in ministerial training established by General Theological Seminary whereby Jewish and Christian students secure supervised ministerial placements in each other's congregations.

Finally, Christians must continue to guard against two continuing tendencies in contemporary Christian theology, both destructive for a sense of bonding with the Jewish people. The first is the frequent overemphasis of Christology to the exclusion of theologies of God and the Spirit. Christians need to right the balance here, particularly since correcting this matter can lead to a productive interchange with Jewish theology. David Tracy, for example, has praised post-Holocaust Jewish scholarship for restoring the centrality of the God-question to theological discussion.

The second tendency is to construct new theologies of liberation, be they feminist, African-American, or Latin American, in a way that downgrades the Judaism of Jesus' time. We have taken this issue up earlier, but it bears repeating. An authentic Christian theology of liberation need not be built on the backs of Jews. Quite the contrary. Understanding the Judaism of Jesus' day enhances understanding and appreciation of the liberating dimensions of Jesus' ministry.[43]

These are but a few examples of the concrete steps that need to be taken and expanded if the renewed theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship is to take root in the church's consciousness. If our efforts are successful, we will finally witness the burial of the patristic *adversus Judaeos* tradition. The process will understandably move along somewhat slowly because it touches upon the very nerve center of Christian identity. But in light of the destructive history of Christian anti-Semitism bred by this theology, moral integrity demands that the church resolutely stay the course.

43. See Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, 93–102.

11. CHRISTIAN REDEMPTION BETWEEN COLONIALISM AND PLURALISM

Colonialism is a blight on the history of Christianity, and colonial exploitation is one of the most tragic events of that history. Bartolomé de Las Casas's *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* presents a frightful example of colonial brutality.[1] The Spanish conquistadores enslaved and condemned whole Mexica tribes to extinction, resulting in a "Holocaust of the Indians."[2] Their attitudes toward the religious beliefs of the Mexica in no small measure influenced their behavior.[3] They appealed to the superiority of Christian belief in contrast to Mexica practices to justify their treatment of the Mexica. Nevertheless, others, like Pope Paul III in *Sublimis Deus* (1537), appealed to Christian beliefs to defend the rights of the Mexica and to criticize colonial practices.[4]

The debate between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de Las Casas on the treatment of the Mexica concentrated on the

1. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffin (New York: Penguin, 1992). Original title and publication: *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias Occidentales* (1542).

2. Fernando Mires, *En nombre de la cruz: Discusiones teológicas y políticas frente al holocausto de los indios, período de conquista* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1986).

3. Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974).

4. For the context of this bull, see Alberto de la Hera, "El derecho de los indios a la libertad y a la fe: La bula 'Sublimis Deus' y los problemas indianos que la motivaron," *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 26 (1953): 65–80.

issue of identity or difference of nature. Sepúlveda justified the treatment on the basis of the Mexica being different from white male Spaniards. "In prudence, talent, virtue, and humanity, they are as inferior to the Spaniards as children to adults, women to men, as the wild and cruel to the most meek, as the prodigiously intemperate to the continent and temperate, that I have almost said, as monkeys to men."[5] In Sepúlveda's eyes Mexica could not become Christians because they were different, whereas Las Casas contested this difference: "Just as there is no natural difference in the creation of humans, so there is no difference in the call to salvation of all of them."[6] In his view, the Christian belief that God's grace is universal speaks against mistreatment of the Mexica.[7] The Christian understanding of creation and salvation provides the ground for criticizing such mistreatment. Nevertheless, the Christian tradition also contains affirmations that might seem to justify it.

RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF EXPLOITATION

The colonial conquest and holocaust of the Indians challenge Christians to be self-critical and raise crucial questions: "What criteria and what possibilities of limiting power exist when two peoples meet and a superiority of arms is linked with the consciousness of superiority in possession of the sole obligatory truth? Do missions and colonialism combined form the hybrid which is responsible for the distress of the Third World?"[8] The holocaust of the Indians demands that Christians examine the degree to which their deepest religious convictions lead them to impose their beliefs, practices, and values upon others or lead

5. Quoted from Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, 84.
6. Quoted from ibid., 96.
7. The charge has been made that Las Casas failed to criticize the kidnapping and enslavement of blacks from Africa. See Isacio Pérez Fernández, ed., *Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, O.P., Brevísima relación de la destrucción de Africa: Preludio de la destrucción de Indias* (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1989).
8. Joseph Ratzinger, "Conscience in Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 5 (1972): 294.

them to resist practices of colonization and oppression. Christian theology must honestly face the problem that its biblical past and religious tradition, as well as its modern practice, entail not only resistance but also oppression.

Biblical Roots

The holocaust of the Indians calls us back to those passages in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that strongly link belief in God or confession of Jesus as the savior with a conviction of religious supremacy and with political domination. The books of Joshua and Judges narrate the military victory over the Canaanites. They commend the eradication of the Canaanite temples and the destruction of their idols. Joshua 24 warns the Israelites that their Lord "is a jealous God." If they should serve foreign gods, the Lord will harm and consume them (Josh. 24:19-20). Similarly the prophets condemn foreign gods as idols and their rituals as idolatry. Their prophetic diatribes are a far cry from empathic understanding or ecumenical dialogue.

The Christian Scriptures sometimes express faith in Jesus as the Christ in categories of exclusiveness and supremacy. The Acts of the Apostles has Peter proclaim: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, RSV here and below). Similarly, the Pastoral Epistles proclaim a unicity: "For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humankind, himself a human, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed himself as a ransom for them all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Colossians professes the uniqueness of Christ's salvation and his reign and lordship over the cosmos and over all heavenly and worldly powers.

The Gospels contain similar affirmations. One early saying, which some scholars attribute to the historical Jesus, is Luke 12:8-9: "And I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." Later traditions likewise link belief in Jesus with

salvation and refusal to believe in him with condemnation. John 12:48 affirms: "He who rejects and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day."

Contemporary Practices

The conviction linking belief in Jesus with salvation and disbelief with condemnation has been at the basis of Christianity's mission to convert all nations. Throughout the history of Christianity this conviction has also been used to justify the use of force for the sake of salvation. The problem has been that physical force is justified so long as its effects are salutary. Modern Christianity's experience of religious wars and the Enlightenment's argument for toleration lead many to assume that we have abandoned appealing to the salutary use of force. They assume that the situation is radically different today and that statements of condemnation and colonialism no longer exist within the contemporary Christian world. Nevertheless, the problem remains, only in a more complex and diverse form.

The emergence of Latin American liberation theology and its translation into many languages often give the false impression that Christian religious movements are now unambiguously on the side of the oppressed and exploited. In fact, a conflict exists between two contrasting Christian missionary approaches. As Sarah Diamond has noted, "The contemporary mission field is a battleground where those who would use the gospel message to empower Third World believers confront rival missionaries eagerly bolstering dependence on world leadership and economic aid of the United States."[9]

Some North American Christian missionary movements actively seek to counter Latin American liberation theology and aggressively oppose emancipatory movements on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised. These Christian missionary efforts see

9. Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End, 1989), 205.

