

Medieval Theology Meets the New Age **Religious Pluralism in the Contemporary Roman Catholic Church**

The rigidity of the Roman Catholic Church has given way in recent years to a spirit of radical toleration. The tortuous Inquisition of the Middle Ages has been replaced by the warm and fuzzy inclusivism of the modern age. Pope John Paul II affirms many of his church's medieval doctrinal positions, then opens wide his arms to embrace the followers of other faiths. Theologians and others line up behind their leader, and the results are sometimes bizarre. Medieval theology indeed has met the *New Age*, compromising the core doctrines of Christian theology even more radically than the Protestant liberalism that entered the scene earlier in this century. While religious pluralism seems to lurk around every corner of our world today, from the World Council of Churches¹ to the mushrooming of New Age practices, this study will concentrate primarily on its intrusion into one of the most unlikely places, the Roman Catholic Church.

Definitions. In a recent evangelical critique of pluralism, Ronald Nash provides us with some helpful definitions. *Exclusivism* is the biblical truth, traditionally held by believers, that Jesus Christ is the one and only way of salvation (Acts 4:12). *Inclusivism* is a broad road that brings under the Christian umbrella many who have no explicit faith in Jesus. *Pluralism* holds that there are many different ways to salvation, and that Jesus is merely one among many equally valid paths.² Much of modern Catholicism, as illustrated by Rahner's "anonymous Christian," would be technically placed under inclusivism rather than pluralism. However, inclusivism is at heart an incoherent position, full of logical contradictions. The waters become muddied and pluralism is the logical end of the Roman road.

Official Church Teachings

In 1854, *The Papal Syllabus of Errors* emphatically rejected the following positions:

15. Every man is free to embrace and profess the religion he shall believe true, guided by the light of reason.

¹ Paul Knitter notes that "especially since the Third Assembly in New Delhi (1961), the World Council of Churches has clearly broken with the previous negative, exclusivistic attitude toward other religions" (p. 138).

²Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, p. 9.

16. Men may in any religion find the way of eternal salvation, and obtain eternal salvation.

17. We may entertain at least a well-founded hope for the eternal salvation of all those who are in no manner in the true Church of Christ.³

Vatican II. Just over one hundred years later, these errors are affirmed as truth by the same church that once pronounced them to be lies. The major documents of Vatican II give official recognition to a theology of pluralism.

There is a trend in these documents toward affirming the unity of all mankind without regard to religious distinctions. Even the church itself is defined in such terms:

"Therefore, though not yet embracing all people and often appearing as a tiny flock, this messianic people is nonetheless for *all mankind* the mightiest germ of *unity, hope and salvation*."⁴

Elsewhere, the Council openly affirms the possibility of salvation outside the explicit knowledge of Christ's saving work:

"They also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek God, and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience."⁵

The introduction to the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* indicates that the World Council of Churches considers this document to be much too weak, failing to consider the questions raised by other religions and merely making "polite remarks."⁶ But from the standpoint of biblical Christianity, the statement is an alarming move in the direction of religious pluralism.

The declaration itself begins by stating the Church's desire to study her relationship with other faiths, noting all that human beings have in common and promoting fellowship. It is noted that God is the Creator of all men, and that He is the final goal of all. Men have looked to various religions to seek answers to the

³ *The Creeds of Christendom*, Volume II, p. 217.

⁴ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 9, emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 16.

⁶ Abbott, p. 658.

"profound mysteries of the human condition," having a certain sense that a "Supreme Deity" does exist.⁷

This document proceeds to speak in positive terms concerning Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, summarizing the Council's position as follows:

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."⁸

While verbally affirming the words of Christ that He is "the way, the truth, and the life," the tone of this document reduces Christianity to the status of another path to morality. As we will discuss later, core biblical truths are mutilated, such as our Lord's deity and His work of atonement on the cross. Warning signs appear in many places, as when the council declares the goal of preaching as "to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows."⁹ This is a statement of universal redemption for all humanity, rather than a call for repentance and faith.

Pope John Paul II affirms throughout his writings numerous traditional--and unbiblical--Roman Catholic doctrines. These include the Mass, transubstantiation, veneration of Mary and the saints, prayers for the dead, purgatory, man's cooperation in salvation, and various feast days. He takes a controversial stand against abortion and other social evils. However, the pope calls Vatican II "a great gift to the Church,"¹⁰ written in an "ecumenical style" intended to stimulate dialogue with both Christians and unbelievers on the basis that "truth is for one and for all."¹¹ Following the Council's spirit, he affirms a "common fundamental element" and "common root" of all religions.¹² He goes on to expound the basic unity of all mankind, particularly in man's spiritual history:

⁷ Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to NonChristian Religions, no. 1.

⁸ Ibid., no. 2.

⁹ Ibid., no. 4.

¹⁰ *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 157.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 162.

¹² Ibid., p. 77.

"From the beginning, Christian Revelation has viewed the spiritual history of man as including, in some way, all religions, thereby demonstrating *the unity of humankind with regard to the eternal and ultimate destiny of man.*"¹³

Like the Council and various Catholic theologians, the pope roots his conclusion in "the faith that *God the Creator wants to save all humankind in Jesus Christ.*"¹⁴ He sees certain "preparations" for Christianity present in others faiths (technically *inclusivism*). Among such "preparations" are the ancestor worship of animistic religions, which parallel the Communion of the Saints.¹⁵

Like the Council in which he participated, the pope insists that explicit faith in Christ is not a necessary prerequisite to salvation:

"If a life is truly upright it is because the Gospel, not known and therefore not rejected on a conscious level, is in reality already at work in the depths of the person who searches for the truth with honest efforts and who willingly accepts it as soon as it becomes known to him.... But the truth is that man is actually called to salvation; that a good life is the condition of salvation; and that salvation cannot be attained without the help of grace."¹⁶

Although affirming the necessity of God's grace, the pope denies that the individual must be *conscious* of that grace, so long as he lives a "good life" and honestly seeks truth.

A compilation of the pope's speeches, ranging in time from 1979 through 1995, confirms an editor's statement that "the pope has held out an open hand to all world religions...he has enthusiastically embraced religious diversity."¹⁷ Note carefully his words, taken from the chapter on World Religions in *The Wisdom of John Paul II*:

"To the Buddhist Community, which reflects numerous Asian traditions as well as American: I wish respectfully to acknowledge your way of life, based upon compassion and loving kindness and upon a yearning for peace, prosperity and

¹³ Ibid., p. 78, emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 81, emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁶ *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 194.

