

Faculty of Theology
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RATZINGER AND THE RELIGIONS

Studies on Pope Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI on the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. It consists of an introductory overview and four peer-reviewed articles. With a systematic analysis of key concepts, structures, and arguments, the dissertation contributes to a better understanding of a less appreciated area of Ratzinger's theology.

The two events that dominate commentaries as well as popular imagination on Ratzinger/Benedict's contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue are the publication of *Dominus Iesus* in 2000 and the 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg, both of which caused an uproar. More attention should be paid to Ratzinger's personal theology of religions as expressed in his books, as well as to the 188 texts from Benedict XVI's pontificate that relate to interreligious dialogue.

Contrary to those who have tried to portray Ratzinger as a soteriological exclusivist, I argue that he is an optimistic restrictivist inclusivist, allowing for the salvation of a great number of non-Christians while not considering other religions instruments of salvation as such. Ratzinger's inclusivism is structured around an objective and a subjective aspect, the vicarious representation of Christ and the Church (*Stellvertretung*) and some sort of a *pistis* or openness to God in the subject. A reinterpretation of purgatory provides the final solution to the salvation of "the many".

Ratzinger's opposition to John Paul II's interreligious Assisi meetings and his negativity about the Asiatic religions have also been exaggerated. Despite a strong juxtaposition between the theistic and mystical paths in the world of religions, Ratzinger hopes for an integration of the best elements of the mystical religions, and while cautious about multireligious and interreligious prayer, he provides criteria for their right realisation.

A contradiction seems to emerge between Ratzinger/Benedict's emphasis on truth as the ultimate goal of interreligious dialogue and his apparent endorsement of the idea that interreligious dialogue, or theological dialogue, is actually impossible. At the end of his papacy, Benedict maintains that interreligious dialogue does not seek to convert another, even though it should always aim at drawing closer to the truth.

Pope Benedict XVI's most central message to representatives of other religions concerns peace and non-violence, coupled with a call to a common witness to spiritual values in a secular society. Religiously motivated violence remains a central challenge for interreligious dialogue.

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INTRODUCTION

In a world that is drawing ever closer together, the question about the meeting of religions and cultures has become a most important subject, and one that is certainly not just the business of theology. The question of the peaceableness of cultures, of peace in matters of religion, has also moved up to become a political question of the first rank. Yet it is nonetheless first of all a question directed to the religions themselves, how they relate to one another peacefully and how they can contribute to the “education of the human race” in the direction of peace.¹

– Joseph Ratzinger

The theology of religions and interreligious dialogue are matters of growing relevance not only for theology and for the religions, but also for the world. One of the most noteworthy – and controversial – thinkers in this area in our times has been Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI,² the Bavarian Catholic theologian who served in 1981–2005 as the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), and in 2005–2013, as the visible head of the Catholic Church. What was his contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue? What did he think about the world religions and their followers in relation to Christianity, salvation, truth, and peace?

The dissertation consists of four peer-reviewed academic articles and the present introductory chapter, which offers a synthesis of the entire study. In the following, I will first briefly present the academic articles and explain the logic of their ordering and the selection of the journals for their publication. Then, I will proceed to outline some of the fundamental definitions, methods, and sources of the study. Next, I will present and evaluate the *status quaestionis* (i.e. engage with scholars who have previously written on the topic at hand). This leads to a discussion of the background and results of each of the four articles of the dissertation. Finally, I will conclude with a brief synthesis of Ratzinger/Benedict’s contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue, summarising the results of the study in a list of seven points and offering a few final reflections.

¹ Ratzinger 2004, 9.

² In this dissertation I use the name “(Joseph) Ratzinger” when I refer to the theologian before the papal election, whereas “(Pope) Benedict (XVI)” refers to the same man after the election of 2005. Consequently, I use “Ratzinger/Benedict” in contexts that encompass both pre- and post-election times.