Central America, for example, as "one of two places in the world for which the Lord had special plans."[10] Because they consider the Latin American social reform movements to be communist-inspired and because they view communism as the great enemy of Christianity, they interpret the situation as a struggle in which Christianity itself is at stake. Consequently, organizations like International Christian Aid have siphoned off money intended for Ethiopian famine victims to Christian groups struggling against insurgency movements in Latin America.[11] They justify such practices as part of the struggle for good over evil, for Christianity over communism. In this struggle, Christian redemption is seen as an otherworldly redemption, and salvation is the salvation of the individual soul.

ANALYZING THE PROBLEM

The conquest of the Indies, traditional affirmations of exclusivity, and the political allegiances of some present-day missionary efforts point to the problem that claims of religious unicity and cultural superiority have been conducive to practices of colonial and economic exploitation. Underlying such practices are issues that Christian theology must face in reconstructing its understanding of Christian redemption. These issues are the correlation between values and the will to power, between belief and political ideologies, and between convictions of cultural superiority and oppression.

Value as Power

Friedrich Nietzsche's analysis of beliefs and morals uncovers the link between values and power.[12] Because knowledge is

10. See David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 149.

11. See *Christianity Today*, April 13, 1973, 44–47; March 2, 1979, 50–57; and March 1, 1985, 36–39.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Random House, 1967); idem, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J.

interested and because valuation entails a will that the values permeate and dominate, Nietzsche links the will to truth with the will to power. The phrase the "will to power"—though its meaning is still debated—points to the intrinsic connection between religious and moral values, on the one hand, and the power of domination, on the other. This connection exists for Christian beliefs and morals just as it exists for any set of knowledge and values. Power is not a goal separate from value; rather, power inheres within knowledge, belief, and values themselves. Inherent in every creative movement, power becomes externalized as control, domination, and exploitation.

Contemporary analyses have further revealed the relation between knowledge and power. Michel Foucault has demonstrated that modern disciplinary and discursive practices involve the exercise of control and domination.[13] Jürgen Habermas has explicated a tripartite link between knowledge and interest: the natural sciences and technological control, the human sciences and understanding, and the critical social sciences in relation to emancipation.[14] Though he has nuanced this scheme, Habermas has maintained the constitutive link between knowledge and interest and has underscored the importance of ordering knowledge, interest, and power toward communication rather than domination.

The challenge of Nietzsche's analysis remains even if his antidemocratic elitism and its political reception have discredited his constructive alternative.[15] Power permeates our discursive

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Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967). See Volker Gerhardt, *Pathos und Distanz: Studien zur Philosophie Friedrich Nietzsches* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988), 72–97; and Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 205–44.

13. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault,* ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), 139–64.

14. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Interest* (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 274–300; and "Nachwort," in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Erkenntnistheoretische Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968), 237–61. For a comparison between Habermas and Foucault on power, see Alex Honneth, *The Critique of Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

15. Despite Walter Kaufmann's defense, the political reception of Nietzsche remains an inescapable problem. See Michael Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge:

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practices, systems of values, and technologies of knowledge. Since Christian ideals and practices are not exempt from the permeation of power, Christians need to explicate the meaning of redemption as a belief and practice in relation to a communicative rather than dominative power.

Belief and Political Power

The relation between religious belief and social control has been analyzed within the sociology of knowledge and sociology of religion since Emile Durkheim.[16] Religious beliefs are not just private convictions; they have social and political functions. To the extent that believers affirm and value their convictions, they seek to live them out, to give them form within their personal and communal lives, and to assert their public and political significance. Their religious beliefs thereby are a component of the glue that holds societies together.

In addition, societies have often functionalized religious beliefs as ideologies to justify political systems. Alan Davies has shown several political interpretations of the Christ symbol that legitimate a nationalist, racist, or class supremacy.[17] These extend across a broad spectrum, from the Latin Christ of royalist French aristocrats to the Anglo-Saxon Christ of social Darwinian English imperialists, from the Germanic Christ of Nazi Christians to the Afrikaner Christ of South African white supremacists. Each appealed to the symbol of Christ to legitimate a position of superiority, often colonial, over other people, races, and religions.

Contemporary liberation and political theologies have made us conscious of the ideological function of belief in two ways. Their analyses have uncovered concrete cases where Christian

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MIT Press, 1990); Tracy Strong, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Transformation,* expanded ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988); and Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990).

16. See Kenneth Thompson, *Beliefs and Ideology* (London: Tavistock, 1986).

17. Alan Davies, *Infected Christianity: A Study of Modern Racism* (London: SCM, 1988).

beliefs have been used to reinforce political power structures. In addition, they have emphasized solidarity with the poor and powerless and have underscored that Christian eschatology can serve as a critique of all political institutions. They have thereby sought to explicate an anti-ideological relation between Christian belief and social-political praxis. Yet the very attempt to relate religious belief concretely to society entails the danger of such belief becoming ideological and distorted. It is imperative, then, that liberation and political theologies recognize and face this danger as they go about advocating political and social change.

Cultural Superiority and Eurocentrism

Christian theology faces not only the will to power of its beliefs and values, not only the possibilities of the ideological distortion of religious belief, but also the implicit assumption of the superiority of Western and Christian culture. Evidence of modern Christianity's assumptions of cultural superiority is easily available. Even Ernst Troeltsch—who took pluralism and the diversity of world religions with great seriousness—displays typical Eurocentric assumptions when he writes: "The heathen races, on the other hand, are being morally and spiritually disintegrated by contact with European civilization; hence they demand a substitute from the higher religion and culture."[18]

The history of the contact between European civilization and the cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Americas is one of economic, cultural, and religious colonization. This history, viewed not from the perspective of European civilization but from the "underside" of history, shows not progress but exploitation and oppression.[19] It invalidates the need for a "higher culture," be-

18. Ernst Troeltsch, *Christian Thought* (London: Univ. of London Press, 1923), 1–35; quotation from p. 29. The English translation uses "race" to translate *Menschheitsgruppen* and thereby gives an unfortunate racial connotation that the German term does not have.

19. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983).

lies progressive theories of history, and challenges evolutionary views of religion. It displays the underside of Christian missions and their salvific purpose. Many Christian missionaries were indeed heroic and generous, but their missionary activity as a work of inculturation entailed cultural as well as economic colonization. The implicit, if not explicit, intertwinement of convictions of cultural superiority with those of religious superiority has resulted in the toleration, if not support, of colonization. Even a theologian like Troeltsch who admits the equality of other world religions and their cultures downgrades native religions with the label "primitive religions."