¹⁷ *The Wisdom of John Paul II*, p. 117 (see quotations on p. 119-126).

harmony for all beings." (Speech to Interreligious Leaders at Los Angeles, September 1987)

"To the Islamic Community: I share your belief that mankind owes its existence to the One, Compassionate God who created heaven and earth." (Speech to Interreligious Leaders at Los Angeles, September 1987)

"To the Hindu Community: I hold in esteem your concern for inner peace and for the peace of the world...." (Speech to Interreligious Leaders at Los Angeles, September 1987)

"I am sure that faith in the one God can be a powerful leaven of harmony and collaboration among Christians, Jews and Muslims in the struggle against the prejudices and suspicions that ought to be overcome." (Address to French Catholics at Lourdes, August 15, 1983)

"All religions, especially the great religious traditions followed by most of the peoples of Asia, bear witness to how deeply the truth regarding our immortality is inscribed in man's religious consciousness." (Address to Manila World Youth Day, January 14, 1995)

"Shintoism, the traditional religion of Japan, affirms that all men are equally sons of God and that, because of this, all men are brothers." (Vatican Address, February 21, 1979)

"[The dialogue with people of other religions] is a complex of human activities, all founded upon respect and esteem for people of different religions.... It means the encounter of theologians and other religions, areas of convergence and divergence. Where circumstances permit, it means a sharing of spiritual experiences and insights. This sharing can take the form of coming together as brothers and sisters *to pray to God in ways which safeguard the uniqueness of each religious tradition.*" (Address to the Members and Staff of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, April 28, 1987; emphasis added)

"All Christians must be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions, so that mutual understanding and collaboration may grow; so that moral values may be strengthened; so that God may be praised in all creation." (Radio Broadcast to Asia from Japan, February 21, 1981)

"These profoundly spiritual questions [concerning suffering, happiness, death, judgment, sin, human origins], which are shared to some degree by all religions, also draw us together in a common concern for man's earthly welfare, especially world peace." (Speech to Interreligious Leaders at Los Angeles, September 16, 1987)

Clearly, one of the pope's stated goals is dialogue between his church and other religions. In expressing this goal, he reveals his faulty view of divine revelation:

"Revelation, redemption, and then faith, prayer, and the whole Christian life, are the substance of God's dialogue with man and man's with God.... Thus the Church is entering into dialogue--or is at least trying to do so--with followers of other religions and also with non-believers and atheists."¹⁸

The distressing theology of the current pope deserves much more attention in view of his influential role throughout the world. For our present purposes, note that both Vatican II and Pope John Paul II are technically *inclusivist* in their view of salvation, but ultimately their positions disintegrate into a profoundly unbiblical pluralism.

Theologians and Other Key Leaders

Official theological pronouncements are supported by several influential theologians as well as other highly visible Roman Catholics.

Mother Teresa is known through the world for her humanitarian efforts with those who are dying. Only a few observe her underlying commitment to pluralism, depriving those in her care of the only true hope for eternity. Quoted in a *Time* magazine article, she says:

"I love all religions...if people become better Hindus, better Muslims, better Buddhists by our acts of love, then there is something else growing here."¹⁹

Similarly, an interview in *Christian News* highlights her comment that dying persons are instructed to pray to *their own gods*. Here is pluralism at a popular, sentimental level.

¹⁸ *The Word Made Flesh*, p. 49.

¹⁹ *Time*, 12/4/89, p. 13.

Karl Rahner and the "Anonymous Christian." Moving on to the level of professional theology, we encounter the widely known Karl Rahner, one of the loudest voices moving in a pluralist direction, though usually considered inclusivist. His view of salvation history takes on an ominous tone when he states that:

"There is a general salvation- and revelation-history at all times and even outside the Old and New Covenants."²⁰

Rahner has no problem suggesting that religions other than the Old Covenant might legitimately precede the Christian faith and even be positively willed by God's providence.²¹

In considering the actual Christian era, Rahner insists that "there are supernatural, grace-filled elements in non-Christian religions,"²² such that members of others faith may be considered "anonymous Christians."²³ His reasoning proceeds from two fundamental presuppositions. First, "there is no salvation apart from Christ," and second, "God has really, truly and seriously intended this salvation for all men." Therefore, "every human being is really and truly exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace."²⁴ Only when non-Christian religions come into contact with Christianity, according to Rahner, do they become "unlawful."²⁵ Meanwhile, they remain--in different senses and to varying degrees--"a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for attaining of salvation."²⁶ Christian missionary activity:

"...turns an anonymous Christian into someone who now also knows about his Christian belief in the depths of his grace-endowed being."²⁷

At this point, he has "a still greater chance of salvation."²⁸ Although Rahner appears to be overtaken by a sentimental concern for the "overwhelming mass of his brothers" who have not heard the

²⁰ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Volume 5, p. 105.

²¹ Ibid., p. 106.

²² Ibid., p. 121.

²³ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁴ Rahner, Volume 5, p. 123.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

gospel,²⁹ his scheme sounds more like a religious roulette game, a *gamble* rather than a genuine *assurance* of one's eternal destiny.

Hans Kung's Challenge to the "Anonymous Christian." Hans Kung is another loud voice in the cacophony of religious pluralism:

"The other religions were regarded formerly as lies, works of the devil.... Formerly they seemed to be ways of damnation. Now they are recognized as ways of salvation...."³⁰

Nevertheless, Kung offers a provoking challenge to the logic and integrity of Rahner's oxymoron, "anonymous Christian." To Kung, sweeping all of humanity through the "back door" of the Catholic Church is a presumptuous "theological fabrication," an event occurring only inside the theologian's head. Essentially, the Church and world, similarly Christendom and humanity, are merged. Such verbal gymnastics are presumptuous, failing to respect the will of those concerned. How would a Christian react to being termed an "anonymous Buddhist"?³¹ Kung challenges his fellow Catholics to admit the logical conclusion of this absurdity:

"Salvation outside the Church: why not honestly admit it, if this is in fact what we assert?... If all religions contain truth, why should Christianity in particular be *the* truth? If there is salvation outside the Church and Christianity, what is the point of the Church and Christianity at all?"³²

Kung does not shrink from the question of *truth*. He rightly notes the contradictions between religions, while insisting that all of them contain truth that can be recognized.³³ Historical religious leaders, whom he calls "archetypal men," are too different from one another to be merged into a composite, single individual representing them all.³⁴ But rather than face the awesome *truth* of the Bible, which affirms the exclusive nature of the faith, Kung divorces *truth* from *salvation*:

²⁹ Rahner, Volume 6, p. 391. The chapter on "Anonymous Christians" (p. 390-38) in this volume repeats many of the same arguments in favor of salvation apart from Christ, reminding us also of Vatican II's pronouncements on the matter.