The Four Articles

This dissertation is the fruit of six years of study, resulting in four refereed articles on Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI’s contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. The articles have been published in English between late 2017 and early 2019 in the following international journals: *The Journal of Theological Studies*, *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology*, *Theological Studies*, and *Islamochristiana*. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have organised the articles thematically and will be referring to them with the code names Article 1, Article 2, Article 3, and Article 4, as follows:

Code name and length	Title	Published in
Article 1 approx. 8 900 words	“Joseph Ratzinger’s Soteriological Inclusivism”	<i>The Journal of Theological Studies</i> , Volume 69, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 170–190.
Article 2 approx. 7 400 words	“Two ways, two steps: On Joseph Ratzinger’s theology of religions”	<i>Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology</i> , Volume 73, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 23–42.
Article 3 approx. 12 300 words	“Mission Impossible? Pope Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue”	<i>Theological Studies</i> , Volume 78, Issue 4, December 2017, pp. 879–904.
Article 4 approx. 7 700 words	“From Violence to Witness via Reason and Faith: The Interreligious Message of Pope Benedict XVI”	<i>Islamochristiana</i> , Volume 44, 2018, pp. 237–252.

Taken together, the four articles touch upon various theological topics of immense weight, such as salvation, truth, mission, reason, peace, prayer, faith, and conscience. Article 1 deals with Ratzinger’s position on the classical question in the theology of religions concerning the salvation of non-Christians. Article 2 focuses on Ratzinger’s classification of world religions into “two ways” and explores his ideas on “interreligious ecumenism” and (multireligious/interreligious) prayer. Article 3 discusses the possibility and aim of interreligious dialogue as well as its relation to mission. Article

4 examines Pope Benedict XVI's concrete message to representatives of other religions, especially Muslims, regarding reason and faith, peace and non-violence, and common service and witness. Though each of the four articles can stand on its own, together they form a logical whole, shedding light on a range of aspects of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict's engagement with the world religions.

Articles 1–4 are not ordered according to the chronological sequence of their publication. Rather, there is another type of chronological and thematic logic to the ordering, namely 1) from Joseph Ratzinger to Benedict XVI, and 2) from the theology of religions to interreligious dialogue. Articles 1–2 deal more with the theology of Joseph Ratzinger and the theology of religions, whereas Articles 3–4 focus mostly on Pope Benedict XVI and interreligious dialogue. Articles 2 and 3 serve a transitional function in both respects: Article 2 moves into the area of interreligious dialogue towards the end, and Article 3 begins with a survey of Ratzinger's views before the papal election. However, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is treated as the same person and thinker throughout. Hence, Benedict XVI also features in Article 1, and Joseph Ratzinger in Article 4.

There is also a logic behind the choice of the refereed journals in which the articles have been published (other than the perhaps confusingly similar-sounding names of some of them!). *The Journal of Theological Studies* is a prestigious Oxford journal, founded in 1899 and covering the entire range of theological research, while the Jesuit-sponsored *Theological Studies* is the leading Catholic theology journal in the United States. *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology* presents North European contributions to international theology, whereas *Islamochristiana* is the journal of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, based in Rome but also reaching a readership in the Muslim world. Thus, the journals are spread out geographically, covering the UK and the US as well as Northern and Southern Europe, and they represent the different though overlapping worlds of academic theology, the Catholic Church, and interreligious dialogue.

Definitions, Methods, and Sources

In terms of some basic definitions, the *theology of religions* in the context of Christian theology refers to Christian reflection on the nature and value of the world religions and their relationship to Christianity, while *interreligious dialogue* refers to practical interaction between representatives of

different religions. To these two, we can add *the theology of interreligious dialogue*, which comprises theoretical reflection on the nature and possibilities of interreligious dialogue. In the present thesis, Article 1 falls into the category of the theology of religions, Article 3 is mostly an example of the theology of interreligious dialogue, whereas Article 4 relates more directly to interreligious dialogue itself. The borders between these categories are not very strict, however, and there can be considerable overlap. Article 2 provides an instance of a natural transition from the theology of religions to the theology of interreligious dialogue, and even more specifically to the question of interreligious prayer. Article 4 also rises to the metalevel of the theology of interreligious dialogue.

Although the subject matter of the present study relates to the fields presented above, the dissertation is nonetheless primarily an inquiry into the personal thought and theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI. I treat the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue through the lens of the writings and speeches of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI and in conversation with other Ratzinger scholars and commentators. In other words, I do not write as a specialist in the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue per se, trying to situate Ratzinger/Benedict XVI in these wide fields. Such a work would, of course, be very welcome, based on the findings of the present dissertation, but here the context is primarily that of Ratzinger scholarship.

