

A DICTATORSHIP OF RELATIVISM? ROGER HAIGHT'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH

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“**W**hat is being constructed (in modern times) is a dictatorship of relativism, that recognizes nothing as definitive, and that regards one’s self and one’s own desires as the final measure.”¹ This warning of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger during the *missa pro eligendo papa*, a day before his election as Benedict XVI, was nothing new. It has been a recurring theme during the papacy of John Paul II.² Among the relativists is a long list of theologians who ran into trouble with the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF). Roger Haight got on the list for daring to place the Church’s christological doctrine “in subordination to its plausibility and intelligibility in postmodern culture. (...) Because of the contemporary pluralistic consciousness,” Haight believes that “one can no longer claim (...) Christianity as a superior religion.”³ This affirmation is totally unacceptable for the Roman authorities.

While I was working on Roger Haight and the CDF’s *Notification*, I received the call for papers of the DAKATEO (*Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya sa Pilipinas* - Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines) for its annual conference. The organizers asked to focus on “postcolonial theological movements that intend to recover voices suppressed by modernity and by its political

1. John L. Allen, Jr., *The Rise of Benedict XVI: The Inside Story of How the Pope was Elected and Where He will Take the Catholic Church* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2005), 89-90.

2. John Cornwell, *The Pontiff in Winter* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 125-128.

3. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), “Notification on the Book, *Jesus Symbol of God*,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, No. 9, (09 February 2005), 8-9.

machinery called ‘colonialism.’” It is highly irreverent to apply this sentence to the CDF and other Roman authorities. They claim that they have to protect “the faith of the little ones” against the onslaught of relativism and pluralism. But what is intended as a defense of the faith may, in reality, result in a suppression of ‘postcolonial voices’ by a Church that did not fully succeed in severing its link with the rationalist and colonial world of modernity created by the West in previous centuries. Modernity, its colonial enterprise, and the role of the Church in the period of western colonization, have been studied at length from different points of view using various scientific disciplines. My paper is a small contribution to the discipline by focusing on a theological issue. My suspicion, shared by other theologians, is that the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church harbored a very unchristian visitor within the walls of its doctrinal fortress: the rationalism of the Western Enlightenment that sponsored “the dictatorship of absolutisms.”⁴

At the time of Vatican II, the Church tried to distance itself from this apologetic, absolutistic stance yet it may not have fully succeeded. Ecclesiastical absolutisms seem to reappear in recent documents of the hierarchy. Roman authorities have silenced the voices of contextual postcolonial theological movements during the last two decades. An obvious example is the voice of the Latin American liberation theologies. Rome also failed to welcome feminist theologies and the theological efforts at inculturation. The crackdown on western theologies in dialogue with postmodernism has perhaps been less effective because educational institutions in the western scene have a long tradition of independence and are often protected by government regulations. Yet there have been a number of famous cases. Hans Küng and Charles Curran are well-known Western theologians who were disciplined by the CDF. Roger Haight had to join their company after having been told “he may not teach Catholic theology.”

4. Tissa Balasuriya, “Some Asian Questions on the Dictatorship of Relativism,” *Chakana* 3, No. 6 (2005): 118-119.

My paper is a case study of Haight's "condemnation," trying to develop my suspicion that the CDF remains somehow imprisoned in the rationalism of modernity and its concomitant colonial attitude. I briefly summarize Roger Haight's Christology in dialogue with postmodernism in the first part while the second one focuses on the Roman reaction instilled by the fear for the "dictatorship of relativism."

Roger Haight's Postmodern Christology

The sowers of the Enlightenment threw a mix of seeds in the fields of the western world in the 18th and 19th centuries. They produced, among others, the wheat of democracy, freedom, equality, human rights, expanding knowledge, instant information, initiative and creativity. The reapers are still sorting out the wheat from the weeds (Mt. 13:24-30) because the centuries of modernity also ended up in some barbaric situations: imperialism, colonization, dictatorships, wars, the holocaust, the gulag, Hiroshima and genocide. The students' revolt of 1968 inaugurated the postmodern era. The great ideologies of modern time - liberal capitalism, socialism, Marxism, Maoism - and the many other "isms" did not deliver. We have to distance ourselves from these "meta-narratives" and learn to live with fragments of meaning. Truth is no longer understood as "something-out-there" found by reason but is rather made through creative interaction between the human mind and the reality-out-there. We are involved in a continuous reality-construction-process in which our perception of the world in terms of economic, political, cultural, and religious systems has to be constantly overhauled.⁵

Roger Haight does not seem to be upset by this postmodern context. In his book *Jesus Symbol of God*, he makes an attempt to reappropriate Christology in dialogue with the postmodern consciousness that he describes by pointing to four distinctive characteristics.⁶ First, it is radically historical. All truth, whether religious

5. See Lode Wostyn, "Challenges and Opportunities for Consecrated Life from the Perspective of Asia," *Religious Life Asia* 7, No. 1 (January-March, 2005): 10-11.

6. Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 330-334.

truth contained in the Bible or Tradition, is formulated in a historical context and hence, has to be interpreted in this context. Second, it is a critical social consciousness. All thought is situated in a social location. The God of order and might of the kings of this earth is different from the God of Exodus who listens to the cry of the poor. We have a history written at the court of the powerful and the mostly forgotten history of the poor who live at the underside. Third, postmodern consciousness is pluralistic. We live in a world that has many cultures, religions and ideologies. They all seem to carry some important insights about our search for humanity. Fourth, it is cosmic. We no longer approach our problems in terms of a nation not even in terms of planet earth. We are space travelers in an ever expanding universe.

In the fourth part of his book, Haight goes in search for “a systematic and constructive Christology” that is first of all radically historical.⁷ The return of the historical Jesus is a sign of historical consciousness but not of a radical kind. It only become radical when one recognizes how deeply the meaning of Jesus Christ has changed within the interpretations developed in different epochs and cultures and why such changes are necessary. The language of the human event of finding salvation in Jesus Christ is, throughout the history of the Christian tradition, a symbolic language. It tries to express how salvation was experienced in different epochs. After studying at length the soteriologies of the New Testament, the Eastern and Western Patristic, the theology of the Middle Ages and the Reformers, Haight asks the question about salvation for the postmodern person. The core question can be summarized in the contrast experience between ignorance, sin, guilt, suffering and death and the elemental human desire to be and to trust in existence. Jesus is placed within this search as an example of human existence and a symbol for the encounter with God.

Secondly, a Christology has to be socially conscious. The different liberation christologies face the negativities of history especially on the social level. Human beings are caught in historical situations that deny their value and freedom. Jesus responds to the lack of intelligibility of history in his own situation by his prophetic

7. *Ibid.*, 301-491.

protest against an oppressive social system and by offering an alternative within his movement. The God of the Kingdom is a liberator of the oppressed who brings people together in a communion with the Divine Spirit and among themselves. Humans have to respond by actualizing their human freedom and creating an alternative society. Jesus' historical liberation points towards the final state of things. His disciples believe that this ultimate goal was already realized in the resurrection of their master.

Thirdly, Christology has to respond to a pluralistic and relativist consciousness. It is impossible in postmodern culture to think that one group of people is a chosen people and another religion the center in which all others are to be drawn. These myths are simply gone. How did Christology respond? Some theologians keep defending an exclusivist position. Others brought the religions into the ambit of Christian salvation through the back door: Jesus is the cause of all salvation and all are included. Non-Christians become anonymous Christians. Haight believes that as Christians we can hold on to the normativity of Jesus as it functions within the context of historicity. Truth on the level of religious experience is not possessed in an absolute way; hence, non-contradictory, complimentary truth is possible. This position opens the door not only for tolerance but also for positive appreciation. Jesus' God is a God of unconditional mercy and love that encompass religions and the whole creation. As Christians we are impelled to dialogue in order to discover this revelation of mercy and love in other religious traditions. Pluralism is not a threat but a blessing, allowing us to discover "the other" — other peoples who are different and valuable but who are excluded or suppressed by the grand Christian narrative and the narratives of the other monotheistic world religions.

Fourthly, Christology involves a cosmic consciousness. Salvation offered by Jesus has to be placed against the background of the whole of creation. We constitute a common humanity on this planet. We need a Christology that will confirm the importance of a human community in a common habitat, affirming human differences at the same time. This theme is partly developed in Haight's elaboration on pluralism. In the last two chapters of his book, he discusses "the formal and narrow Christological questions": how to affirm Jesus' divinity? He believes that a pluralistic approach is possible and

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proposes logos-and-spirit christologies as two viable options. These two christologies need a Trinitarian theology to safeguard the belief that there is only one sole God manifested to us in the narrative of salvation as Father, Son and Spirit.

