

# Introduction

IN 1965, NEAR THE end of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church published *Nostra Aetate*, a landmark document that seeks to draw humanity closer together through fostering interreligious understanding. In this declaration, the church re-examined its relationship with non-Christian religions in a more positive light than it had in recent history. It acknowledged that other religions also try to answer questions that affect our human existence at the deepest level—the meaning and aims of human life, admitting that ancient and venerable religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism have attempted to answer those questions with sophisticated concepts and languages. *Nostra Aetate* also “regards with esteem” the other two great monotheistic religions that come from Abraham’s stock, Islam and Judaism. Most significantly, *Nostra Aetate* expressed in unequivocal terms that the Catholic Church rejected nothing “that is true and holy in these religions,” a position that implies that there are indeed things that are true and holy in these religions. Thus the church began to encourage its members to collaborate and dialogue with followers of other religious traditions as a form of witnessing to their Christian faith.

Fifty years after the declaration of *Nostra Aetate*, this declaration has lost none of its relevance and significance. In an age of globalization, secularization, and continuing religious plurality, it is dialogue and not confrontation that can help us to resolve our problems. Since Vatican II there has been hope-filled progress and promising developments in interreligious relations as well as periods of disillusionment, disappointment, and anguish. There have been theologians who, taking *Nostra Aetate* seriously, enthusiastically embarked upon interreligious dialogue and imagined a positive role for religious pluralism in their writings and teachings but who were derailed by Joseph Ratzinger. In his speeches and writings, Ratzinger declared war on pluralist theology and its most dangerous correlate—relativism. He did not

hesitate to rein in Catholic theologians whom he believed to have strayed from church teaching with the charge that they might adversely affect the faith of simple believers.

Appointed as the Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in 1981, Joseph Ratzinger took on the role of the church's chief doctrinal watchdog, making it his duty to discipline Catholic theologians who were thought to be teaching ideas not in line with the Catholic faith. Prioritizing another teaching of Vatican II—that the church founded by Christ exists fully only in the Catholic Church—Ratzinger emphasizes that Christianity is the only completely true faith. While other religions may contain elements of truth, they remain “gravely deficient” and contain at most only fragments of the greater truth revealed by the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ and preserved in the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, Ratzinger often speaks against pluralist theologians who believe that all religions are valid paths to salvation and that we are all journeying together towards the Kingdom of God. Ratzinger thinks that the kind of dialogue promoted by these theologians, stressing tolerance and neglecting the question of truth, is not only futile but is actually dangerous to salvation since it minimizes the role of the church. To pluralist theologians, dialogue is itself a kind of witnessing of the gospel, but for Ratzinger, proclamation must clearly come first and foremost.

This study attempts to show that Joseph Ratzinger's teaching on the relationship of Christianity to other religions assumes the normative status of Western philosophical and theological thought. He sincerely believes that the Greek intellectual and cultural expression found in Christianity is part of God's plan, and the relationship between faith and reason cast in Hellenistic philosophy is part of divine revelation and hence, part of faith itself. This giving of precedence to Western thought makes him critical and suspicious of theologians operating from a different theological framework. For example, in 1994, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the influential Vatican office Ratzinger had led for thirteen years, investigated and censured Tissa Balasuriya's book, *Mary and Human Liberation*, and in 1997, a Notification of his excommunication was published. On January 24, 2001, the CDF released a Notification concerning Jacques Dupuis's book, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. In September 2007, the CDF investigated Peter Phan, a Vietnamese-born theologian, who had argued for a less Euro-centric church in his book, *Being Religious Interreligiously*. Through this analysis it will be seen that Ratzinger's views attained hegemony over other positions in official Catholic circles not because they were inherently more compatible with the developing Catholic tradition,

but because this singularly influential figure systematically used his authority to silence viewpoints that differed from his own.

Ratzinger regards the reflections of these three theologians and others, not as a theology, but as an ideology that arose from a particular philosophy of a certain period. If this is true, can we not say that Ratzinger's so-called official theology is also a product of history and of a particular mindset conditioned by his upbringing and education?

Ratzinger tends to see religious pluralism as an expression of relativism. Like John Henry Newman, Alasdair McIntyre, and Gavin D'Costa, he is critical of Western theologians influenced by the Enlightenment, because in granting equality to all religions, the Enlightenment denied all truth to any of them. This may be justifiable, but the problem is that Ratzinger tends to view theologians operating from a non-Western paradigm in the same light. He seems to regard them as products of post-Enlightenment thinking. The cases of Jacques Dupuis and Peter Phan highlight the fact that, while their theology falls within Catholic orthodoxy, they clashed with Ratzinger on a number of points regarding ecclesiology, praxis, and Christology. Ratzinger's own theological position is not without justification within the Western context, but he fails to recognize the legitimacy of the positions of these "dissident theologians" in the Asian context, which is distant from the post-Enlightenment, European context.