Christian faith in Jesus as savior is now being articulated in a context that includes interreligious dialogue among the world religions; but that context also includes colonization and its exploitation and denigration of peoples, their cultures, and their religions. Any interpretation of the meaning of the Christian faith in Christ as redeemer and savior has to mitigate the will to have one's values and beliefs dominate, to prevent the ideological misuse of symbols, and to uncover hidden assumptions of cultural and religious superiority. Theological interpretations of Christian salvation should do justice to the commitments of the Christian tradition and should also prevent the ideological justifications of oppression and colonialism.

Such an approach should lead to a reexamination of the Christian belief in the unicity of Jesus as savior that has led many theologians to view his life and message as the criterion of truth that judges other religions. For example, Wolfhart Pannenberg has argued recently that "just as the message of Jesus is, in the final judgment, the criterion for the salvation of the individual person, so should the Christian judge non-Christian religions in relation to their proximity or distance to the message of Jesus."[20] Since such affirmations of Jesus as the unique criterion of universal truth have historically led Christians to

20. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Religion und Religionen: Theologische Erwägungen zu den Prinzipien eines Dialoges mit den Weltreligionen," in *Dialog aus der Mitte christlicher*

seek power over others for the sake of bringing salvation to them, we should reflect critically, indeed self-critically, on them. In order to establish a context for such a constructive interpretation of redemption, this essay first examines some contemporary theological approaches to the issue of Christian salvation and religious pluralism with their corresponding practices and demands.

A TYPOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL OPTIONS

The conflict between the plurality of religions and the Christian claim to the unicity of truth and salvation emerges in all its sharpness within modernity. Though Christianity has dealt throughout its history with the problem of the religious other, it has faced religious pluralism in a very special way only in modernity. During the medieval period, Christians assumed that the majority of persons in the world had at least some knowledge of Jesus as redeemer. Indeed, Thomas Aquinas referred to the Sibylline prophecies as examples that the "redemption was revealed to many Gentiles before Christ's coming," and he thought that "God would either reveal to him [i.e., someone who had no knowledge of Jesus] through internal inspiration what had to be believed, or would send some preacher of the faith to him as he sent Peter to Cornelius" (Acts 10:20).[21] But the discovery of new worlds and the travel east to China and Japan forced Europeans to see that Christianity was in fact geographically and numerically limited to Europe. Three distinct proposals are currently made to deal with the Christian claim to unicity of salvation and the awareness of worldwide religious diversity. The proposals stress exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism; they call for a corresponding conversion, enlightenment, or acknowledgment.

Theologie Beiträge zur Religionstheologie, vol. 5., ed. Andreas Bsteh (Mödling: Verlag St. Gabriel, 1987), 190.

21. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth,* vol. 2 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), q. 14; quotes from ad 5 and ad 1.

Exclusive Communitarianism

When redemption is very closely linked with the Christian community, the question emerges of whether those outside that community are saved. The phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est* (outside of the church, there is no salvation) has long roots. These extend back to early Judaism and the image of the boat that saved Noah from the flood. In later Jewish writings, this image became a metaphor for the salvation of the remnant of Israel, as in Wisd. of Sol. 10:4: "When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous person by a paltry piece of wood." Early Christian writings (for example, 1 Pet. 3:20) use Noah's ark as a symbol of the church.[22] Just as the ark was the means of salvation, so too is the church. Facing church disunity, Cyprian polemically used the phrase "outside of the church, there is no salvation" against groups splitting off from the church: "Whoever does not have the church as mother cannot have God as father; who breaks the peace of Christ...is destroying the church."[23] Later Augustine adopted the phrase but expanded the notion of church beyond that of the empirical church of his age to include Israel insofar as the church goes back to Abel.

Moreover, at that time, Christians thought that the church extended throughout the whole world. It is important that we should interpret exclusionary statements in relation to other contrasting affirmations, such as: "Christ has died for all." There is precedent for this. When Cornelius Jansenius rejected the notion that Christ died for all and when Pasquier Quesnel argued that outside the church there was no grace, their exclusive claims were condemned by the Roman Catholic church as inadequate expressions of Christian faith.[24] This tension characterizes much

22. In 1 Pet. 3:20-21 baptism corresponds to Noah's ark.
23. Cyprian, *De cathol. eccl. unit.* 6.
24. Augustine's interpretation influenced medieval theology through his student Ruspe of Fulgentius. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Das Volk Gottes* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1969), 341–61.

of Christian theology. On the one hand, Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctam* (1302) declares: "We believe that there is one holy catholic church . . . outside of which there is no salvation. . . . We declare that it is necessary for salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."[25] On the other hand, the idea of baptism of desire makes the church more extensive than the visible institution and loosens the link between the visible, institutional church and salvation. As Thomas Aquinas argues, the Gentiles are saved by their implicit faith.[26] Today, the excommunication of Father Leonard Feeney, a Boston priest, for his rigoristic interpretation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est* has pointed to a "semiexclusive" rather than a rigorously exclusive limitation of salvation.

A similar exclusivism is echoed in Karl Barth's limiting of God's true revelation and grace to Christianity.[27] He claimed: "That there is a true religion is an event in the act of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. To be more precise, it is an event in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To be even more precise, it is an event in the existence of the Church and the children of God. The existence of the Church of God and the children of God means that true religion exists even in the world of human religion."[28] Similarly, Hendrik Kraemer has sharpened this neoorthodox exclusiveness of Christianity in his interpretation of world religions.[29] Such a theological approach interprets the unconditionality of the truth in a binary fashion: a belief is true or false; non-Christian beliefs are rejected as false.[30]

25. DS 870–75. The last sentence in Latin is quite stark: "Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus, dicimus, diffinimus omnino esse de necessitate salutis" (DS 875).

26. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, vol. 2, q. 14, a. 11, ad 5: "It was enough for them [Gentiles] to have implicit faith in the Redeemer, either as part of their belief in the faith of the law and the prophets, or as part of their belief in divine providence itself."

27. See Paul Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1974), 20–36.

28. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 1/2:344.

29. Hendrik Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth, 1961).

30. Schubert Ogden formulates the issue as a binary true or false in *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1992).

By denying that other religions manifest a genuine revelatory presence of God, such an approach makes Christian revelation exclusive. This exclusiveness is sometimes mitigated—as, for instance, in volume 4/2 of Barth's *Church Dogmatics,* which interprets other religions as lights reflecting the true light of Christ.

The exclusivist approach stresses the necessity of belief in Christ as God's saving revelation to all of humanity and proclaims the necessity of membership in Christ's community for all. It requires *conversion* to Christ and the Christian community as the corresponding practice. Even its exceptions, for example, baptism of desire, require an implicit desire for such conversion.

