

tematically from biblical or historical scholarship; still others gain insight from dialogue with theologians in Third World and Fourth World countries. There is no longer just one theology.

The outcome of these three tectonic shifts—American, lay, pluralistic—is not totally clear. But their occurrence marks this period as different from that which preceded the past quarter century. Furthermore, the ongoing confluence of these three shifts already sets a certain direction and inspires dreams for theology in the decades ahead. Despite these dreams, the bleak mood of my opening vignette returns with the realization that theology in an American voice is still in a fledgling state. Investigations and firings of theologians who use new idioms have already occurred at the hands of the Roman Curia and episcopal magisterium. If the original norms of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* are juridically enforced, then the fledgling could be crushed, or at least seriously disabled. It has happened before to the detriment of other local churches and I long ago lost the innocence of thinking we might be spared.

However, we are here to celebrate an anniversary of a journal that has charted and contributed to the growth of theology in American voices. And so I dare to hope and say: the next quarter century will witness a vital theology spoken by many new voices, even in the teeth of opposition: by lay as well as ordained, by married as well as single persons, by women as well as men, and by Hispanic, African-American, and Asian-American as well as Euro-American citizens. It will be theology done in a genuine American idiom, allowing a pluralistic church's various experiences of God to nourish the interpretation of the great Catholic heritage. It will be a theology responsive to American questions and challenging to American sinfulness, serving the search for God in this technological, pluralistic, multireligious society. Finally, if it does its job well, it will grow into a theology that will serve the world church by a prophetic, compassionate sensitivity to the many dimensions of liberty, equality, and justice for all, so that the least among the people of the world can benefit.

## **A DIALOGICAL CHURCH: NEWLY BORN AND STILL GROWING**

**Paul F. Knitter  
Xavier University**

As I look back over the past quarter century, since the birthing of *Horizons*, I witness, from my personal theological perch, the concomitant birthing of what we might call a "dialogical church." Since the

theological watershed of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, there has begun in the church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, a sea-change in its relationships with other religions. In this "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," a Christian church did something that no Christian church had ever done before in its two-millennia journey through history: it affirmed the divinely given truth and value of other religions and then called upon its sons and daughters, "prudently and lovingly" to engage in "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions" (NA 2). This shift (some might call it an about-face) in Christian attitudes gave birth to a new kind of church—a church that gradually has come to understand itself as a religious community in conversation with other religious communities.

This birthing process was in its first phases when *Horizons* was born. During the 1970s the recently founded Vatican Secretariate for Non-Christian Religions began to carry out the mandate of *Nostra Aetate*—prudently and lovingly, but also creatively and boldly—to organize, and then publish the results of, meetings with persons who for much of church history had been viewed as *pagani* and subjects for conversion, not conversation. This dialogical outreach from "top-down," began to have its effects "from bottom-up." In dioceses throughout the church's vineyard, especially in so-called mission lands, there grew up offices or committees for "ecumenical and inter-religious affairs"; on the parish level, if not all parishes formed groups to study or actually meet with persons of other faiths, most did take on a new way of looking at or speaking about other religious communities. "Our brothers and sisters" no longer referred only to Protestants but also to Muslims, Jews, Buddhists. The term "pagan," so prevalent in sermons and collections for starving babies, has retreated for the most part from the Christian vocabulary. In fact, given the growing dialogical consciousness and the effects of actually getting to know and appreciate persons of other faiths, even the Vatican has changed its language: in 1989, the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions became the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue.

Over the years, this growth of a dialogical church has also produced its effects in the theology of the Magisterium. Even though the bishops of Vatican II recognized the "rays of truth" shining in other religious communities, they could not get themselves to declare, clearly and explicitly, that these other religions could be *viae salutis*, actual instruments of saving grace. In recent magisterial statements, however, the momentum of dialogue has evidently inspired greater theological courage. The 1991 joint declaration of the Vatican Commission on Interreligious Dialogue and of the Congregation for the Evangelization of

Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP), explicitly announced that through the “sincere practice” of their own traditions, Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims can “receive salvation.” These other religious paths therefore play “a providential role in the divine economy of salvation” (see #29 and 17). Even more clearly, the International Theological Commission in its statement on “Christianity and World Religions” of 1997 declared that the religions have a “certain salvific function” and are “a means [*mezzo*] which helps for the salvation of their adherents” (#84, 87; see *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) #55). This is a theological giant step from the 1970s.