This work also proposes to show that Ratzinger's theology is distinctly normative in character. A number of documents from the CDF, signed by Cardinal Ratzinger as prefect, show an attempt to declare his own theological viewpoints as normative. Motivated by his perception of how the church should respond to the modern world, his theological writings are polemical and defensive. He takes a negative view of pluralism, which he equates with relativism, and believes it is important to protect the faith of ordinary believers by censoring dissident theologians. "Pluralism" here is distinct from "plurality" in that pluralism refers to a theory or system that justifies the co-existence of two or more groups. Plurality, on the other hand, simply means a large number of persons or things. Thus "plurality" indicates a fact, while "pluralism" refers to a theory.

Ratzinger spelt out clearly what he saw as the greatest doctrinal threats of the day: the practical relativism of Europe and America, and also Asia's theology in which Jesus Christ is viewed as no more than another sage comparable to Buddha or the Prophet Muhammad and Christianity as one of several equally valid religious paths. He believes there is an unseemly closeness between Europe's post-metaphysical philosophy and Asia's theology which can be observed in the phenomenon of religious relativism. If this were true, how might one explain the close affinity of early Christian

theologians with Greek philosophy and the use of Hellenistic terms to express the mysteries of the Christian faith?

In many ways, Ratzinger's theological viewpoints are antagonistic to and insensitive of religious pluralism. His negative comment on the attraction of Buddhism as "spiritual autoeroticism" has created indignation among its adherents. The uproar over the supposedly anti-Islamic quotation in his Regensburg lecture on September 12, 2006 remains fresh in most minds. Perhaps as an intellectual and academic, Ratzinger was not aware of the grassroots reaction of fervent believers of other faiths before this event had taken place.

Furthermore, Ratzinger takes a theoretical and dogmatic approach towards interreligious relations. Most of the church's declarations signed by him begin with an affirmation of the uniqueness and superiority of Catholicism and the necessity of the Catholic Church for the salvation of all humanity. They claim that the church holds the absolute truth on matters religious and that the Bible is the only inspired word of God. Only Christians have theological faith and enjoy the grace of God, whereas all others have, at best, a human religious belief. Interreligious dialogue is seen as part of the evangelizing mission of the church. Somewhat paradoxically, he strongly believes in dialogue with other religions, while stressing the church's evangelizing mission. This naturally raises the question of whether respect for Asian religions and their vitality demand a rethinking of the church's mission and an end to efforts to make converts.

Many Christians in Asia agree that Jesus Christ has to be proclaimed, but they believe that this proclamation has to be through deeds and the witness of life, rather than through words and doctrinal formulations. Asian theology has to do more with orthopraxis than orthodoxy, and the tension is between tradition and experience: Ratzinger stresses adherence to the tradition of the church, while Asian theology calls for adaptation to the lived experience of religious pluralism across the continent. These two approaches, although different, need not be confrontational; they can be harmonized. This means the tradition of the church should be interpreted according to the spirit rather than the letter. In many ways, Joseph Ratzinger challenges Asians to be authentic Christians without betraying their identities.

Related to this central theme is the Ratzinger-Kasper debate on the universal (catholic) church and local churches, a debate which has a large ecumenical dimension and interreligious relation. Ratzinger holds that the universal church is prior to the local church both historically and ontologically. He emphasizes the unity of the universal church. In this age of globalization and inculturation, is it more important than ever to have a

centralized office that safeguards the unity of all the particular churches in the essentials of faith, morality, and liturgy?

There is a difference in theological approach between the universal church as expressed by Ratzinger and local Asian churches. These differences inevitably spill over to the church's priorities and its understanding of the role that other religions play in the evangelizing mission. The tension between Rome and Asia has to do with how the church functions in Asia. While Rome is concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy, Asian theology is concerned with dialogue with Asia's cultures, religions and the poor.

While this study takes a critical view of Joseph Ratzinger's approach to religious pluralism from an Asian perspective, the author also acknowledges the importance of his overall contribution to the church. In Ratzinger's interview with Peter Seewald, published in *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium*, a wide range of topics was covered, including Ratzinger's biography. Many people found inspiration and encouragement in it because he was able to "answer the deeper questions of the human spirit." According to Vincent Twomey, most theologians attempt to interpret faith in the light of contemporary culture rather than interpret contemporary culture in the light of faith. Thus, today, Christian faith and morals tend to be diluted to suit our hedonistic generation. Ratzinger, in contrast, with his ability to shed new light on old truths in our postmodern world, holds firm to the truths of the faith, without compromise.<sup>1</sup>

As the guardian of orthodoxy, it is natural and appropriate for Ratzinger to take a cautious view of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. It was only after Vatican II that the church began to take steps towards understanding other religions. Therefore, interreligious dialogue is a topic that needs further clarification and guidance from the church. The CDF under Ratzinger's direction has provided an authoritative response, but it was not always well received as some theologians mistrust the Magisterium. In his capacity as a private scholar, Ratzinger has continued to publish articles and books, offering for critical assessment his personal views on many important issues pertaining to the church and society. In short, he is not against new ideas and changes, but rather he rises to the challenges they pose.

