnipotence. However, clearly, the theme of suffering as punishment for sin or suffering as a test of the strength of one's devotion to God is repeatedly found in both the Bible and Christian theology, although some, but certainly not all, contemporary theologians have taken issue with such explanations for suffering. According to Schillebeeckx, there is too much suffering in the world to ever be able to make sense of it, and thus, there is no way to answer the theodicy question.⁶⁹¹

In Islam, human beings are regarded as the "vicegerents of God." In Arabic, the word for worship, *ibadah*, also means service. Therefore, to worship God means to serve God, and this service to God entails care for humanity, especially the poor and marginalized.⁶⁹² In general, the Sunni tradition of Islam encourages Muslims to make the world a more peaceful place, and thus, to prevent the Final Hour from arriving prematurely.⁶⁹³ Furthermore, as will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, the existence of feminism in Islam speaks to the fact that Islam does not passively accept suffering or the status quo. Schillebeeckx wisely points out that what may be interpreted as a lack of "critique of society" on the part of Islam may actually be a critique by Islam of the West. Western society often views itself as the harbinger of liberation for all, when, in reality, oppressions of all kinds remain, although we may not always be conscious of them.

⁶⁹¹ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 621.

⁶⁹² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 177.

⁶⁹³ Saritoprak, 48.

Finally, Schillebeeckx remarks that Christianity does not really have an ethics, while Islam does. This statement does not mean that there is no such thing as “Christian ethics” whether as a branch of study, or a certain set of moral principles that Christians profess to live by. The Beatitudes found in Matthew and Luke’s Gospels, and The Parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25 both are both said to represent guidelines for Christian morality. However, there is an element of truth to Schillebeeckx’s comments, which stems from the differences in the origins of both traditions, and how their sacred texts are understood.

In Robert Simon’s view, Christianity can be said to have two phases. It started with a prophetic movement of Jesus’s followers, resented by Judaism, that moved out into incorporating Gentiles. However, in the fourth century, as the Roman persecution of Christianity ended and Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, it became “sacramental, ritualized, and hierarchized,” shaped after the model of the imperial Roman Empire, imbued with this-worldly ambitions.⁶⁹⁴ Jesus had never assumed political leadership in this movement. He was not the head of a state or institutional organization. In the Gospels, we do not find a set of specific institutional guidelines laid out by Jesus himself for all of his followers.⁶⁹⁵ Rather, the communities worked out particular issues as they arose within the early Church. In fact, the most commonly quoted saying of Jesus with regard to politics is, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things which are God’s.”⁶⁹⁶ This verse is often interpreted to mean that

⁶⁹⁴ Simon, 16.

⁶⁹⁵ Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2011), 61.

⁶⁹⁶ This statement of Jesus is found in all three Synoptic Gospels: Mark 12:17, Luke 20:15, Matthew 22:21.

church and state should be separate, but what exactly a separation of church and state means is still being worked out in contemporary American and European politics.

Islam also emerged as a prophetic movement and was seen as a direct threat to the religious, social, political, and economic structure of the society in which it first appeared. Muhammad's message was an affront to the polytheistic tribal leaders of Mecca who gained enormous economic benefit from regular religious practices and festivals, and a rigid, male-dominated social structure.⁶⁹⁷ However, unlike Jesus who eventually met his death right outside the walls of Jerusalem, Muhammad fled from his persecutors in Mecca. In 622, he established the first Islamic *ummah*, or community, in Medina. In Medina, Muhammad became the leader of a new religious-political government. He actually oversaw the functions of the state, appointing judges and military commanders, and negotiating treaties.⁶⁹⁸ The framework for this society was centered around the *ummah*, a community bound by the religious faith and commitment of Muslims. The authority for this new approach to religion and politics rested on the Quran and after Muhammad's death in 632, both the Quran, and the sayings and actions

⁶⁹⁷ In particular, the Meccan leaders were threatened by radical monotheism, the declaration that all are equal before God, the prohibition of female infanticide, which was highly practiced in seventh century Arabia, and Muhammad's practice of freeing slaves. See Kimball, 102.

⁶⁹⁸ One of the most famous of Muhammad's negotiations was the Treaty of Hudaibiyya in 628. Muhammad and his companions were intercepted by the Meccan army while on a pilgrimage back to Mecca. Stopping short of Mecca, Muhammad negotiated with the Meccans, agreeing to terms whereby the Muslims would not make a pilgrimage that year and both sides would agree to remain peaceful toward one another for the next ten years. The next year, Muhammad returned to Mecca peacefully. During this pilgrimage, another well-known episode occurred in which Muhammad destroyed all of the pagan idols in the Kaaba, or the House of God, believed to be a symbol of God's covenant with Abraham and Ishmael. It is toward the Kaaba that Muslims direct their prayer, even today. A significant part of this story is that when Muhammad entered the Kaaba, he destroyed all of the polytheistic idols, but left intact Christian icons of Abraham, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. See Kimball, 104. See also John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (University of California Press, 2011), 151.

of Muhammad. By contrast, the early Christian community began to form many years prior to the composition of the Gospels. These disciples, who worshipped together in house-churches and were faced with the threat of persecution, had nothing akin to a “Christian state” in the way that Medina can be called an “Islamic state.” St. Paul and his followers were religious leaders, not political ones.

The Quran, in Islam, can be viewed not simply as the particular revelation of God to a particular people at a particular time, but “an unparalleled window into the moral tradition.”⁶⁹⁹ In Islam, a process that eventually became known as *fiqh* describes a movement from the roots of revelation to specific determinations or judgments of what actually constitutes divine law. The Quran is considered the first and most important basis of *fiqh*. As Islamic ethicist A. Kevin Reinhart explains, the Quran is a source of knowledge in the way the entire corpus of legal precedent is the for the common law tradition. The Quran, is “not so much an index of possible rulings as a quarry in which the astute inquirer can hope to find the building blocks for a morally valid, and therefore true, system of ethics.”⁷⁰⁰ By the fourth century, it was generally acknowledged that the *Sunnah* of the Prophet formed the second source of *fiqh*.⁷⁰¹ The *Sunnah* is the verbally transmitted reports (*hadith*) of the Prophet’s words and actions. The *Sunnah* is generally considered to be the standard used to by Muslims to interpret the Quran. Given that only

⁶⁹⁹ A. Kevin Reinhart, “Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics,” in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11:1 (1983), 189.

⁷⁰⁰ Reinhart, 189.

⁷⁰¹ Reinhart also identifies two additional sources of *fiqh*. The third is *ijma*, or consensus, and refers to an agreement by an authoritative body about the assessment of an act of practice. The fourth is *qiyas*, or analogical reasoning. I have given less attention to these additional sources, as different schools of Islam grant them different levels of recognition and authority. Also, throughout Islamic history, there has never been widespread agreement over which persons or bodies have legitimate authority. See Reinhart, 191-92.

God is absolute, *fiqh* knowledge is considered suppositional rather than certain. However, because *fiqh* knowledge is held to be guaranteed by sources which are of God, it has the same imperative status as a direct command from God above and can therefore be labeled as “truth.”⁷⁰²

In summary, one can say that revelation in the Quran is interpreted through the medium of the *Sunnah* to mark the contents of *shariah*, or Islamic law.⁷⁰³ The term *Shariah* signifies “a highway along which to travel in order to lead the moral life.” The statutes and ordinances of Islamic law are the result of entry (*shar’*) by God into the world in order to provide a means (*shariah*) to Him.⁷⁰⁴ Judaism, therefore, is much closer to Islam than is Christianity in terms of laws and practices.⁷⁰⁵ The centrality of *shariah* as a path to God differs from St. Paul’s treatment of the law of Moses. Paul did not outright reject the Law, but held that it has been fulfilled by the arrival of Jesus. According to Paul, the Law and its keeping can lead only to a certain knowledge of sin, but it does not necessarily lead one to salvation.⁷⁰⁶ For Christians, there is no law that is considered a “path to God” in the same way the *shariah* functions for Muslims.

Due to their different histories and ways of viewing their sacred texts, Christianity cannot be considered as having its own particular ethics in the same way Islam can.

⁷⁰² Reinhart, 192-93.

⁷⁰³ In general, Sunni Muslims believe that the door of new legal interpretation closed in 900 CE, while the Shi’i tradition has tended to leave the door of new legal interpretation open indefinitely. John Renard points out that here, the Sunni view corresponds to Protestant Christianity’s belief that inspired authority ended with the apostles, while the Shi’i stance parallels the Catholic belief in the ongoing authority of the Magisterium, or teaching office of the Church. See *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (University of California Press, 2011), 133-34.

⁷⁰⁴ Reinhart, 188-89.

⁷⁰⁵ Seritoprak, 134.

⁷⁰⁶ Simon, 25. See also Romans 5:12-21.

Islamic ethics and Islam appear simultaneously, whereas for Christianity, what can be properly called “Christian ethics” did not arise with Jesus’ ministry, nor with the composition of the New Testament, but from the work of theologians inspired by these two sources. Nevertheless, the difference between Christianity and Islam, and their respective relationships to ethics are not as stark as one may at first perceive them to be.

For example, it would be rash to declare that Christianity is inherently more flexible because it lacks a system like *shariah*. According to many Muslims, the *shariah* is not exempt from the need to be re-thought in ever changing circumstances and historical contexts. According to Abdullahi An-Naim, the *shariah* is “not the whole of Islam” but “an interpretation of its fundamental sources as understood in a particular context.”⁷⁰⁷ Thus, it may embody “medieval principles of reason and objects of public good [that] may no longer be valid today.”⁷⁰⁸ The Quran may be called divine speech, but there remains a distinction between the divine speech and its earthly realization.⁷⁰⁹

Furthermore, Islam is not necessarily opposed to the notion that ethics and religion are independent to a certain degree, though most Muslims, along with Schillebeeckx, would not consent to the claim that ethics is done just as well without religion. According to Tariq Ramadan, the message of the Prophet Muhammad, or as Muslims would say, “the last message,” brings “nothing new to the affirmation of the principles of human dignity, justice, and equality: it merely recalls and confirms them.”

⁷⁰⁷ Abdullahi An-Naim, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse University Press, 1990), 14.

⁷⁰⁸ An-Naim, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, 71.

⁷⁰⁹ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 79.

The Prophet did not conceive the content of his message as the expression of pure otherness in contrast to what other societies of his time were saying or what had been said in the past.⁷¹⁰

Prior to the revelation of the Quran, Muhammad participated in an alliance known as the Pact of the Virtuous, which was contracted at the home of Abdullah ibn Judan, chief of the Taym tribe. This alliance sought to place respect for the oppressed over considerations of kinship and political power in order to put an end to conflicts between the Meccan tribes. Yet, even after the period of revelation began, Muhammad remembered the pact, accepted it, and would not have hesitated to participate in it again, even as a Muslim.⁷¹¹ In this way, we can say the both the Jesus and Prophet Muhammad shared and responded to their experience of the *humanum* as threatened and damaged.

Furthermore, while the Quran is the consummation of all previous revelation, the Quran is not considered to be the first or only instance of God's communication with humankind. Revelation is not confined to any particular group or time period.⁷¹² Just as Schillebeeckx and the Roman Catholic tradition assert that revelation was occurring prior to the incarnation of Jesus in history, particularly, in the form of the Old Testament, Islam

⁷¹⁰ Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22.

⁷¹¹ The Prophet said, "I was present in Abdullah ibn Judan's house when a pact was concluded, so excellent that I would not exchange my part in it even for a herd of red camels; and if now, in Islam, I was asked to take part in it, I would be glad to accept." See Ramadan, *Footsteps of the Prophets*, 21.

⁷¹² In Islam, the revelation of God on a spiritual and existential level is available to all of humanity at all times. The Quran teaches that human beings have an innate nature called *fitrah*, and thus, knowledge of God is inherent in human existence. However, human beings cannot rely upon innate spirituality alone and need the assistance of explicit Divine guidance. For this reason, God revealed His will for humanity to the prophets, so they could be the teachers of humankind. Revelation in this specific and explicit sense was given to the prophets alone and finally to the Prophet Muhammad. See Siddiqi, "God: A Muslim View," 74.

also affirms that revelation occurred prior to the Quran. The Quran says that there were never any people without a warner [prophet] living among them.⁷¹³ For every people, God assigned a religious path to follow.⁷¹⁴ The Islamic tradition, therefore, is no less capable than the Catholic tradition of recognizing cooperation with religious others as a not only a necessity for keeping the peace in the modern world, but as a religious duty.

Islam also lacks a centralizing authority figure akin to the papacy in Catholicism. Although one may argue that not all Catholics act in obedience to the Pope, and in fact, many flat out disagree with him on certain topics, the papacy at least has “symbolic spiritual authority.” Since all Catholics are technically under the authority of the pope, Catholic statements have an “official” character, which makes them more easily enforceable and generates “a remarkable global homogenization of Catholic culture.”⁷¹⁵ According to political scientist Michael Driessen, this can make negotiations with Catholic hierarchy easier. If a deal is reached with the pope, one can rest assured that the bishops and the faithful will rally around that decision, whereas the decentralization of authority in Islam “makes negotiations messier, involving more personalities and

⁷¹³ Quran 35:24, “Indeed, we have sent you with the truth as a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And there is no nation but that there had passed within it a warner.”

⁷¹⁴ Quran 5:48, “And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.” Quran 22:34, “And for all religion We have appointed a rite that they may make mention of what He has provided them of animals. For your go is one God, so to him submit. And, give good tidings to the humble.”

⁷¹⁵ Jose Casanova, “Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective,” in *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 1:2 (2005), 98.

ideas.”⁷¹⁶ This leaves more room for fear and skepticism, as one cannot exactly pinpoint “where Islam stands” or “what Islam says.” Nevertheless, this decentralization can also ease negotiations with political leaders as it makes it less difficult for Muslims to “adapt to new political environments” and “to support a greater pluralism of ideas and allow new ideas to ascend in importance more quickly.” The rigid centralization of authority in Catholicism, on the other hand, makes it easier for the pope to “remain personally obdurate to new political principles over greater lengths of time.”⁷¹⁷ Individual Catholics can preach about their support for LGBT rights and women’s ordination, and make legitimate theological arguments for doing so, but they are always faced with the fact that “official” Catholic teaching says something different.

Finally, although Schillebeeckx spoke about the split between Sunni and Shi’a, his brief reflection does not even come close to expressing the amount of diversity that exists within in Islam, a diversity that is much greater than the internal differences among Catholics. No matter how much studying a person can do, it is impossible to know and understand a religious tradition completely, even one’s own tradition. Thus, for example, when Catholic and a Muslim engage one another, their engagement is with a particular Catholic and a particular Muslim, who may expand upon, confirm, or even contradict one’s original beliefs about that tradition. Furthermore, as I will explore in the next chapter, others markers of identity, such as race, gender, location, socioeconomic status, etc. often shape how one interprets and practices his or her religion.

⁷¹⁶ Michael Driessen, *Religious Democracy and Civilizational Politics: Comparing Political Islam and Political Catholicism* (Washington DC: Center for International and Regional Studies Georgetown University, 2013), 26.

⁷¹⁷ Driessen, 26.

E. Dialogue with the Criterion of the Threatened *Humanum*: How two Religions Can Make Absolute Claims and Still Find Fragments of Salvation Through Their Interaction with One Another

The existence of many similarities between two religions does not necessarily increase the likelihood of dialogue or peace between them. In fact, the more alike two religions are, the more threatening they may become to another, making them more prone to attack the other in an effort to accentuate the significance of their differences. This is not to say that mutual likenesses are always the cause of violence. On the contrary, they may also serve to foster compromise and understanding, as well as stimulate cooperation toward shared goals.