This giant-stepping continues. In the two mentioned documents, RM and DP, the Catholic Church holds up something else it had never previously affirmed: that *dialogue*—real dialogue in which both sides learn and are changed—makes up an essential part of the *mission of the church*. In other words, Catholic missionaries, to carry out their job, must not only *preach*, they must also *listen*, not only *teach* but also *learn*. “There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other. . . . Both [dialogue and proclamation] are . . . necessary” (DP #6, 77, 2; RM #55-57). And therefore the International Theological Commission can announce: “The religious dialogue is connatural to the Christian vocation” (#114). If we are not dialoguing with those who are religiously different from us, we are not really Christian! Readers of the first issues of *Horizons* would have expected such statements to come from wildy liberal theologians, not from the Vatican.

What has been happening in the Catholic Church institutionally has also been going on in my own personal life. Interreligious dialogue has become “connatural” to my Christian vocation. While my own experience does not mirror that of the majority of Catholics, it does reflect what many Catholics and Christians in general are feeling. I can honestly say, I hope without exaggerating, that today it would be hard for me to understand and practice my Christian faith without my ongoing dialogue with Buddhism. It is a dialogue that includes study, conversations with Buddhists, daily practice of meditation. Through my exploration of the Buddhist experience pointed to in the symbols of *anicca*, *anatta*, *Sunyata*, Buddha-nature, I have come to understand more clearly my Christian belief in the God-world relation, the paradox of free will and grace, the essential link between personal and social transformation; most importantly, Buddhist teachings on mindfulness and the no-self have enabled me to feel and live more deeply the core of Christian existence: the experience of being “in Christ Jesus”—of living, not I, but Christ. Because of my dialogue with Buddhism, if I am not a “better” Christian, at least I am a more satisfied one than I was back in 1974.

But over these same years, this institutional and personal growth into a dialogical identity and community has also produced its tensions and problems. One might say that the practice of interreligious dialogue has outstripped the theology of dialogue. I guess this is what I was trying to get at back in 1978 in my *Horizons* article "World Religions and the Finality of Christ: A Critique of Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*." As with many Christian theologians, Küng's understanding of the finality and normativity of Christ and Christianity did not seem able to sustain the kind of genuinely open-ended dialogue he was so prophetically pursuing. Authentic dialogue, it seems, calls for a level playing field, or what Vatican II terms a dialogue *par cum pari*—of equals with equals (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, #9). But if one religion possesses the *only* God-given, ontological cause of salvation, or the final word on all religious truth, it would seem that this religion occupies a piece of high ground in the dialogue not available to others.

While Küng has since made successful efforts to address this tension in his own theology, it seems that the official Magisterium of the Catholic Church (and official bodies of other churches) has not. After their revolutionary recognition of the beauty and salvific efficacy found in other religions and of the necessity of genuine dialogue with persons of other religious paths, the Pope and Vatican bodies continue to use the traditional language of exclusivity and superiority regarding the significance of Jesus and the role of the church. "Christ is the *one* savior of all, the *only one able to reveal God and lead to God* . . . salvation can *only* come from Jesus Christ. . . . In him, and *only in him*, are we set free from alienation and doubt" (RM #5, 11, emphasis mine). Therefore, "the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and . . . she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (RM #55, see also DP #19, 22, 58). And so the 1997 declaration of the International Theological Commission draws the bottom line of such a theology of religions: "The religions can exercise the function of a *praeparatio evangelica* . . . interreligious dialogue forms a part . . . of the *praeparatio evangelica*" (#85 and 117). The ultimate purpose of dialogue, then, is to prepare followers of other religions for conversion to the Christian church. With such a theology of dialogue, will not non-Christian participants feel a little like the fly invited into the parlor of the spider?