While Ratzinger holds fast to his conviction regarding the superiority of Catholic Christianity, he is not closed to appreciating other faiths. He believes that religions are not "static" but "dynamic" entities, and like the cultures they form and express, they are subject to change to the extent that they become "open or closed to the universality of truth."<sup>2</sup> Ratzinger

1. Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI*, 70.

2. *Ibid.*, 67–68.

believes that all the great world religions and traditions find their source in the great Christian vision of reality: “The ethical vision of the Christian faith is not in fact something specific to Christianity but is the synthesis of the great ethical intuitions of mankind from a new center that holds them together.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, Christianity is a universal religion that can satisfy the spiritual longing of humankind.

Finally, Joseph Ratzinger’s insights into the problem of truth, tolerance, religion, and culture and the wisdom and hope he offers to Western culture may be relevant to Asian societies. Although he is against a religious pluralism that views all religions as equal, he supports a tolerance and a freedom that have their basis in truth and are thus compatible with the reality of human nature. The religious landscape in Asia is vibrant and varied, and Ratzinger’s understanding of religion as a movement in history can enable different faiths to come together in their search for the truth. He supports a pluralist’s view of religion that is not static but dynamic. It is a plurality that allows different religions to uphold their claims to truth and to their uniqueness. This kind of plurality is better than a pluralism that tries to eliminate all differences in order to reach a consensus on the nature of religious belief.

As far as I know from database research, there is no work that directly provides a critical evaluation of Joseph Ratzinger’s understanding of religious pluralism. There are, however, general studies of Ratzinger’s theology that include his view on religious pluralism. In 2000, John L. Allen Jr. published a biography, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican Enforcer of Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000), in which he states that at Vatican II, Ratzinger came across as a committed ecumenist, but as Prefect of the CDF, he had done little for ecumenism and much to retard it. This book is also published under another title, *Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Continuum, 2000). Allen’s account is focused on Ratzinger himself and is somewhat one-dimensional. He does not explain why the mind of the then Cardinal Ratzinger is so deeply at odds with the opinions of Professor Ratzinger some twenty or thirty years previously. Nonetheless, the book provides a good resource for Ratzinger’s view on religious pluralism and the theologians that he disciplined as head of the CDF.

Joseph Ratzinger, John Allen argues, is dedicated to expanding and consolidating the power of the magisterium, the teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church. Ratzinger represents the conservative, even repressive, aspects of John Paul II’s papacy. He is seriously trying to shape a faithful, enduring church that can face the aggressive secularism of contemporary culture. Allen documents Ratzinger’s disciplining of theologians

3. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 43.

including Jacques Dupuis. Although Allen's writing style is journalistic, he is also sensitive to theological issues.

The key to Ratzinger's writing and policies, according to Allen, is in his ecclesiology. Ratzinger believes that the church is a transcendent and divine reality that constitutes itself on earth. This happens especially when the faithful participate in the sacraments. Ratzinger insists Christians do not create the church, but rather the church creates them and invites them to communion with God and with one another. Therefore it is only right that believers should submit to the church and its authoritative teaching.

Ratzinger's opposition to liberation theology and theologies of religious pluralism is based on his conviction that these ideologies, as he calls them, disregard certain absolute laws given by God. We have to respect other religious beliefs, but if God has called us to know Christ, then it is our duty to proclaim the gospel. Allen stresses Ratzinger's Augustinianism with its inherent pessimism towards the world. Ratzinger insists that the church must guard against a fallen world's destructive influences. This theme has pervaded Ratzinger's life and work from the beginning.

A good proportion of Allen's book is devoted to religious pluralism, especially in chapter 6, "Holy Wars" and chapter 7, "The Enforcer". He gives us the impression that Ratzinger, as head of the CDF, is constantly waging a war against pluralist theology. Allen writes, "No theologian has been censured by Ratzinger for deviations pertaining to ecumenical dialogue. When Catholic theologians treat non-Christian religions, however, Ratzinger's doctrinal reservations become far more profound, and he has not hesitated to deploy the full power of his office."<sup>4</sup>

The weakness of this work is that, while trying to present a concise account of Ratzinger's life, Allen's analysis lacks depth or insight. He tends to present issues in "either-or" terms and thus the points being debated are discussed with little depth or nuance. The confrontations between Ratzinger and the "dissident theologians" are reduced to a game of a "power struggle" with the "enforcer" as the villain.

Vincent Twomey, S.V.D., in *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), accuses Allen of giving Ratzinger a negative image, labeling him "Grand Inquisitor," *Panzerkardinal* (the iron-clad cardinal) and "enforcer of the faith."<sup>5</sup> Twomey offers a substantial critique of Allen's biography of Ratzinger, calling into question his fairness and objectivity. He devotes the epilogue of his book to a criticism of Allen's biography of Joseph Ratzinger. According to Twomey, "Allen claims

4. Allen, *Pope Benedict XVI*, 235.

5. Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI*, 14.

that Ratzinger's attitude to other religions is negative, yet he fails to note . . . that the Patriarch of Constantinople awarded the then Professor Ratzinger the Golden Cross of Mount Athos for his contribution to a greater understanding between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.<sup>6</sup> Although Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy are not exactly two different religions, it does show Ratzinger's openness to Christian ecumenism.