³⁰ Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p. 91.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³² Kung, p. 99.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

"Certainly the question of truth and the question of salvation are not to be confused, as they were formerly in Christian theology. The modern Christian 'theology of religions' is right in saying that people can attain salvation in other religions and in this sense the latter can reasonably be called 'ways of salvation.' But the question of salvation does not make the question of truth superfluous. If Christian theology today asserts that all men--even in the world religions--can be saved, this certainly does not mean that all religions are equally true."³⁵

The very fate of Christianity is in jeopardy, Kung asserts.³⁶ Indeed, Christianity must be radically redefined in order to accommodate the pluralism of modern theologians. Yet Kung presses on in his pursuit of pluralism, attempting to seek out common religious ground.

All religions, according to Kung, address man's need for redemption and perceive "the Divinity." All religions "rightly heed the call of their prophets" as "models of knowledge and behavior."³⁷ Each has "its own character and its own riches...often not noticed by Christians."³⁸ Kung opts for a position where traditional religions undergo gradual growth and change, none claiming "narrow-minded, conceited, exclusive particularism which condemns the other religions in toto." At the same time, he rejects a syncretism that blindly ignores the contradictions in the mingling process.³⁹ Kung wishes Christianity to remain *unique*, but not *exclusive*, entering into a "fruitful encounter in which other religions would be encouraged to bring out what is best and deepest in them."⁴⁰ In Swidler's compilation of articles seeking a "universal theology," he makes a particular case for acknowledging Islam as a valid way of salvation. He sees Mohammed as a prophet alongside those of the Old Testament and proclaims the Qur'an to be *the Word of God*.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Christianity is advised to "correct its all-too-anthropomorphic ideas of God the Father" and to reorient itself away from the "hereafter,"⁴² all the while in search of "new unknown truth."⁴³

³⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

³⁹ Kung, p. 111.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴¹ Swidler, p. 192-209.

⁴² Kung, p. 113.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 115.

Interestingly, Kung cries out for "a discussion of universal ethical criteria,"⁴⁴ something he admits can only be established by religion.⁴⁵ But apart from the God revealed in Scripture, the Creator and Lawgiver, no such *universal* criteria can possibly be established. The best Kung can pull together is criteria grounded in "common humanity," in "human dignity."⁴⁶ However, the conflicting views of fallen men can never serve as the foundation for a universal, absolute moral standard for all people at all times.

Certainly, Kung lays bare some of the internal contradictions in the "anonymous Christian" construction. Yet in his persistent efforts toward pluralism, he has left us with a "Christian theology" that bears not the slightest resemblance to "the faith once and for all delivered to the saints"!

John Hick, though not a Catholic theologian, is an influential pluralist whose writings must be noted in our survey. He has concluded that all of the major world religions worship the *same* God, though He has been given various names.⁴⁷ His proposal is a major paradigm shift where Christianity is replaced by *God* as the focal point of saving religion:

"It must involve a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center to the thought that it is *God* who is at the center and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him."⁴⁸

Hick is also important in his exposure of the inconsistency involved in the inclusivism of theologians like Rahner and Kung:

"Thus all of these thinkers, who are trying so hard to find room for their non-Christian brethren in the sphere of salvation, are still working within the presuppositions of the old dogma. Only Christians can be saved; so we have to say that devout and godly non-Christians are really, in some metaphysical sense, Christians or Christians-to-be without knowing it."⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Swidler, p. 240 (Kung's chapter, "What is True Religion?").

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 241.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

⁴⁷ Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁹ Hick, p. 69.

As we will see, Hick takes pluralism to its logical conclusion, a radical redefinition of the Christian faith where its fundamental doctrines are destroyed.

Paul Knitter is a Roman Catholic theologian (Xavier University) who surveys the roots of pluralism in terms of three distinct approaches: (1) "all religions are relative"; (2) "all are essentially the same"; (3) "all have a common psychological origin."⁵⁰ He evaluates the Catholic model of pluralism as containing three major insights. First is the argument that Christians *must* consider other religions as possible ways of salvation because of God's universal love.⁵¹ A second "achievement" is the understanding of Christ as the *final* but not the *efficient* cause of salvation. As "final cause," according to Knitter, His saving presence operates in *all* religions. The church is "a sign or sacrament of salvation."⁵² Finally, Knitter applauds the Roman Catholic call for dialogue with other religions that does *not* attempt to convert, but only to learn from these other traditions. He sees such interreligious dialogue as representative of a "new age" for Christianity.⁵³

Knitter's criticism of the Catholic model centers on its continuing insistence on the proclamation of Christ as "the norm above all other norms," the "definitive savior."⁵⁴ He asserts that the finality of Christ *does not* form an essential part of the Christian message, and that current *experience* with other religions must surpass both the New Testament witness and Christian tradition.⁵⁵ In the volume co-edited with John Hick, he summarizes his position in terms of seeking a common *experience* among the various religions of the world:

"Instead of searching for 'one God' or 'one Ultimate' or a 'common essence' or a 'mystical center' within all religions, we can recognize a *shared locus of religious experience* now available to all the religions of the world."⁵⁶

Knitter surely redefines our faith in a totally unacceptable manner, but he does take pluralism to its logical conclusion, in contrast to the "anonymous Christianity" of Rahner.

⁵⁰ Knitter, *No Other Name?*, p. 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁵⁵ Knitter, p. 143.

⁵⁶ Hick and Knitter, p. 186, emphasis in original.