Admittedly, my own theological preferences and biases skew my description of this tension between the church's practice of dialogue and its theology of religions. But no one can deny the tension. *Horizons*, like other theological journals, has been the arena for discussions, even debates, between so-called "inclusivists" and "pluralists." Whatever the inadequacy of these models—and despite the introduction of new models such as "comparative theology" and "post-liberal

theology"—there exist within the Christian body confusing and unsettling differences in the way Christians understand how the saving Spirit is active outside the confines of the church. That these differences, and the tensions they contain, are not just the grist of theological debates but are affecting the pastoral life of the churches became clear in the Asian Synod of Bishops of April 1998. Abandoning their usual indirect and nonconfrontative style, the Asian Bishops, especially in their response to the Vatican *lineamenta* but also in the Synod itself, stated that traditional formulations of the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity were not appropriate for Christian life in Asia. The Japanese bishops echoed responses from the Sri Lankan, Indonesian, and Indian bishops when they wrote to Rome that the "section on Christology [of the *lineamenta*] . . . does not help the faith of Asian Christians." They said why: "If we stress too much that 'Jesus Christ is the One and Only Savior,' we can have no dialogue, common living, or solidarity with other religions" (Japanese response, 1/2/[1], from Website on Asian Synod).

Such sharp-edged tensions give promise for the future. My hopes are based on the way the *practice* of spirituality (the *lex orandi*) has informed and transformed the *theory* of theology (the *lex credendi*) throughout the history of the church. We can expect the same in the relationship between the practice of dialogue and the theology of religions. I suspect that my own Roman Catholic Church, especially under the stimulus of the local churches of the South, will gradually recognize and admit that, as Edward Schillebeeckx has put it, there is more of God's truth in the entirety of the world of religions than in any one of them, including the Christian religion. "One and only" language will not be renounced (nor, do I believe, should it); but the church will also come to understand that, paradoxically, there are many "one and only's" in the religious world. Such language is fundamentally confessional language, meant to affirm one's own commitment, not denigrate that of others; yet Christians will also experience that to recognize the confessional and personal nature of such "one and only" language does not remove or minimize its *universal* and, yes, its *missionary* demands. Each religious community speaks from its own unique revelation, but it speaks not only to itself but *to other communities*.

I suspect that the way forward in balancing and understanding the paradox of many "one and only's," or the tension between "relative" and yet "universal," will be through a pneumatological more than a christological approach to other religions. Emphasizing the Spirit rather than Christ present within other religious traditions, we are less likely to end up viewing or treating them as anonymous Christians. But the christological issues will not go away. My suspicions—I

should say, my hopes and efforts—are that such issues will be dealt with more successfully by means of a *representative* rather than a *constitutive* christology—through understanding Jesus-the-Savior more as one who *reveals* what we presently are rather than as one who *fixed* what happened in the past.

However these matters are dealt with, I do believe that, as the new millennium dawns and *Horizons* celebrates its twenty-fifth birthday, there will be further sea-changes in the way the Christian church views other religions and itself in dialogue with them. The dialogical church is still growing.

## IN THE NEXT QUARTER CENTURY

Norbert J. Rigali, S.J.  
University of San Diego

Into the new era of theology inaugurated at the Second Vatican Council *Horizons* was born twenty-five years ago. In these brief pages I shall note two theological developments of this era and my hopes for their respective transformations during the journal's second quarter century.

### *Feminism*

The feminism found in much of the theological literature of the last quarter century is one of these developments. While the word "feminism" bears several meanings, the feminism addressed here is a common type that defines itself as the corrective of sexism, understood as a kind of patriarchy. As one representative of this school of thought sums up the matter: since sexists are by definition persons who "think that the benefits and burdens of any community should be allocated at least in part according to gender differences," and since history shows that such persons most often "believe that most of a society's benefits should go to males and most of its burdens to females,"

the word "sexism" generally connotes discrimination against females. In contrast, a feminist is any person, male or female, who promotes the equality of women with men, and who is willing to challenge social and ecclesiastical customs on behalf of that commitment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Patricia Beattie Jung, "Give Her Justice," *America* 150 (1984): 277.