The aim of Haight's book "is not to propose a spirit christology but to begin a systematic conversation about Jesus Christ that addresses the postmodern culture that characterizes the situation of the churches as they begin the third millennium of their existence after Jesus Christ."⁸ My short survey of the fourth part of the book tried to give an idea how Haight approaches this systematic conversation. A great number of theologians joined in the conversation and voiced their criticism of certain aspects of Haight's study.⁹ A sharing of ideas came to an end with the CDF's "Notification on the book, *Jesus Symbol of God*." "The CDF, after careful study, has judged that the book...contains serious doctrinal errors...erroneous assertions, the dissemination of which is of grave harm to the faithful."¹⁰

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The text of the CDF can easily be consulted. I only summarize its key affirmation concerning Haight's theological method. Today's theology must be done in dialogue with the modern world; hence, it has to establish a "critical correlation" between the data of faith and the modes and qualities of postmodern thought. "This 'critical correlation,' however, results, in fact, in a subordination of the content of faith to its plausibility and intelligibility in postmodern culture." The document gives a few examples of faith being betrayed by postmodern culture: Christianity is no longer the superior religion; christological formulations contradict the true meaning of the dogmas; religious epistemology proposing symbol as medium of faith to provide objective information about God himself, and so

8. Ibid., 490.

9. Roger Haight, "Jesus Symbol of God: Criticism and Responses," *Louvain Studies* 27(2002): 389-405. The article discusses 34 review articles.

10. CDF, "Notification on the Book, *Jesus Symbol of God*," *L'Osservatore Romano*, No. 9 (09 February 2005), 8.

on. The epistemological choice of the theory of symbol is the main culprit. “It undermines the basis of Christological dogma, which from the New Testament onward proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is the person of the divine Son/Word who became man.”

The CDF believes that Haight’s deficient theological method led to a theological disaster. The Christology of the Councils (the pre-existence of the Word, the divinity of Jesus, the Holy Trinity) is presented in an erroneous way. Some other doctrines of the Church (the salvific value of the death of Jesus, the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus and the Church, the resurrection of Jesus) receive an unorthodox interpretation. After the production of such a list of serious doctrinal errors, “the Author may not teach Catholic theology.”

How do we react to the CDF document? “*Roma locuta, causa finita*” is the safest reaction honored by theologians. But does it not betray the *aggiornamento* started by Vatican II? Theology received a “new” reference point in Scripture, a norm that has no higher norm above it. Catholics were allowed to step out of the neo-scholastic doctrinal straitjacket and rediscover the God who never revealed Himself/Herself as an idea but as an actor in history. This action was captured in a storytelling faith, using a symbolic language.¹¹ Why does the CDF put Christological dogmas above Scripture? Is the Greek-Roman re-appropriation of the New Testament Christology in a conceptual language the final word? And does a final judgment have to be made by Rome? Does the ecclesiology of Vatican II, with its vision of a people of God, possessing many charisms and being the ultimate reference point of inerrancy,¹² not contradict the Roman monopoly of orthodoxy? Why not continue the dialogue among theologians?

The Zenith News Agency’s “The World Seen From Rome” gives perhaps an answer to my questions. We are all involved in a continuous reality-construction-process. The Roman construction process (“The World Seen From Rome”) may be very different from that of the western postmodern person and of the many Christians who move at the periphery of our Church whose voices

11. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 196-202.

12. *Lumen Gentium* 12.

are hardly heard in Rome: the voices of Latin-American, African and Asian churches. At the time of Vatican II, the bishops gathered in Rome arrived at the awareness that the time of a monolithic Roman Church had come to an end. The church has “to take to herself, insofar they are good, the ability and resources, and customs of each people. (...) Particular churches hold a rightful place. (...) The chair (of Peter) presides over the whole assembly of charity and protect “legitimate differences.”¹³ We are and should become a communion of churches, situated in different cultures and contexts. Moreover, we are a Church in the midst of the human family with its many religions. Those belonging to non-Christian religions “can attain to everlasting salvation, (...) moved by grace” within their own traditions.¹⁴ These insights that had to allow pluralism and relativism within our Church were gradually abandoned in a process of Roman re-centralization that started during the papacy of John Paul II. My suspicion, formulated earlier, is that Rome opened again its doors for a visitor who had been sidelined during Second Vatican Council: the rationalism of western Enlightenment. The doctrinal and legal fortress of the past had to be restored by publishing a “universal” Codex (1983) and Catechism (1994).