Leonard Swidler is yet another Catholic advocate of pluralism. In gathering representatives of several faiths to dialogue toward a "universal theology of religion," he says that:

"What is certain about the future is only one thing: at the end of human life as well as the end of the world, there will be no Buddhism or Hinduism, no Islam or Judaism, no Christianity."⁵⁷

Clearly, this turns all Christian eschatology on its head!⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Swidler displays an extreme skepticism in his understanding of the nature of truth. In his attempt to universalize theology, his initial step is to "deabsolutize" truth so that it is dynamic and "relational," limited to historical circumstances, language, and human interpretation.⁵⁹ Truth for *me* may differ from truth for *you*.⁶⁰ Swidler hopes that interreligious dialogue will lead to knowledge of other positions "from within," i.e., from the *other person's* actual perspective, as both sides explore "truth" together.⁶¹ The "universal" nature of Swidler's theology is based on *categories* that can be utilized and understood by all religions and ideologies.⁶² Rejecting any sort of "unconscious or anonymous Christianity,"⁶³ he envisions Christians witnessing for Christ while Muslims witness for Mohammed and Buddhists witness for Buddha!⁶⁴ His compilation of dialogue among several faiths (Hindu, Islam, Buddhist, Protestant, Catholic) is a radically man-centered orientation where absolute truth is repudiated as not only impossible but undesirable.

Edward Schillebeeckx is a Dutch Catholic theologian whose influence on Roman Catholicism emerged prior to Vatican II and continues beyond its promulgations. His comments regarding the Council reveal his support for the religious inclusivism its documents affirm.

Schillebeeckx's analysis indicates that many in non-Christian circles regard the Council's declarations as tactical moves rather than substantial change.⁶⁵ However, he personally disagrees with

⁵⁷ Swidler, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, p. 250.

⁵⁸ The whole area of eschatology deserves more attention than can be given in this brief paper. Pluralism destroys the eschatological hope of the book of Revelation, whatever one's particular millennial position!

⁵⁹ Swidler, p. 7-9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Swidler, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: The Real Achievement*, p. 6.

that evaluation, so long as the teachings in the documents are actually put into practice by Christians.⁶⁶

This theologian regards as "historical truth" the Council's recognition of "basic evangelical elements of the one true church of Christ" in non-Christian religions.⁶⁷ He agrees that the church must "redefine its position towards the secularized world."⁶⁸ The *gains* of Vatican II, according to Schillebeeckx, include not only the restoration of Christ to the center of the church,⁶⁹ but also the acknowledgment that:

"Everyone, including even a well-disposed agnostic, has some connection with this church and is not a complete outsider."⁷⁰

The Council's officially expressed attitude toward other religions is one that Schillebeeckx regards as "a first step in a sincere but prudent dialogue."⁷¹ In fact, the church even declares that it has something to *receive* from the world and its religions, as well as something to give.⁷² This emerges from the "spiritual, moral and social-cultural values in these religions," values that the church wishes to promote.⁷³ Although Schillebeeckx notes that the Council avoids affirming non-Christian religions as redemptive *institutions* ordained by God, at the same time it affirms, as part of God's redemptive plan, the search in other religions for answers concerning the fundamental questions of man's existence.⁷⁴ The church has thus "officially relinquished her religious monopoly" while not attempting to definitely state the chances of a non-Christian achieving salvation.⁷⁵ Authentic religion is recognized apart from any Christian church.⁷⁶

Schillebeeckx's positive evaluation of Vatican II is one that lends the support of another Catholic theologian to the cause of religious inclusivism, a cause that all too easily degenerates into outright pluralism.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is a paleontologist who entered the Jesuit Society in the early twentieth century. Although his

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 38.

⁷² Schillebeeckx, p. 48.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

teachings were rejected by the Roman Church in France, his evolutionary process theology continues to be an influential voice to both Roman Catholics and New Age adherents. Teilhard bases his view on a forward looking evolutionary philosophy, where evil, disease, hunger, and such will be conquered by science and peace will result.⁷⁷ He views Christ as the "Alpha and the Omega, the center and the end of the entire universe," asserting that "the Incarnation has not been occasioned by sin," but achieves a "divinization of humanity" that is subordinate to redemption.⁷⁸ This is remarkably similar to New Age views and flatly denies the work of Christ. Teilhard's view of man, God, and the future coincides neatly with religious pluralism. His optimistic view of man's evolutionary ascent conveniently overlooks both sin and God's sovereign purposes. His union of all reality in Christ is one that merges the Creator with His creation and simultaneously blurs the distinctions between Christianity and other faiths. Van Til's critique joins Teilhard with the universalism of neo-orthodoxy, and implicitly with religious pluralism as well:

"God is his work of saving all men in the Christ Event. God is the Act of saving all men in Christ. Such is the view of neo-orthodox Protestantism. Similarly, Teilhard's Christ is also the Act of saving all men. All reality is what it is for him, as is the case for neo-orthodox Protestantism, because of its saving relation to this all-encompassing Christ."⁷⁹

Theological Issues

Pluralism may appear to be motivated by a desire to "reach out and touch" (borrowing a phrase from the phone company!) every human being. After centuries of religious wars and persecution, there is strong temptation to embrace this tolerant spirit. The advantages appear to outweigh its major drawback--theological fuzziness. But fuzziness there is! The pluralistic path is one where every distinctive doctrine of biblical Christianity is necessarily thrust aside.⁸⁰ Both Vatican II and the writings of modern Catholic theologians demonstrate the destruction of Christian theism.

⁷⁷ Van Til, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin - Evolution and Christ*, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Allegra, *My Conversations with Teilhard de Chardin on the Primacy of Christ*, p. 40-41.

⁷⁹ Van Til, p. 42.

⁸⁰ Nash makes this point at the outset of his critique of pluralism, which encompasses both the Protestant and Roman Catholic positions (p. 10).

Man's "Dignity" -- Man's Autonomy -- Man's Sin. In reading the documents of Vatican II, one cannot help but be overwhelmed with the emphasis given to human dignity. At points the statements are quite biblical. Harm to others is "a supreme dishonor to the Creator," and furthermore:

"This love and good will, to be sure, must in no way render us indifferent to truth and goodness. Indeed love itself impels the disciples of Christ to speak the saving truth to all men."⁸¹

But we dare not be deceived by such statements. A defective view of sin emerges in addition to an assertion of "the rightful autonomy of the creature."⁸² Man is described as "wounded by sin," experiencing "rebellious stirrings in his body," rather than dead in sins and trespasses as the Scripture states (Ephesians 2:1).⁸³ His intellect is viewed as "partly obscured and weakened,"⁸⁴ rather than darkened in his understanding and the futility of his thinking (Romans 1:21). An unbiblical equality of all men, disregarding man's need to repent and trust Christ, underlies the conclusion that all religions contain truth and provide a way of salvation. The Council insists that God "has willed that all men should constitute one family."⁸⁵

Theologians add their support to the Vatican's unbiblical view of man. Hans Kung is one who rejects "the mythological idea of a sin transmitted through physical generation, an idea spread in the Western Church since Augustine's time, but one which a Confucianist believing in man's goodness could never properly understand."⁸⁶ One of his major criticisms of Christianity is that:

"It exaggerates almost pathologically the consciousness of sin and guilt at the core of allegedly corrupt humanity in order all the more effectively to bring into play its need of redemption and dependence upon grace."⁸⁷

In this highly unbiblical view, it is almost as if Christians have *invented* sin to justify their message of grace! Pluralistic

⁸¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 28.