Naturally, then, differences are not an automatic cause of strife. Obvious differences can actually make the religious other appear far less threatening, namely because such dissimilarities easily mark the other off as “other.” This may explain why Muslim-Christian relations are a much more controversial issue than, for instance, Christian-Buddhist relations. Muslims and Christians can easily say that one another has corrupted God’s true revelation, but Christianity and Buddhism have such disparate views of Ultimate Reality that such a claim would not begin to even make sense. When differences are not perceived as ominous, they may be more easily welcomed by both sides as a source of fascination and potential new knowledge. Of course, this is certainly not always the case. As many pluralist theologians have pointed out, the differences between religions have often led to a desire to rank them, and with this, a tendency to render one’s own tradition superior to such a degree that one need not listen to anyone else. However, given that both differences and similarities have the potential to lead to

both productivity and hostility, it does not make sense to offer the eradication of difference as a solution to religious animosity. Also, asking persons to not view their own personally held religious tradition as the best or most complete is impractical in many circumstances. In fact, such a solution, especially if applied to the relationship between Christianity and Islam, only exacerbates the problem.

As can be gleaned from the information provided so far in this chapter, Christianity and Islam have many similarities. Both are monotheistic prophetic traditions that stress a personal relationship between God and humanity. Through further study of each tradition and through the experience of dialogue and theological exchange between members of both traditions, more areas of mutual agreement have been found than previously thought to exist. However, there is no denying both traditions make absolute claims. Certain beliefs, unless drastically altered, will always conflict with and even contradict one another.

Christians believe that Jesus is God incarnate, fully human and fully divine. In Chapter One, I categorized Schillebeeckx as an inclusivist since Schillebeeckx affirmed the absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the history of religions. Jesus, for Schillebeeckx, is not one mere incarnation among many, or just another intermediary between God and humanity. But, rather as “God’s unequivocal yes to humankind,” Jesus is “the one, the definitive eschatological revelation.”⁷¹⁸ When speaking about Jesus, Schillebeeckx retained the three terms rejected by pluralist Paul Knitter: full, final/definitive, and unsurpassable.

⁷¹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 26-27.

Schillebeeckx's vision of Jesus is one that clearly clashes with certain Islamic beliefs. For Islam, Muhammad is the Final Prophet, the revelation that surpasses and fulfills all others. In John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always."⁷¹⁹ Christians believe the Advocate refers to the Holy Spirit and points to the concept of a triune God. Muslims believe that the Advocate refers to the Prophet Muhammad, and that Jesus was clearly foretelling the coming of Islam.⁷²⁰ The Christian ascription of divinity to Jesus is not a mere difference of opinion, but for Muslims, a violation of *tawhid*, God's oneness and absolute sovereignty. The Quran, in rejection of a Trinitarian notion of God, states, "Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son."⁷²¹ Quran 5:116 illustrates the following exchange in which Jesus himself denies the idea that divinity should be attributed to him:

And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen."

If Jesus is not divine, Muslims cannot concur with Schillebeeckx that Jesus is the guarantor of eschatological salvation. For Islam, prophets like Jesus and Muhammad, convey the message of God's salvation, but only God can truly give salvation. Islam does not merely deny the significance of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, but explicitly claims that these events did not even happen. Yet, the resurrection of Jesus, regardless of

⁷¹⁹ John 14:16

⁷²⁰ Saritoprak, 4.

⁷²¹ Quran 4:171

whether one affirms that Jesus' appearances to the disciples after his death were bodily and literal, or spiritual and mystical, is central to Christian belief and practice.

In Chapter One, I reviewed the positions of Christian theologians who tried to minimize disagreement by shifting their understanding of Jesus. Catholic Paul Knitter drops the terms full, final/definitive, and unsurpassable when speaking of Jesus. He insists that titles such as Son of God, Savior, and Word of God, are mere "love language" rather than conveyers of truth about the status of Jesus. Catholic theologian Roger Haight describes Jesus as the "symbol of God" who is the "mediation of God's presence to Christianity," but not the completion of other religions.⁷²² Both theologians affirm that other religious figures, such as Muhammad or Buddha, can be considered to be on the same level as Jesus.⁷²³ This creates a multitude of problems for interreligious dialogue.

First of all, many Christian theologians, including Schillebeeckx, are not able to assent to such pluralist claims. Second, such pluralist theologies would not necessarily be accepted or appreciated by Muslims. The problem that Islam has with Christian theology is not so much that it ranks Jesus higher than Muhammad, but that it considers Jesus to be divine, which, to Muslims, is a clear violation of *tawhid*, or the oneness of God. This is the reason many Muslims find it insulting to be referred to as "Mohammedans." It implies that they worship and divinize the Prophet Muhammad in the same way Christians worship and praise Jesus Christ. Muslims reject any ascription of divinity to

⁷²² Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 338.

⁷²³ See Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 192-93 and Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian* (London: Oneworld, 2009), 125.

the Prophet, even if he is considered the most perfect of all human beings.⁷²⁴ This also explains why the Islam forbids statues, monuments, or icons of the Prophet, since these could easily lead to worship. Saying Muhammad is a saving figure “on the same level” as Jesus Christ is offensive to Muslim beliefs and distorts Islam’s true teachings.

Christian philosopher and theologian John Hick goes further than Knitter and Haight in holding a pluralist position. According to Hick, Christians must leave the language of the Council of Nicea and the Council of Chalcedon behind.⁷²⁵ The incarnation, instead of the notion that God became flesh in Jesus Christ, takes on a metaphorical meaning in Hick’s theology. Jesus is Christianity’s supreme teacher and inspirer, but he is not divine. Divine incarnation is no longer defined solely by the birth of Christ, but is seen as “taking place wherever and whenever God’s will is done.” Thus, for Hick, Christian worship should be directed to God instead of Jesus.⁷²⁶

⁷²⁴ According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Muhammad was protected from error by God. Many Shi’a Muslims understand Muhammad’s inerrancy in the sense that his very substance of his being was immune from sin. See Nasr, *Muhammad: Man of God*, 71-72. Tariq Ramadan states that the Prophet “is a model for Muslims not only through the excellence of his behavior but also through the weaknesses of his humanity revealed and mentioned by the Quran.” In one passage of the Quran, the Prophet is actually chastised by God for his behavior. When trying to convey the message of Islam to a tribal chief named Walid, the Prophet was interrupted by a blind man and quickly became agitated as this blocked him from presenting his case to the chief. The following verses (Quran 80:1-12) were revealed: “In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, He [the Prophet], frowned and turned away, because the blind man came t him. But could you tell but that perhaps he might grow in purity? Or that he might receive admonition, and the reminder might profit him? As to one who regards himself as self-sufficient, you attend to him, though it is no blame to you if he does not grow in purity. But as to he who came to you striving earnestly, with fear, of him you were unmindful. By no means [should it be so]! For it is indeed a message of remembrance. Therefore let who will, keep it in remembrance!” See Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48-49.

⁷²⁵ At the first Council of Nicaea in AD 325, Jesus was identified as God incarnate, the Second Person of Trinity, equal and consubstantial with the Father. In 451, at the Council of Chalcedon, Jesus was confirmed as having two natures, human and divine.

⁷²⁶ John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 136.

Still, even Hick's pluralist Christianity would not erase conflicts with Islam. Hick indicates that his vision of Jesus differs from the Quran on two major points. First, he rejects the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary, which is attested to in the Quran, as well as the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁷²⁷ Second, he affirms, against the Quran's denial of the event, that the crucifixion of Jesus took place, although he still does not believe Jesus' resurrection was a bodily event, nor that his death was necessary for the atonement of human sin. Here, Hick uses Christian standards in his rejection of the Quranic account of these events. With regard to the miraculous birth of Jesus, he accepts that by doubting its historicity, he is following the opinion of many New Testament scholars who acknowledge that the story has a meager basis in the New Testament and that many miraculous birth stories surround great figures in the ancient world. With regard to the crucifixion, Hick refers to historical evidence both in the New Testament and in references by the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus.⁷²⁸ While Hick gives an accurate assessment of current trends in New Testament scholarship, he nonetheless shows how one cannot so easily give up their own religious tradition as a frame of reference when considering certain claims. If even Hick cannot seem to place biblical criticism on the same level as Quranic exegesis, it shows that a pluralism that radically declares all religions to be entirely equal is neither a realistic nor a desirable goal if one wishes to maintain the integrity of individual religious beliefs.

⁷²⁷ Quran 21:91 says of Mary, "And [mention], the one who guarded her chastity, so We blew into her [garment] through our angel Gabriel, and we made her and her son a sign for the worlds." The virginal conception of Jesus is found in the New Testament in Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:25.

⁷²⁸ John Hick, *Islam and Christianity* (lecture to Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Tehran, 2005), 14-15.

The rationale behind the call for religious pluralism is a desire to end appeals to religious others to convert to one's own tradition. Certainly, ending proselytizing attempts that are coercive or violent is a noble and necessary objective in order to foster peaceful co-existence between religions. However, pluralism still insists that religious others undergo a conversion, a conversion to the pluralist position. Hick states, "I believe in time mainstream Christianity will come to see itself, not as the one and only true faith, but as one among a plurality of true faiths.... And I venture to hope that an equivalent long-term development is also taking place in Islam."⁷²⁹ In an earlier work, Hick expressed his desire that

the Muslim world will eventually find its own Quranic way of combining modern knowledge with its faith in the Transcendent and its commitment to a morality of human community. And we may further hope that this development will also include an increased recognition of the ecumenical point of view that has been so powerfully expressed within the Sufi strand of Islam.⁷³⁰

Muslim philosopher Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen⁷³¹ states that Hick's remarks are not only patronizing toward Muslims, but they also grossly misrepresent Sufism.⁷³² Legenhausen points out the Hick is fond of citing the words of Sufi mystic and poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, "The lamps are different but the Light is the same." It is true that for many Sufis, religious differences are considered exterior differences, while the interior core of

⁷²⁹ Hick, *Islam and Christianity*, 17.

⁷³⁰ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 378.

⁷³¹ Legenhausen was raised Catholic and converted to Islam in his adult life. He is currently a professor of Philosophy at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Qom, Iran.

⁷³² Sufism, briefly defined, is not so much an Islamic sect as a mystical way of approaching the Islamic faith. It is commonly described as "mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God." See Shamim Akhter, *Faith & Philosophy of Islam* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2009).

all religions is the same. This, however, does not mean Rumi was the religious pluralist Hick claims him to have been.

The Sufi way of life is called a *tariqah* or “path,” with the goal of the path being *fana*, or the total annihilation of the self in recognition that God is one. According to Legenhausen, the vast majority of Sufis have affirmed that there is no *tariqah* without *shariah*. In other words, “there is no way to the interior except through the exterior and the exterior required in the current age is that of Islam.”⁷³³ All religions have divine light,⁷³⁴ but this does not mean that which religion we choose to follow today is of little consequence, or that one’s choice of religion is merely a matter of personal taste or preference. Even the twelfth century Sufi mystic and philosopher, Ibn Arabi, who expressed that God’s truth can find expression in different religions and who spoke eloquently of Jesus⁷³⁵ and his mother Mary as prophetic figures, also stressed that it is incumbent upon people in the present age to follow the *shariah* brought by Muhammad. He stated:

All the revealed religions are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are

⁷³³ Hajj Legenhausen, “A Muslim’s Proposal: Non-Reductive Religious Pluralism,” in *Originalbeitrag für den Leseraum* (January 1, 2006), 15-16.

⁷³⁴ The Quran attests to the divine light found in the three prophetic religions. Quran 5:44-5:48- “Indeed, we sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light... And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah, and gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it in the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous....And We revealed to you, O Muhammad, the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it.

⁷³⁵ In the Ibn Arabi’s *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyan* (*Meccan Revelations*), his first encounter with the Unseen World takes place at the hands of Jesus. See *Meccan Revelations*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William Chittick and James Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 169-80. In his other major work, *Fusus al-Hikam* (*Wisdom of the Prophets*), Ibn Arabi entitles a chapter “From the Wisdom of the Prophecy in the Word of Jesus.” See *The Wisdom of the Prophets*, trans by Titus Burckhardt and Angela Culme-Seymour (Beshara Publications, 1975), 68-82.

included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions: that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null by abrogation- that is the opinion of the ignorant."⁷³⁶

Just as most Christians affirm the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to be full, definitive, and unsurpassable, Islam, likewise, states that all previous religions are brought to fulfillment with the revelation of the Quran. Whatever is necessary from the other traditions has been incorporated into God's final revelation in the Quran. However, this does not mean other religions are worthless, since Islam can and does still learn from and cooperate with other traditions.

If religions are to regard one another's adherents as intellectual equals and equals in human dignity, room must be made for disagreement and for the possibility that one may view his or her religion as the best, or most true. Engagement with disparate religious beliefs leads to the acknowledgment that one's own religious perspective, even if one regards it to be the most unique or most complete is, nonetheless, not the only possible or rational point of view. Religious pluralism prompts us to recall, with Schillebeeckx, that "human insight never exhausts the truth and always leaves a remnant of strangeness and obscurity."⁷³⁷ The absolute claims made by one tradition, instead of a source of violence, can serve as a productive challenge for religious others. Islam's

⁷³⁶ *Futuhat*, III, 153. 12, translated in William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 125.

⁷³⁷ Schillebeeckx, "Christians and Non-Christians: The Theory of Toleration," in Schillebeeckx, "Church and World" in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 4: World and Church* Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 138, first published as "Het gesprek" in *Netherlands Gespreks Centrum* Publ. 1 (ns) (Kampen-Utrecht, 196), 11-16.

rejection of Jesus' divinity may serve as a powerful reminder to Christians, who all too often neglect the study of the historical Jesus in favor of focusing on the Christ of faith, of Jesus' full humanity. The Christian devotion to Jesus and a Trinitarian God can remind Muslims of the immanence and intimacy of God. The Christian does not have to deny Jesus' divinity nor does the Muslim have to deny the finality of God's revelation, but they can both come to understand and appreciate why the other believes differently, while still preferring their own perspective.

Encountering conflicting religious beliefs can also encourage powerful reflection upon why we believe the way we do. A Christian in dialogue with Islam may be motivated to explore why he or she holds a Trinitarian conception of God, or considers Jesus to be the savior of all humankind. A Muslim, likewise, may be driven to a personal meditation on why Muhammad is God's final prophet, or why he or she chooses to follow the *shariah* of Islam in his or her everyday life. Such ruminations show individual believers how fragments of salvation can be found through the engagement with other traditions, while still maintaining that one's own tradition is the best or most complete path to eschatological salvation. Appreciation for religious others, furthermore, reinforces how salvation is a dynamic concept. The *humanum* is the concept of human wholeness, which includes all of humanity, not simply one religion or culture. Our definition of human wholeness, therefore, must encompass the well-being of those who believe

differently than we do, and include the ability of religious others to meaningfully practice their tradition and share its wisdom with others.⁷³⁸

F. Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue, need not, as many may fear, lead to an acceptance of everything in the name of toleration. Rather, dialogue must always be done with a sense of responsibility, namely to the threatened *humanum*. Schillebeeckx's concept of the *humanum*, as a term that can never be fully defined at any one period, provides a common starting point for the formation of ethical values and norms. However, a shared commitment to the *humanum* is not incompatible with belief in and devotion to particular religious traditions that, at times, may conflict with one another. Using the example of Islam and Christianity, I attempted in this chapter to show how absolute claims need not lead to violence, while pluralist efforts to eradicate such claims do often become violent and exclusive. In fact, dealing with and learning from religious differences and even disagreements can be fruitful for both traditions, prompting self-reflection that enables Muslims and Christians to ultimately become better followers of their respective traditions in today's world. Religion and ethics, although independent, are interrelated and religious faith is not irrelevant for one's ethical practice. Therefore, one must be able to maintain, as Schillebeeckx does with respect to Christianity, and many Muslims do with regard to Islam, that one's own tradition is the best path toward eschatological

⁷³⁸ This would, of course, exclude religious talk or practice that explicitly causes physical or emotional harm to others. According to Schillebeeckx, all religions must be held to the criterion of the threatened *humanum*. That which harms human wholeness or integrity cannot be considered a valid religious interpretation. For example, a religion "that sends the eldest son to death is certainly not of the same value as a religion that expressly forbids it."⁷³⁸ See Schillebeeckx, "The Religious and the Human Ecumene," 181. See also *I Am A Happy Theologian*, 59; and *Church*, 162-63.

salvation. Schillebeeckx's inclusivist soteriology lets religions keep what serves as the vital source of their hope, while enabling Christians to see fragments of salvation in practices and teachings that are found in other religions, and are not specifically Christian.