Edward Schillebeeckx points to this reinstatement of the rationalism of modernity in his book *Church*.¹⁵ The encounter between the Enlightenment and the Church has been a history of fear and condemnation. Apologetics finally succeeded in conquering this fear by baptizing the enemy, human reason, and calling him/her “reason enlightened by faith.” The products of this enlightened reason were absolute “supernatural” truths that could knock down the enemies of the Church: scientists, philosophers, politicians, social reformers and others. The story starts with the condemnation of Galilei (1616 and 1633) that became a sort of paradigm of the Church’s answer to scientific progress. Pope John Paul II felt sorry about this

13. Ibid., 13.

14. Ibid., 16.

15. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990). I summarized and discussed this book in Chapter 4 of *Church: Pilgrim Community of Disciples* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1995), 41-58.

condemnation but Galilei was already gone a few hundred years ago. What follows is what Thomas Bokenkotter calls “the Church in a state of siege.”¹⁶ The Pius popes (IX to XII) in the 19th and 20th centuries met the French Revolution and the creation of new socio-political structures, especially democracy, with an unending list of condemnations: *anathema sit*. A marvelous anthology of these anathemas is the *Syllabus of Errors* of the beatified Pius IX (1864).

The Second Vatican Council caught up with the freedoms of the Western bourgeois society and expressed its willingness to meet human reason on its own ground, just at a point when the projects of the Western Enlightenment collapsed. The challenge for the Church, according to Schillebeeckx, is to step out of its Roman-centered colonial image. Following the lead of *Gaudium et Spes*, it has to meet the world by adopting a “postmodern” or what he calls a “post-ecumenical standpoint.” The Church has to place itself in a globalized world and see its role in the context of the ecumene of world religions and the ecumene of humankind, especially “the ecumene of suffering humankind.”

The Church has “to be put in its proper place” in order to move towards this ecumene of humankind. Schillebeeckx discusses in his book a number of issues: the universality of salvation, religious knowledge and truth, Jesus and the Church, uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ and the Church, orthodoxy and orthopraxis. They are the issues we also meet in Haight’s book. “Only a broad conversation of many voices can help the Church address the questions that challenge ordinary Christian people. Educated Christians are asking questions. (...) Purely dogmatic answers simply do not meet the challenge. Neither does polemic and debate which are increasingly labeled ‘theological’ for their narrow, esoteric, and sectarian mystification. What is needed is broad, sympathetic, mutually enriching and implicitly self-critical conversation.”¹⁷

Such a conversation will never take place if one of the partners of the dialogue is the exclusive possessor of truth. The First Vatican Council gave us an infallible pope. The Second Vatican

16. Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

17. Haight, “Jesus, Symbol of God: Criticism and Responses,” 404.

Council, on the other hand, tried to put the issue of infallibility in the broader framework of a pilgrim Church. Adopting a “post-ecumenical standpoint” will mean that we move on. “We put the Church in its proper place” and join humanity in its search for truth by saying “no” to suffering and by trying to do away with a bit of meaninglessness through liberating praxis. Meaning and truth are never given in a void. They are mediated by human beings who create meaning through a praxis of justice, peace, and care for neighbor. Such praxis is an open process pointing towards total liberation that we only can anticipate in fragments. Within our church and other religions, we find a tradition of meaning that is closely connected to a liberating way of life. The value of such a tradition should never be absolutized.

I only highlighted the issue of truth in Schillebeeckx’s attempt to get the Church on the track of the ecumene of world religions and of humankind. How did the Roman Catholic Church respond to this challenge? Vatican II triggered off a number of initiatives that created an openness for the wider ecumene. *Gaudium et Spes* wanted a Church that “stands forth as a sign of that brother-and-sisterliness which allows honest dialogue and invigorates it. Such a mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence, and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity.”¹⁸ After the Council, the Church entered into dialogue with other churches, religions, social and political institutions, science, and medicine. John Paul II became somehow a symbol of a Church that showed its concern for the wider world through his many travels, meetings with world leaders, praying with religious leaders in Assisi, and recognizing the Church’s failures in the past (the Jewish question, Galilei).

Yet Rome also blocked the road towards dialogue with our postmodern world because of fear. After the Reformation and the French Revolution, the Church was in a state of siege. It was scary to be out there in the western world that went through a process of profound changes. At the time of Vatican II, we became a world Church, a communion of local churches in a variety of contexts.

18. *Gaudium et Spes* 92.

