equally new moment breaks upon us as a group of Roman Catholic Indians, trained in the finest theological faculties of Europe and North America and having returned to India and earned doctorates in the Hindu tradition at Benares, Madras, and Pune, now begin their theological task.

My response to Paul Knitter and my colleagues dealing with interreligious understanding seeks clarification and further development along these lines. (1) Should we not retain the categories of universality and the normative in order to understand better how other religious traditions continually form us and reform us as we form and reform them? (2) Would not a more anthropological model, rooted in the sacramental principle, aid us to grasp better what happens when religious people meet, experience, and seek understanding? (3) Should we not look upon religious experience doubly-determined with coefficients from two faith traditions as the new hermeneutical situation from which a future theology emerges?

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AUTHOR'S RESPONSE

"You asked for it," said my wife after she read the five perspectives in this symposium. She is right, and I am grateful. I wrote No Other Name? to ask a question and invite a response—the question mark on the title page is meant with utter seriousness. In the book I wanted to formulate as lucidly as possible what I think is a pressing, though often unconfronted, question for Christian belief and practice and then to propose what I think is a viable, though still controversial, answer to that question. My answer, though, is still part of the question. Whether the proposed "theocentric model" (or something like it) is valid for the Christian academy and ecclesia will depend, in great measure, on how much it merits the "placet" or (to be realistic) the "placet juxta modum" of my theological colleagues and fellow believers.

I am grateful to Horizons for helping this ecclesial-theological process along. And I am most grateful to my five colleagues for the seriousness and candor with which they gave me what I asked for. In what follows I hope to express how much they have left me enlightened, chastened, and confirmed. I am arranging my response according to the three general categories into which, I think, their comments and criticisms fall.

Fidelity

In a number of ways, my fidelity is in question—fidelity to Christianity in general, to the New Testament witness, to the sensus fidelium,
to historical research. In this regard, I am not sure whether Daniel Sheridan's comments are the most serious, but they certainly are the most sweeping and hard-hitting. (I felt buried!) I suspect that the reason he is so totally displeased with my project is that he rejects the validity not only of my answers but of the very question. Perhaps this is what makes our drummers not only different but so loud that it is difficult to hear each other.

Sheridan asks whether my "unitarian theocentrism" merits the name Christian. While I can understand that he would question the Christian quality of some of my views, I cannot understand how he can call my theocentrism "unitarian." Throughout the last three chapters I try to show how in the theocentric model Jesus Christ remains both essential to Christian life and universally relevant for all times. Theocentrism goes beyond (sublates?), but it does not destroy, Christocentrism (p. 166). And if in posing such views, I have, as Sheridan tells me, been unecumenical toward my fellow Christians and failed to respect their integrity, I can only sincerely apologize where I have done so. But again, I have trouble recognizing my sin. I took great pains to represent as accurately and as sensitively as possible the views of my fellow Christians (and Evangelical friends have complimented me for doing so); but I have also tried clearly to point out where I think these views are inadequate or inconsistent with Christian tradition. As Sheridan, I think, would agree, we need to be honest and straightforward in our dialogue.

William Collinge questions whether I am faithful to the "very diversity of the New Testament theological frameworks" all of which "express the uniqueness and absoluteness of Jesus." While I would point out that uniqueness seems to be a much less important ingredient in some of these frameworks (e.g., Logos christologies) than in others (e.g., Maranatha christologies), I still fail to see how abundant diversity lessens the significance of my arguments for distinguishing between the New Testament's basic message (God has truly spoken in Jesus) and its cultural expression (God has spoken only in Jesus). If (and this "if" is open to question, I know) the New Testament is pervaded by what Lonergan calls a "classicist culture" and if all the language of the New Testament is what Krister Stendahl terms confessional or love language that unavoidably speaks in "absolutes," then one would not be surprised that all the diverse frameworks in the New Testament would be marked by absolutist and unique claims. In this view, however, such absolutist claims belong more to the historical-cultural context than to the substance of the message.