In the next chapter, I will focus on how forcing dialogue partners to give up the absolute claims made by their respective traditions may have negative implications in the area of social justice. I will concentrate more specifically on the implications of Schillebeeckx's soteriology and his inclusivist position for dialogue between Muslim and Catholic women, two groups that both experience marginalization within their respective traditions.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: SCHILLEBEECKX'S SOTERIOLOGY AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUSLIM AND CATHOLIC WOMEN

Chapter Four traced Schillebeeckx's development of the concept of the *humanum* throughout his theological career. Influenced by Ernst Bloch and Paul Ricoeur, the *humanum* is a term used to express the not-yet-seen fulfillment of all that it means to be human and the articulation of the promise of humanity's positive potential.⁷³⁹ There is no universal agreement about what exactly constitutes the *humanum*, but in Schillebeeckx's estimation, all cultures and religions share the universal experience of the *humanum* as being threatened and damaged. This concept, I argued, has the potential to serve as the motivation and criterion for interreligious dialogue because it allows for an understanding of human wholeness that is not static, but one that is constantly developing in response to new experiences. It also does not require that different religions explain away doctrinal disagreements in order to engage with one another. In the last half of the chapter, I referred to Muslim-Christian dialogue as an example of one area where Schillebeeckx's concept of the *humanum* may be particularly helpful. Because Islam and Christianity both make absolute claims that conflict with beliefs held by persons outside of their adherents, an inclusivist position that insists upon the necessity of dialogue and learning across religious boundaries without simultaneously trying to explain away their differences is essential in seeking the *humanum*.

⁷³⁹ Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1.

In this chapter, I focus on a more specific example of the threatened *humanum* in order to illustrate the suitability of Schillebeeckx's soteriology as a resource for contemporary interreligious dialogue: the experience of Muslim women and Catholic women, two groups who experience marginalization both within their respective religious communities and in society as a whole. The implications of women's subordination, in which women are subjected to discrimination, violence, and labeling, due to negative stereotypes based on gender identity and expression, is a particularly egregious example of how the *humanum* is currently threatened and damaged. Since in Schillebeeckx's soteriology, salvation is a dynamic concept defined by its opposite, a contemporary understanding of salvation must include a response to gender oppression here and now. If, as was emphasized in Chapter Three, there is no salvation outside the world, and the world is religiously pluralist, responding to suffering in a way that brings about partial and fragmentary experiences of salvation in this world requires mutual learning and dialogue between persons of various religious beliefs. I contend that this is particularly important for Muslim and Catholic women who live under patriarchy.

In this chapter, I will discuss how feminist theologies have arisen as a response to the threatened *humanum* of women, yet these theologies often repeat many of the same exclusive dynamics that have kept women's experiences from being included in theological reflection. Here, I will demonstrate that Christianity alone cannot be considered the only valuable resource in responding to the threatened *humanum*. I begin by examining the ways in which patriarchy has been manifest in both Islam and Christianity with regard to four main points: body image, rigid notions of gender roles, leadership and authority, and purity standards. Next, I provide five major reasons why

dialogue between Muslim women and Catholic women is necessary for responding to the myriad ways the *humanum* of women is threatened in today's world. In particular, I focus on how dialogue with Islam can contribute to a Catholic understanding of the *humanum*. Finally, I reiterate that the adoption of a pluralist position is unnecessary for such dialogue to be fruitful.

A. Feminist Theology As a Response to the Threatened *Humanum*

The need for feminist theology, which takes the experience of women as its starting point, arises from the fact that women's experiences have been neglected in religious and theological reflection. According to Catholic feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, classical Christian theology, including its codified traditions, are androcentric.⁷⁴⁰ Androcentrism, of course, is not unique to the Christian tradition. Buddhist feminist Rita Gross describes religion in general as a "boys-only club," in which women's presence has often been absent. This is also true, according to Gross, with respect to interreligious dialogue.⁷⁴¹ Even in so-called secular spaces, women do not enjoy many of the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts.

As was discussed in Chapter Four, there is no universal vision of the *humanum*. The multiplicity of human experience means there are multiple perspectives on what the *humanum* entails. However, one can make the case that in most visions of the *humanum* articulated throughout history, male experience has been taken to be normative. This is seen especially in the use of exclusive language. Even Schillebeeckx, throughout his

⁷⁴⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 20.

⁷⁴¹ Rita Gross, "What Do Women Bring to the Dialogue Table?" in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Jillian Maxey (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 232.

writings, uses generic terms like “man” and “mankind.” God is often automatically given the pronoun He or Him, not only in prayer, worship, and academic writing, but even in everyday references to God by those who do not claim to believe in any deity.⁷⁴²

However, the concept of the *humanum*, if it means human flourishing, cannot neglect the experiences of women whose voices have been marginalized throughout history.

Rosemary Radford Ruether’s articulation of the critical principle of feminist theology is similar to Schillebeeckx’s articulation of the *humanum*. She defines the criterion of feminist theology to be “the promotion of the full humanity of women.” This means that “whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive.” However, this negative principle implies a positive principle; namely, that “what does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy, it does reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of things, the authentic message of redemption and the mission of redemptive community.”⁷⁴³ Unfortunately, the meaning of this positive principle is not fully known and has not yet existed in our history, although partial glimpses of it have been witnessed to, in the protests of women concerning what has diminished them and their proposals for a better alternative.

The fact that this positive principle remains unrealized also means that even among women, there exist many different and even contradictory ideas about what women’s flourishing entails. Also, women’s responses to female suffering and

⁷⁴² For more on the social effects of gender exclusive God-language, see Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 97-100.

⁷⁴³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 19.

subordination have been limited and have, at times, repeated the same dynamics as androcentricism. According to Ruether, “any principle of religion or society that marginalizes one group of persons as less than fully human diminishes us all.” Thus, women cannot affirm their humanity in a way that denigrates the male population. Rather, in rejecting androcentrism, women must criticize all forms of chauvinism. No group or community can become the norm of humanity.⁷⁴⁴ The implication is that for redemption to take place, the focus cannot only be on the experience of white, heterosexual, Western Christian women as if their experiences speak for all women. Women’s identities are not shaped solely by gender, but also by other categories, such as race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. These identities are not easily separable as if women can just switch back and forth between “speaking as a woman” and “speaking as a Christian or Muslim” and speaking as an African American, or Latin American, or Caucasian.” Rather, these identities intersect. For example, how one lives her life as a devout Muslim is likely shaped by one’s experience of being female, African American, and heterosexual. How another woman lives her life as a devout Catholic is influenced by her experience as being a lesbian, white, and middle-class.

While I use the framework of Catholic feminist theology to begin this chapter, it is clear from Ruether’s articulation that she recognizes that Christian feminist theology’s vision of the *humanum* is neither complete nor the only one that matters. Feminist liberation theology, Ruether avers, “opens up as a human project, not an exclusively

⁷⁴⁴ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 20. \

Christian project. Re-envisioned Christian symbols can be one cultural resource among others in a struggle for liberation that can meet and converge around the world only by being authentically rooted in many local contexts.”⁷⁴⁵

Buddhist feminist scholar Rita Gross, whom I discussed in Chapter One, criticized feminist theology for its tendency to equate the term “religion” with Christianity.⁷⁴⁶ For Gross, inclusivist perspectives are to blame for this situation, since, she claims, inclusivism turns difference into hierarchy and therefore, always implies competition and leads to mutual hostility. According to Gross, feminist theology can only be done from a pluralist perspective.⁷⁴⁷ While Gross does make a legitimate claim that feminist theology has not adequately recognized the voices of non-Christian religions, I argue that adopting a pluralist position does not solve this problem. Using the example of Muslim and Catholic women, I intend to show that interreligious dialogue is necessary, but dialogue from an inclusivist position, like that of Edward Schillebeeckx, is not only more practical, but provides the possibility of a more fruitful and mutual exchange—one that respects the difference and uniqueness of the other’s beliefs. I focus on Muslim and Catholic women in particular because women in both traditions encounter patriarchal beliefs and practices that inhibit their full flourishing. In addition, for many Muslim and Catholic women, giving up their faith is not an option and in fact, they often find resources within their traditions that promote the *humanum* of women. While both

⁷⁴⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 272.

⁷⁴⁶ Rita Gross, “Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61-63.

⁷⁴⁷ Gross, “Feminist Theology,” 65.

traditions make absolute claims that come into conflict with one another, I propose that this need not prohibit reciprocal learning and appreciation.

B. The Myth of Christian Exceptionalism: Patriarchy in Islam and Christianity

As Jacques Dupuis warned, Christians cannot compare what is best in their own tradition to what is worst in others.⁷⁴⁸ Such a double standard is dangerous not only because it inhibits the positive appreciation of other religions, but because, as in the case of Islam and Christianity, it leads to the acceptance of one form of patriarchy over another, rather than the total eradication of patriarchy. In this section, I reflect on the way patriarchy is manifest in both Islam and one particular branch of Christianity, Roman Catholicism.⁷⁴⁹ I will concentrate on four main points: 1) body image; 2) rigid notion of gender roles/gender complementarity; 3) lack of religious leadership roles for women and 4) purity standards/male control over women's bodies. All of these points, I will demonstrate, demand attention because they have caused women to suffer and inhibit women's full flourishing. Thus, they illustrate how the *humanum* is threatened and damaged.

1. Body Image

⁷⁴⁸ Jacques Dupuis, "The CDF Declaration *Dominus Iesus* and My Perspectives on It," in *Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition*, ed. William R. Burrows (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 65.

⁷⁴⁹ This is not to imply that patriarchy is absent in other Christian denominations, nor that Catholicism is the most patriarchal form of Christianity. Rather, I focus on Catholicism here, because it is my home tradition and the one for which I have the most familiarity. It is true that rules regarding women differ according to particular denominations, especially with regard to women's ordination. However, even among denominations that ordain women, it is acknowledged that sexist attitudes and practices still persist. For more on how Protestant female ministers have experienced discrimination, see Sarah Sentilles, ed., *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit* (Harcourt, 2008). Furthermore, although certain circumstances may apply solely to Roman Catholicism, many apply to Western Christianity as a whole. Finally, I do not mean to imply that Catholicism is solely a Western religion, or to neglect the fact that Catholicism is a global religion. Rather, this paper focuses on the West and Western Christianity given that it is the part of the world most associated with opposition to Islam.

A quick “Google Images” search reveals some disturbing trends. If one types in the words “Muslim woman,” one will find a substantial number of pictures of women in full *burqas* or *niqabs*.⁷⁵⁰ The general impression given by the overall results is that Muslim women are submissive and supportive of violence both against themselves and against the West. This is evidenced by the presence of weapons in some of the women’s hands and the pictures of faces hidden behind cages. Such an impression is repeated in related searches for “*burqa*,” “*hijab*,” “clothing,” and “abuse.” So also, if one types in the words “American woman,” one will find an array of pictures of scantily-clad women in sexually provocative poses. Searches for “flag” result in images of women holding the American flag while in various sexually suggestive poses, and pictures containing statistics comparing the size of a typical woman versus Barbie dolls and models. Most of these women are clad in bikinis or tank tops. These results paint a picture of the American woman as a sex object who is entirely occupied with the quest for attaining a so-called “perfect body.” Clearly, the vast majority of Muslim women and American Christian women looking at these photos would say, “These results do not capture me, nor most of the woman I know!”

Yet, sadly, these pictures *do* capture certain cultural expectations and stereotypes of these women. In some countries in the Muslim world, the practice of veiling is strictly enforced.⁷⁵¹ Shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, women were required to

⁷⁵⁰ The *burqa* covers the head and the body and has a grill which hides the eyes. A *niqab* covers the entire person, including the mouth and the nose, but has an opening for the eyes.

⁷⁵¹ My point in discussing the veil is not to make an argument either for or against it, but to demonstrate that women often lack choice in the matter. It should be left between them and God, not them and society. Pressuring or forcing women to unveil is just as problematic as pressuring or forcing them to veil.

wear the *chador*. Failing to do so could result in arrest for inappropriate clothing. Mandatory veiling was enforced under the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s and early 2000s. Refusal to wear a *burqa* could result in beatings or imprisonment for immodesty.⁷⁵² In Saudi Arabia, women are required to cover their bodies and don the *hijab* and *abaya*.⁷⁵³ Often, women feel social pressure to veil, since unveiling can be interpreted as a rebellious and indecent act. The veil can be perceived as a way for women to ensure they are taken seriously, and that they do not suffer harassment or ridicule in public.

While some women in the Middle East may be at risk for choosing not to veil, ironically, in the West, Muslim women experience the opposite problem. The day of the Boston Marathon bombing, a friend of mine at Harvard Divinity School was told that she should not be out on the street in a *hijab* in order to protect her safety. Another Muslim friend begs her younger sister not to veil because she worries it will provoke violence against her. Discrimination and mockery are persistent realities for women who choose to veil. As Amina Wadud explains, while the number of tenured Muslim women in U.S. academia is already low, it is nearly impossible to find tenured Muslim women in *hijab*.⁷⁵⁴ A Catholic woman in the West may feel she has more freedom than her Muslim sisters, given that in most places, she is no longer required to cover her head in church.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵² Mohammad Hassan Kalil, "Wearing the Veil," in *Modern Muslim Societies*, ed. Florian Pohl (Tarrytown, NY: Marsall Cavendish Corporation, 2011), 87.

⁷⁵³ The *abaya* is a cloak, or robe-like dress that covers the entire body except the face, feet, and hands.

⁷⁵⁴ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 62.

⁷⁵⁵ The 1917 Code of Canon Law states that while men can be bear-headed, women must cover their heads when approaching the table of the Lord. This part of the law was abrogated in 1983. Given that there is no canonical obligation upon women to veil, most no longer choose to do so. However, there are some who still believe veiling is proper practice.

Fatima Mernissi, however, in her article “Size Six: The Western Woman’s Harem,” points out that women in the West are not necessarily more free with regard to their choice of attire.

Mernissi recalls her experience walking into an upscale New York clothing boutique and being made to feel ashamed for wearing a size larger than a six. “Deviant sizes,” she is told, must be purchased elsewhere. Walking around New York, feeling for the first time ever that her hips are a “deformity,” she comes to the conclusion that the Western objectification of women’s bodies is much more effective at keeping women subservient than “the methods of the Ayatollahs in the East.” In the U.S., Mernissi states, “women enter the power game with so much of their energy deflected toward physical appearance that one hesitates to say the playing field is level.”⁷⁵⁶ Interestingly, the United States, which has one of the largest numbers of woman in previously male-dominated spheres, also has the highest presence of anorexia.⁷⁵⁷ Approximately 90-95% of those diagnosed with anorexia are female.⁷⁵⁸

Unveiled women are often perceived as women who have a “choice” in what they wear and how they carry themselves. Yet, these women are, more often than not, affected, albeit sometimes unconsciously, by cultural beauty standards which support not only the fashion industry, but also the multi-billion-dollar diet industry and pornography industry. Scientific studies have shown that body dissatisfaction is correlated with

⁷⁵⁶ Fatema Mernissi, “Size 6: The Western Woman’s Harem” in *Understanding Inequality: The Intersection of Race/Ethnicity, Class, and Gender*, ed. Barbara Arrighi (Maryland: Rowman&Littlefield, 2007), 57.

⁷⁵⁷ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 182.