Twomey also calls attention to the then Cardinal Ratzinger's role in helping to establish diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel. He complains that not a word is heard from Allen about Ratzinger's defense of Islam from the "blanket charge of fundamentalism" nor "his appreciation of the significance of primordial religious rituals and myths" found in Hindu tradition.<sup>7</sup> Twomey, a former doctoral student of Ratzinger, presents a personal observation of his beloved teacher, in order to give the reader clear insights into the fundamental thinking of the Pope, especially his views concerning truth and conscience.

*The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI* (London: Burns & Oates, 2007), by Aidan Nichols, O.P., is a well-researched and lucid account of Joseph Ratzinger's thought. Nichols provides a good background to Ratzinger's theological writings, including his understanding of pluralism. According to Nichols, Ratzinger recognizes pluralism as "constitutive of Christianity" only in regard to the church's relation with civil society.<sup>8</sup> This means that, for Ratzinger, there must be unity in religious truth, but not necessarily in the social and political arenas.

In contrast to "fruitful pluralism," Ratzinger speaks of "ruinous pluralism" which leads to dissolution, destruction and loss of identity. This happens when people have "lost the ability to re-unite the great tensions internal to the totality of the faith."<sup>9</sup> This idea comes from his understanding of the church as the "corporate subject of her own Tradition."<sup>10</sup> Led by the Spirit, the church transcends the "limitations of human subjectivity by placing history in touch with the source of reality itself." Thus, according to Ratzinger, the "internal plurality of the symphony of faith" can only be maintained by the church, but this can be disrupted by what he calls the "dislocated pluralism of a home-made Christianity."<sup>11</sup> The church is the "single, world-wide household of faith" which God himself has established for the flourishing

6. *Ibid.*, 165.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 202.

9. *Ibid.*, 205.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Nichols writes on these issues in relation to Ratzinger's concept of *symphonia* which we will discuss further in chapter 2.

Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion, eds., in *The Ratzinger Reader* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), have chosen extracts from Ratzinger's writings and have provided balanced editorial comments that shed light on the complexity of his roles as theologian and pope. The focus is on Ratzinger's writings as a private theologian, keeping in mind that they guide the formation of his official texts as pope. The personal writings of Ratzinger also give us a more comprehensive understanding of his theological vision, revealing the core themes that have been his concern over the decades. From these writings, we also discover the sources and methods of his theological reflections. Ratzinger was a once-liberal turned conservative churchman. The two editors believe this shift in his thought was more subtle than has been presumed, and suggests a more "pragmatic personal character than his dogmatic pronouncements indicate."<sup>13</sup> Gerard Mannion interprets Ratzinger's earlier progressive tendency as the thinking of a priest and brilliant theologian discovering his vocation in the church. This work has a good section on Ratzinger's fundamental ecclesiology.

Mannion asserts that there is much continuity in Ratzinger's understanding of ecclesiology, the theme that runs throughout his writings, with some changes in his views concerning Episcopal conferences and the Synod of Bishops. Ratzinger's Bavarian background and essential Christian anthropology influence his writings on the church. His theological training and the events in Europe and the church also shaped his ecclesiology. Indeed, one consistent theme running through Ratzinger's writings and addresses is this pessimistic assessment of the state of modern society in relation to the church. He sees clearly the ills and challenges of modernity and post-modernity in relation to the church and believes that the church is in a kind of "Babylonian captivity" in the contemporary world.<sup>14</sup>

On the whole, the book is an indispensable guide to understanding the theology of Joseph Ratzinger. The editors, Boeve and Mannion, attempt to show that although Ratzinger insists that his theological opinions are distinct from his official teaching as Prefect of the CDF, they actually influence his official position. In fact, the editors try to show that Ratzinger's personal theology is the official theology of the church and thus, many of Ratzinger's writings, released in a private capacity, will influence the formation of the official church's teachings issued under his name. The comments

12. Ibid.

13. Boeve and Mannion, eds., *The Ratzinger Reader*, xiv.

14. Ibid., 82.

on Ratzinger's writings are both positive and negative, highlighting the views of his supporters and also of those hostile to his ideas.

Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., in *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), gives a concise and insightful overview of Joseph Ratzinger's theological vision, notably his eucharistic ecclesiology, his theology of liturgy and his Christology. There is also a good chapter on the ecclesiology of Ratzinger, namely the issues concerning apostolic succession and ecumenism. On religious pluralism, Rauch deals with the investigation and the notification concerning Jacques Dupuis' book, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. He says that perhaps the most controversial document to come out of the CDF under Ratzinger's leadership was the 2000 declaration, *Dominus Iesus*, "the result of tensions between Asian churches and Rome over how best to proclaim the gospel in the Asian Context."<sup>15</sup>

Rauch calls our attention to the issue of theological pluralism. He remarks that the growth of globalization has brought about new challenges to theology and the inevitable tensions between local and universal churches. Rauch asks: "How can a universal, multicultural church embrace theologies that reflect the unique insights, problems, and approaches that make up the diverse cultures of the Catholic Church? Can there be genuinely Asian or African theologies?"<sup>16</sup>

Many theologians seek to develop their own theologies, reflective of their context, for effective evangelization. Ratzinger seemed more open to contextual theologies in his early days when writing about the highlights of Vatican II. However, as Prefect of the CDF, Ratzinger told Asian bishops in 1993 to avoid the term, *inculturation*, and to use *inter-culturality* instead.<sup>17</sup> As mentioned earlier, Ratzinger seems to presume the norm of Western culture and thought in his theology. This is seen in Ratzinger's lecture, as Pope, at Regensburg University, on September 12, 2006, when he commented on the translation of the Hebrew Bible to the Septuagint.<sup>18</sup>

On interreligious dialogue, Rauch believes Ratzinger's attitude is more cautious than that of his predecessor, John Paul II. While John Paul II affirmed the Spirit's presence in other religions, Ratzinger thinks non-Christian religions are in a "gravely deficient situation." Unlike John Allen who paints a negative picture of Cardinal Ratzinger, or Aidan Nichols who gives a rather positive but objective account of Ratzinger's thought, or

15. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI*, 29.

16. *Ibid.*, 58.

17. *Ibid.*, 59.

18. *Ibid.*, 60.

Vincent Twomey who is full of praise for his former professor and is adulatory, Thomas Rauch offers a critical examination of Benedict's theology. Rauch's book provides the sort of critical reflection that Ratzinger himself has invited with his recent book, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

James Corkery, S.J., in *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions & Legitimate Hopes* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), offers a sympathetic and yet critical presentation of Ratzinger's thought. Corkery believes that Ratzinger's personal theological views exercise an influence on the position taken by his Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). He gives the example of Ratzinger's reluctance to give a crucial role to praxis in theology. This was already evident in 1970, in a Vatican Radio Talk, in which he stated that "orthopractice" had replaced orthodoxy, as well as in a text in 1975, in which Ratzinger sarcastically referred to "almighty praxis."<sup>19</sup> Thus, it was no surprise that Ratzinger as Prefect of the CDF was very critical of liberation theology during the 1980s. The judgment of Ratzinger the theologian and Ratzinger the prefect cannot be separated.<sup>20</sup>

Corkery has observed that in the 1980s theologians were worried about Ratzinger's theological preferences. The publication of *The Ratzinger Report* was a "bombshell" and confirmed his reputation as a pessimistic hardliner. It raised theological concerns of the "first magnitude." Many could not share Ratzinger's pessimism and thought that he was also making his fellow theologians "scapegoats" for the plight of the church. Some questioned Ratzinger's "easy dualism" and his "idealized account of the Church."<sup>21</sup> Many were discouraged by the pessimistic views of Ratzinger in the 1980s, especially moral theologians who could foresee a difficult working relationship with the magisterium.<sup>22</sup>

Instead of focusing on particular theologians who had problems with the CDF, Corkery examines the motives behind the way Ratzinger deals with the dissidents, including those who disagreed with "certain non-infallible teachings of the magisterium." This means analyzing Ratzinger's own views on theological dissent. Corkery asserts that Cardinal Ratzinger, in the 1980s, had the tendency to view Catholic theologians "who dissented from non-infallible teachings of the Church as *misconceiving* the nature of the Church and its teaching office."<sup>23</sup>

19. Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas*, 81.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 82.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 83.

Ratzinger thinks that certain theologians *relativized* the teaching of the church and looked upon it as “the archaic Roman theology” rather than the “expression of the faith of the Church.” He considered this to be “one of the roots of the crisis of the time”: that Catholics conceived the church’s teaching authority as “authoritarian and anti-democratic.” Corkery claims that *The Ratzinger Report* was so negative about theological dissent that theologians began to be worried about their freedom to do creative and critical work.<sup>24</sup>

Ratzinger was concerned that liberation theologians were distorting and threatening the faith of the ordinary believers whom they sought to protect. Thus the magisterium saw itself as duty-bound to protect the poor and simple people. Ratzinger knew about this threat to their faith, from reports and letters he received from ordinary Catholics. Corkery questions the reliability of their correspondence. He asks, “Is extolling the simple faithful not a justification for ignoring the un-simple faithful: educated men and women who are also members of the Church but who wish to contribute reflections based on their genuine competencies—theology included?”<sup>25</sup> Corkery thinks Ratzinger’s rhetoric and his suspicion of theologians were excessive.