Also, Collinge tunes to the "sensus fidelium" and asks whether I am faithful to the lex orandi and its roots in an exclusive or normative Christology. (A. Dulles and M. Hellwig would resonate with his concerns.) I would have to ask, in return, whether the lex orandi has to be so rooted and, more significantly, whether it actually is. I suspect that there
are many Christians whose devotion to Jesus would not be substantially jeopardized if they knew that Buddha might be considered, from a Christian perspective, a "savior" for Buddhists.

Sheridan charges that I am unfaithful to, or insufficiently aware of, the "detailed information" from the sciences of religion. Here I must recognize the limitations of my training and identity. Although I have carried on an informal study of Eastern religions over the past fifteen years, I remain what is called a systematic theologian, not a historian of religions. I need the corrective advice of specialists like Sheridan and William Cenkner. Still, with my mentor Karl Rahner, I also believe that in working out a Christian understanding of other religions, certain dogmatic foundations need be laid before (or while) one takes up the actual task of studying or dialoguing with them. Also, I strongly suspect that preestablished theological perspectives (e.g., that all other religions are untrue or incomplete) can easily cloud one's ability to be open to and really listen to what other believers may be saying. Even studious historians of religions might, unconsciously, be so limited by their own theology. That is one purpose of my book—to clear away possible theological impediments to dialogue. While openness without detailed information about the religions can well lead to "irrelevant abstractions," at the same time, information without openness may never really be heard or appreciated. Sheridan's concern cuts both ways.

What's Wrong with Uniqueness Anyway?

Four of the respondents harmonized, on very different notes, in asking me the same question: must traditional claims that Christ is God's final, unsurpassable, and normative word be an obstacle to Christian participation in dialogue? Maybe I have worked myself needlessly into a doctrinal dither. But when my colleagues go on to explain what they mean, they either do not calm my dither or their explanations of traditional claims do not sound very traditional. Denise Lardner Carmody, William Loewe, and Sheridan stress that traditional understandings of Jesus as unique incarnation or definitive bringer of salvation still allow Christians to be open "to the world" (Sheridan), "to Buddha or Lord Krishna) (Carmody) and to the Spirit working in other believers (Loewe). Fine, but that is not my problem. Such openness is a laudable characteristic of what I call the Roman Catholic Model. My difficulties arise when Christians in interreligious dialogue or study, after proclaiming and practicing their openness to others, go on to say (either to the others or only to themselves) that in Christ they have God's one final and normative word; such a dialogue, it seems to me, no matter how open and sensitive one might be, ends up as a conversation between the cat and the mouse. Not only is the cat the preestablished winner, but also it
will be difficult for the cat, during the dialogue, really to listen and learn from the mouse, especially when the mouse says something that does not fit the cat's "last word."

Carmody points out that belief in the finality of Christ means "that Christians believe that everything essential or required for salvation occurred in Jesus Christ." If she can also allow Christians, as I think she does, to affirm that everything essential for salvation may (as a possibility) have occurred in other religious figures, then she is ready for dialogue. But then, I think, she has gone beyond the traditional understanding of the finality of Christ. And when Loewe argues that Christians can engage in "genuine openness" to other traditions because the "humanity of the eternal Son" is "historically limited," he seems to be implying that the finality and normativity of Christ is limited. Claims for a limited finality are, no doubt, less of an impediment to dialogue. But I am not sure what they mean. I have the same difficulty with Collinge's suggestion that Christians "do not fully know . . . what it means for Jesus to be . . . the fullness of salvation," and that therefore they need to dialogue with other believers. If we do not know what full or final salvation means, why should we—or how can we—claim that we possess it?

Sheridan will indulge in no such interpretative "sublating" of the finality of Christ as constitutive cause of all salvation, for otherwise, he argues, the metaphysical basis for God's salvific will is lost. But I do not understand why. Might there not be another metaphysical basis for God's salvific will—such as the nature of divinity as love?