⁷⁵⁸ Maggie Wilkes and Barrie Gunter, *The Media and Body Image* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005); 13.

decreases in academic performance, motor skills used in athletics, and ability to take on leadership roles, as well as diminished ability to experience sexual pleasure.⁷⁵⁹

2. *Narrow Roles Pre-Ordained by God: Gender Complementarity*

A common theme in both Catholic and Muslim thought is “gender complementarity,” or the belief in natural, God-given distinctions between males and females that prescribe for them certain roles, behaviors, and characteristics. Many who adhere to a complementary view of gender do so out of belief that this upholds the dignity of both men and women who are “equal but different.” The Egyptian Islamic theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi believes that the different tasks assigned to the two sexes are not due to preference by Allah, but to differences in “natural disposition.”⁷⁶⁰ In his view, the Quran assigns guardianship to men by virtue of Surah 4:34, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other because they spend [to support them] from their means.” This verse is interpreted to affirm that Allah has delegated the man to be the family provider. A man is required to provide his wife with food, clothing, a place to live, and medical treatment. Islamic philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr adds that this is man’s duty even if his wife is economically wealthy.⁷⁶¹ In exchange for what he provides for her, “a wife is obliged to obey her husband in everything except disobeying Allah.”⁷⁶² She also bears the responsibility of providing a home for her family and bringing up her children properly.

⁷⁵⁹ Syzmanski, Moffitt, Carr, “Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research,” in *The Counseling Psychologist* 39:6 (September 2010), 8.

⁷⁶⁰ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, “The Status of Women In Islam,” translated by Sheikh Mohammed Gemeah, found at <http://www.iupui.edu/~msaiupui/qaradawistatus.html>, accessed March 8, 2015.

⁷⁶¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London:Unwin Hyman, 1966), 112.

⁷⁶² al-Qaradawi

“In the home,” writes Nasr, “woman rules as queen and a Muslim man is in a sense the guest of his wife at home.”⁷⁶³ At the Istanbul Women’s Conference held November 2014, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan⁷⁶⁴ stated that “you cannot place a mother breastfeeding her baby on an equal footing with men,” while calling on all women to have at least three, but preferably five, children.⁷⁶⁵

Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI were major defenders of gender complementarity in the Catholic Church. In Catholicism, women are often defined by their relationships with men. In his 1988 Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (“On the Vocation of Women”) John Paul II defined women in terms of motherhood, and named virginity and motherhood as “the two dimensions of the female vocation.”⁷⁶⁶ Women who renounce marriage and physical motherhood can practice what he calls “spiritual motherhood,” which takes on many different forms, such as “concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned, and, in general, people on the edges of society.”⁷⁶⁷ Such a narrow understanding of women is disheartening. Some women cannot bear children, and do not have the means to adopt. Not all women who are childless feel called to join a religious order, or necessarily want to be defined in as “spiritual mothers.” In his 1995 *Letter to Women*, published shortly before the UN’s

⁷⁶³ Nasr, 113.

⁷⁶⁴ President Erdogan’s words are relevant here as he is a Muslim and founder of the Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP).

⁷⁶⁵ Sophia Jones, “Turkish President Says Women and Men Can’t Be Equal” *Huffington Post* (November 24, 2014)

⁷⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*: Apostolic Letter on the Vocation of Women (August 15, 1988), found at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jpii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html, 17.

⁷⁶⁷ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 21.

Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, John Paul II called for “universal recognition of the dignity of women.”⁷⁶⁸ However, he still considered women to be better suited for domestic work and the rearing of children, asserting that “society should create and develop conditions favoring work in the home.”⁷⁶⁹

The view that women are, by nature, more nurturing and therefore, suited for domestic care-taking roles, is found in both Islam and Christianity. Adjectives like “nurturing,” “loving,” and “caring” are certainly not negative attributes. However, when they are posited as essential characteristics belonging to all women in a greater capacity than they belong to men, they can serve to undermine the importance of women’s economic independence. In turn, when women are not economically independent, they are often less likely to leave an abusive relationship. Furthermore, homes headed by women today are more likely to be impoverished than those headed by men. Women constitute 70% of the world’s 1.3 billion poorest and own less than one percent of the world’s property.⁷⁷⁰

3. *The Consequence of Complementarity: Lack of Leadership*

Given the rigidity of “God-given gender roles,” it is no wonder that many Muslim women and Catholic women find themselves barred from exercising important public leadership positions in their communities. Traditionally, Muslim women are not allowed to act as an *imam*, or public prayer leader, unless the congregation is all female.

⁷⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (June 2, 1995), found at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html, 4.

⁷⁶⁹ John Paul II, *On the Family: Familiaris Consortio* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1982), 23.

⁷⁷⁰ Daniel Maguire and Larry Rasmussen, *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 3.

While cases vary depending on the mosque and the country, gender segregation is a prevalent reality in Muslim prayer services. Some mosques do not even permit women to enter. Others have women pray behind a partition that is located either on the side of or behind the men, making the women invisible to them. Such a separation, insists self-identified Muslim feminist Amina Wadud, also reflects gender disparities through which women have limited access to or participation in mosque activities, especially decision-making.⁷⁷¹ A common justification for gender segregation is summed up by Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. Because prayer requires intense concentration, he says, “it does not befit a woman, whose structure of physique naturally arouses instincts in men, to lead men in prayer and stand in front of them, for this may divert the men’s attention from concentrating in the prayer and the spiritual atmosphere required.”⁷⁷² Women are often associated with *fitna*, or trial/strife. A frequently cited hadith⁷⁷³ quotes the Prophet Muhammad as having said, “I have not left to you any *fitna* greater than women.”⁷⁷⁴ According to Wadud, “while some gender discretion in prayer may have been the intention, hierarchy is what is exemplified when women pray in the rear or in a place invisible to the leader of the prayer.”⁷⁷⁵ Some mosques have attempted to address the

⁷⁷¹ Wadud, 174.

⁷⁷² Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Wadud Fatwa* (March 16, 2005), available from <http://www.peacethrujustice.org/wadudFatwa.htm>. A *fatwa* is a ruling on a point of Islamic law by a recognized authority. The context for Al-Qaradawi’s release of this particular *fatwa* was a response to Amina Wadud’s decision to lead a mixed-gender congregation in prayer on March 18, 2005 in New York City.

⁷⁷³ Hadith are reports of sayings and practices of the Prophet. There is much debate among Muslim thinkers as to which hadith are authentic, and collections of hadith differ among different schools.

⁷⁷⁴ Hidayet Serfkali Tuksal, “Misogynstic Reports in the Hadith Literature,” *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Ed. Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medini (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 148.

⁷⁷⁵ Wadud, 175.

issue by having men and women pray in separate sections, but side by side. Nevertheless, these solutions do nothing to challenge the dangerous idea that women are a distraction or an impediment to one's communication with God.

In Catholicism, women cannot be ordained. If you walk into a Catholic Church, you will never see a woman presiding at Mass. This also means that the Magisterium, the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church, which consists of the pope and the bishops, is composed entirely of men. Although many Catholic teachings deal directly with women (i.e, the Church's position on divorce and remarriage, artificial contraception, and abortion), women have no role in the formulation of Catholic teaching.⁷⁷⁶ While women can now be consultants to a Synod,⁷⁷⁷ they never have a vote. Decision-making power in the Catholic Church belongs solely to the ordained.

During the 1960s and 1970s, with the women's rights movement in full swing, calls for admitting women to the priesthood were prominent, and on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, a petition was submitted calling for women's ordination.⁷⁷⁸ However, the petition did not get very far. In 1963, Pope John XXIII, who inaugurated the Council, died and was succeeded by Paul VI, who was unwilling to expand women's roles. In 1976 the document *Inter Insigniores*, was released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and sought to explain why the Church was not authorized to

⁷⁷⁶ While women can and do become theologians, they are rarely consulted by the Magisterium. Pope Francis has recently called for a more inclusive presence and increased participation of women in the church. One example of this is the formulation of the Study Commission on the Women's Diaconate In August 2016 to research and respond to the question of whether women might be allowed to become deacons.

⁷⁷⁷ A synod in the Roman Catholic Church refers to an authoritative meeting of bishops to deal with matters of Church doctrine and governance.

⁷⁷⁸ Deborah Halter, *The Papal "No:" A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican's Rejection of Women's Ordination* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 20.

admit women to priestly ordination in spite of the increasing demand for it. The document appealed to the example of Jesus, whom it claimed only chose male Apostles and was not influenced by the patriarchal social conditions of his time when doing so. The Church, the CDF argued, is not comparable to other kinds of government, since its authority is not granted by people's choice, but by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the admission of women to the priesthood cannot be based on appeals to the equality of rights of the human person. Furthermore, the priesthood is neither a right nor a goal of social advancement. Any woman who does feel called to the priesthood, the document asserts, is not experiencing a "genuine attraction."⁷⁷⁹ Women who believe they are called to Catholic priesthood are automatically dismissed as frivolous and self-seeking, without any investigation or discernment of their personal spiritual journey.⁷⁸⁰

Since Catholicism and Islam place such a heavy emphasis on "natural" gender roles, deviation from gender norms is often considered to be morally wrong. In Catholicism, homosexual inclinations are morally neutral, but acting upon them is considered to be sinful. A person experiencing same- sex attraction is therefore counseled to live a celibate lifestyle. Similarly, according to Muslim ethicist Kecia Ali, Muslim

⁷⁷⁹ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (October 15, 1976), found at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html. 6. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address all of the issues surrounding women's ordination, but debate on this topic has continued long after the release of *Inter Insigniores*. In 1994, John Paul II released the encyclical *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* to reiterate the CDF's 1976 position and essentially, close debate on the question of women's ordination. Yet, the issue has not gone away.

thinkers have, for the most part, taken for granted that same-sex relationships are neither licit nor possible to legitimize.⁷⁸¹

4. *Unequal Standards of Purity and Men's Control over Women's Bodies*

In both Islam and Catholicism, concerns surrounding women's purity are prominent. As a normative position across Muslim schools of legal thought, the menstruating female is excluded from three of the five pillars of Islam⁷⁸²: *salat*, or the ritual prayer that is to be performed five times a day; *fasting*; and *circumambulation of the Kaaba*, the holiest shrine in Islam, during pilgrimage to Mecca.⁷⁸³ There is considerable disagreement regarding when a woman is eligible to regain a state of ritual purity, and it is not uncommon for contemporary hygiene manuals to supply extensive charts to aid in determining whether a vaginal discharge, based on color and texture, is "defiling or not."⁷⁸⁴ According to Celene Ayat Lizzio, "often the material filth of the excreted material is emphasized in the case of post-partum bleeding and menstruation,

⁷⁸¹ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 85. One example of the conventional view is Khalid Duran who, in 1993, boldly claimed that there were no self-proclaimed gays in Muslim countries. He argues that the Quran, in particular the story of Lot, "is very explicit in its condemnation of homosexuality, leaving scarcely any loophole for a theological accommodation of homosexuals in Islam." See "Homosexuality in Islam," in *Homosexuality in World Religions*, ed. Arlene Swidler (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1993), 181-83. Many Muslims disagree with this position and believe there is room for the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex relationship in Islam. See Scott Kugle, "Sexuality, Diversity, and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims," in *Progressive Muslims*, ed. Omar Safi (Oneworld, 2003), 190-234.

⁷⁸² The religious practice of Islam consists of five tenets, known as the Five Pillars, to which all Muslims are expected to adhere. These five pillars consist of the following: 1) the *Shahada*, or profession of faith, which states that "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet" 2) *salat*, or ritual prayers that should be recited five times a day 3) *zakat*, or alms-giving 4) *saum*, or fasting from dawn till dusk during the month of Ramadan 5) *hajj*, pilgrimage to Mecca at least one's during one's life time. Pilgrimage consists of circumambulating the Kaaba, or holy shrine, seven times.

⁷⁸³ Celene Ayat Lizzio, "Gendering Ritual: A Muslima's Reading of the Laws of Purity and Ritual Preclusion" *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Ed. Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medini (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 170.

⁷⁸⁴ Lizzio, 172.

whereas the defiling property of semen is often seen as immaterial, non-physical.”⁷⁸⁵

Some jurists go so far as to say that ritual prayer performed during menstruation is disobedient to God and therefore, nullified. In Lizzio’s words, “these male jurists reserve for themselves the authority to declare an act invalid regardless of personal intent.”⁷⁸⁶

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the rite of “churching,” or the purification/blessing of women after childbirth, was a regular occurrence. The practice is thought to derive from Leviticus 12:2-5, which prescribes 40 days of ritual impurity to a new mother after the birth of a male, and 80 days after the birth of a female. In medieval literature, the practice was linked to notions that childbirth rendered a woman unclean. It was later renamed the Blessing of Women after Childbirth, and thus, became more associated with blessing and thanksgiving rather than re-gaining purity. Since the Second Vatican Council, the practice has been largely discontinued.⁷⁸⁷ However, the teachings of the Magisterium still place limits on women’s bodily autonomy. The 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* reaffirmed the church’s consistent teaching that marriage and conjugal love “are by their nature ordained toward the procreation of children.”⁷⁸⁸ Much to the disappointment of many Catholics, it continued to assert that the human being, through his or her own initiative cannot break the procreative significance inherent in the marriage act, and therefore, should not use any means of artificial birth control. The

⁷⁸⁵ Lizzio, 177.

⁷⁸⁶ Lizzio, 175.

⁷⁸⁷ Joanne Pierce, “Marginal Bodies: Liturgical Structures of Pain and Deliverance in the Middle Ages,” in *Practicing Catholic: Ritual, Body, and Contestation in Catholic Faith*, ed. Morrill, Ziegler, Rogers (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 59-60.

⁷⁸⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, On the Regulation of Birth (July 25, 1968), http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html found at 9.

document does state that couples wishing to regulate the number of children they have can use natural family planning, or the rhythm method. However, the rhythm method has an average failure rate of 13-20%, which is much higher than those of the contraceptives banned by the Vatican.⁷⁸⁹ In addition, many women have irregular menstrual cycles that do not allow them practice this method with accuracy, a reality that could not possibly be in the purview of an all-male celibate hierarchy. Furthermore, use of the rhythm method places the blame on the woman and her body if an unintended pregnancy occurs.

In Islam, the majority position in eight out of nine legal schools permits contraception. However, the reasons behind such support do not always reflect a concern for women's freedom and dignity. Among the reasons given by the twelfth century mystic Al-Ghazali for allowing contraception, was "the need for the wife to preserve her beauty and attractiveness for the enjoyment of the marriage."⁷⁹⁰

Positions on abortion also vary in Islam, but many who oppose it are at least in favor of certain exemptions. The Grand Ayatollah Yusuf Saanei of Iran, for example, issued a *fatwa*⁷⁹¹ that permits abortion in the first trimester, and not only for reasons of mother's health or fetal abnormalities. In a 2000 interview, Saanei stated that Islam is a religion of compassion and therefore, in the event of serious problems, abortion is

⁷⁸⁹ Rhythm Method, *Epigee*, 2009 Available from <http://www.epigee.org/guide/rhythm.html> Accessed 10 July 2009.

⁷⁹⁰ Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Family Planning, Contraception, and Abortion in Islam," in *Sacred Rights: The Case for Contraception and Abortion in World Religions*, ed. Daniel C. Maguire (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 115. S

⁷⁹¹ A fatwa is a ruling on a point of Islamic law issued by a recognized authority.

permitted.⁷⁹² The Grand Shaykh of Al-Azhar, Sayed Tantawi similarly issued a *fatwa* indicating that abortion is permissible in the case of rape.⁷⁹³

In Catholicism, however, abortion is forbidden in all circumstances, even in cases of rape or when the mother's life is in danger. In 2009, Archbishop Jose Cardoso Sobrinho of Brazil declared a local woman to be excommunicated for obtaining an abortion for her nine-year old daughter, who conceived twins after being raped by her stepfather. The doctors who performed the procedure were excommunicated as well.⁷⁹⁴ In 2010, Sr. Rosemary McBride, RSM, was excommunicated by the bishop of Tucson for approving the decision of the ethics committee at a Tucson Catholic hospital to permit a woman undergo an abortion. The woman was pregnant with her fifth child and doctors claimed the abortion was necessary to save her life.⁷⁹⁵ In this latter case, the excommunication was eventually lifted, but the church's stance is still that the correct solution would have been to let the mother die. With regard to abortion, there is a strong moral tradition that adheres to the doctrine of "double effect." An action that causes serious harm is permissible as a side effect of some good end. However, one cannot use that same action as a means to an end. For example, a doctor may choose to perform a hysterectomy in order to save the life of a pregnant woman with cancer, even though the death of the fetus is a consequence of the primary means, the hysterectomy. Performing

⁷⁹² Shaikh, 122. See Robin Wright, "Iran, Now a Hotbed of Islamic Reforms," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 29, 2000.