⁸² Ibid., no. 41.

⁸³ Ibid., no. 14.

⁸⁴ Ibid., no. 15.

⁸⁵ Ibid., no. 24.

⁸⁶ Kung, p. 114.

⁸⁷ Swidler, (Kung's chapter, "What is True Religion?"), p. 238.

theology profoundly distorts the depravity of man and denies the gospel message.

Creator/creation Distinction. The exaltation of man leads all too easily to erasure of the Creator-creature distinction. Some of Pope John Paul II's remarks are particularly illustrative of the alarming trends on this key theological issue. When he speaks in traditional Catholic terms of man's cooperation with God in salvation, he states the "ultimate purpose" of man's life as "his salvation and divinization":

"With God, man 'creates' the world; *with God, man 'creates' his personal salvation.* The divinization of man comes from God. But here, too, man must cooperate with God."⁸⁸

Nowhere does the pope define "divinization" in a manner that would lead us to understand it as something *other than* man actually becoming divine. Elsewhere in the same volume, Christ's redemptive work is explained in similar "divinization" terms:

"*The work of redemption is to elevate the work of creation to a new level.* Creation is permeated with a redemptive sanctification, even a divinization. It comes as if drawn to the sphere of the divinity and of the intimate life of God. In this realm the destructive power of sin is defeated."⁸⁹

Sanctification? Yes. Destruction of the power of sin? Yes. But the "divinization" of creation? Absolutely not!⁹⁰

Paul Knitter, exploring the "common psychic origin" of all religions, believes he can reject both monism *and* supernaturalism. God is supposedly distinct yet *not separate* from His creation:

"For the nondualist, God and the finite are not *one* (that would be pantheism or monism); nor are they *two* (that would lead to supernaturalism). God and the finite are bonded in a mystical, inexpressible unity beyond 'one' and 'two'; this unity can really be known only in experience."⁹¹

This defies Scripture, perverting the biblical doctrine of the believer's union with Christ, as taught in Romans 6 and other

⁸⁸ *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 195.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹⁰ The pope's disturbing divinization of man can also be found in earlier writings. See *The Word Made Flesh*, p. 55 (1968) and p. 104 (1975).

⁹¹ Knitter, p. 68.

passages. Knitter fails to escape the charge of monism. His view also renders the revelatory acts of God in history irrelevant:

"If deity has its being within our unconscious, it is not dependent on extraordinary events to reveal itself; it does not have to 'step down' and enter history here and there, through 'mighty deeds'...rather, the divine is *already there*, constantly revealing itself from within."⁹²

The Christian faith is turned upside down by such blasphemous statements. God has become an "it" here; deity is referred to as "itself." True Christianity is established by supernatural events of history, such as the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. Knitter's Creator-creature denial excludes real Christian faith.

The Deity of Christ. Pluralist John Hick is well aware that the exclusiveness of Christianity rests on the identity of Jesus Christ as God in the flesh. He has reinterpreted the deity of Christ in line with his pluralistic convictions:

"This sense of unique Christian superiority is grounded in the faith that the founder of the Christian way was none other than God incarnate.... The proper conclusion seems to me to be that the notion of a special human being as a 'son of God' is a metaphorical idea which belongs to the imaginative language of a number of ancient cultures."⁹³

Contrary to the clear testimony of the entire New Testament, Hick denies that Jesus ever made any claim to be God:

"The historical Jesus almost certainly did not in fact teach that he was in any sense God."⁹⁴

Rejecting also the Chalcedonian formulation of the two complete natures of Christ, Hick asserts that:

"He was wholly human; but whenever self-giving love in response to the love of God is lived out in a human life, to that extent the divine love has become incarnate on earth."⁹⁵

Kung accuses Christianity of a *false christology* in its proclamation of Jesus as Son of God.⁹⁶ His favorable evaluation of

⁹² Ibid., p. 68.

⁹³ Hick, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹⁵ Hick, p. 58-59.

⁹⁶ Swidler, p. 238 (Kung's chapter, "What is True Religion?").

Islam is possible only in view of this blatant denial of the deity of Christ. The Qur'an, he notes, views Jesus as a prophet but He "may not be made into a god; he may not be put alongside the one God as a second deity."⁹⁷ Kung insists that we cease speaking in alternative terms, "Jesus or Mohammed," thinking rather of a synthesis: "Jesus and Mohammed."⁹⁸

Knitter applauds Kung yet accuses him of a "subtle, camouflaged narrowness" due to his use of "exclusivist adjectives" concerning Jesus as "the final, normative prophet."⁹⁹ He urges Kung and others to "cross the rubicon" from "inclusivism to pluralism."¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, he attempts to apply a "method of liberation theology" to the issue of pluralism, and like Hick, he insists that Christians must "revamp or even reject their traditional understanding of Jesus Christ as God's final, definitive, normative voice." He claims that the "praxis" of historical, social involvement is both the origin and confirmation of truth, including christology.¹⁰¹ The uniqueness of Christ, according to Knitter, can *only* be known when Christians are engaged in dialogue with other religions! He goes on to declare such truth about Christ as unnecessary to Christians, who ought to be more concerned with giving preferential treatment to the poor.¹⁰²

Swidler insists that Jesus is only the *preacher* but not the *preached*, having no consciousness of Himself as being God. Supposedly, He taught "the way," or rather a way, of salvation, but was not Himself *the way*.¹⁰³ Such a view denies the explicit claims of Jesus Christ to be God and to be "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," for which the Jews plotted to kill Him (John 8:58, 14:6). Swidler lines up with modern liberalism in its attempt to see Jesus as merely an ethical teacher rather than God incarnate. Both liberalism and Swidler, however, have departed from the Christian faith. As J. Grescham Machen eloquently explained in *Christianity and Liberalism*, liberalism is *another* religion, a complete apostasy that denies all the essentials of the Christian faith.