This dissertation is also a work in the discipline of dogmatic theology or dogmatics, belonging to the Department of Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. For some decades, Finnish systematic theologians have called their method “systematic analysis”, which can be further explained as an analysis of concepts, propositions, presuppositions, structures, and arguments, based on a close reading of the relevant sources and literature. In this tradition, the idea has been to reveal the structuring principle(s) of the object of study in a system-immanent way, as an X-ray might reveal the spine that holds a person’s bones together. What the researcher personally thinks or believes about the actual subject matter should theoretically not affect the study or appear in it. The idea has been to thus safeguard the nature of academic theology as a “science” (Finnish *tiede*, Swedish *vetenskap*, cf. German *Wissenschaft*) in the context of a secular state university.

This differs somewhat from the English-speaking world, where the concept of “science” is generally narrower and refers mainly to the natural or empirical sciences. In the Anglo-American academic tradition, theologians do not necessarily reflect upon questions of “method” at all. Rather, they are expected to position themselves hermeneutically at the very outset, and there

is an emphasis on the writer's own argument and a demand for constructive proposals. The "method" is really determined by the nature of the task and becomes evident enough in the argument itself.

Reflecting on my own work, writing as a Helsinki scholar for the international English-speaking world, I find myself saying with St. Paul *συνέχομαι δὲ ἐκ τῶν δύο* – "I am torn between the two" (Phil. 1:23). The present thesis represents a sort of combination of these two ways of doing academic theology. I do not wish to abandon the ideal of objective analysis, but I am also aware of the inevitable influence of the interpreter's personal history and cultural context. In that regard, I can say that I come to the study as an ecumenical Finnish Catholic and a critical admirer of Ratzinger. In simple language, my "method" has been to attentively read the writings and speeches of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI relating to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue, make observations, detect tensions, think about the arguments, analyse, and then share my findings in an intelligible and coherent written form. It has also been an important part of my method to critically consider the broad spectrum of views expressed by various commentators, in order to reach a balanced and truthful assessment of the whole.

What, then, are the most important sources for determining Ratzinger/Benedict's contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue? The main source for Ratzinger's personal theology of religions is *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, which is a collection of articles and papers mostly from the 1990s and early 2000s (except for the first one, which was first published in 1964). The book was released in German and Italian in 2003 and in English in 2004.³ A second source is the short volume titled *Many Religions – One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World*, especially its last essay, "The dialogue of the religions and the relationship between Judaism and Christianity". This piece was first published in 1997 in the Catholic journal *Communio*; the book was released in 1998, and the English translation came out in 1999.⁴

In addition to these two books, Ratzinger/Benedict's thoughts on non-Christians and world religions can be found scattered throughout his work, spanning from the late 1950s until the 2010s. Special attention should be given to the very sincere and revealing personal opinions expressed in interviews, such as the four book-length interviews conducted by Peter Seewald: *Salt*

³ Ratzinger 2004.

⁴ Ratzinger 1999.

of the Earth (1996), *God and the World* (2002), *Light of the World* (2010), and *Last Testament* (2016).⁵

Of course, the originals of all the above-mentioned sources are in German; I will be referring to the existing English translations. In German, Ratzinger's main writings on the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue have been published in Volume 8/2 of the series Joseph Ratzinger: Gesammelte Schriften, titled *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern*,⁶ which I have been able to consult for some terminological verification.

After Joseph Ratzinger's election to the papacy in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI's speeches about interreligious dialogue and his addresses to interreligious audiences become the most important sources. These can easily be found in one volume in Italian: *Il Dialogo Interreligioso nell'insegnamento ufficiale della Chiesa Cattolica (1963-2013)*.⁷ This book contains citations from a total of 188 documents (speeches and writings) from Benedict XVI that are relevant to the topic of the world religions and dialogue, and it shows, contrary to popular imagination, that the subject was in fact very important in Benedict's less than eight-year pontificate.⁸ The English translations of all the pertinent papal discourses are available online at the Vatican's official website.⁹

In addition to the writings of Ratzinger the theologian and Benedict XVI the pope, there is a third category of texts, signed by Ratzinger the prefect; this includes the official documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, such as the declaration *Dominus Iesus*. My view is that these do not constitute primary source material for studying Ratzinger's theology of religions or his theology of interreligious dialogue, though they can be used for comparative purposes and as secondary materials. In my opinion, many commentators have taken the wrong starting point here and therefore arrived at distorted conclusions, as we will see in detail in the examination of the *status quaestionis*.