Inclusive Universalism

A second approach points to the universal presence of God and God's grace throughout the world. Several contemporary proposals take this position, which also has historical roots. The early Christian apologists appealed to the notion of the *logos spermatikos* (germinal logos) to affirm the presence of Christian truth and revelation outside the confines of institutional Christianity. In the fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* appealed to a broader presence of Christian truth in discussing the plurality of religions.[31] According to Nicholas, only one God exists; therefore, only one religion and only one true worship of God exist. The one God, however, is sought in various ways, is given different names, and is worshiped differently in different religions. Nicholas identified the one true religion as Christianity, but he granted that non-Christians could discover the truths of Christianity as present within their own religions.

A contemporary proposal in this vein is Karl Rahner's interpretation of the universal presence of God's grace. All religions manifest the grace and salvation of Christ, but Christianity is

31. Nicholas of Cusa, *De pace fidei: On Interreligious Harmony,* trans. and ed. James E. Biechler and H. Lawrence Bond, Texts and Studies in Religion 55 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1990).

the high point of the historical religious evolution. Though God's grace is present in all religions, this presence is "inadequate" or "deficient" insofar as God's most complete and more explicit presence is in Christianity—the culminating symbol of God's grace.[32] Christianity is the explicit sign that makes manifest what is hidden or anonymous elsewhere.[33]

This approach does not so much demand conversion as demand *enlightenment*. It calls for the uncovering of implicit or anonymous structures of Christian truth represented in other religions. Such an approach tends to neglect the historical particularity of each religious tradition; this particularity is seen as an exemplification of a universal human nature. The transcendental conception of human nature, as in Karl Rahner's proposal, presupposes a transcendental uniformity of human nature that underlies and comes to expression not only in all world religions but also in nonreligious worldviews.

Pluralism

A third approach takes religious pluralism seriously by advocating either a perspectival (epistemological) or a "realistic" pluralism. A perspectival pluralism underscores that the object of religion transcends all human knowledge. Every religion, therefore, represents only a distinct perspective of the one and same reality.[34] A perspectival pluralism points to the one absolutely transcendent God behind all religions that cannot be adequately grasped by any particular human word, symbol, or belief. Every

32. Georg Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988). Only Hegel's first set of lectures correlates the history of religions with logic. The Christian religion is not the only final religious configuration. On this see Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 265–311.

33. Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations* (New York: Seabury, 1966), 5–34; idem, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," *Theological Investigations* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 12:161–78; and idem, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," *Theological Investigations* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 16:199–224.

34. Nicholas Rescher labels the former the "complex reality view" and the latter the "perspectival reality view" ("Philosophical Disagreement: An Essay towards Orientational Pluralism in Metaphilosophy," *Review of Metaphysics* 32 [1978]: 217–51).

language, symbol, and belief as human is a finite and inadequate perspective. The inadequacy of every religious perspective requires a pluralism of religions, each representing a distinctive and limited perspective. The symbols of Christian salvation are therefore the Christian perspective of the transcendent. The Christian claim to truth is represented through a particular perspective that needs to be complemented by other perspectives of the one transcendent reality.

This perspectivalism can be criticized for being insufficiently pluralistic.[35] When a perspectival or epistemological approach acknowledges the validity of diverse religions, it does so implicitly from the Christian viewpoint of God as infinitely transcendent. It then assumes that other religions represent in their own way this Christian, Neoplatonic, transcendent conception of God. A more radical anthropological or ontological pluralism would assert that the Buddhist notion of nothingness and the Hindu notion of religion express realities that are radically different from the Christian conception. These notions are not simply ways that different cultural and religious symbol-systems express the very same transcendence that Christianity professes. The nonbeing of Buddhism does not, for instance, correspond to the negative theology of some Western mystical traditions. Pluralism, then, should not be based either on the inadequacy of every religion to symbolize in its own way the one transcendent reality or on the multifaceted nature of that one reality. Instead pluralism should affirm that reality itself is pluralistic.

Advocates of either approach maintain the truth of the other religions. Truth is relational to each perspective so that what appears as true to one perspective may appear at first glance as untrue to another perspective. Once one acknowledges the limitations of one's own perspective, one can openly acknowledge the claims advanced from another perspective. Religions, there-

35. See Gordon Kaufman, "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

fore, need to converse with those sharing different perspectives and advocating different visions of reality. The diversity of perspectives and complexity of reality call for this dialogue. While one is justified in claiming the truth of one's own position, one is not justified in rejecting the truth of the other's position. Instead one enters into conversation and dialogue in order to grasp other viewpoints and even a more complex religious vision.

Though pluralism might appear as a genuine alternative to exclusivism, it too has failings. First, it reduces religion to a Western view of religion and makes it an object of consumer choice. Modern Western society is characterized by its market economy. Religion becomes a commodity within this market. The choice of religion, like the choice of values and goods, becomes a matter of individual preference. The advocacy of pluralism as the solution to interreligious dialogue may mirror Western society, its values, and its structure just as much as the other approaches mirror other societies. We must be cautious not to impose Western attitudes toward religion upon other cultures under the guise of advocating pluralism.

Second, pluralism does not deal adequately with the issues of religious truth, the criteria of truth, and the relation between religious truth and social practice, especially the practice of oppression and discrimination. Two examples will help here. In recent years many Christian theologians have argued that their churches should admit women to all ministerial offices. Yet theologians who argue pro or con within a particular community often balk at advocating such arguments when they are in dialogue with other religions. They refrain from such arguments lest they impose Western and North American prejudices. What, in this situation, has happened to truth? Another example: hardly anyone questions that the cults at Jonestown or Waco symbolized distorted forms of religious life. But doesn't such an assessment imply that one uses one's own religious, moral, and cultural criteria to judge other forms of religious life as systematically distorted?

Religious beliefs as interpretations of the ultimate meaning of reality raise truth claims about reality. Those claims often determine social, political, and personal life. Religious beliefs are not simply another perspective. Pluralism and dialogue involve more than each party stating, say, the location of an object.[36] To the extent that religious beliefs make truth claims about reality and those claims affect social and political praxis, they call for dialogue that challenges as well as accepts. If a religious conviction favors colonialism, militarism, classism, or sexism, then dialogue aims at communication—a communication with an interest in transforming that religious conviction and sociopolitical practice. Dialogue aims not merely at the acknowledgment of other positions but also at a transformative practice for oneself and for others.

REDEMPTION AS COMMUNICATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE

A constructive interpretation of redemption should work against the limitations of the above positions, explicate the significance of the belief in redemption for human life, and take into account the problem of oppressive power. Any attempt to get a fuller grasp of the nature of redemption also has to consider three presuppositions that plague modern understandings of it. A reconstruction of the meaning of redemption is not simply a reconstruction of the tradition; it also entails taking issue with these modernist background assumptions.

Inadequate Presuppositions

The first presupposition is the reduction of soteriology to the justification of the individual; the second, the ambiguity of the historical knowledge of Jesus; and the third, the conflict within modernity between universalism and historicism. A theologi-

36. Hilary Putnam tends to view diverse moral views as distinct and diverse logical mathematic worlds (*The Many Faces of Realism* [LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1987], 41–91).

cal reconstruction of the meaning of redemption stands against the background of these developments within the context of modernity.