In Hans Kung we find yet another christological aberration. He throws aside "divine sonship, pre-existence, creation

⁹⁷ Swidler, p. 202 (Kung's chapter, "Dialogue with Islam").

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 207.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 224, 226-7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁰¹ Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 191.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰³ Swidler, p. 34-35.

mediatorship and incarnation" as "often clothed in the mythological or semi-mythological forms of the time." Although claiming to retain intact the two-natures formulas of the early church, Kung warns "against all tendencies to deify Jesus." He exalts the humanity of Jesus and radically redefines His divinity.¹⁰⁴

The conclusions of Hick, Knitter, Swidler, and Kung provide classic examples of what must logically follow when Christianity attempts to embrace pluralism. The core doctrines of the faith must be cast aside!

The Incarnation. Vatican II roots the restoration of the divine image in the *incarnation* rather than in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. Such restoration is proposed as a universal fact for *all* humanity:

"Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man."¹⁰⁵

Karl Rahner's view is parallel to that of the Council when he states that God's self-revelation to man, and therefore His relationship to man, is "basically the same for all men, because it rests on the Incarnation, death and resurrection of one Word of God become flesh."¹⁰⁶

These views demonstrate that the cross and resurrection have taken a back seat to the incarnation, in and of itself, as the vehicle for man's salvation. What is presented here is a salvation that is universal in scope and accomplished solely by the incarnation. As we consider the atonement, however, we will see that there is anything but real clarity concerning Christ's redemptive work on our behalf.

The Atonement. The recent Council recognizes that Christ merited life for us in shedding His blood, but more emphasis is placed on the *example* provided by His suffering, one that we are called to imitate:

¹⁰⁴ Kung, p. 449.

¹⁰⁵ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 22.

¹⁰⁶ Rahner, Volume 5, p. 118.

"By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation. He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning."¹⁰⁷

But the Council's words are intended not merely for Christians, but rather "all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way."¹⁰⁸

Rahner affirms at one point that the atonement provides not merely the *possibility* of salvation, dependent on man's free will, but *actual* salvation itself. God's redeeming work, he says, "redeems the false choice of man by overtaking it."¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, he bypasses the scriptural teachings about God's sovereign election of particular individuals. Consequently, his statements lead at this juncture to universalism. Elsewhere, he admits (inconsistently) that the person who openly rejects God and His grace *cannot* be rightly called an "anonymous theist" or "anonymous Christian."¹¹⁰

In the writing of John Hick we encounter a denial that the atonement was in any manner a satisfaction of divine justice (contrary to Romans 3:25-26). Hick finds that notion contrary to God's love and forgiveness, the latter being conditioned solely on our own forgiveness of others.¹¹¹

Pluralist Paul Knitter, riding on the coattails of Carl Jung, is another one who mutilates the atonement:

"What does salvation mean? How did Jesus effect redemption? To follow Jung means to run counter to the popular and traditional image of Jesus' dying for our sins, satisfying the Father's justice, and thus opening the gates of heaven. In Jung's view, Jesus saves not primarily by *doing* something (e.g., paying a divine debt) but by *revealing* something--by showing an image of God and a vision of life that moves persons deeply and empowers them to liberating action; in living this life they know it to be the reality of salvation."¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., no. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Rahner, Volume 5, p. 124.

¹¹⁰ Rahner, Volume 6, p. 394-5.

¹¹¹ Hick and Knitter, p. 33.

¹¹² Knitter, p. 71.

Jesus did indeed *reveal* something: the gospel! However, that revelation cannot be separated from what He *did*, dying for our sins, satisfying divine justice, and rising from the dead.

Nash's critique of pluralism is helpful in identifying the distinction between the *ontological necessity* of Christ's work and its *epistemological necessity*.¹¹³ Inclusivists, like Rahner, affirm the *ontological necessity* of the atonement and its universal application to all mankind, but declare it unnecessary that every person consciously *know* about Christ in order to receive the benefits He provides. This is a radical departure from the faith (Romans 10:10-11). Pluralists like Hick deny the ontological necessity of the atonement as presented in Scripture. We find ourselves ultimately in a theological twilight zone, because the biblical truth of the atonement cannot possibly coexist with religious pluralism.

Revelation and Authority. The role of revelation is critical to the retention of solid biblical Christianity. Nash points out that one of the basic flaws underlying pluralism is the rejection of that foundation:

"...many theologians and clergy trivialize or repudiate the central role that revealed truth has played in the Christian religion. Knowledge about God is simply declared impossible and replaced by personal encounter, religious feeling, trust, or obedience."¹¹⁴

The Vatican view of revelation is one that opens wide the door to pluralism. Scripture and tradition are considered two equally reliable sources of revelation:

"Hence there exist a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.... Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church."¹¹⁵

Whenever humanly devised wisdom and tradition is placed alongside God's inerrant Word, there is no end to the error that can result, nor is there any defense whatsoever against the "truth" of other religious faiths. In earlier centuries, the Roman Church raised

¹¹³ Nash, p. 23-24.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12-13.

¹¹⁵ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 9 and 10.

the traditions of man to the level of divine Scripture. Today, however, *both* Scripture *and* tradition are viewed as merely *human witnesses*.

Pluralists often want to distinguish between religious systems and avoid a relativism that would give equal credence to them all. But they have no absolute standard on which to make such judgments:

"Unfortunately, pluralists have not identified a criterion to mark the line between authentic and inauthentic 'responses to the Transcendent' clearly enough to make it work on a broad scale."¹¹⁶

God's revelation is the sole and ultimate foundation for theological truth. Without this solid anchor, we are faced with the theological anarchy inherent in pluralism.

Eschatology. The hope of Christ's return evaporates in the fog of religious pluralism. Rahner's words on this matter give reason only for despair, not hope:

"Christianity has no predictions to make...the Christian is not given any concrete directions for his life in this world as such, which could relieve him of the anguish of planning the future and of the burden of his passage into the *dark unknown*."¹¹⁷

What a discouraging contrast this is to the glorious eternal hope that permeates the pages of Scripture! The universal "salvation" offered by pluralism (and inclusivism) may be alluring, but the absence of heaven is a critical omission that destroys hope.