Another methodological and source-related decision requiring a brief comment is the question regarding the Church's dialogue with Judaism. Since the Second Vatican Council, this dialogue has been considered a special case in Catholic engagement with other religions, so that the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews functions under the patronage of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, not the Pontifical Council for Interreligious

⁵ See Ratzinger 1996; Ratzinger 2002; Benedict XVI 2010a; Benedict XVI 2016.

⁶ Ratzinger 2010.

⁷ Gioia 2013.

⁸ Holy See Press Office 2013.

⁹ See <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en.html>.

Dialogue. Although it would have been possible to proceed otherwise, I have followed this line and left the otherwise important question of Ratzinger/Benedict's theology of (and dialogue with) Judaism outside the scope of this study. That said, in some contexts, there are inevitable references to Judaism as a monotheistic religion alongside Christianity and Islam.

The Religions in Ratzinger Studies: The State of the Question

In the field of Ratzinger studies, the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue are rather minor subjects, at least in comparison with some of the more prominent ones such as ecclesiology, Christology, liturgy, Vatican II, scripture and tradition, the nature of theology, faith and reason, etc. Most works on Ratzinger and his thought give little space to the topic of the world religions, and some ignore it altogether.¹⁰

On the other hand, we do have two fairly recent monograph-sized English-language studies on Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's engagement with the world religions, and many other books deal with the subject to various degrees, whether they are journalistic portraits or theological introductions. In addition to English, there are also pertinent publications in other languages, most notably German, French, and Spanish.¹¹

The purpose of the following overview is to present and evaluate the *status quaestionis* vis-à-vis Ratzinger and the religions, to provide a context for the contributions of the articles of the present dissertation, and to consider how the discussion on "Ratzinger and the religions" relates to the more basic hermeneutical question regarding simply "Ratzinger" (i.e. how one sees him as a person and a theologian).

¹⁰ To illustrate, we can consider Elio Guerriero's 640-page biography *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thought*, published in English in 2018. I was able to consult this book only in the very last phase of my research, after the present chapter was preliminarily completed. Pages 418–426 of this biography deal with *Dominus Iesus, Truth and Tolerance*, and the Dupuis case, whereas pages 493–500 are devoted to the Regensburg speech and its aftermath. Page 135 mentions Ratzinger's friendship with Paul Hacker and his early interest in Hinduism, while the interreligious Assisi meetings are given three pages (444, 616–617). Thus, the topic of the world religions does not occupy more than 3 % of the biography. This is not an insignificant figure, but it also reflects that the theme is not central in Benedict's life and thought. Overall, Guerriero's book is solid but contains little that is original in terms of our topic, and the results of the current study are unaffected by my late reading of it.

¹¹ One might be surprised by the absence of Italian here. In my research, I was not able to identify Italian studies on this topic, unless one counts Marcello Pera's book (treated below), which was originally published in Italian. I am further reassured by the fact that Guerriero, himself an Italian who makes use of many Italian sources, knows of none, either. Rather, Guerriero refers to the French scholar Vincent Aucante (see below).

Rocco Viviano and Ambrose Mong: Similarities and Differences

The two monograph-sized studies relevant to our topic and referred to above are Rocco Viviano's PhD dissertation titled *The Theological-Ecclesiological Thought of Benedict XVI (2005–2013) on the Christian Engagement with the Religions in the Context of the Modern Papacy*¹² and Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong's *Dialogue Derailed: Joseph Ratzinger's War against Pluralist Theology*.¹³

Both Viviano and Mong are Catholic priests active in Asia (Japan and Hong Kong, respectively), and both of their works were completed after the conclusion of Benedict XVI's pontificate. To the best of my knowledge, Viviano and Mong are the only ones so far to have written *extensively* on Ratzinger and the religions on an academic level in the English language. However, it should be pointed out that only a portion of these works (about one third in both cases) deals directly with the actual subject of the religions.¹⁴ Furthermore, both Viviano and Mong have published much of the same material on this topic in different places under different titles.¹⁵

Despite the commonalities, the two authors represent very different approaches to Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, with Viviano admiring him as a "modern Church father"¹⁶ and Mong deploring his "war against pluralist theology".¹⁷ This introduces us to the broader question of the "two Ratzingers", to which we will return. For now, we must be content with an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Viviano and Mong's studies.