⁷⁹³ Shaikh, 122. See Mariz Tadros, "The Shame of It," *Al-Ahram*, Dec 3-9, 1998.

⁷⁹⁴ Andrew Downie, "Nine-Year Old's Abortion Outrages Brazil's Catholic Church," *Time*, March 6, 2009.

⁷⁹⁵ Michael Clancy, "Nun Excommunicated For Allowing Abortion," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 18, 2010.

an abortion, on the other hand, is unjustifiable, as it would involve direct intention to kill the fetus as a means of saving the mother.

Furthermore, as Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether observes, the Church's teachings on birth control and abortion are "an extraordinary example of moral absolutism" that go beyond official church judgments against "sins" that are far worse than these.⁷⁹⁶ Killing a fetus is considered "intrinsically evil," but not killing in all cases, since mitigating circumstances such as self-defense are taken into account.⁷⁹⁷ Ruether points out that "the official church uses very different kinds of moral reasoning when it comes to questions of war than when it deals with abortion."⁷⁹⁸ When speaking of abortion, the Church uses an absolutist natural law ethic, allowing no debate, applying coercive sanctions and excommunication, and demanding criminalization. Yet, when discussing war, it allows for a variety of opinions and perspectives, and ultimately "leaves matters in the hands of individual conscience." No bishop has ever said that soldiers who directly massacre noncombatant civilians should be excommunicated.⁷⁹⁹

Catholic and Muslim women have also been subjected to judgment for venturing outside certain standards of purity. Nineteenth century Hanafi scholar Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawi reasoned that abortion was permissible in the case of pregnancy out of wedlock, given that the future prospects of an unwed mother would be radically reduced in his society.⁸⁰⁰ Unwed mothers are not treated much better today. Amina Wadud recounts

⁷⁹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 41.

⁷⁹⁷ Ruether, 42.

⁷⁹⁸ Ruether, 53.

⁷⁹⁹ Ruether, 53.

⁸⁰⁰ Shaikh, 123.

how the Muslim community in Philadelphia made specific judgments about the virtue of her womanhood after her first divorce.⁸⁰¹ Asra Nomani recalls the following line from a sermon at her mosque in Morgantown, VA, “A woman’s honor lies in her chastity and modesty. When she loses this, she is worthless.” An unwed mother herself, when Nomani challenged him a few weeks later, the preacher told her to leave the mosque, since she was not respected by anyone.⁸⁰² It is not difficult to find news stories of Catholic schools firing female teachers for having children out of wedlock, even though these same women would have been condemned more strongly if they had chosen to abort, and the fathers of these children never seem to meet a similar punishment. In 2010, a single woman in Cincinnati, Ohio lost her job teaching at a Catholic elementary school because she chose to get pregnant through artificial insemination. In 2005, St. Rose of Lima School in Queens, New York fired a pregnant teacher because she was unmarried, yet still chose to keep her baby. Also, many Catholic schools discourage pregnant women from attending class out of fear that it will undermine efforts to teach Catholic marriage and sexuality.⁸⁰³

The above comparisons are not meant to imply that Catholicism is better or worse than Islam, or that Islam is better or worse than Catholicism when it comes to the treatment of women. In fact, it is meant to demonstrate that such an evaluation cannot be made. Women from both traditions experience discrimination with regard to these four

⁸⁰¹ Wadud, 60.

⁸⁰² Asra Nomani, *Standing Alone: An American Woman’s Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 233.

⁸⁰³ Angela Senander, “When Pregnancy Hits Home: Recognizing the Need for Familial and Ecclesial Solidarity,” in *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women’s Strategies for Reform*, ed. Colleen M. Griffith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 135.

main points: standards of dress and body image, fixed definitions of womanhood found in gender complementarity, lack of access to leadership and decision-making, and unequal expectations of purity.⁸⁰⁴

5. *Why Patriarchal Attitudes and Practices in Islam and Catholicism Are a Threat to the Humanum*

Especially when thinking about middle and upper-class women in the United States and Western Europe, one may be skeptical as to whether or not the issues discussed in the previous section are truly a threat to the *humanum*. Indeed, it may very well be a stretch to categorize women's desires to be ordained, or to act as an *imam*, as negative contrast experiences.⁸⁰⁵ One cannot deny that there are more pressing issues to be addressed, such as poverty, illness, and ecological degradation, to name only a few. For many women, constant concerns about having enough food to eat, clean drinking water, and a safe place to live mean that the question of women's religious leadership is not even able to be pondered. It is also true that, at least in the West, some Catholic and

⁸⁰⁴ This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather the aspects of women's subordination that I found in my own experience and research. Also, there are some women who espouse a complementary view of gender and who believe strongly that barring women from certain positions of religious leadership is in no way discriminatory. These women's views must also be respected. One example is Sr. Sara Butler, professor emerita of dogmatic theology at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois. See *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Liturgy Publications, 2007).

⁸⁰⁵ In fact, women's ordination movements in the West have been criticized for their elitism. At the 2000 Women's Ordination Conference in Milwaukee, Black British Catholic scholar Sheila Briggs argued that in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the ban on women's ordination is far from the primary manifestation of the oppression of women. Poverty, disease, and lack of education exclude women (and men) from ordination long before the Roman Catholic hierarchies do. See Marian Ronan, "Ethical Challenges Confronting the Roman Catholic Women's Ordination Movement in the Twenty-first Century," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23:2 (Fall 2007), 154. After Amina Wadud led a mixed-gender congregation in New York City in March 2005, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, although supportive of female *imams*, felt that her actions were counterproductive, and more focus must be on the suffering of women in places like Pakistan and sub-Saharan Africa. See Thomas Bartlett, "The Quiet Heretic" in *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51:49 (August, 8, 2005), 12.

Muslim women can choose to disobey the teachings of their traditions. For example, although they may experience pressure from families or religious communities to do otherwise, many Catholic women in the West have access to and use birth control. While it may frustrate some women that ordination is not something they can consider, I would not maintain that it is a constant source of pain and anguish for highly educated women with plenty of food to eat and clothes to wear.

However, the presence of patriarchal attitudes and practices in religious communities do cause suffering, oppression, discrimination, and isolation, and these are contemporary examples of negative contrast experiences: the female victim of abuse who is unable to go confession to a male minister,⁸⁰⁶ the lesbian and the unwed mother fired from their jobs or shunned from their communities, the woman with a life-threatening pregnancy. One must also keep in mind that the negative impact of certain religious teachings may be felt more severely depending on one's culture and context. Joanna Manning, for example, describes the horrible effect the ban on artificial contraception has on women in Africa, who do not enjoy the same economic and legal rights as women in the United States. Many of these women have had more children than they could clothe, educate, and feed. Use of the rhythm method poses a problem for many African women, who are threatened either physically or with divorce if they tell their husbands they must

⁸⁰⁶ Ludmila Javorova, who was ordained a Catholic priest in the underground church in Czechoslovakia in 1970, saw many cases where women could not go to confession, since "some women can't share freely with a man some problems of a personal nature, even with a man of God. This often happens in cases where a woman's husband is a tyrant or very patriarchal, so that the woman loses her ability to trust men in general, thereby missing out on this opportunity for spiritual transformation." See Miriam Therese Winter, *Out of the Depths: The Story of Ludmila Javarova, Roman Catholic Priest* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 138.

avoid intercourse on certain days of the month.⁸⁰⁷ Furthermore, not all women have access to theological education, and therefore, have not had the opportunity to read and discuss the statements made by religious authorities. I personally, as a Catholic theologian, have been exposed to persuasive counter positions to the Magisterium's teaching on women's ordination, contraception and abortion, and the dimensions of the female vocation. However, not all women live in a context where they can safely and publicly question religious teachings.

Even when religious authorities do not explicitly condone violence against women and non-gender conforming individuals, their patriarchal beliefs and practices may indirectly encourage it. Rigid gender roles give way to rigid gender expectations. Those who defy such expectations—whether through dress/mannerisms, their choice of romantic partner, their disobedience toward male authority—are often the targets of violence and harassment, or are ostracized from certain communities. Even women who have not been on the receiving end of extreme violence or discrimination are aware of such cases. For example, most women know that rape is a more common occurrence than it should be. Women who have never been raped still have to contend with fears such as walking unaccompanied after dark, being taken advantage of when drinking alcohol, or being blamed for wearing clothing that encourages unwanted sexual advances. In other words, women know that they are “not safe,” that constant threats to their well-being exist, and that it is their gender that makes them more vulnerable. These experiences of

⁸⁰⁷ Joanna Manning, *Is the Pope Catholic?: A Woman Confronts her Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 50-51.

contrast are also often endured in silence, since many women fear reporting rape or sexual violence due to the potential for negative repercussions.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, Schillebeeckx states, while conceptions of the *humanum* vary greatly, every human being experiences the *humanum*, however they define it, as threatened and damaged. This is especially true for women who encounter patriarchal practices and attitudes in their religious communities. Yet, not all women agree upon what human wholeness entails. This can be seen by the fact that some women choose to leave Islam or Catholicism altogether, while others remain devoted to their religion and dedicate themselves to pushing for reform. Still others believe in the importance of adhering to traditional teachings. Despite these different visions on what reform should look like, or whether or not religious reform is even necessary, women are responding to their experience of subordination on the basis of gender and sharing their visions of a more egalitarian future. Since, as Schillebeeckx asserts, the *humanum* can never be given an absolute, final definition, a multitude of visions and perspectives must be taken into account when addressing the threatened *humanum*. This means that neither Catholic nor Muslim women can regard the resources from their own religions as providing all that is necessary for the healing and liberation of women. This is why, in my estimation, women from both traditions must be open to listening to and learning from one another.

C. Women's Liberation and the Need for Dialogue with Religious Others as "Others"

The comparison made above is not meant to imply that Catholicism is better or worse than Islam, or that Islam is better or worse than Catholicism when it comes to the

treatment of women. In fact, it is meant to demonstrate that such an evaluation cannot be made. One cannot claim, therefore, that the response to the experience of the threatened *humanum* in one tradition is to convert to or copy from the other. No person or religious tradition contains a complete vision of what human wholeness entails, or has a ready answer to every instance of suffering that befalls humanity. Therefore, each person must regard his or her own vision of the *humanum* with a sense of humility, knowing that each one's vision has room to expand in dialogue with other visions. Christians do not need to accept everything that comes to them from another tradition, but one needs to realize that the resources of their own tradition are not enough. In what follows, I propose five major reasons why I believe that dialogue between Catholic women and Muslim women is necessary for the realization of women's flourishing today.

1. Disproving the Myth of Christian Exceptionalism & The Need to Engage in Self-Critique

First, the presence of patriarchy in Islam and Christianity disproves the myth of a Christian exceptionalism, or the notion that Christianity contains all that is necessary for human flourishing and Islam has nothing new to offer, or all that it has to offer stems from what it shares in common with Christianity. In other words, Christianity, although it contains many positive resources that may serve as an inspiration for non-Christians, cannot be seen as the "liberator" of Muslim women.

Accepting this is true, one might inquire what benefit there might be for Catholic and Muslim women to hear or read about one another's particular experiences of marginalization. I see the advantages as twofold. First, sharing such experiences can dispel the myth that Islam and Christianity are inherently opposed to one another. In

learning about the experiences of Muslim women, Catholic women are almost always likely to find something to which they can relate and empathize. As was mentioned earlier, religious identity is shaped by one's social location and experience, and these identities are entangled in such a way that they cannot be neatly separated. A person is not simply Christian or Muslim, but each individual is a *particular* Christian and a *particular* Muslim. For example, an openly lesbian Catholic woman may find more in common with a Muslim woman in a same-sex relationship than with a heterosexual Catholic man who staunchly holds that homosexuality is a sin. Similarly, a Muslim woman who works in an impoverished city school district might relate more to an urban Catholic woman from a similar city, than to a wealthy, tenured Muslim professor at an Ivy League university. Bonds of solidarity can be fostered beyond religious and cultural boundaries, emphasizing our common quest for the *humanum*.

In addition, exposing the myth of Christian exceptionalism makes room for Catholic women to realize the need to critique all that threatens the *humanum* and assists them in the practice of self-critique. It cannot be denied that many Catholic women theologians, Ruether being one of them, engage in such critique and call for reforms that will more fully acknowledge the humanity of women. Due to limitations of time and space (Schillebeeckx's fourth anthropological constant), it is possible to be out of touch with other people's experiences and sufferings, even though they may belong to the same religion. Thus, for some Catholics, an all-male priesthood may be regarded as just "the way things are" without recognition of the reasons behind it and its implications. A Catholic woman may not lament the limitations placed on women's roles because she was never taught to think about the priesthood as an option in the first place.

Furthermore, some may be unaware of the struggles faced by the most marginalized persons in their traditions. A wealthy woman with flexible working hours and in good health may not fully recognize the difficulties of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* for a woman with three children who is struggling financially and has been told by doctors that her body cannot withstand another pregnancy.

Since another tradition comes to us as strange and new, it can often be easier to pinpoint problems found in that tradition. For example, as Fatima Mernissi points out, many Western women automatically assume that just because they do not cover their heads, they have more freedom. Western women may have so internalized Western standards of beauty that favor bodies of a certain shape and size that they do not notice that such standards represent a threat to the *humanum*. Mernissi, who grew up in Morocco, expresses how she never felt self-conscious of her body size until her experience shopping for clothing in New York City. She had never considered that wearing a size large than six might be a cause of shame or embarrassment. Muslim women like Mernissi have important insights to impart to Catholic Western women who need to respond to this situation.

2. *No Person or Community Possesses a Complete, Totalizing Vision of the Humanum*

The second reason dialogue is necessary is that while women's commitment to the threatened *humanum* may be universal, their positive conception of it is not. No woman, no matter how committed she may be to feminist theology, can possibly possess a complete vision of what the *humanum* is, nor what bringing it about should entail. Thus, dialogue with Islam can provide a key element in expanding the Catholic conception of the *humanum* and for avoiding distorted visions that emphasize the well-being of one

group to the neglect of another. The veil is a poignant example here. In some Muslim countries, there are laws that force women to veil against their will. The realities that contribute to the veil's necessity for some women, such as sexual harassment and the objectification of female bodies, are also examples of the threatened *humanum*.

However, without consulting Muslim women themselves, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that the veil is nothing but a symbol of women's oppression and therefore, must be completely eradicated. Laws or policies that prohibit women from wearing religious attire exist in many countries today, especially throughout Europe.⁸⁰⁸ While such bans on veiling may be enacted in the name of granting women freedom, in many respects the effect has been just the opposite.

In Turkey, the ban on the headscarf in universities and hospitals, enacted in 1998, has greatly restricted women's access to education and health care.⁸⁰⁹ Sadly, in the 2004 case of *Leyla Sahin v. Turkey*, the European Court of Human Rights upheld the Turkish ban on the headscarf, claiming that it was "legitimate and necessary in a democratic society" and that it was "a necessary protection for other students, specifically those who do not wear a headscarf."⁸¹⁰

In 2014, The European Court of Human Rights also upheld the validity of France's 2010 ban on the veil in public places declaring that the ban was a way of

⁸⁰⁸ For more information about restrictions on women's religious attire worldwide, see the Pew Research Center, "Restrictions on Women's Religious Attire," April 4, 2016.