Missions. Vatican II's missionary statement begins by stating that:

"The Church has been sent to unbelievers to be the 'sacrament of unity of the whole human race.'"¹¹⁸

Pluralism necessitates not only a radical redefinition of all core Christian doctrines, but also missions. The Council abandons the exclusiveness of the Christian faith, but at the same time clings (inconsistently) to missionary activity, when it says that:

¹¹⁶ Nash, p. 22.

¹¹⁷ Rahner, Volume 5, p. 138, emphasis added.

¹¹⁸ Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, no. 1.

"Though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6), yet a necessity lies upon the Church (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16), and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the gospel."¹¹⁹

However, the "gospel" preached by the contemporary Church of Rome is not the call to repentance and faith in Christ as the only way of salvation. It is rather a universal announcement of salvation that does not specifically require such faith:

"Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than a manifestation or epiphany of God's will, and the fulfillment of that will in the world and in world history.... Whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, is not lost."¹²⁰

Paul Knitter agrees, calling the church "a universal symbol of salvation" rather than "an exclusive sanctuary." Its "mission" is one he defines as one of *showing* God (epiphany) rather than *redemption*. It is to facilitate love, justice, truth, and peace as God's kingdom on *earth* (rather than heaven!), not to seek conversions.¹²¹

If unbelievers may be saved apart from faith in Christ, as Vatican II teaches, the Great Commission given by our Lord is turned upside down!

The Role of Modern Psychology

Our overview of religious pluralism must not neglect the enormous contribution of modern psychology. The past hundred years reveals numerous efforts of zealous atheists to "explain" all religious faith as emerging from a common psychological source. An entire volume could be written about the influential connections between psychology and pluralism. Here we can only scratch the surface with an overview of key figures.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, no. 7.

¹²⁰ Ibid., no. 9.

¹²¹ Knitter, p. 132.

¹²² Discernment Publications offers extensive papers documenting the religious beliefs of Freud, Fromm, Ellis, James, Adler, and Jung, exposing the anti-Christian bias of these men. All of them contribute toward religious pluralism in some manner.

Nevertheless, the role of modern psychology can hardly be overstated.

Vatican II does not hesitate to affirm a positive role for modern psychology, informing us that "recent psychological research explains human activity more profoundly"¹²³ (than the Scripture!) Grounding its conclusion in the belief that faith and reason are two *distinct* orders of knowledge:

"...this sacred Synod affirms the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences."¹²⁴

Having basically divorced the study of man from the study of God, the Council informs readers that pastoral care must make "appropriate use" of the secular sciences, *especially* psychology and sociology, in addition to theological principles.¹²⁵ The stage is officially set for the invasion of atheists who wish to suppress the truth about man's relationship and responsibility to God.

Psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, William James, and Abraham Maslow have all attempted to lump the world religions into one convenient basket, proposing common *human* origins. God is reduced to man's unconscious, projected as an external divine being. The increasingly popular 12-step movement, founded by enemies of Christianity,¹²⁶ contributes heavily toward the merging of all religions in its vague "God-as-you-understand-Him" deity that denies exclusive truth. *This is religious pluralism!* Popular author Scott Peck,¹²⁷ who has written the best-selling *The Road Less Traveled* and several other prominent works, professes Christian faith but is well known for his endorsement of religious pluralism.¹²⁸ Over the past one hundred years, psychology has indeed made a major contribution to the emergence and popularity of religious pluralism.

Paul Knitter is one pluralist who openly cites modern psychology in support of his aberrant views. As he begins his

¹²³ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 54.

¹²⁴ Ibid., no. 59.

¹²⁵ Ibid., no. 62.

¹²⁶ This fact is not commonly known. However, the officially approved conference literature of Alcoholics Anonymous documents beyond question that its founders, Bill W. and Bob Smith, were *not Christians*, but rather were heavily involved in the occult!

¹²⁷ Peck does not identify himself a Roman Catholic, but his influence is widespread among people of many religious persuasions!

¹²⁸ See my papers, "The Road Broadly Traveled," Parts I and II, Discernment Publications.

chapter about the "common psychic origin" of all religions, here is what he says concerning such attitudes toward religion:

"They all have to do with the assertion that religious faith has its genesis in the human psyche: all religions arise from (or as part of) a common psychological process within the individual, which can be examined and interpreted by the scientists of the psyche--modern psychologists and psychiatrists."¹²⁹

Knitter proceeds to give his readers a detailed analysis of Carl Jung's role in the study of religion. He cites Jung's theory about archetypes of the human unconscious:

"Their general contents, Jung tells us, have to do with light and darkness, death and rebirth, wholeness, sacrifice, and redemption. He saw such archetypes as the common seedbed of all religions.... The archetypes are common to all religions, but symbols and myths will be different, dependent on the varying cultural, historical contexts."¹³⁰

Jung further asserts that:

"The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual."¹³¹

Knitter notes that Jung proposed an "'imprint' of God within the unconscious" but as a "scientist" Jung refused to comment on whether an "Imprinter" existed in reality.¹³² We are faced here with the unbeliever's *inescapable knowledge of God* as outlined in Romans 1:18ff, thus the "imprint." Note carefully, however, that this claim to ignorance is one that presupposes *atheism*. When Jung insists that the existence of God cannot be known, he *assumes* that the God of Christian theism, *who has clearly revealed Himself* (Romans 1; Psalm 19) *cannot exist*.

According to Jungian psychology, "revelation" is radically redefined. It is no longer God speaking *to* man, but rather God speaking *within* man.¹³³ Note the perversion of Romans 1. Man is created in God's image, and God does in a sense reveal Himself within man's consciousness; there is an inescapable knowledge of

¹²⁹ Knitter, p. 55.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 58, quoting Jung.

¹³² Ibid., p. 59.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 60.

God that the unbeliever suppresses due to his rebellion. However, it is nevertheless God, distinct from His creation, who is speaking to man. God is not created by man's unconscious!