Soteriology Reduced to Justification of the Individual

Christian theology has traditionally explicated the belief in Christ as redeemer or savior with diverse images, models, and ideas.[37] Nineteenth-century theologians sought to uncover the idea, principle, or essence underlying this diversity. One influential reduction has been the narrowing of redemption to justification, Albrecht Ritschl's influential history of redemption being a prime example. Emphasizing the justification of the individual human subject, it interpreted reconciliation and justification primarily in religious and moral categories and neglected or passed over lightly the cosmic and social soteriology of the ancient church.[38] Its major emphasis begins with Anselm's theory of satisfaction. A comparison to Ferdinand Christian Baur's more broadly conceived treatment shows the limitations of this approach.[39] Whereas Ritschl had related reconciliation to justification, Baur related reconciliation to redemption and analyzed such important classic themes as redemption from death and the devil as well as the notion of Christ's abolition of the distance between divine and human existence.

Despite such differences, both share the modernistic emphasis on "subjectivized" redemption by emphasizing the change

37. For a brief survey of Christian interpretations of redemption, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Redemption," in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1988), 836–51.

38. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1900). In contrast to my argument that modern theology has reduced redemption to justification, Carl E. Braaten has claimed that contemporary theology, especially liberation theology, has insufficiently focused on justification ("The Christian Doctrine of Salvation," *Interpretation* 35 [1981]: 117–44, esp. 129ff.).

39. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Versöhnung in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung von der ältesten Zeit bis auf die neueste* (Tübingen: Osianer, 1938). See Peter C. Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

within human subjectivity.[40] Except for religious socialism, the Social Gospel movement, and the recent emergence of political and liberation theology, much of modern theology has developed the significance of redemption in existential categories of religious justification or psychological wholeness to the neglect of the social and political dimensions of redemption.

Ambiguity of Historical Rationality

A specific rationality has come to dominate much of modernity. Empirical, instrumental, scientific, and technocratic are some of the labels used to describe this rationality that counts as knowledge only a certain kind of knowledge.[41] This rationality shaped the critique of traditional metaphysics and the emergence of historical criticism. It thereby profoundly affected language about God and the interpretation of Scriptures. The application of historical criticism to the materials in the Gospels produced ambiguous results. On the one hand, historical-critical study has provided more knowledge than ever before about the New Testament writings and their environment. On the other hand, this historical-critical study has produced a fourfold crisis in the foundations of Christian theology and of Christology.

First, historical studies questioned whether faith in Christ can be grounded by research into the historical Jesus or whether some other ground is necessary. It resulted in a distinction between the *Jesus of history* (what historical knowledge tells us about Jesus) and the *Christ of faith* (what the Christian community believes about Jesus).[42] Second, historical research has led to skepticism about the historical Jesus, and some conclude that one can know little about him.[43] Third, historical stud-

40. Gunther Wenz, *Geschichte der Versöhnungslehre in der evangelische Theologie der Neuzeit* (Munich: Kaiser, 1984), 2:14–41, 321–41.

41. Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

42. David Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

43. See Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 15–42.

ies have discovered that early Christian beliefs about Jesus and his salvific role existed in quite diverse strains and that traditional dogma had explicated only one or two of these strains.[44] Fourth, historical-critical approaches undercut popular religious readings of the Scriptures insofar as they claim that the expert reading is the only legitimate one. They thereby create a dichotomy between the academic as the correct interpretation of Scripture and the popular as uninformed interpretations.[45] Although theology needs to heed Schleiermacher's warning against relegating Christianity to the barbarians and learning to the atheists,[46] the problem today is that the "meaning" of the Scriptures is increasingly relegated to the expert philologist and historian and is less dependent upon the centrality of the Christ cult within the present community.[47]

Conflict between Universalism and Historicism

In addition to the subjectivization of redemption and the ambiguity of modern expert rationality, a third presupposition is the conflict between universalism and historicism. Critics of modernity and of modern theology attribute a monolithic and universal understanding of rationality to them. A much more accurate assessment is that modern theology faces the dilemma between universalism and historicism, between claims of universality and those of historical particularity. On the one hand, the early Enlightenment and Deism advocated a natural religion, stripped of the particularities of positive, revealed, and institutional religion. Though Schleiermacher responded to the Enlightenment by arguing that religion exists only in individual and concrete historical configurations, he grounded religion in the religious

44. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1979).

45. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Crisis of Scriptural Authority: Interpretation and Reception," *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 353–68.

46. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Two Letters: On the Glaubenslehre* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981).

47. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Writings on Theology and Religion,* ed. R. Morgan and Michael Pye (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), on the significance of the historical Jesus.

dimension of human experience and saw that dimension as basic and universal. Both the Enlightenment's natural theology and Schleiermacher's "experiential" grounding of religion could be considered a "substitutional universalism" insofar as they claim that what is particular is a universal; they substitute a particular experience as and for a universal one. On the other hand, the category of individuality and its application to historical cultural periods led to a historicist understanding of reality. The nineteenth-century historical school furthered this understanding through its historical-critical emphasis on contextuality. Each cultural period represents an individual configuration of history that has no claim upon other periods or other cultures. Consequently, modernity leaves us with an unresolved conflict, namely, the unresolved problem of the relation between universality and particularity.

Christian believers stand in a paradoxical relation to the unity and the multiplicity of the modern world. At no time before in its history has Christianity become more widespread. In previous centuries Christianity was primarily a European or a Mediterranean faith, whereas today the majority of Christians are non-European and non-Western. Yet previously Christians were confident of the alleged superiority of their Western culture and the potential universality of their faith, whereas today they are increasingly conscious of their particularity. If medieval Christianity could assume that almost everyone had heard the gospel, modern theology is aware of the particularity of Christianity and the force of cultural disparity.

Therefore, any reconstruction of redemption in categories of communicative and transformative practice not only should strive to go beyond the limitations of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism but should also avoid the reduction of redemption to individual subjective justification, escape the ambiguities of historical rationality, and deal with the conflict between universalism and particularism. I shall attempt such a reconstruction in three steps. First, a description of the diverse images of redemp-

tion within the Scriptures and tradition shows that redemption is not simply the subjective justification of individuals but entails a communicative and transformative practice. Second, the particularity of Christian faith is based upon the life-praxis of Jesus and its innovative reception within the constructive Christian imagination of the Christian communities that nurture and link their symbols of Christ with reconstructions of his life-praxis. This life-praxis, thereby, serves as a critical corrective and contrast to imperial, colonialist, and ideological exploitations of the Christ symbol. Finally, the universality implied in a Christian understanding of redemption should be neither particularistically exclusive nor universally inclusive but rather communicative so as to take seriously both the particularity and unity of humanity, as explicated in contemporary experience and in background assumptions about human nature.