⁸⁰⁹ For a more in-depth discussion on the effects of the ban on the headscarf in Turkey, see Abdullahi An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 208-212

⁸¹⁰ Kerime Sule Akoglu, "Piecemeal Freedom: Why the Headscarf Ban Remains in Place in Turkey," *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 38:2 (May 2015), 288.

encouraging citizens to “live together.”⁸¹¹ Yet, such laws have made Muslim women the targets of abuse, from being spat on to having their veils pulled off as they walk along the streets.⁸¹² According to the National Observatory Against Islamophobia, eighty percent of anti-Muslim acts in France that occurred between 2013-2014 were directed against veiled women.⁸¹³

As scholar and expert in Quranic hermeneutics Asma Barlas states, it is entirely too simplistic to assume a correlation between a covered body and slavery. In fact, historically, female slaves were denied the right to cover themselves. This is recognized in the Quran when it defines the function of the *jilbab* (cloak) to distinguish between free women and slaves.⁸¹⁴ During the British occupation of Egypt in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, many women adopted the *hijab* as a symbol of their resistance to colonial definitions.⁸¹⁵ During the 1979 Iranian Revolution, many middle class Iranian women chose to wear the *hijab* as a symbol of their resistance to the Shah and Western cultural encroachment. Prior to Iran’s post-revolutionary enforcement of the *hijab*, many educated and professional woman “deliberately donned the veil as an assertion of their identity which reflects a synthesis of modernity and tradition.”⁸¹⁶

⁸¹¹ Pew Research Center, “Restrictions on Women’s Religious Attire,” April 5, 2016, 4.

⁸¹² Suzanne Daley and Alissa J. Rubin, “French Muslims Say Veil Ban Gives Cover to Bias,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2015.

⁸¹³ Suzanne Daley and Alissa J. Rubin, “French Muslims Say Veil Ban Gives Cover to Bias,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2015.

⁸¹⁴ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 160. For more information regarding Quranic injunctions on women’s attire, see Barlas, 31-61.

⁸¹⁵ Sa’diyya Shaikh, “Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice,” in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, Ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 152.

⁸¹⁶ Fadwa El Guindi, “Veiling Intifadah with Muslim Ethic,” *Social Problems* 28 (1981), 465.

Without a willingness to dialogue with Islam, Muslim women tend to be treated as objects of research instead of individual subjects in their own right. As Sa'diyya Shaikh explains, the *hijab*, for Muslim women, has come to represent a variety of meanings within multivalent realities. Some women see it as a religious requirement. Others state specifically feminist and anti-capitalist reasons for deciding to veil. Some claim that veiling detracts from patriarchal prioritization of women's physical and sexual attractiveness, and resists Western consumerism in which women spend a lot of their time and energy keeping up with changing fashions.⁸¹⁷ For other Muslim women, the veil is a way of outwardly expressing their religious identity, and serves as a visible reminder of their relationship with God. In many ways, it is similar to the reasons a Catholic may choose to wear a cross around his or her neck, or the medallion of a favorite saint. During a visit to the Islamic Center of Boston in Wayland, MA one woman explained to me her decision to veil in spite of opposition, saying, "I veil. It is what I choose to do to feel close to God. If someone does not like me for my choice, they are not a friend."

Interestingly, the veil for many Muslim women represents such a personal choice that it is common to meet two sisters or a mother and daughter, one in *hijab* and one with her head uncovered. While many believe that Muslim women are pressured into wearing the *hijab*, the opposite is actually quite common. Given the harsh reactions the veil often provokes, some Muslim women are actually encouraged by Muslim relatives and friends to uncover their heads for their own safety and protection. Women's lack of autonomy is certainly a sign of the threatened *humanum*, but this cannot be remedied without careful

⁸¹⁷ Shaikh, "Transforming Feminisms," 152-53.

consideration of the actual experience of Muslim women, who should have a choice as to whether or not to adopt more Western styles of dress. Without taking into account the feelings and concerns of Muslim women, Western Christians may all too easily assume that their first reaction to the threatened *humanum* of women, namely the demonization of the veil as oppressive, is what is best for all women regardless of their cultural or religious background. Furthermore, Muslim women who freely choose to veil may offer important insights to Catholic women who seek to outwardly express both their feminism and their religious devotion in the contemporary world.

3. Muslim and Catholic Women May Expand One Another's Conceptions of the Humanum

Third, in engaging the particularities of both traditions, Muslim women and Catholic women can find inspiration from one another's beliefs and practices, even if they may not be able to offer full assent to everything the other religion believes. As was discussed in Chapter Four, both Catholics and Muslims make absolute claims and therefore, doctrinal disagreements will persist. Catholics believe that Jesus was God incarnate, both human and divine. Jesus plays a crucial role in the salvation of all humanity, as God's full, definitive and unsurpassable revelation. Islam, on the other hand, states that all previous religions are brought to fulfillment with God's final revelation in the Quran. Muhammad, rather than Jesus, is God's final prophet, although Muhammad is not divine, since, in Islam, the incarnation is seen as a violation of *tawhid*, or the oneness of God.

The Second Vatican Council acknowledged that the Church does not always have at hand the solution to particular problems.⁸¹⁸ Schillebeeckx defined Christian discipleship, not as an exact imitation of Jesus, but as the effort to follow Jesus's example by "allowing an intense experience of God to have an influence on our own situation."⁸¹⁹ Jesus was a finite human being and as such, lived and spoke in a particular time and culture, which means he did not leave specific instructions on how to deal with many of the circumstances that confront human beings today. Jesus was a Middle Eastern Jewish man living under the oppression of the Roman Empire. The main focus of his ministry was the kingdom of God and he taught in the form of parables. He did not have a spouse or children, and was put to death by the Roman Empire at the age of thirty-three.

Muhammad lived in a very different context than Jesus. A seventh century Arab man, he was considered both a religious and political leader. He had wives and children, who also are considered to be important figures in Islam. Catholics look to the example of Jesus, and Muslims look to the example of the Prophet Muhammad, for guidance on how to live their lives and be faithful to God. However, it is impossible to fully replicate their actions in today's world. Therefore, Catholics and Muslims must ponder how to follow their examples in modern situations, many of which were unthinkable centuries ago.

⁸¹⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport: NY: Costello, 1996), 33.

⁸¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 8: Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 46, originally published as *Tussentijds verhaal over Jezus boeken* (Bloemendaal, 1978).

Both Jesus and Muhammad were countercultural in their treatment of women. Jesus ate with women and taught them alongside men, behaviors that were scandalous at the time. According to the Gospels, women were the first witnesses to his resurrection. With the Prophet Muhammad, we get a different example of countercultural treatment toward women. Unlike Jesus, Muhammad had wives and children. His first wife, Khadija, was a wealthy businesswoman. She not only provided for Muhammad financially, but she was the one to console him when he received his first revelation of the Quran in 610.⁸²⁰ In other words, Muhammad loved a powerful woman, and his marriage provides an example of a situation that is still considered rare in many parts of the world today; namely, a female acting as the major breadwinner of a family. Indonesian religious studies scholar Syafa Almirzanah states, “Our Prophet cooked and even sewed his own clothes himself. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that.”⁸²¹ According to Almirzanah, “the Prophet didn’t teach that women should just stay at home. These rules were introduced by the Prophet’s companions after his death. The Quran gives women the right to pursue an education and be involved in worldly matters.”⁸²² The Prophet often consulted with wives. After negotiating the Covenant of al-Hudaybiyyah, which established peaceful relations between Muslims and the Quraysh tribe, his Companions refused to sacrifice their camels. He went to his wife Um Salamah and it was she who suggested the solution to his problem.⁸²³

⁸²⁰ Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 11.

⁸²¹ Syafa Almirzanah, “The Prophet’s Daughters,” Interview by editors *US Catholic* (January 2009), 31.

⁸²² Almirzanah, 29.

⁸²³ Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 159.

The Prophet's role as a father was also countercultural. According to Tariq Ramadan, the Prophet had six children with Khadija. Their two sons died in infancy and only their four daughters survived. Among seventh century Arabs, the birth of a daughter was considered shameful, yet Muhammad and Khadija "surrounded their daughters with deep love and constant care that they never hesitated to express in public."⁸²⁴ The Prophet is said to have loved children. If his ritual prayer was disturbed by a crying child, the Prophet would say that the child was praying to God by invoking his or her mother, and would then shorten his prayer as if to respond to the prayer of the child.⁸²⁵ The Prophet learned from children to look at his surroundings with a sense of awe and wonder.

Muhammad, as a non-celibate political and religious leader, dealt with many situations that Jesus did not; therefore, Catholics may find some of the stories and examples of the Prophet's life, such as those mentioned above, to be not only educational, but spiritually and morally enriching. This does not mean that a Catholic should abandon Jesus as the criterion for her ethical behavior. However, hearing the accounts of the Prophet as a father and husband can broaden her knowledge of the religious resources that counter the notion that a patriarchal society is God's will. She may regard what she learns from Islamic sources as necessary for responding to the threatened *humanum* of women today and therefore, part of being a disciple of Jesus.

Both Catholic and Muslim women find many examples of strong, admirable female figures in their tradition who defy gender stereotypes of women as passive and

⁸²⁴ Ramadan, 34.

⁸²⁵ Ramadan, 214.

obedient. Women exercised important leadership roles in the early Christian community. For example, the Church at Philippi was founded by a prosperous woman named Lydia. Many women shared in the task of evangelization along with Paul and helped provide for him financially. In Romans 16:1, a woman named Phoebe is referred to as a “deacon.” She was responsible for overseeing the assembly of Christians at Cenchreae and informing Paul of its progress. In Romans 16:7 Paul also bestows the term “apostle” on a woman named Junia.⁸²⁶

Early Muslim women took on different types of leadership roles in a different context than that found in the Gospels. The Prophet’s wife Aisha was a leading theologian, as well as political/military personality.⁸²⁷ She defended the integrity of the Prophet by calling into question misogynistic *hadith* reports, stressing the importance of “narrating hadith in their entirety, highlighting the context in which they were uttered.”⁸²⁸ *Hadith* are accounts of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad.⁸²⁹ Women had an active role in the initial preservation of the Quran as well as in the transmission of

⁸²⁶ Some have tried to claim that this was a scribal error and Paul was really referring to a man named Junias. Others argue that Paul simply meant that Junia was “like an apostle” but not actually an apostle.

⁸²⁷ Ednan Aslan, “Early Community Politics and the Marginalization of Women in Islamic Intellectual History” in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Ed. Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medini (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 37.

⁸²⁸ Zainab Alwani, “Muslim Women as Religious Scholars: A Historical Survey” in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Ed. Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medini (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 57.

⁸²⁹ A comprehensive study of *hadith* literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, there is much debate among Muslim thinkers as to which hadith are authentic or not, and different schools of Islam regard different collections of *hadith* as authentic. Some hadith reports do not contain statements that are unfavorable toward women. However, according to Hidayet Sefkatli Tuksal, such reports carry many of the characteristics of fabrication. She insists that Muslims must judge reports that place women in a lower position than men against the overall actions of the Prophet, and the value the Quran attaches to human dignity and freedom. See “The Position of Women in the Creation: A Quranic Perspective” *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Ed. Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medini (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 136.

hadith. An eyewitness encounter with Muhammad was the only prerequisite for narrating reports on his life, and thus, the narrations of women were considered no less reliable than those of men.⁸³⁰ One of the first people to memorize the Quran was the Prophet's wife, Hafsa bint Umar.⁸³¹ She also played a vital role in looking after the holy scrolls and relics on which the Quran was inscribed during the Prophet's lifetime. The final editing of the Quran by the Third Caliph was also placed in her care and became the standard copy of the Holy Script.⁸³²

Becoming aware of the major female figures in both Muslim and Catholic history expands women's knowledge of what women can and have accomplished, providing more examples and therefore, more role models than can be offered by one tradition alone. Such examples also provide encouragement for women who wish to maintain that being religious (or even religious scholars) is compatible with a commitment to the flourishing of women.

While the Quran may not have the same level of authority as the Bible for a Catholic (and vice versa for a Muslim), that does not mean that the Quran cannot deepen our understanding of the *humanum*, particularly in its vision of how human beings should approach the situation of religious pluralism. The Quran Surah 5:48 speaks beautifully to the need for interreligious dialogue: "For each [people] We have appointed a Divine Law and a way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He may

⁸³⁰ Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 23.

⁸³¹ Sayeed, 39.

⁸³² Yusuf Da Costa, *The Honor of Women in Islam* (Washington DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2002), 58-59.

try you by that which He hath given you. So vie with one another in good works.”⁸³³ The Quran presents us with a positive appreciation of the existence of multiple religions, stating that is the will of God rather than an unfortunate circumstances. Rather than bemoan the fact that humanity does not share one religion, the Quran encourages human being to vie with one another in their efforts to better the world. This also implies that all human beings, not just Muslims, have the ability to perform “good works.” In witnessing the good works enacted by religious others, human beings should raise their own standards and continuously strive to better themselves.

The account of the Prophet Muhammad’s encounter with the Najran Christians can be read as conveying the value of interreligious dialogue from an inclusivist perspective. A delegation of fourteen religious leaders from Najran (present day Yemen) visited Muhammad to inquire about the new religion of Islam and what its perspective was on Jesus. The Prophet happily answered their questions and pointed out the link between the two traditions. He viewed Islam as being the continuation of Jesus’s message, but he rejected the dogma of the Trinity. The Prophet invited the Najran Christians to convert to Islam but they refused. Nevertheless, the Prophet, to the dismay of some of his Companions, still allowed the Christians to pray inside the mosque. They left Medina unharmed and still devoted to their Christian beliefs. Here, we see an example of both groups being unwilling to give up their deeply held beliefs, but still able to converse peacefully.⁸³⁴

⁸³³ Quran 5:48.

⁸³⁴ Ramadan, *The Footsteps of the Prophet*, 114-17.

Specifically dealing with women, Catholics and Muslims share some foremothers in common, in particular, Eve and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Muslim perspectives on Eve and Mary can prove nourishing for Catholic women's spirituality. In the Catholic tradition, many women have lamented that the Virgin Mary, as an "ideal woman," has been upheld as a model of obedience, rather than independence and strength. Mary is held in high esteem in the Quran. As does Catholicism, the Quran affirms that Jesus was created in the womb of Mary by a special decree to which she freely assents and not by normal biology. The position of St. Ambrose, which was eventually adopted by the Church, insists upon the utter intactness of Mary's body throughout the birthing process, never penetrated or torn, a birth without pain or blood.⁸³⁵ In Genesis 3:16, after her disobedience, God says to Eve, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth." The Church Fathers reasoned that Mary, as the receptacle of the Savior, must have been conceived without sin. Being sinless, she could not be subject to birth pangs, since they are the mark of original sin. This depiction of Mary removes her from the experience of ordinary women, and also posits a strong association between the female body and sin.

In the Quran, however, Mary's birthing process is described like that of every other woman who bears a child. "Would that I had died before this time and been long forgotten (rather than feel such pains)?"⁸³⁶ The Quran also demonstrates God's sympathy for Mary at this time, telling her to "Grieve not!"⁸³⁷ and asking her to eat, drink, and be

⁸³⁵ Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 277.

⁸³⁶ Quran 19:23

⁸³⁷ Quran 19:24

comforted.⁸³⁸ The Quran classifies Mary as one of the *qanitin*, or one devout before Allah. Interestingly, the Quran uses the masculine plural form of this word, rather than the feminine, to emphasize the significance of Mary as an example for all who believe and showing that “her virtue was not confined by gender.”⁸³⁹ These are aspects of Mary’s experience that have been covered up throughout Church history which many women today want to recall. Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes, “real blood was shed at this delivery, by a poor woman of peasant society far from home, laboring in childbirth for the first time. And it was holy.” The human Mary who gives birth naturally shows that “womb and breasts, flesh and bleeding” are not “outside the sphere of the sacred.”⁸⁴⁰ A Catholic may not regard the Quran as God’s final revelation, but Quranic passages about Mary may help her in a thinking and speaking about Mary in fresh new ways and may increase her appreciation of and ability to relate to Mary as the Mother of God.

For a Catholic, the admission that the wisdom of the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad make valuable contributions toward expanding our conception of the *humanum* does not amount to putting Muhammad over Jesus, or even declaring that Muhammad and Jesus are on the same level. It also does not mean that Catholics must adopt or accept all of the Prophet’s teachings.⁸⁴¹ However, as was stated earlier, even

⁸³⁸ Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39.