Of the two, it must be said that Viviano is better acquainted with and makes broader use of the vast array of writings by Ratzinger/Benedict, especially the papal speeches relating to interreligious dialogue. This results in a much more substantial, accurate, and trustworthy presentation overall. However, Viviano lacks a critical approach, failing to notice tensions or engage with the bewildering variety of scholarly opinion on the topic. By contrast, Mong is more familiar with the wide world of theological scholarship, and he deserves credit for his critical and argumentative approach. Yet, I would submit that his critical attitude is not one of a healthy

¹² Viviano 2013.

¹³ Mong 2015a.

¹⁴ Both spend much of the space exploring other more or less connected areas of Ratzinger's theology, such as ecclesiology and ecumenism.

¹⁵ In the case of Viviano, there is an article from the same author, published three years before the dissertation, with large portions of identical material: see Viviano 2010. Much of the same material is published again for a third time in Viviano 2017. See also Viviano 2015. As for Ambrose Mong, the same book has been published under different titles but with almost identical content: see Mong 2015b. Both of Mong's books also acknowledge permissions from various journals.

¹⁶ Viviano 2013, 14.

¹⁷ Mong 2015a, xiii.

academic nature, but containing an overly negative bias that leads to confusing and contradictory interpretations. In the following, I will illustrate these evaluations of Viviano and Mong in more detail and in relation to the present contribution.

Viviano: Reliable but Uncritical

In the first part of his thesis, Rocco Viviano helpfully explains that the Church's engagement with the world religions is a natural consequence of the development of the papacy in modern times, including such aspects as worldwide travel and diplomatic relations. The second part deals with Ratzinger's vision of theology and especially his ecclesiology, thereby paving the way for situating Benedict's theology of religions and interreligious dialogue in this context in the third part.

In the second part, Viviano explores Ratzinger's emphases on the question of truth and the relationship of theology, Church, reason, and faith, concluding that "Christian faith generates theology as the outcome of its inner life-giving dynamism" that seeks to make the faith understandable to others.¹⁸ This is also the purpose of interreligious dialogue, "not aimed at convincing them through rational arguments to become Christians, but to make Christian faith understandable to them, and therefore to enable them to engage with it in one way or the other".¹⁹ Significantly, Viviano argues that the inner connection between dialogue, faith, and theology means that "there can be no authentic Christian interreligious engagement if the theological dimension is excluded from it".²⁰ This is an admirable analysis, but oddly there is no critical engagement with the view according to which Benedict XVI sought the very opposite, namely to exclude theology from interreligious dialogue and focus on intercultural dialogue instead. This problem is the starting point of Article 3.

The third part is divided into three subsections, the first of which examines Ratzinger/Benedict's theology of religions and his theology of interreligious dialogue. The second subsection focuses on Judaism and Jewish-Christian dialogue, and the third looks at Islam and Christian-Muslim relations. In the first subsection, Viviano presents some of the core points of Ratzinger's 1964 article on the theology of religions, his 1997 article on interreligious dialogue, and his 2000 presentation of *Dominus Iesus*; in this sense, he covers some of the same ground as Articles

¹⁸ Viviano 2013, 139–140.

¹⁹ Viviano 2013, 140.

²⁰ Viviano 2013, 140.

2–3. Viviano’s overviews are generally reliable, rightly noting Ratzinger’s archetypal division of religions into the two ways of mysticism and monotheism, his rejection of the relativistic ideology of dialogue, and his emphasis on truth as the ultimate goal of dialogue.²¹ Viviano goes on to examine Benedict’s papal speeches in Washington (2008), Sydney (2008), and London (2010), pointing to his “generous and creative effort to emphasise the value of religion and religions at levels different from the question of salvation”.²² Here, too, Viviano stresses that the ultimate goal of interreligious dialogue is the “common quest for truth”, which must “always be kept present, even when dialogue is still at earlier stages of development and focuses on what Benedict XVI sees as its intermediate goals”, such as peace-building, the promotion of human life, human development, and religious freedom.²³ This is an interesting possible solution to the dilemma posed by Article 3, but again, frustratingly, there is no explicit engagement with the problem or any recognition of the sources and literature that might seem to suggest otherwise.