Images of Redemption as a Transformative Praxis

The meaning of redemption is often narrowly interpreted in reference to linguistic studies and/or to the activity of Christ. A linguistic approach to interpreting redemption is much too narrow, even though the language about redemption is quite diverse and complex. Two Greek nouns (*lytrōsis* and *apolytrōsis*) are usually translated as "redemption," and the Greek verbs *lytrousthai, exagorzesthai,* and *hryesthai* are usually translated as "redeem."[48] The Greek word *katallagn*, however, is translated as "reconciliation," and the Latin Vulgate distinguished between *reconciliare* and *placare* or *expiare*. This difference eventually became lost. The noun *soteria* and the verb *sozo* (to save) are the usual terms to express salvation. The linguistic roots of the term "redemption" point to the buying or freeing of some person or thing; the meaning of the term "salvation" is much more complex.

48. See Martin Kahler, *Zur Lehre von der Versöhnung* (Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlag, 1937), 1–38.

Another limited focus interprets redemption from the perspective of the agent of redemption. One can outline four distinct conceptions of the work of Christ.[49] The first emphasizes the redemption that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ (Paul and Mark). Another type emphasizes that God's redemptive purposes are accomplished in Jesus Christ (Luke and the Acts of the Apostles). In another, Christ as preexistent is the active agent of redemption (Colossians and Ephesians). Finally, the fourth type sees redemption as mediated by Christ. All four accounts emphasize the agent of redemption or the role of God and Christ in interpreting human redemption.

A much broader interpretive approach is to survey the diverse images of redemption and salvation.[50] Redemption from sin and guilt is one image. Other images are found in the stories about Jesus' practice of healing: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead rise, and the possessed are liberated. Such images point to personal healing and making whole. Other images are political images of liberation. The Book of Revelation envisions redemption as liberation and salvation as a new world freed from Roman imperial domination and oppression. These diverse images show that redemption embraces not only sin and personal life but also political and social life, the cosmos and the world of nature.[51] The breadth of classical images of redemption shows diverse and changing conceptions.[52] It contrasts starkly to modern systematic presentations limiting redemption to justification.

A more comprehensive accounting of the meaning of redemption would have to include the following elements. First, redemp-

49. Arland J. Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).
50. For creative reinterpretation of the Christ symbol, see Mark Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990).
51. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Redemption as Liberation: Rev. 1:5–6 and 5:9–10," in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); and idem, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).
52. See Gisbert Geschake, "Der Wandel der Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Theologiegeshichte," in *Erlösung und Emanzipation*, ed. Leo Scheffczyk (Freiburg: Herder, 1973).

tion must be seen in relation to *God*. Redemption as freedom from sin and guilt signifies that human fault and misdoing do not affect only the individual human self or only a partial aspect of human life, existence, and value. Instead human misdoing affects the web of life in its very ultimacy and transcendence. Hence redemption requires a transformation not only of the human self but also of the relation of the self to the ultimacy and transcendence of life. Redemption takes place not only when we are changed but also when the very web of life is changed, as traditional theology sought to explicate when it combined subjective and objective versions of redemption. Since sin is not simply a developmental inadequacy or lack of knowledge but a distortion of reality, redemption is not simply a maturation or the obtaining of insight but rather the transformation of the structures of reality away from their systemic distortions. In classical Latin *Conservator* was the term for savior. The *Conservator* guaranteed salvation insofar as it preserved the sacred order of the world and preserved the empire in the face of war and barbarity. Since Christians did not envision salvation as preserving what had been achieved, they replaced the term *Conservator* with *Salvator*.[53] Salvation is not conservation or maturation but liberation and transformation.

Second, it is necessary to understand that redemption affects the whole human person so that persons become what they should be. Redemption is not an external change imposed upon persons but affects the core of a person's being. In the words of Karl Rahner: "Indeed the Christian faith considers redemption in the normal human situation not simply that which through God's act simply affects humans while bypassing human freedom. Instead redemption is the definitiveness of human freedom, even though redemption is indeed first of all God's act."[54] The

freedom of redemption is not primarily a negative freedom, as it is often interpreted—that is, it is not freedom from sin, the law, death, or the devil. Instead redemption involves primarily a *positive freedom* entailing *solidarity* with God and with fellow humans.

Third, it is necessary to affirm that redemption affects *corporeality* and relates to the world of nature. Images of redemption are neither individualist nor spiritual—they do not exclude bodily existence within the world of nature. Redemption affects humans in their corporeality and worldliness. The imagery of healing from physical illness is a basic sign and symbol of redemption that extends beyond a person's individual physical existence to her or his relation to nature. Prophetic imagery refers to a heaven and a new earth.

Fourth, redemption must be seen as affecting humans in their historical, social, and political existence. The images of the reign or kingdom of God are key New Testament metaphors that speak of salvation in social and political categories. Insight into the apocalyptic origin of language regarding the kingdom of God in the New Testament has led Rudolf Bultmann to demythologize this imagery into a call for an existential decision. Such an approach cuts short the apocalyptic imagery, as does an interpretation that translates such imagery into individualistic moral categories or into transcendent ecclesial categories. Apocalyptic and eschatological language contains a diversity of images and a pluralism of interpretations.[55] Apocalyptic language is more appropriately interpreted in, but not reduced to, social and political categories.[56] The kingdom of God embraces freedom, peace, and justice not only for the individual but also for humanity and the

Andreas Bsteh (Mödling: St. Gabriel, 1982), 112–127; quotation from p. 113. See the survey in Thomas Propper, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 2d ed. (Munich: Kösel, 1988).

55. For a survey, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Eschatology of the NT," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 271–77.

56. See Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), esp. 119–35; and idem, *The Emergent Church* (New York: Seabury, 1986), 82–94.

53. H. U. Instinksy, *Die alte Kirche und das Heil des Staates* (Munich: Kösel, 1963), 28ff. Joseph Ratzinger, "Vorfragen zu einer Theologie der Erlösung" in *Erlösung und Emanzipation,* 141–55.

54. For the relation between redemption and human freedom, see Karl Rahner, "Das christliche Verständnis der Erlösung," in *Erlösung in Christentum und Buddhismus,* ed.

world. Christian redemption and salvation imply not only a positive freedom and reconciliation but also a solidarity between all humans and all of God's creation.