⁸³⁹ Wadud, *Quran and Woman*, 40.

⁸⁴⁰ Johnson, 277.

⁸⁴¹ Here, it is important to mention the Prophet’s practice of polygamy, which is often offensive to modern sensibilities. While a comprehensive study of this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Muslims scholars have sought to explain that the Prophet’s practice of polygyny does not make polygyny acceptable in today’s context, even by the standards of the Quran. According to some interpretations, the Quran does not favor polygyny and seeks to restrict it. The Prophet was allowed to marry more wives because, as the

while Catholics hold that Jesus is God incarnate, they must recognize that Jesus, during his time on Earth, was limited by the constraints of time and space. Thus, the Gospels do not provide us with examples of how to deal with every possible issue that arises in modern day society. Catholics, therefore, do not learn what the *humanum* entails directly from Jesus but constantly rely upon additional sources for moral guidance: saints, priests and ministers, scholars and theologians, parents, and other influential figures in their lives. They also rely on these sources knowing that they are human and therefore, subject to error. Therefore, there is nothing preventing Catholics from learning from and drawing upon the resources of Islam, even when not holding the same beliefs as Muslims do regarding the status of the Quran and the Prophet. Recognizing that Islam has something new and unique to offer to the development of the *humanum* that is not found or emphasized in Christianity does not amount to saying that Islam is necessarily a better religion, or even that it holds the same importance in the life of the devout Catholic.

4. Deepening Appreciation of One's Own Tradition and the Tradition of the "Other"

Fourth, dialogue is necessary especially for a Catholic who might be devout but repeats their creedal affirmation or responses to the consecration of the Eucharist by rote. Likewise, a Muslim who stops to pray five times a day has developed a habit of doing so and may rarely stop to think about why she does it.

head of state, he was responsible for women who had no means to support themselves. With the exception of Aishah, all of the Prophet's wives were widows. The reported age of Aishah at the time of her marriage to the Prophet is often the target of Western criticism, as well as a source of debate among Muslims. Similarly, many point out that Aishah's age does not constitute permission for men to marry children today in order to indulge their lusts, since the Quran unequivocally rules against lechery in marriage, See Asma Barlas, Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 125-26.

Mara Brecht explains that dialogue across disagreement provides an opportunity for members of different religions to listen to one another with deeper appreciation. This was particularly important after September 11th when many media outlets portrayed Islam and Christianity as inherently opposed, with the former religion being intrinsically violent and something to be feared. Brecht conducted research on the Philadelphia Area Women's Interreligious Dialogue Group, which has been in existence for a little over a decade. This group of Muslim and Catholic women practiced the art of negotiating difference through dialogue. For many months, they devoted each dialogue session to the spiritual autobiographies of two women, each of whom would exchange the role of storyteller and story hearer at various times. These narratives helped women build empathy across religious boundaries, and cultivate feelings of care and appreciation.

In one such example, Brecht relates how a Christian woman hears a Muslim woman describe her pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam. From the Muslim woman's pilgrimage description, the Christian woman began to envision the Hajj as something walking around the Kaaba and be awestruck. While, as a non-Muslim, she cannot technically participate in the Hajj, her imagining herself into the pilgrimage instills in her the profundity of the ways Muslims express their faith in walking and reminds her of the embodied nature of religious experience.⁸⁴² In other words, the encounter with the unfamiliar is an example of how one can re-ignite one's faith by inspiring a sense of awe and wonder at the Divine and the created world.

⁸⁴² Mara Brecht, "Epistemology and Embodiment in Women's Interreligious Dialogue," in *Women in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille & Jillian Maxey (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 64.

5. *Feminism is Not and Cannot Be a Solely Western Christian Phenomenon*

The fifth and final reason why dialogue is beneficial is that the term “feminism” has come to have negative connotations, especially in pre-dominantly Muslim countries. Islamic philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr identifies feminism as “a thirsting for all things Western.”⁸⁴³ If, Nasr says, Westerners really wanted to be “friends and fellow human beings,” they should not seek to impose their views on Muslims but should ask Muslims what they considered to be the rights that were most missing in their lives.⁸⁴⁴ Contrary to widespread belief, the majority of women in Muslim countries believe that women deserve the same legal status as men, the right to vote without influence from family members, and to work at any job they are qualified for, and even to serve in the highest levels of government.⁸⁴⁵ However, while many Muslim women admire much about the West, the majority do not yearn to become more like their Western counterparts. Many are wary of the “West’s perceived promiscuity, pornography, and indecent dress-perceptions that can be traced to Hollywood images exported daily to the Muslim world... images of scantily clad young women may leave Muslim women believing that despite Western women’s equal legal status, their cultural status is lacking.”⁸⁴⁶ Some may also perceive a lack of respect for motherhood in the West. Thus, while many Muslim women favor gender parity, they want it on their own terms and within their own cultural

⁸⁴³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Unwinn Hyman, 1966), 112.

⁸⁴⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 289.

⁸⁴⁵ John Esposito, “What do Muslim Women Want?” in *Who Speaks for Islam? What A Billion Muslims Really Think*, Ed. John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 101-02.

⁸⁴⁶ Esposito, 108.

context.⁸⁴⁷ Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is necessary to keep feminism from being perceived as an imperialistic Western Christian phenomenon. A feminism that refuses to listen to non-Christian perspectives is not truly feminism since it neglects the *humanum* of women from other cultural and religious contexts.

In summary, I have provided five reasons why dialogue between Catholic and Muslim women is necessary in responding to the threatened *humanum*. First, dialogue can dispel the myth of Christian exceptionalism and reminds both traditions of the need to not simply look for the issues found in the beliefs and practices of the other, but to also engage in self-critique. Second, no one person, culture, or tradition possesses a universal vision of what the *humanum* should entail. There is always more that can be learned in responding to a particular situation. The veiling of women is a poignant example here. Without listening to perspectives outside her own culture and religion, the Western Christian woman can easily come to the dangerous conclusion that veiling is oppressive and should be prohibited in all circumstances. Third, every human being is limited by the constraints of time and space. Islam, having arisen and developed in a different context than Christianity, has wisdom to offer Christianity that has not been thematized in the Christian tradition, yet still may prove necessary for responding to the threatened *humanum* in today's world, and vice versa. Fourth, dialogue with another tradition can foster better appreciation of one's home tradition, reminding her of what she believes and why. Fifth and finally, dialogue between Catholicism and Islam serves as a powerful

⁸⁴⁷ Esposito, 107.

reminder that feminism cannot and should not be solely defined by the experience of Western Christian women.

D. Conclusion: Pluralism is Not the Answer

I have maintained throughout this chapter that patriarchy is manifest in both Islam and Catholicism. In both traditions, women's ability to change this situation is inhibited by the fact that they are excluded from major roles of religious leadership. To put it succinctly, women are told by male authorities how they should think and behave as "holy women." For this reason, I do not accept Rita Gross's assertion, that the pluralist paradigm is the only suitable choice for any feminist theology of religions.⁸⁴⁸ Insisting that women can only collaborate with one another if they subscribe to a pluralist position reinforces certain patriarchal patterns. Instead of male humanity, pluralism is held up as the norm. Whatever beliefs and practices fail to meet the standards of a pluralist theology of religions are rejected as wrong, inherently violent, and incompatible with fruitful interreligious dialogue. Basically, if Gross' assertion is to be upheld, women are told by persons outside of their religious traditions what beliefs and practices they can and cannot accept.

Given the similarities between Jesus and Muhammad discussed in the section above, one may wonder why Catholics and Muslims cannot simply declare them to be on an equal level to avoid disagreement and potential conflict. However, according to Schillebeeckx, the belief that God's salvation was brought about definitively in Jesus

⁸⁴⁸ Rita Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 65.

Christ came about because of the earliest disciples' experience of being touched and healed by Jesus. Jesus's divinity and Jesus's role in eschatological salvation are not simply personal preferences that can be given up when one pleases, but faith convictions that stem from personal experience.⁸⁴⁹ For Muslims, the finality of the Prophet Muhammad stems from the experience of the Quran as the Word of God and as a central part of one's life. The absolute claims made about Jesus, and about the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad, are not made simply for the sake of proving one's religion to be better than others, but, as statements of faith, as personal responses to the divine in one's life. Certainly, such claims have been misused to justify violence toward religious others and may have at times instilled a sense of religious superiority. Also, not every person who publicly declares faith in Jesus or the Quran is an authentic believer (one's inner beliefs are not something we can know with exact certainty). We cannot ask people to simply change their religious beliefs the way we may try to convince them to change their preference for political candidates or policy positions. Certainly, genuine religious conversions can and do happen, but they must be in response to one's personal experience, not a theory that seeks to eradicate religious disagreement for the sake of making the beliefs of religious others more palatable.

In Chapter Four, I discussed how the reality of the threatened *humanum* demands that we respond to it now, even though human beings hold different and sometimes contradictory views. Therefore, for Schillebeeckx, ethics must always be given priority

⁸⁴⁹ See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 174-75.

over religion because ethics has the character of a “pressing urgency” which cannot wait until there is unanimity among humankind over the ultimate questions of life.⁸⁵⁰ This applies to the contemporary situation, in which the *humanum* of women is threatened by patriarchal attitudes and practices that perpetuate gender-based suffering and oppression. Women today are realizing that this situation “should not be!” Thus, interreligious cooperation cannot wait until mutual agreement upon religious doctrines is found; nor is such unanimity even necessarily desirable. As Schillebeeckx also states, “God is too rich and too super-substantial to be exhausted in fullness by one distinct and thus limited tradition or experience.”⁸⁵¹ In other words, the praxis of Muslim and Catholic women on behalf of the *humanum* is richer when informed by dialogue between both religions, rather than based on the experience of one tradition alone. Even if one believes her tradition to be the most complete, she can still acknowledge that the religious other has something new and profound to offer.

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate how Schillebeeckx’s claim that “there is no salvation outside the world” must translate into “no salvation apart from religious others” using the example of Muslim women and Catholic women. First, utilizing the work of Catholic feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, I discussed how the *humanum* of women has been and is continuously is threatened. Feminist theology has sought to respond to this situation, but has often failed to take into account the experiences of non-Christian, non-Western women. Second, I sought to uncover the

⁸⁵⁰ See *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 7: Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 649.

⁸⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and Human Ecumene,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, Ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 184.

myth of a Christian exceptionalism by discussing how patriarchy is present both Catholicism and Islam with regard to four main points: body image, rigid gender roles, lack of leadership roles, and purity standards. Third, I argued that the presence of patriarchy in both traditions shows that no one religion contains a full vision of what the *humanum* entails. Therefore, interreligious dialogue is necessary for glimpses of salvation to be felt and seen. When one fails to see religious others as cooperators in building the *humanum*, one often neglects to practice the self-critique necessary for responding to threats to the *humanum* found in her own tradition. A concept of what the *humanum* should be cannot neglect the hopes and desires of women outside of another woman's own religious or social location. Finally, given that both Muslims and Christians make absolute religious claims that conflict with one another, I have attempted to show that it is not only possible, but in fact, desirable, to engage in fruitful dialogue from an inclusivist position that does not demand the eradication of major religious differences.

CONCLUSION

THE IMPLICATIONS OF “NO SALVATION APART FROM RELIGIOUS OTHERS” FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

The motivation behind this dissertation was to acknowledge the situation of religious pluralism as a “sign of the times.” Today, Christians are not simply aware that other religions exist, but rather, religious others are prevalent in our classrooms, workplaces, and even in our families. Even at a Catholic institution, Christianity is not the only religion represented on campus. It can no longer be assumed that a married couple will share the same religion, or that children share the same religion of their parents. Although not all Christians engage in the scholarly study of world religions, they still are often exposed to some of the beliefs, practices, and concerns of other religions through their everyday interactions and through social media.

A. Was Schillebeeckx Really an Inclusivist? And Why Is this Significant?

In both the Introduction and Chapter One, I presented the three paradigms of the theology of religions that seek to deal with the question of the salvation of non-Christians: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Although Schillebeeckx never explicitly identified himself as such, I argued that throughout his theological career, he remained a representative of the inclusivist paradigm. He did not hold that all religions are equal or the same. Nor was he willing to relinquish his belief in Jesus as God’s universal, definitive, and unsurpassable revelation.

In the words of Lieven Boeve, throughout Schillebeeckx's entire theological career, "in the end the Christian truth claims is the criterion for all other truth claims."⁸⁵² Schillebeeckx maintained a vision of Jesus as normative for all of humankind. In Jesus, Schillebeeckx insists, we witness "an unveiling of the true face of God and a disclosure of the true being of man." Jesus's humanity thus becomes the measure by which we ought to judge ourselves.⁸⁵³ This, however, does not mean that those who follow Jesus have a monopoly on the definition of what it means to be human, a definition which no human person or institution can fully possess. As Schillebeeckx attested, "turning to Jesus to find salvation in him means approaching him in a state of not knowing, or rather of 'open knowledge' of the true meaning of humanity and divinity alike, maybe to learn from him the true nature of their interrelationship as manifested in Jesus."⁸⁵⁴ In Jesus, Christians do not have an instruction manual on how to handle every situation that could ever possibly arise in this world, but they do believe they have an image of the invisible God, God incarnate. Jesus, and only Jesus, then, is the "positive guarantor" of the final salvation that Christians believe is yet to come, in which all forms of suffering will cease. Jesus is the testament to the statement that "God is among us" and that the meaninglessness and suffering found in the world will not have the last word. Therefore, Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are of all universal significance for all of humankind.

⁸⁵² See, for example, Schillebeeckx, "Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus," *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 30 (1990) 259-275. See Boeve, "Experience According to Edward Schillebeeckx: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology," in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, Ed. Lieven Boeve & Laurence P. Hemmeing (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 220-221, footnote 61

⁸⁵³ Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 6: Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 566.

⁸⁵⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 567.

Given Schillebeeckx's understanding of salvation, discussed in Chapter Three, denying this would not make sense. Salvation from God is a communal reality, not simply good news for certain individuals. Jesus cannot be the redeemer of Christians if he is not the redeemer of all humankind including those who do not believe him to be such. The purpose of the Christian declaration that God's salvation was brought about definitively in Jesus Christ is not one-upmanship in comparison to other religions, but reflects the Christian response to their experience of Jesus as the foundation for their eschatological hope.

Just as Schillebeeckx did not explicitly refer to himself as an inclusivist, it is important to acknowledge that most Christians, including many Christian theologians, do not categorize their views in terms of the paradigms, even if they are aware of them. Most people do not base the way they treat non-Christians during the course of their everyday lives on a well-established theory. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx's fifth anthropological constant (discussed in Chapter Four) concerns the mutual and essential relationship between theory and praxis. Any commitment to the *humanum* requires both reflection and action. As was stated in the introduction, it is widely accepted that, whether consciously or unconsciously, Christians come to any encounter with another tradition with an understanding that corresponds to one of three paradigms: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Certainly, not all Christians need to do an in-depth study of the theology of religions, but it is important for all Christians to reflect about their own personal understanding of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian traditions, since such an understanding, albeit unconsciously, impacts their ability to dialogue with and learn from religious others in their everyday lives. The paradigms are

not the only way to do this, but they do provide a helpful guidepost when one is attempting to articulate his or her perspective.

This dissertation attempted to dispel the belief that one must hold a pluralist position, and thereby uphold that all religions have equal validity, relinquishing any absolute claims, in order to dialogue with religious others effectively. As this dissertation has shown, it is not necessary to dismiss pluralists as if they cannot also be contributors to fruitful interreligious dialogue. For example, Paul Knitter does not apply the terms “full, definitive, and unsurpassable” to Jesus Christ. He also maintains that he is fully a Buddhist-Christian, without giving primacy to either identity. In this way, neither identity is considered better or more important than the other. Thus, the intention of this dissertation was not to prove that Paul Knitter cannot or should not make such claims. He is free to do so, especially if these are the beliefs that truly correspond to his own experience. Rather, my critique of Knitter in this dissertation was his belief that *all* Christians *must* adopt his perspective.