In the subsection on Islam, Viviano properly highlights Ratzinger’s view of Islam as a multifaceted phenomenon and his willingness to enter into dialogue with “noble Islam”, as distinguished from “extremist, terrorist Islam”. Viviano also notes Ratzinger’s point about the inseparable connection between religion, society, and politics in Islam, which makes questions of democracy and religious freedom challenging. Furthermore, he pays attention to the consequences of the famous Regensburg lecture of 2006, especially the 2007 Muslim document *A Common Word*, which Benedict XVI regards as being of great importance. Viviano correctly underlines Benedict’s conviction that Islam and Christianity share fundamental values and stand on the same side against the challenge of radical secularism.²⁴ Viviano also points out that although Benedict recognises the violent tendencies of parts of Islam, he stresses the need to search for the better elements.²⁵ Viviano relates the argument of the Regensburg lecture, according to which “violence is against reason and therefore, God being reasonable, violence cannot be God’s will”,²⁶ and he presents the views of many of the lecture’s commentators on this issue. Elsewhere, Viviano recognises Benedict’s interreligious call to “show that religion can never be used to motivate violence”,²⁷ but there is no

²¹ Viviano 2013, 205–212.

²² Viviano 2013, 213.

²³ Viviano 2013, 215.

²⁴ Viviano 2013, 291–292.

²⁵ Viviano 2013, 293.

²⁶ Viviano 2013, 294.

²⁷ Viviano 2013, 217.

critical engagement with this idea. This is what Article 4 attempts to do, with some new twists to the analysis.

Viviano also lays out the theological foundations of Benedict's dialogue with Islam. These include belief in the one Creator, reference to Abraham, and the idea of "God's irruptive call" heard in the midst of daily existence.²⁸ From belief in God the Creator flows the common idea of the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the person, which should encourage solidarity and respect and serve as an antidote to all forms of terrorism.²⁹ This should also lead to a guaranteeing of religious freedom, which is a fundamental human right. Finally, Christians and Muslims share a common vocation to witness to the religious aspect of life, to serve humanity by peace-building, and to cooperate in the promotion of human dignity.³⁰

In terms of the concrete contents of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Viviano lists theological exchange, the search for truth, and cultivating the potential of human reason. With regard to attitudes, Viviano mentions the concepts of authenticity, sincerity, willingness to learn, and commitment to one's own spiritual growth.³¹ Finally, he concludes that Benedict XVI contributes to Christian-Muslim dialogue by trying to understand Islam in its complexity and by challenging Muslims to take responsibility for the "distorted Islam" of some Muslims, so that only "noble Islam" may emerge in the world. Moreover, he encourages Christians and Muslims to make a serious commitment to dialogue, which is not an option but a necessity, and to deepen their understanding of their respective faiths. He also challenges Muslims to articulate their own understanding of interreligious dialogue, helping them in this process by pointing out theological foundations on which both Muslims and Christians can build.³²

In sum, Viviano's work offers a helpful and generally reliable overview of Benedict's theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. On the other hand, its significant shortcoming is that virtually no critical questions are raised, neither about Benedict's own texts nor about the conflicting interpretations of commentators. Thus, there is relatively little originality in the analysis. Nevertheless, the dissertation provides a solid basis for further work on Benedict XVI and the world religions.

²⁸ Viviano 2013, 299.

²⁹ Viviano 2013, 300–302.

³⁰ Viviano 2013, 304–306.

³¹ Viviano 2013, 307–310.

³² Viviano 2013, 311.

Mong: Critical but Unreliable

Ambrose Mong's book *Dialogue Derailed: Joseph Ratzinger's War against Pluralist Theology* is divided into an introduction and 11 chapters, in which he critically examines Ratzinger's theology as well as the cases of some theologians disciplined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), such as Tissa Balasuriya and Jacques Dupuis. For an alternative to Ratzinger, Mong turns in the last chapter to the perspective of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. The most relevant chapters for our purposes are the introduction and chapters two, six, and eight, titled "Challenge of Religious Pluralism", "Dictatorship of Relativism", and "Jacques Dupuis: Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism".

Mong starts his introduction with a highly critical tone, echoing the book's title. He refers to theologians committed to Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, "derailed by Joseph Ratzinger", the Prefect of the CDF who in his speeches and writings "declared war on pluralist theology and its most dangerous correlate—relativism".³³ The paradigm seems to be provided by John L. Allen, Jr.'s 2000 book *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith*, whose sixth chapter is titled "Holy Wars" and includes subsections on Ratzinger's theoretical and practical "war against pluralist theology".