Particularity as Critical: Interpreting Jesus' Praxis

Appeals to Jesus are limited in many modern scholarly approaches to Christology. Some limit their appeal in part because of their skepticism in the face of the difficulty of distinguishing between what has originated in the proclamation of the Christian community and what goes back to the historical Jesus. Such skepticism contrasts with the appeals to Jesus within popular religious piety. It also contrasts with the appeals in various liberation theologies to the practice of Jesus as a resource of resistance to destructive oppression. Others limit their appeals to the historical Jesus for ideological reasons. Charles Davis argues that the historical particularity of Jesus is the basis for Christian exclusiveness.[57] A post-Christian critique might argue that the symbols based on Jesus' life, crucifixion, and death can become symbols justifying suffering and victimization. Ernst Bloch, for example, maintains that Luther's theology of the cross served this function when preached to the rebellious peasants. Some feminists view the maleness of Jesus as a significant obstacle or note that appeals to Jesus' suffering and obedience serve to urge women (more often than males) to sacrifice themselves or their aspirations.

If, however, one interprets the crucifixion and death of Jesus as a consequence of his life, preaching, and praxis, then one obtains a leverage point to place into check ideological symbolizations of Christ and to discover a resource for resistance.[58] A major problem, leading to colonial and ideological use of Christian symbols,

57. Charles Davis, *Christ and the World Religions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 41.
58. See my essay "Critical Social Theory and Christology," *Proceedings of the CTSA* 30 (1975): 63–110.

is precisely their dislocation from the historical concreteness of the life and praxis of Jesus. The symbolization of Christ has been diverse throughout the history of Christianity: Christ as King, Christ as Lord, Christ as Ruler, Christ as Sovereign. These symbols stand in contrast with the historical life of Jesus, even allowing for awareness of the limitations and interpretive character of all historical research. Consequently, one should attempt historical reconstructions of Jesus' life and practice not simply as a moral example but also as an individual historical communicative and critical praxis. The tension between such tentative historical reconstructions and symbolizations cut off from such historical reconstruction is healthy; even though the historical Jesus does not ground the symbol Christ, it provides a check upon the christological symbols and provides historical resources for further symbolic interpretations.

The historical particularity of Jesus can serve as a critical corrective to Christian symbols of Christ. The preaching and life-praxis of Jesus, although attainable only through revisable historical reconstructions, portray Jesus in ways that contrast with imperialistic symbolizations of Christ. Imagery and language about Christ as King, as Victor, and as Lord are triumphalistic and can become imperialistic if they are disassociated from the historical imagery of Jesus as one in solidarity with outcasts from the society and as a victim of the existing power structures. Likewise the images of Jesus' practice of a ministry of healing and inclusion countervails exclusionary practices, even though Jesus' life-praxis was limited to the extent that he most probably understood his mission solely and primarily as directed at Israel. Jesus' practice of including sinners, tax collectors, and women among his disciples points to an inclusive practice that can become even more inclusive. Because the proclamation and life-praxis of Jesus led to his crucifixion and because that crucifixion was, most probably, a consequence of this solidarity with outcasts—a solidarity concretely narrated in diverse gospel accounts—a theology of the cross cannot legitimate victimization,

oppression, and colonization unless it is isolated from Jesus' life-practice.

Redemption as Communicative and Practical

The issue is to interpret the particularity and universality implied in a Christian understanding of redemption in a way that takes seriously the danger of exploitation and colonialism. To do so, Christian redemption must not be understood in developmental or in perfectionist terms, as if the Christian understanding of redemption is the high point toward which other religions tend. Nor should it be interpreted as in the thesis of anonymous Christianity, whereby Christianity is a real symbol of what is universally implicit. Nor should it be understood as a mere concrete exemplification of a universal human religiousness. Christian redemption needs to be explicated as a communicative claim and praxis of what is historically concrete. There are warrants for this from our experience in the world, from background theories about universality and particularity, and from an interpretation of the Christian tradition.

Our experience within the contemporary world provides us with rather *complex warrants* regarding the issue of universality and particularity. On the one hand, we are increasingly conscious of the particularity of diverse cultures, religious beliefs, life-habits, and political organizations. On the other hand, telecommunication and travel increasingly make the world into a global village. For example, during an earthquake in Armenia or floods in Bangladesh, one can more easily communicate between New York and a stricken village via television than between one side of the village and the other. We face a similar dilemma concerning our culture. At a time when postmodern trends in cultural criticism underscore particular narratives over against metatheories, diverse cultures realize the unity of the earth in the ecocrisis. All cultures must face the challenge of the survival of the earth.

The warrants to be drawn from the experience of this inter-

mingling of global unity and increased particularity point toward a theological position that moves away from two approaches: one that simply points to the historicity and particularity of individual religious conviction for the sake of radical plurality and one that undermines particularity with its advocacy of a simple unity of humanity. Instead this religious formulation has to explicate at the same time both the particularity of one's own culture and religious beliefs and its relation to the global unity. Any articulation of the meaning of Christ as savior has to take into account both the unity of humankind and its radical diversity. The christological and soteriological problem then becomes the awareness of the interrelation as well as tension between the unity of humankind and particular diversity. Particularity and pluralism need to be understood in a way that they do not undercut the solidarity and co-humanity of humans. To the extent that religious beliefs are lived beliefs and affect social and political life, the diversity of religions crisscrosses with the imperatives of ecological, economic, and political life. This position, thereby, takes seriously the postmodern critique of Eurocentrism and does not understand the unity of humanity within the individualistic categories of the modern European West but rather understands it as based on solidarity with others.

Theological interpretations of redemption have often assumed specific *background theories* about human nature. They have either assumed a nonhistorical transcendental essence of human nature or an evolving human nature, or they have dissolved human nature into the particularities of specific cultures and time periods. It seems more adequate to talk about human nature with the help of a concept of historical individuality that does not fall into either the radical particularism of the historical school or the universalism in which the historically concrete is just a specific example of a universal human nature. In dealing with historical events and historical persons, one needs testimony to document the individual historical events. The genre of testimony documents singularity and yet displays a surplus of

meaning that is communicative and open to new receptions and interpretations.[59]

These two observations underscore that the Christian claim to unicity should not be explicated in the categories of either individuality or universality.[60] Individuality presupposes an incommensurability between individuals and views the other as wholly other. Consequently, one's own religious beliefs appear to the other as foreign and incommensurable, just as the other's beliefs and practices are foreign and incommensurable. The necessity of dealing with truth claims and their significance for practice is minimized. Universality presupposes an underlying common human nature and practice. It undercuts diversity and plurality, which are reduced to a fundamental oneness.