Certainly, pluralists like Knitter are not wrong in pointing out that in the past, Christian beliefs have been used to justify violence. The Crusades and the Inquisition are just two examples that testify to the dangers of religious violence. Nevertheless, preventing religious violence cannot consist of forcing persons to water down their religious beliefs so as not to conflict with the beliefs of others. In today’s religiously pluralist world, one must be able to discern the difference between a dangerous sense of superiority and authentic devotion to one’s tradition. The latter need not always lead to the former. To use Christianity and Islam as an example, a Christian may claim that Jesus is God’s definitive revelation and the guarantor of final salvation from God, while a

Muslim may claim that the Quran is the Word of God and Muhammad is God's final prophet. The Christian and the Muslim need not abandon these claims. However, they can and should reflect on why they make these claims, and the way these claims influence their actions in the world. If these are statements of faith made in response to the experience of the Divine in their lives, or what a person, in his or heart, believes to be true, then one cannot expect that they can easily be dropped. However, if these statements are made for the sake of giving one comfort that his or her beliefs are "right," while others are "wrong," they become problematic and a threat to one's ability to engage in dialogue. For the Christian, the belief in Jesus as God's definitive revelation should not be a source of satisfaction as if one has "chosen the best religion," but a constant challenge to make this belief in final salvation from God credible in today's world.

As we have seen, Schillebeeckx's soteriology is founded on the notion that there is "no salvation outside the world." The world through which God reveals Godself is not a society with perfect agreement among all individuals and communities. In its current state, the world we live in is one in which not all persons profess the same religion or any religion at all. Rather, persons hold unique, different, and sometimes even contradictory beliefs. Therefore, the human history which serves as the material of divine revelation cannot be understood as a history built solely by Christians. It must include the participation of non-Christians and non-believers. Since God reveals God's self to the world independently from a human person's decision to confess belief in God or Jesus Christ, it is conceivable that Christians have not come to know everything there is to know about experiencing the Divine. Nor are Christians the only ones who possess the wisdom necessary for responding to the threatened *humanum*. As I have insisted in this

dissertation, “no salvation outside the world” means no salvation outside a world that is religiously pluralist. The Church, although a part of the world, is not the whole world. The implication therefore is that partial and fragmentary experiences of salvation in this world that Schillebeeckx speaks about are seen and experienced in relationships with religious others, even if these others do not label their experiences as fragments of salvation. “No salvation apart from religious others,” thus becomes the logical conclusion of Schillebeeckx’s soteriology in today’s world.

The notion of “no salvation apart from religious others,” as a consequence of “no salvation outside the world” does not view interreligious dialogue as simply something nice to do for the sake of minimizing discord. Neither does my claim take a patronizing attitude toward non-Christian religions, in which everything of value found in the religious other must somehow derive from Christianity. Rather, the view of the religious other adopted in this dissertation has been that religious others truly have something unique to offer a Christian understanding of the *humanum*. Even though Christianity and other religions have different beliefs that sometimes come in conflict with one another, such differences need not be erased, but can be the basis of fruitful dialogue. The topic of religion need not be constantly shunned in diverse groups for fear of maintaining so-called “political correctness.” Even if the Christian does not share all of another religious adherent’s beliefs, one can and must see the religious other as a source of wisdom simply because—as Schillebeeckx has persuasively argued—the Christian cannot find everything necessary for the building of the *humanum* in this world solely within Christianity.

B. A Controversial Claim? Avoiding Misconceptions

“No salvation apart from religious others,” I recognize, is a potentially controversial claim. Therefore, it is important to avoid certain possible misconceptions. First of all, “no salvation apart from religious others,” does not mean that everything found in non-Christian traditions contributes to the *humanum*. While not imposing a static definition of the human being, the *humanum* serves to help prevent interreligious dialogue from becoming relativistic and accepting all beliefs and practices in the name of diversity. The criterion of the *humanum* holds that anything that serves to diminish or oppress others cannot be embraced. This means that one may reject or even criticize what may come about from an interreligious encounter. However, in keeping with the criterion of the *humanum*, one’s critique of a particular situation, action or attitude must not turn into a blanket condemnation of an entire religion or culture, labeling it as wicked or backward. Nor should one harbor an attitude of fear or hatred toward anyone who identifies with a particular culture or religion. Although one may denounce particular acts of violence committed in the name of Allah or in the name of Jesus, such judgments cannot lead to the labeling of all Muslims or Christians as evil. As this dissertation has argued, “no salvation apart from religious others” means that no religious tradition has all of the answers; therefore, it is necessary to cooperate with and learn from religious others. However, cooperation and dialogue does not entail a blind obedience to whatever comes to us from another tradition. Dialogue partners must practice discernment, remaining open to what might at first sound strange, or new, but which may prove useful and even necessary in responding to the suffering that surrounds us.

As I have shown, some pluralists, like Rita Gross, have rightly pointed out that non-Christians have been excluded by certain movements, communities, and institutions. This is an issue that demands attention, and it is a key reason why I proposed in Chapter Five, that dialogue between Muslim and Catholic women is both beneficial and necessary. However, a person or community's treatment of religious others may not devolve into the sole litmus test for whether or not that community is sufficiently responding to the threatened *humanum*. In Chapter One, I referred to the statement of Paul Knitter, who said: "I do not have major problems with the controversial ethical or practical teachings of my church dealing with matters such as birth control, divorce, the role of women, homosexuality, clerical celibacy, episcopal leadership, and transparency."⁸⁵⁵ Rather, Knitter went on to explain that he struggles with what he calls the big stuff—that which applies to all Christians, not just the Roman Catholic community. Here, he was referring to the "basic ingredients of the Creed, the beliefs that many Christians proclaim together every Sunday and that are supposed to define who they are in a world of many other religious beliefs and philosophies."⁸⁵⁶ My critique of Knitter argued that for some people, ethical and practical teachings are "big stuff." A community may adopt a more open and inclusive attitude toward non-Christian traditions, but this alone is not necessarily going to help the gay couple fired from their jobs at Catholic institutions solely for marrying one another, or the Muslim woman who feels excluded from the mosque for having a child out of wedlock. Religious

⁸⁵⁵ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, x.

⁸⁵⁶ Knitter, *Without Buddha*, x.

communities must not neglect internal relationships in their efforts to dialogue and learn from religious others.

In Chapter Five, I argued that dialogue between Muslim and Catholic women, in which both come to appreciate the beliefs and practices of the other is certainly valuable, especially in a world where these groups often hold negative stereotypes about the other. However, this does not mean that every encounter between a Muslim and a Catholic automatically contributes to the *humanum*. Dialogue between Muslim and Catholic men might actually lead to discovering common ground on how to continue exclusionary practices toward women. Dialogue between Muslim and Catholic women could also end in an exchange of feelings of disgust toward LGBTQI persons. My point here is that simply talking to and learning from religious others cannot be our sole concern; rather we must always undertake dialogue with attention to the sufferings of those who are marginalized both within and outside of our religious communities.

Nevertheless, the potential for dialogue to have harmful consequences does not lessen the need for interreligious cooperation. The patriarchal beliefs and practices that threaten and damage the *humanum* of women which were presented in Chapter Five, illustrated but one contemporary example of a situation where interreligious dialogue and cooperation can contribute to furthering experiences of fragments of salvation and healing needed in this world. Both Islam and Christianity, even if their adherents believe them to have universal significance, are historically particular religions that arose in a particular time, place, and culture. While both traditions have spread beyond their places of origin, Muslims and Christians are and have always been limited by the constraints of time and space. Moreover, no religious institution can claim the ability to know or teach

everything that is necessary for the building of the *humanum* in this world. There are always more resources to be tapped and points of view to consider. By focusing on the benefits of dialogue among Muslim and Catholic women, this dissertation has argued that both groups' perspectives on what freedom and wholeness for women entails may prompt them to critically examine situations that previously were never regarded were oppressive. In other words, there is wisdom to be found in the Quran and examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad that have not been thematized in Christianity. Again, this does not mean that Islam is better than Christianity, nor that Christianity is better than Islam. It does, however, mean that there is more wisdom contained in the exchange between two religions than in one religion alone.

In discussing the importance of “no salvation apart from religious others,” it becomes crucial to always to keep in mind that the term *salvation*, in the context of Schillebeeckx's usage, always refers to the *this-worldly experience of salvation*, which is always only partial and fragmentary, not the final salvation given by God and reserved for the afterlife. In Chapter Three, I explained how the Catholic Church has shifted away from an exclusivist position, which maintained that there is no salvation outside of Christianity. The affirmation, at the Second Vatican Council, that non-Christians and non-believers may experience salvation in Jesus Christ (the inclusivist position), came about through pondering religious pluralism as a major “sign of the times.” In much the same way the Catholic Church no longer claims that an explicit confession of faith in Jesus is necessary for final salvation, neither am I claiming that participation in interreligious dialogue is necessary for final salvation, as if those who are unwilling to engage in such dialogue are destined for damnation. The aim of interreligious dialogue is

not to create another category of persons excluded from “salvation.” Here, my argument has followed Schillebeeckx’s claim that fragments of salvation may be glimpsed in human actions, but the fulfillment of salvation and total elimination of suffering is reserved for God. The person who refuses to engage with persons outside of his or her own tradition may be perpetuating a form of suffering in this world and missing out on opportunities to experience healing and inspiration, but it is not up to human beings to make the judgment that this precludes someone from final salvation.

It is also important to reiterate what was said in Chapter Three, that while Schillebeeckx saw creation as an ongoing act of God in which human beings are called to participate, and that he affirmed the role of human creativity and freedom in the shaping of history, he was not a Pelagian.⁸⁵⁷ Human beings cannot “save” themselves. Thus, he states, “on the one hand, eschatological hope is not a passive state of waiting for the future, but, on the other hand, neither is it self-redemption, as though the promised future could be realized by human achievement.”⁸⁵⁸ Therefore, I am not claiming that interreligious dialogue is the key to the achievement of the total salvation of humankind. Final salvation only comes from God; nevertheless, the ability to glimpse bits and pieces of salvation in our own experience is what makes faith in final salvation from God

⁸⁵⁷ One of Schillebeeckx’s critiques of critical theorists, particularly Harbermas, was that they “tend to give a Pelagian interpretation to the emancipative praxis, regarding it as something that can always be achieved by purely human means.” See “The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Vol 5: The Understanding of Faith*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 130, originally published in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 11 (1971): 113-139.

⁸⁵⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, “The New Image of God, Secularization, and Man’s Future on Earth,” in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 3: God The Future of Man*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 116, first published in Dutch in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 8 (1968): 44-66.

possible. Since this world is a religiously pluralist one, the ability to experience this-worldly salvation now depends on the ability to address the problems facing humankind in dialogue with those who may believe differently. This does not mean that final salvation will never come about if we do not dialogue enough, as if human beings can control God or influence the timing of the eschaton. However, human beings can influence how credible the hope of final salvation from God appears in our history through their efforts to bring healing to those who are suffering.

Schillebeeckx famously stated that “we cannot suddenly experience God in the church’s liturgy if we never perceive God outside the church in our everyday experiences of our fellow human beings and the world.”⁸⁵⁹ Indeed, one’s ability to experience God in the Catholic liturgy stems from experiences of God in one’s day-to-day life. Again, this means, in a religiously pluralist world, one cannot preclude the influence of non-Christians and secular traditions. Whenever we witness actions that respond to human suffering in a way that contributes to people’s healing and well-being, we get a glimpse of salvation. These actions are not performed solely by Christians, nor are they only motivated by Christian sources and teachings. While Catholics may be inspired by the task to build “the kingdom of God” in this world, a Muslim may be prompted by the notion that every human being is created a *khalifa*, or moral agent of Allah, to accept the charge of establishing social justice and cosmic harmony.⁸⁶⁰ Likewise, a Buddhist may be motivated by the desire to generate positive *karma*. Just as one cannot say that all

⁸⁵⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx, Vol 10: Church, The Human Story of God*, Ed. Shoof, Sterkens, Borgman, Shreiter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 25, originally published as *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).

⁸⁶⁰ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 35.

religions are the same and can be reduced to a least common denominator, one cannot deny that unique traditions and cultures produce unique praxes and perspective that may contribute new and necessary elements to the healing of the *humanum*. The Christian can experience fragments of salvation in the encounter with another tradition, even if he or she does not accept all the beliefs in that tradition and holds that final salvation comes to all of humanity through Jesus Christ. One can maintain one's Christian identity while regarding non-Christians as equal companions and partners in the effort to heal the threatened *humanum*.

C. What does it mean to be a Christian Disciple Today?

To be a disciple means to “follow Jesus,” just as Jesus's original followers are referred to as disciples in the New Testament. Yet, being a disciple today looks different and has different implications than it did for the first Christians. This is not only because today's Christians no longer have Jesus with them in bodily form, or can no longer copy his actions directly, or ask him questions. The world itself has changed and become more complex. Advances in science and technology have increased human knowledge and capabilities, yet have also presented us with new issues and concerns that were not on the minds of Jesus and the early disciples. Thus, for Schillebeeckx, discipleship cannot be an exact imitation of Jesus. Rather it consists of “responding to one's own new situations from an intense experience of God.”⁸⁶¹

Jesus himself was not confronted with the question of how to understand the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions. Neither Christianity nor

⁸⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 46

Islam were established religions during Jesus's lifetime. In fact, Jesus was Jewish and remained so throughout his entire ministry. There was no branch of study called theology of religions and therefore, Jesus certainly never identified himself as an inclusivist or pluralist! However, we can look at Jesus's interactions with those on the margins of society in the New Testament in order to discern how his example could apply within the context of religious pluralism. Certainly, one can take a cue from Jesus's attitude of openness toward those around him.

In Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-28, we have the example of Jesus's encounter with a Syrophoenician woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon. This woman was a pagan, not a Jew, and from a region that could be considered an enemy of Israel. The woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus ignores her at first, but then tells her "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." When she continued to beg, Jesus again tells her "it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Ever persistent, the Syrophoenician woman replies, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table." Jesus is surprised by this reply, realizes the woman's great faith, and ultimately heals her daughter. Here, we see how Jesus's mind was changed by someone outside of his own religious tradition. This pagan woman expanded Jesus's conception of the *humanum*. We are not told that Jesus abandoned Judaism nor did he adopt this woman's pagan beliefs. We are also not told that the woman became a follower of Jesus. Yet, she becomes a partner with Jesus in bringing about fragments of salvation, not only accomplished in the healing of her daughter, but in that fact that Jesus acknowledges her faith and went forth with the knowledge that he should respond to the suffering of those outside of his own religious and cultural milieu. In the words of New

Testament Scholar Sharon Ringe, this encounter “sets forth who Jesus is as the Christ of God.” She states,

Elsewhere [in the Gospels], those who see themselves as the privileged people in social or religious terms are shown struggling to comprehend this Christ who so often offends them, while the “poor”— the economically poor and socially outcast, the sick, the oppressed, the rejected— respond joyfully to the good news of God’s reign. Here Jesus himself must learn about being that sort of Christ from one of the poorest of the poor and most despised of the outcast— a Gentile woman on her own before God and humankind. Her gifts and her ministry become the vehicle of the gospel to Jesus and to us.⁸⁶²

Following Jesus in today’s religiously pluralist world is not an exact science. Nor do we have stories of Jesus in every single situation we can possibly encounter today. However, the story of the Syrophoenician woman at least tells us that religious others have important wisdom to offer and can expand our visions of the *humanum*. Just as Jesus’s understanding of his own ministry was changed by a religious other, our own ideas about how to best follow Jesus in today’s world may be impacted by our interactions with non-Christians, and enhanced by non-Christian beliefs and practices. To be a disciple of Jesus today means always maintaining an attitude of openness toward those who believe differently than we do, and to see them as co-collaborators in our continued efforts to discover and bring about what the *humanum* entails

⁸⁶² Sharon H. Ringe, “A Gentile Woman’s Story,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 72.

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