But again, Rome was apparently overcome with fear in facing the postmodern and postcolonial world that radically questions the principles and laws out of which the western and colonial world was built. What happened under the papacy of John Paul II is the return to a centralized Roman government that controls the local churches. When he became pope, his message was “Be not afraid!”¹⁹ And yet he feared the consequences of collegiality, subsidiarity and dissent within the Church. What was needed was a unified Church under a strong leadership. This Church would be able to start an aggressive re-evangelization to bring people in the fold. The Curé d’ Ars, Saint Jean-Marie Vianney, kissed the soil of his parish every time he re-entered it.²⁰ Father Wojtyła did the same in his parish in Poland and repeated this gesture each time he entered as pope in one of “his parishes” on his world travels. The Church became one diocese with one pope parish priest.

This same pope repeatedly warned about the danger of pluralism and its companion, relativism. Our Church has a strong anti-pluralist tradition dating back to the French revolution and its destructive elevation of reason over faith.²¹ Vatican II made a u-turn in its *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. With *Centesimus Annus* of John Paul II the pluralist spectre makes it re-entry. “An alliance between democracy and ethical relativism would remove any sure moral reference point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible.” Democracy and free market were incapable of creating the circumstances for flourishing society without the values of the Church. A top-down magisterial doctrine is here at war with authentic pluralism. The pope could apparently not produce any respect for the strength and virtues of a pluralist culture. Pluralism, like capitalism, is an enemy to be engaged and conquered. *Ad Tuendam Fidem* (1998), *Fides et Ratio* (1998) and *Dominus Iesus* (2000) offer the strategies for this conquest. The protests against some absolutist statements in *Dominus Iesus*, a document signed by Cardinal Ratzinger but endorsed by John Paul, questioned

19. Cornwell, *The Pontiff in Winter*, 99.

20. *Ibid.*, 31.

21. *Ibid.*, 125-128.

the performance of the pope himself. Overnight his ecumenism and dialogue with leaders of other religions appeared dishonest.

Some theologians aligned themselves with papal thinking and described the enemies to be slaughtered by Catholic theologians. Avery Dulles, in a talk delivered in Chicago in 2004, agreed with the Holy Father in that “the thinking and feeling of our age is dominated by subjectivism, individualism, relativism, and historicism.”²² Using this progressive democratic ethos as its template, theologians have interpreted Vatican II to dismantle the old hierarchical structures in favor of equalization. “If the actual teaching of the Council had been followed, rather than being obscured beneath alien ideologies, the Catholic Church, I submit, would be much stronger and more vibrant than it is.” This authentic interpretation can be found in John Paul’s teaching that “the Church has always known the rules for a correct hermeneutic of the contents of dogma...that which has been believed ‘by all, always, and in every place’ is the authentic newness...”²³

It becomes rather boring when newness means what has been “always” known but it looks as if theologians will have to make peace with these absolutist claims because John Paul II’s defender of orthodoxy during the last 25 years, Joseph Ratzinger, became his successor. It is too early to say what the papacy of Benedict XVI will bring but his schooling in the CDF is not promising. We already quoted the passage in which the new Pope, one day before his election, warns about “the dictatorship of relativism.” I wonder what he is describing in this passage? Is this the Western world? Why this pessimism? Ratzinger’s relativism (“recognizing nothing as definitive”) may be a danger. But does our postmodern world with its historicism, pluralism, relativism, subjectivism and many other isms also not contain a challenge? Is the ecumene of humankind with its many cultures, ideologies and religions, its power and poverty, its happiness and suffering, not the scene where we can and have to meet the God of Jesus, the God of surprises? Our experiences of

22. Avery Dulles, “Vatican II and Post-Conciliar Theology,” Talk given at the Lumen Christi Institute, Chicago, 07 February 2004.

23. John Paul II, Audience on February 17, 2000, as quoted in the talk of Avery Dulles. Quotation comes from Vincent of Lérins (d. before 450).

the divine will have always been historical and relative. But such relativism does not mean that people do not honor truth and do not seek a clear direction for their life. It means, however, that they have abandoned the absolute claim of possessing the truth held by the Enlightenment and its associate, an enlightened rationalist Christianity.