Hence, there existed a tense relationship between the Prefect of the CDF and the theologians.<sup>26</sup> Most worrisome was the fact that dissent of any kind was prohibited because it was perceived as coming from a wrong conception of the church and a relativistic ideology. Corkery argues that Ratzinger’s judgments on dissident theologians seem like a return to the mentality of Pope Pius XII whose view of the church was highly juridical. The mentality of the church then was—*Roma locuta est, causa finita est.*<sup>27</sup> Rome has spoken, the case is closed.

The CDF had issued a document entitled *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*. Quoting Francis Sullivan, Corkery states: “the danger in the juridical approach of this Instruction is that it suggests that ultimately there is only one kind of teaching authority in the Church—the hierarchical.” Corkery is quick to remind us that although the *Instruction* gives the “impression” that it was returning to the mentality of Pius XII, Ratzinger did not forbid the possibility of dissent at all. In fact, Ratzinger even spoke of “cases of loyal dissent.”<sup>28</sup>

24. *Ibid.*, 84.

25. *Ibid.*, 85.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, 86.

28. *Ibid.*, 86–87.

Ratzinger was against theologians using the mass media to voice their grievances. Thus, it was a case of the magisterium versus the media. He viewed *public* dissent as unacceptable and in the CDF *Instruction*, dissent means “public opposition to the Magisterium of the Church.” This means any public dissent is forbidden. Corkery asks whether it is possible for a theologian to disagree with the magisterium privately. Obviously this is not possible in this age of communication. Besides, theology is a public undertaking, seeking “to mediate between a culture and a religion.” Thus, Corkery thinks Cardinal Ratzinger was rather “disingenuous” to suggest that public dissent can be avoided, given the fact that Ratzinger himself was a public figure who has published and given press conferences.<sup>29</sup> Ratzinger took for granted that theologians could voice their disagreements through theological journals and conferences, but these forums also have a “public aspect” and materials shared in conferences and journals will inevitably be known in the popular media.<sup>30</sup>

What we can say definitely about Joseph Ratzinger is that he practises what he preaches. Corkery writes that in 1972, Ratzinger made a suggestion, as a theologian, that divorced and remarried Catholics could be permitted to receive the sacraments. However, Pope John Paul II, in 1984, spoke against such reception in *Familiaris Consortio*. Ratzinger obeyed and submitted to the judgment of the magisterium without hesitation. He did not change his view as pope when the issue was brought up again in 2005. Thus, Corkery says, “*Roma locuta est, causa finita est* remained the case for Joseph Ratzinger, even when he had become Benedict XVI.”<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, Corkery is critical of the way the CDF deals with dissident theologians. The CDF assumes that these theologians are not thinking with the church when they disagree and thus their writings need to be investigated. Corkery finds this assumption “odd” because no theologian “wants to find himself or herself *not* thinking with the Church”—“that is painful and isolating.”<sup>32</sup>

Can theologians be dialogue partners with the CDF? Ratzinger seems to emphasize the “human being as a *receiver*,” not as a thinker or contributor to theological reflection. Concerning teaching, the theologian’s ultimate support, in Ratzinger’s view, is authority and not understanding. Hence a theologian is merely “an echo, but never a critical questioner,” of church teaching. This means that the theologian cannot be said to be commending

29. *Ibid.*, 87.

30. *Ibid.*, 88.

31. *Ibid.*, 89.

32. *Ibid.*, 91.

the teaching, but simply holding it. Corkery claims that this only reveals “a truncated, an immature, humanity.” In the Ratzinger-John Paul II era, such scholars and church officials who refrained from saying anything controversial for fear of offending the Vatican were favored. This, in reality, “contradicts the very fullness of humanity” which Ratzinger himself has taught.<sup>33</sup>

My methodology will be to present Ratzinger’s theology and others with alternative approaches, to highlight the contrasts and parallels in them and to indicate, where appropriate, the extent to which Ratzinger’s theology has influenced the direction he has taken. This will help to bring out the polemical character of his theological viewpoints. I will also attempt to synthesize Ratzinger’s writings in the different areas that are related to the topic of religious pluralism. “Disputed questions” (*quaestiones disputatae*) such as pluralist theology, theological dissent, relativism and the Christian heritage of Europe that have occupied Ratzinger’s mind will be studied, together with voices from Asia.

The standard typology in the Christian theology of religions—exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism—will also be examined in relation to Ratzinger’s writings on other religions and other Christian churches. Exclusivism has been the church’s predominant attitude throughout its history. It regards other religious beliefs as false. In the Catholic Church we have often interpreted the axiom, *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (Outside the church there is no salvation) in an ahistorical manner. This expression *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is believed to have come from St. Cyprian of Carthage, a bishop in the third century. In this context, Cyprian was referring to Christian heretics who were not in union with the universal church. In 1442, the Council of Florence-Ferrara declared that the Holy Church of Rome firmly believes that no one—not just the heathens, but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics—outside the Catholic Church can be saved unless they are received into the church before they die.