Instead unicity expresses an unconditionality of the communicative claim of a historical particularity. What is historically particular remains historically particular, and yet in raising truth claims, it raises what is communicative insofar as these claims are brought before others, for their acceptance or rejection. The power of the symbol is its location in history, in a community, and in cult. The unicity of the historical stands over against the universality, though the universal enables the symbolic to develop. A dialogical and conversational model does not necessarily imply a pluralism in which there are no claims of truth and norms. It implies instead entering into a dialogue where one expects one's claims to be acknowledged as well as challenged and where one challenges others as well. Even though one affirms that no abstract universal (rational, ethical, or religious) standards exist that can assess religious differences, such an affirmation should not mean that no criteria exist or that one cannot raise issues of truth or value within an interreligious dialogue. Unconditionality and unicity are therefore not simply expressions of individuality but are expressed in the commu-

nicative act of raising claims. The affirmation of the unicity of the historically particular checks claims that reduce the particular to simply a manifestation of the universal and therefore impose the particular upon the other. The Christian affirmation of the historical conditioning of Jesus underscores the unicity of Jesus. Christian theology seeks to elaborate Jesus' significance for the other while at the same time acknowledging Jesus' particularity.[61]

Jesus is not simply an example of a universal human nature; nor is Christianity simply an example of human religiousness. Jesus is a historical individual; Christianity is a historical religion. The redemption that Christians seek to proclaim and to live is a historical and individual configuration, but one seeking to be communicative. Christian redemption and salvation are the transformative praxis of the Christian vision—a vision that is to be put into practice and communicated. The vision is therefore neither individual nor universal but communicative, for it is a particular vision and praxis that are raised with a communicative and practical claim.[62] The symbol of Christ is a symbol of the historical Jesus. The symbol incorporates and seeks to communicate the particular, which in turn is known only through symbolization. The tension between the historical Jesus and the symbolic Christ is a tension between, on the one hand, what is a historical source and critical corrective of the symbolic and, on the other hand, the symbolic as a communicative opening of the particular to new meanings and references, to new interpretations that make possible new receptions and understandings and hence a pluralistic Christology.[63]

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59. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).
60. See Carl E. Braaten, "The Person of Jesus Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), esp. 1:557–69.

61. The term "absoluteness" is unfortunate insofar as it stems from *absolvere*, removed from limits.
62. See my explanation in relation to transcendental and hermeneutical approaches to religion in "Theology: Transcendental or Hermeneutical?" *Horizons* 16 (1989): 329–41.
63. For an important analysis of sign, see Rebecca Chopp, *The Power to Speak* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AS COMMUNITIES
OF DISCOURSE AND PRAXIS

Christian believers have a double social location: within their churches and within their contemporary culture. The Christian faith originated within the early Christian communities with their affirmation of Jesus as the center of their community life. This faith lives on and is nurtured in the life and cult of these Christian communities.[64] When Christians explicate the meaning of their faith, they explicate a faith with roots in a historical community. Their faith depends upon the historical conditions and social effects of that community just as much as it relates to the historical conditions and social effects of modern culture.

The problem of modern Christianity, Ernst Troeltsch argued, is not simply intellectual but also a matter of community. "This lack of community and cult is the real sickness of modern Christianity and contemporary religious practice generally. It is what makes it so impermanent and chaotic, so dependent upon who happens to be there, so much an amateur thing for enthusiasts, so much a matter of world-view and the intellect."[65] Along with this lack of community, modern Christianity has to contend with the historicity of the Christian tradition, the social conditions and effects of its beliefs, the diversity and validity of other religious traditions, and the interrelation between the criteria for the assessment of religious beliefs and the criteria of its culture. The meaning of the Christian faith in Jesus should be explicated with full awareness of the historical and social nature not only of Christianity but also of other religions.

Such a task faces both the pluralism and historicism of modern culture as well as the challenge of political oppression and economic exploitation. Since Christian communities have come into existence as interpretive communities, both re-creatively recep-

tive and communicative of the presence and life-praxis of Jesus, their task is to place their interpretive reception and interpretation of Jesus into a transformative and redemptive practice. Hence the Christian communities take up the communicative task of the realization of the redemptive praxis represented through their affirmation of Christ. This task entails an understanding of redemption that involves ultimacy, freedom, corporeality, and political and social transformation. It entails Christian communities taking as criteria of their praxis reconstructions of the praxis of Jesus; even if these are new and creative, they still provide clues to answer questions about the possibility and criteria of limiting power. As communities of interpretation and practice, churches raise with their convictions validity claims not only about the ultimate meaning of reality but also about how that meaning should transform personal, social, and political reality. Because their claims affect the ultimate meaning of reality and the intersection of this meaning with social and political reality, the churches necessarily engage other visions of reality and practice.

Modern political and liberation theologies underscore the public and political nature of Christian faith. To the extent that they interpret salvation neither in otherworldly nor in individualistic categories, they make the problem of domination acute. Their emphasis on the option for the poor, the victimized, and the oppressed offers a corrective to the problem of dominative power.[66] The intertwinement of belief and power calls for a response that is as much practical as theoretical. It calls as much for the transformation of the Christian communities and their practice as for a reinterpretation of redemption.

This relation between theory and practice has been well formulated by Gotthold Lessing's "Parable of the Three Rings."[67]

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64. Ernst Troeltsch has noted that "the truth is that almost all forms of contemporary religiosity are variations of what was nurtured in the churches; only here are the treasures of religion alive" (*Writings*, 193).

65. Ibid., 194.

66. On interpretation of suffering, see Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986).

67. In act 3 of his drama *Nathan Wise* (1779). See Henry Allison's interpretation in *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1966).

Saladin asks Nathan about the truth of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Nathan avoids answering. But Saladin pushes him, for one must be responsible for what one believes. The parable is Nathan's response, and it disallows a simple or unambiguous answer to whether one, none, or all is true. The parable answers in terms of the practice of life—religion is true if its adherents in their life and practice show that they possess the power of God's revelation. Yet no one of the religions exhibits such an exemplary life-practice that singles it out above the others. Perhaps all do not have the true ring. The parable views the contention among the religions as theoretically unanswerable. The life-praxis of the diverse religions could in the future display the answer. The answer is left to a future praxis and to a future and greater judge than human reason and criteria.

SUSAN BROOKS THISTLETHWAITE AND
PETER CRAFTS HODGSON

12. THE CHURCH, CLASSISM, AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY

Working people are likely to cling to a hierarchical, authoritarian, fixed social order, which ironically has been the source of their victimization. They do so because of the precariousness of life in an age when the dream is being betrayed all around them. They cling to a privatized religion removed from their worldly struggles because in their private realm they can be themselves, the real self or "soul" can live and the wounds be forgotten. They adopt the upwardly mobile values and religious orientation of those above them because of their tenacious belief that in the end the dream will "save" them. In other words, their religious expressions have been colonized or become captive to the dynamics of domination from which they seek salvation.
—Karen Bloomquist, *The Dream Betrayed*

Why do many economically burdened Americans consistently vote to maintain economic policies that continue to disadvantage them? According to Karen Bloomquist, they do so because they identify themselves with those who have "made it," who have attained the American dream of economic security. They are unable to see their social class for what it is and to identify the forces that keep them in that class. Further, Bloomquist argues, their religious faith is "colonized," that is, invaded by these same dominant class values, and therefore their faith only further blinds them to their real economic condition.[1] In fact, in identify-

1. Karen Bloomquist, *The Dream Betrayed: Religious Challenge of the Working Class* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 48; see 47–53.