In a recent article, Tissa Balasuriya discusses this claim of absolute truth made by the Cardinal in *Dominus Iesus*.²⁴ Such a claim is incomprehensible in the Asian context of religious pluralism and ancient cultures. The Asian approach to the analysis of problems does not view the truth in terms of “either-or” but rather one of “both-and.” Opposites may be part of the whole. There are different roads to the mountaintop and many streams making up the river (the yin-yang of Chinese thought). “In relation to the Absolute all human realities and perspectives are relative. The Truth is one, but the expressions of the truth are many. To claim to know the absolute is not to know the Absolute, as Taoism says.”²⁵ The apophatic tradition in Christianity has told the same thing. The reflection of Balasuriya runs parallel with the Document of the Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference: *Methodology: Asian Christian Theology* (2000).²⁶ After describing the Asian way as one of integration and inclusion, this document pleads for the acceptance of pluralism in theological method. “Unity, peace, and harmony are to be realized in diversity... One of the serious obstacles to harmony is the attitude of exclusivity.”²⁷

Such pluralism does not mean that everything is acceptable. Pluralism can lead to a relativizing of all reality. Relativism that makes the self and one’s wishes the ultimate value will indeed lead to what Cardinal Ratzinger calls “the dictatorship of relativism.” Balasuriya, however, believes that we should not overlook the dictatorship of those who claim to possess the absolute and full truth and want to impose it on others. This dictatorship of absolutisms has been manifested in different forms in recent history. The Christian churches

24. T. Balasuriya, “Some Asian Questions on the Dictatorship of Relativism,” *Chakana* 3, No. 6 (2005): 111-124.

25. *Ibid.*, 121.

26. Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All Peoples of Asia*, vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 329-419 (see “Introduction,” 329-332). The same text is published in *FABC Papers*, No. 96.

27. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

in colonial times - regarding other faiths as false and enemies of Christianity and, where possible, even to be eliminated - has been the victim of such absolutism. What is required is a middle way “which has norms that are general and binding but with less claims than of a sure conviction of Absolute Truth and privileged friendship with God.”²⁸ The Church needs some definite norms to constitute its Christian vision and accepted way of life but such teaching cannot be one that has historically led to the Church claiming to be the possessor and only legitimate interpreter of the absolute truth. “The Asians would have to suffer not only from the unjust world order set up by the Christian West but also to accept that they are marginalized even by the God of the Christians.”²⁹

The great Asian traditions are increasingly influencing the thinking of the postmodern person in the secularized west. Western people feel more and more at home in the eastern way of integration and inclusion. The great meta-narratives of modernity are abandoned. People are exposed to the babble of diverse and contradictory fragments of meaning. They are pilgrims towards the truth and try to put together fragments of truth by borrowing not only from the Christian but also from other traditions. Pope John Paul II, having experienced the rock of Polish folk Catholicism that overcame the godless Marxist Russian Empire, had little sympathy for the hesitant and searching faith of Christians in the western world. The pope wanted a clear stand and sought to “rebuild” the Church as a centralized fortress with a powerful leadership, a clear doctrinal and ethical framework, fixed laws and rituals. Theologians had to back up this enterprise by (re)-producing a Catechism that contained the well-proven doctrinal positions of neo-scholasticism. People are apparently not supposed to understand them. Western theologians starting a dialogue with postmodernism were not welcomed by the CDF. This same “Congregation” did not succeed in appreciating the struggle of justice in Latin American theology and the efforts by Asian theologians to enter into a triple dialogue: with the poor, culture and the religions. Roger Haight, followed by Thomas Reese, got on

28. Balasuriya, “Some Asian Questions on the Dictatorship of Relativism,” 118.

29. *Ibid.*, 122.

the list of Catholic theologians in exile, a list that probably will be continued. He endangered the missionary proclamation “by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism.”³⁰

Another reaction is possible. I recently heard Godfried Cardinal Danneels on television in Europe. Danneels never refuses to take part in a dialogue in which he meets people defending atheist positions, Marxism, postmodernism, and so on. He seems to be aware that one cannot be a credible dialogue partner in an emancipated (western) world, if one does not honor its values of transparency, democracy, human rights, and pluralism.³¹ He has repeatedly argued that the contemporary emancipated mind is allergic to arguments from authority so the Church has to learn instead to speak in the language of beauty. We have to learn to appreciate the beauty of a hesitant and searching faith of Christians attempting to find meaning and direction in a changing world. The unbridled search of a person is often the most meaningful act of faith. God, always the greater one, is threatened when this becomes impossible.³² We are challenged as Christians by a world in the process of globalization to become pilgrims towards the ecumene of humankind guided by our master, Jesus of Nazareth. Why are we afraid?

30. Dominus Iesus 4.