Jung's view of Jesus is particularly alarming. He is merely "an effective symbol of the self."¹³⁴ Jung blatantly denies His unique claim to divinity, and Knitter approves:

"Jesus is for Jung one of the best symbols of the Christ, but he is not the only one. Jung had a psychological explanation for the traditional Christian claim for the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus: from the early history of the church, Christians have held that Jesus is 'one and only' precisely because he is such an effective symbol; having been grasped and transformed by this symbol, they naturally attribute to it 'a universally binding truth--not of course by an act of judgment, but by the irrational fact of possession, which is far more effective.'"¹³⁵

It was Jung, in fact, who was possessed--not by Jesus but by demonic powers that he *openly credits* for his ideas. The statement above dismisses the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection and the claim of Jesus Christ to be God in the flesh. Both Knitter and Jung conveniently suppress vast portions of the New Testament, hoping that "psychological explanations" will demand the merging of all religions.¹³⁶

Abraham Maslow is another prominent modern psychologist who espouses religious pluralism.¹³⁷ He openly admits his agenda of replacing religion with a "religion-surrogate" grounded in values derived from within man. The worship of God the Creator is replaced by the individual "peak-experience" focused on self. Maslow identifies the divine revelations of *all* religions (Christianity included!) with such "peak-experiences" rather than any actual communication from the God of the Bible. He concludes that *all* religions are fundamentally the same:

"To the extent that all mystical or peak-experiences are the same in their essence and have always been the same, all

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 62, with quotations of Jung.

¹³⁶ See Discernment Publications paper about Jung's psychology, "A Blend of Blasphemy, Mythology, and Psychology," 1995.

¹³⁷ See Discernment Publications' paper, "Maslow's Hierarchy: How the 'House of Cards' Crumbles."

religions are the same in their essence and have always been the same."¹³⁸

Maslow advocates the application of his theories to public education. Indeed, this is *already occurring* through the teaching of psychology as a "science" unrelated to any specific religion. Actually, psychology is vitally related to a particular religion: atheism!

There is so much more to be studied in this arena. Sigmund Freud was a militant atheist who proposed an "explanation" of Christianity in terms of his ludicrous Oedipal theory.¹³⁹ He lumped all religions together and rejected them in toto. William James, writing *Varieties of Religious Experience*, assumed that all religious experience is basically mysticism and can be explained as such.¹⁴⁰ He neglected any adequate consideration of Christian theism. Erich Fromm demanded man's radical freedom from God.¹⁴¹ Albert Ellis declared religious faith a symptom of irrationality, or "mental illness."¹⁴²

These systems have a common thread, merging *all religious faiths*, either to explain, embrace, or reject. But even when *all* religions are theoretically embraced, watch out! Christianity, with its claim to the exclusive truth of the gospel, is necessarily excluded. Religious inclusivism includes all except the one true faith.

The Rotten New Age Fruits of Pluralism

Religious pluralism leads inevitably into the monism of New Age theology, along with every variety of bizarre theological theory and practice.

Catholic Feminism. Religious pluralism blurs certain critical distinctions, between true and false religion, between Creator and creation. Parallel to these errors are feminist attempts to blot out the lines between male and female. Devout Catholic Donna Steichen provides exhaustive documentation on the development of radical feminism within her church. At the outset, these alarming trends are traced to the "unintended side effects of the Second Vatican Council," described as "catastrophic."¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Maslow, p. 20.

¹³⁹ See Discernment Publications' paper, "Freudian Frauds."

¹⁴⁰ See Discernment Publications' paper, "Varieties of Religious Deception."

¹⁴¹ See Discernment Publications' paper, "Blasphemy From Fromm."

¹⁴² See Discernment Publications' paper, "The Case Against Albert Ellis."

¹⁴³ Steichen, *Ungodly Rage*, p. 17.

Shortly after that Council, "Catholic feminists began spinning an intricately entangled web of organizations."¹⁴⁴ Steichen deplors the goddess worship that has bewitched many women in her church, recognizing its ties to ancient gnosticism, process theology, and the modern New Age merging of religions.

This author notes the rejection of divine revelation by the feminist Catholic "Women-Church."¹⁴⁵ Certainly, where exclusive truth is excluded, there is no anchor for the faith and religious anarchy is inevitable. Steichen's detailed analysis provides us with much useful information about the fruits of pluralism in the Roman Church. Unfortunately, she fails to see that her church's position on many issues does not defend against these bizarre, "catastrophic" results. Scripture and human tradition are equally authoritative, yet both merely *human* witnesses. The idolatrous veneration of Mary and the saints differs only in degree from New Age goddess worship, although to some of the Roman Catholic feminists, Mary represents all that is *wrong* with the traditional theology of their church. Only a return to biblical truth can insulate believers against the avalanche of religious pluralism in our day.

Matthew Fox - New Age Priest. Steichen describes Father Matthew Fox as "the most renowned Catholic apostle of the new mysticism that so much resembles the old pantheism."¹⁴⁶ His theology is "an ambiguous muddle of Pelagianism, pantheism, primitivism, syncretism, irrationalism and theosophy."¹⁴⁷ In the final article of its four-part series on Roman Catholicism, the Christian Research Journal documents the New Age underpinnings of Fox's "creation spirituality."

Matthew Fox entered the Dominican order in 1960 and was ordained as a priest in 1967. He established the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality in 1972, an organization whose staff includes Starhawk the witch. During the 1980's, Fox's controversial writings were investigated by both the Dominican Order and the Vatican, resulting in a mixture of defense and condemnation of his theology.¹⁴⁸ Fox's "Cosmic Christ" is a pantheistic concept that embraces divinity in every creature, denying the Creator-creature distinction. Despite the one-year silence ordered by the Catholic Church in 1988, the religious pluralism evident in that church has no foundation on which to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁴⁶ Steichen, p. 219.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁴⁸ CRJ, p. 16.

refute Fox's teachings. His theology is one of the more radical fruits growing out of that pluralism.

Evangelical Response and Conclusions

The Roman Church hopes to engage in "dialogue and collaboration" with other religions in order to promote morality and societal values such as peace, justice, and freedom.¹⁴⁹ Such goals sound innocuous at first glance. The Christian is certainly exhorted to live at peace with others whenever possible (Romans 12:18; 1 Timothy 2:2). Because of man's creation in the image of God, others are to be treated well (Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9-10), and evangelism is to be carried out in a spirit of gentleness and love (2 Timothy 2:24-26; 1 Peter 3:15). The Roman Church, however, has abandoned all of the central claims of the Christian faith in order to "dialogue" with other faiths and to address the pressing social issues of our times. Similar pluralism has invaded the Protestant realm as well. Several lengthy evangelical responses since Vatican II have addressed the pressing theological issues.¹⁵⁰

Religious pluralism is a modern *apostasy*, a grievous departure from the faith that cannot be justified on any biblical grounds. As in centuries past, we must diligently seek to defend the "faith once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

¹⁴⁹ Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, no. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (1994); Paul G. Schrottenboer, *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (1987); David Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (1972).

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