In all my christological questions about uniqueness and normativity I am not trying to do away with "the categories of universality and the normative," as Cenkner seems to think. He is right, such categories are essential within all religions for understanding how they "continually form and reform us." My term "nonnormative Christology" is, I see, misleading. I am not questioning norms simpliciter, but absolute or one-and-only norms—norms that have to be exclusive or at least inclusive of all others. In my proposed model, Jesus remains universally normative, but I am asking whether Christians can recognize that other revelations or revealers might also be universally normative. Could there be a complementary uniqueness among the religious traditions of the world? To try to answer that question, "intellectual conversion," as Carmody suggests, is a requisite. But it will have to be an intellectual conversion that walks more than "the way to Nicea and Chalcedon." We will have to remove our scotoses and really be attentive, intelligent, and reasonable regarding the data and the witness from other traditions. As I urge in Chapter 10, only on the basis of the praxis of authentic dialogue—grounded in intellectual, moral, and religious conversion—can we know the uniqueness of Christ.
Theocentrism—The Way To Go?

Here we enter the area of what I think are the most productive questions—and where I am most chastened. Cenkner takes up Loewe's lead and lays bare the difficulties in trying to fashion theocentrism into a common ground and goal for interreligious dialogue. I could respond that I held up theocentrism only as a hypothesis, that I meant it only for Christian consumption (not to be imposed on Buddhists in the dialogue), and that the "Theos" of theocentrism is not necessarily the personal God of theism. But such retorts would not go to the heart of Cenkner's concern. In the end I have to agree with his reservations about a theocentric dialogue or a theocentric christology. But I change my mind not so much because I am convinced that a theocentric model cannot work but, more so, because Cenkner and many others have shown me that another model can work much better. Carmody's stress on praxis over doctrine and Cenkner's case for a sacramental model do, I agree, offer a better starting point and basis that can create a "new hermeneutical situation" and even allow people to experiment with "binary religious experience."

But I want to clarify their suggestions, perhaps even go a step further. Cenkner's anthropocentric sacramental model can be an even more effective basis for dialogue if understood as a soteriocentric liberative model. Theologians of religions must begin to listen to theologians of liberation. It is, I suggest, the preferential option for the poor and nonperson—i.e., the praxis of human, socio-economic liberation—that today can best provide a common cross-cultural, cross-religious locus for religious experience, a common ground and goal for dialogue, a new hermeneutical situation and possibility of mutual understanding. If, as I argue in the book, there has been in Christian approaches to other faiths an evolution from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism to theocentrism, it is now time to move on to soteriocentrism.

A soteriocentric model would enable us to grapple with the difficult issues of category application raised by Loewe and Sheridan and of the nature of truth raised by Collinge. True, there is a great danger of imposing our religious categories, either traditional or watered-down, on other, very different traditions. And I admit to the personal propensity to rush into category comparisons where analytic philosophers fear to tread. Yet, eventually, we must compare and evaluate our symbols and categories; we must ask about the relation between moksha and satori and justificatio—are they, as I suspect, complementary both-and's or contradictory either-or's? Such comparisons and judgments can, I think, be made more effectively and less dangerously if done on the basis of shared liberative praxis with and for the poor and nonpersons. Expanding on Merton's terminology, not just mystical communion but
also liberative communion must precede our doctrinal or categorical communication.

Such a soteriocentric approach to interreligious study and dialogue, I must admit, would not work very well with Sheridan's primarily eschatological understanding of salvation. While the "reality of salvation" must be distinguished from the "experience of salvation," they cannot be separated. And while salvation consists of more than "authentic human life," it is inadequate without this human, this-worldly component. Where the glory of God is sung by oppressed and impoverished human beings, salvation (the beginning of the Kingdom) has not yet really arrived; God's salvific will is, in such situations, partially "inefficacious." That's the point of liberation theology. And if religious people from different traditions can agree on this point—that salvation/enlightenment must bring about both personal and societal transformation now—they will have a basis-in-praxis for interreligious communion and communication.

Responding to Carmody's tease, I confess that "the marvelous image" of many ways to the center was rooted in my archetypal depths, and this allowed me to subconsciously plagiarize it from the title of one of the best "introduction to world religions" textbooks that I know. With soteria as the center, the image is more marvelous than ever: many very different ways, acting and searching together for a center never fully realized or defined.

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