Inclusivism regards the Christian faith as the fulfillment of other religions. This approach has been adopted by the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. Traditional non-Christian religions are seen as genuine expressions of human beings’ longing to answer the most fundamental question regarding their human existence. Religious pluralism holds all legitimate religions to be the same in that they can help us to reach God or find salvation.

The theology of religions is an important theological subject in view of the growing interest, in the academic world, in the issues of secularism and pluralism. My hope is that this study will provide important reflections

33. *Ibid.*, 92.

regarding Joseph Ratzinger's understanding of the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church with other Christian churches, non-Christian religions, and the secular world as well. As a contribution to the academic community, this work will not only assist interested readers to have a better grasp of Catholic teachings, it will also help the church to appreciate the beauty of religious pluralism as a sign of God's abundant love for the world and all its peoples.

Through a critique of Joseph Ratzinger's theology, I hope to draw attention to the importance of other theological discourses originating from a non-European context. While I appreciate Ratzinger's penetrating insights and balanced point of view, my work will serve to highlight the gap between a dogmatic understanding of the faith and the pastoral realities of the Asian church, as well as the difficulties faced by Asian theologians who are trying to make their voices heard in a church still dominated by Western thinking. Regarding this point, I will mention the views of two scholars, Paul Hedges and Robert J. Schreiter.

Looking at the rise of European colonialism by the Spanish, Portuguese, British, French, and Dutch, which resulted in Latin Christianity becoming dominant, Paul Hedges is of the opinion that our view of what is normative Christianity is conditioned by political power and not biblical truth.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Hedges contends that the Vincentian canon about the universality of the church is doubtful. Although we must not give up all traditions, he thinks that they are very much related to power struggles. Tradition, therefore, must not be taken as "normative in the absolute sense." In other words, Hedges stresses the fact that, like most systems, Christianity as a religion is tied to its cultural context and there is no such thing as universal truth coming down directly from God.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, Hedges believes that we must allow different expressions of Christianity to exist and this implies that the normative pattern of Western theology must be challenged.<sup>36</sup> In line with this, this work attempts, with the realities of Asia in mind, to evaluate Joseph Ratzinger's approach to religious pluralism, ecclesiology, ecumenism and other Western thinking which he regards as "ideologies."

The point made by Hedges and particularly by Robert J. Schreiter is that all theology is "contextual."<sup>37</sup> This means that contrary to Ratzinger's teaching, we cannot assume that Latin Christianity, as taught by the Magisterium, is normative, while the Asian approach, for example, is contextual

34. Hedges, *Controversies*, 38–39.

35. *Ibid.*, 42.

36. *Ibid.*, 45.

37. *Ibid.*, 48.

in relation to Rome. Schreier, in fact, argues that plurality is normative: “The universal theologies . . . were in fact *universalizing* theologies; that is to say, they extended the results of their own reflections beyond their own contexts to other settings, usually without an awareness of the rootedness of their theologies within their own contexts.”<sup>38</sup> This point is also highlighted by the Document of the Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conference (FABC) which states: “The impressive unity in the theological enterprise could only be achieved at the expense of theological pluralism. It is striking how Eurocentric, and even parochial, this theology now appears. The claim of being *the* universal way of doing theology is negated by the obvious limitation that it really is restricted to the particular context in which it originated.”<sup>39</sup>

In other words, we cannot favor one theological style such as so-called normative, orthodox Christianity over and above others. Schrieter insists that all theologies must be in relation to other cultural contexts so that we can attend to local needs while at the same time trying to develop a theology that is ecumenical.<sup>40</sup> Joseph Ratzinger is very well acquainted with the rootedness of his own theology and champions it. As Prefect of the CDF and head of the church, he regards the Western theological discourse as normative and orthodox. This is not surprising and is to be expected, given his background and history, as we shall see in chapter 1. However, in the religious pluralistic societies of Asia, where Christianity is a minority religion, there should be room for more adaptation and accommodation in its liturgy as well as theological formulations.

## OUTLINE AND SEQUENCE OF THE WORK

Chapter 1 presents a biographical sketch of Joseph Ratzinger, focusing on his experience during the Second World War and his priestly and theological formation, which resulted in his negative attitudes towards modern thinking. They confirmed his belief in the superiority of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions and in the importance of the church as a bastion against ideologies.

Chapter 2 discusses Ratzinger’s position on religious pluralism in relation to the three paradigms in the Christian theology of religions: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Influenced by the early church fathers’ teaching on the logos, Ratzinger adopts an open inclusivism, in which he recognizes that truth can be found in non-Christian religions from which the church can

38. Schrieter, *The New Catholicity*, 2.

39. Phan, “Doing Theology,” footnote no. 42.

40. Schrieter, *The New Catholicity*, 49.

learn. At the same time, this chapter attempts to show that Ratzinger's attitude towards other religions, as paths to salvation, is essentially negative.

Chapter 3 studies a fundamental aspect of Joseph Ratzinger's theology—his ecclesiology. It examines his writings on the church, focusing on the debate between him and Cardinal Walter Kasper—on the ontological and temporal priority of the universal church. Ratzinger's normative understanding of the church is reflected in his critical attitude towards other models of ecclesiology and his negative stance towards religious pluralism. Determined to protect the faith of ordinary believers, Ratzinger takes a centrist approach to ecclesiology which claims that "All roads lead to Rome." This chapter argues that Ratzinger's ecclesiological vision may not be adequate for the church to deal effectively with the challenges of religious pluralism in contemporary society.

Chapter 4 examines Ratzinger's thoughts on relationships with other Christian churches. His theological approach to ecumenism is closely tied to his fundamental ecclesiology. In his writings on Christian unity, Ratzinger maintains the superiority of the Catholic faith as the path to salvation and thus in his ecumenical effort, he seeks the transformation of the separated Christian churches into particular churches in communion with Rome. While agreeing with Ratzinger that ethos cannot exist without logos, this chapter seeks to show that ecumenism should also be practical and directed towards the welfare of people, if Christianity is to serve humanity. This pastoral orientation in ecumenism is particularly urgent in Asia where the majority of the people are poor and require the services of the church in areas like health care, social welfare and education.

Chapter 5 discusses Ratzinger's warnings, in many of his writings, against the threat of aggressive secularism in Western societies, including his debate with Jürgen Habermas in *The Dialects of Secularization*. This chapter shows that Ratzinger is not against secularity *per se*, but rather secularism as an ideology that banishes God from the public sphere in the name of tolerance. Ratzinger actually supports a "healthy secularism" where different cultures and religions can coexist peacefully in society.

Chapter 6 examines "the dictatorship of relativism." As in his attitude towards secularism, Ratzinger is not against relativism *per se*, but only when it seeks to be absolute regarding ethics and religion. Ratzinger tends to equate religious pluralism with relativism and thus he is reluctant to accept theological frameworks operating from a non-Western tradition. The writings of Richard Rorty and Tissa Balasuriya will be contrasted with Ratzinger's thought on the dictatorship of relativism.

Chapter 7 reviews the case of Tissa Balasuriya who was investigated in 1994 by the CDF and excommunicated in 1997 for purported errors in his

book, *Mary and Human Liberation*. The severity of his punishment reveals that Ratzinger, as the Prefect of the CDF, was determined to censure works that deal with religious pluralism and relativism, which he believed threaten the faith of the ordinary believers. The excommunication of Balasuriya, however, won him widespread support and sympathy, from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Balasuriya's excommunication was lifted after a year when he signed the "Profession of Faith" on January 15, 1998. This episode gives us the opportunity to understand the difficulties of theologians working in the areas of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue in the 1990s.

Chapter 8 reviews Jacques Dupuis' book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* and the investigation of this work in the light of Ratzinger's understanding of Catholic orthodoxy. While Ratzinger looks upon religious pluralism as a challenge for the church to proclaim the gospel more fervently, Dupuis believes it has a place in God's plan of salvation. This means that fidelity to the gospel is compatible with openness to other faiths. This chapter seeks to show that Dupuis' problem with church authorities has more to do with Ratzinger's negative attitude towards religious pluralism than with Dupuis contravening Catholic teachings.

Chapter 9 discusses the investigation of Peter Phan's theology by the United States Bishops' Doctrine Committee as well as by the CDF. Phan's *Being Religious Interreligiously* was considered by the CDF to be in open contrast to the teachings of the declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000). Phan has sought to correct the mistakes of Christian mission in the past by his critical reflection on religious pluralism. The conflict between Phan and the ecclesiastical authorities is shown to be due to different emphases on doctrine and practice in a church dominated by Ratzinger's theology.

As we have seen, Joseph Ratzinger's basic theological thrust lies in his "privileging" of Western philosophical-theological tradition as well as his concern over the decline of Christianity in Western Europe. Chapter 10 examines his writings on the crisis of Europe and his polemics against post-Enlightenment thinking that seeks to banish God from public life. While it is understandable that Ratzinger laments the crisis of faith in the West, this chapter attempts to show that Christianity has the ability to renew itself in a secular framework. It also argues that Ratzinger has failed to take note of the growing immigrant churches in Europe. In his writings, he mainly focuses on the white native Europeans influenced by the radical post-Enlightenment thinking.

There is an urgent need to formulate an Asian theology in response to the challenges of poverty, nationalism, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and colonialism. Given the rich and diverse religions that are an integral part of the societies of Asia, some originating in Asia and

some brought by colonizers, these issues are best addressed in the context of dialogue among other Christian churches and between Christian and non-Christian religions. This study concludes in chapter 11 with the perspective of the FABC in relation to Joseph Ratzinger's theological stance on religious pluralism. Constructing an Asian theology, however, lies beyond the scope of this work, but I hope that this study will encourage more scholars to do research in this area.

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