Failing to acknowledge Allen's later retraction of this one-sided early work, Mong calls it a "good resource for Ratzinger's view on religious pluralism and the theologians he disciplined as head of the CDF"; accordingly, he follows its stress on "Ratzinger's Augustinianism with its inherent pessimism towards the world".³⁴ While Mong is aware of Vincent Twomey's and Joseph A. Komonchak's critiques of Allen's book and agrees that its weaknesses include a lack of depth, insight, and nuance; an excessive either-or approach; and a hermeneutic of a "'power-struggle' with the 'enforcer' as the villain",³⁵ his own analysis remains affected by the same approach and prone to the same mistakes. There might be more depth and nuance in Mong, but examples of the latter do not really fit the overall picture presented; rather, they often come as confusing contradictions of the dominant thesis. Let us look at two cases, both of which are important components of Mong's critical analysis: the claim of soteriological exclusivism and the identification of Ratzinger with the

³³ Mong 2015a, xiii.

³⁴ Mong 2015a, xviii–xix. See Rowland 2008, 9–10: "Contrary to many hastily prepared editorials at the time of his election to the papacy, Ratzinger's Augustinian dispositions should not be construed as having anything to do with wanting the Church to retreat from the world, or wanting her scholars to close down conversations with the rest of non-Catholic humanity. . . . Ratzinger could not be further from this *mentalité*."

³⁵ Mong 2015a, xix.

CDF and *Dominus Iesus*, in connection with the case of the Congregation's investigation of Jacques Dupuis.

In chapter two, Mong argues that while Ratzinger displays an open inclusivism with regard to truth, he is a soteriological "exclusivist" who believes that "faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation".³⁶ This is the dominant thesis in the chapter, repeated several times.³⁷ On the other hand, in a context that seems soteriological, Mong says that Ratzinger supports "the inclusivist position", being "closer" [than who or what remains unclear] to the "restrictivist inclusivists".³⁸ This attempt at nuance comes across as confusing and contradictory with regard to the main thesis. Dedicated to clarifying this, Article 1 argues that Mong is wrong in his claim regarding exclusivism and that Ratzinger *is* in fact a restrictivist inclusivist.

The second case concerns Ratzinger's relationship to the CDF investigation of Jacques Dupuis. Mong is of course right to connect this to both the CDF's 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus* "On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church" and the 2001 "Notification concerning the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J."³⁹ This topic requires a lengthier consideration here, as it is only briefly alluded to in some of the articles. Mong claims that although *Dominus Iesus* (DI) was not written by Ratzinger, it is "obvious" that it "represents his own theological thought".⁴⁰ Mong refers several times to DI's most notorious passage about followers of other religions as being "*objectively speaking ... in a gravely deficient situation*",⁴¹ as if *this* was most characteristic of Ratzinger's personal approach to other faiths.⁴² This identification of Ratzinger's theology with the documents of the CDF leads to the claim that Ratzinger "systematically used his authority to silence viewpoints that differed from his own", attempting to "declare his own theological viewpoints as normative".⁴³

Here, questions concerning the substance of Ratzinger's theology are mixed with assessments of his person. More extreme versions of the same line of thought make Ratzinger appear as an evil inquisitor, even a kind of Nazi.⁴⁴ Thus we come back to the problem of "two Joseph

³⁶ Mong 2015a, 41.

³⁷ Mong 2015a, 25, 41–43, 56–57.

³⁸ Mong 2015a, 42.

³⁹ Mong 2015a, 206, 222. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2000; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2001.

⁴⁰ Mong 2015a, 30.

⁴¹ DI 22.

⁴² Mong 2015a, xiv, xxii, 46, 161.

⁴³ Mong 2015a, xv.

⁴⁴ An example is found in O'Connor 2013, 163, where DI's "gravely deficient" is taken as "confirmation that deep inside Ratzinger ... there was apparently the Jansenist conviction of God 'pre-selecting' those to be saved", which to "cynics"

Ratzingers”, detected early on by German journalist Peter Seewald in his own journalistic research: there is the Ratzinger of his friends, “likeable, friendly, and humble”, and that of his enemies: “hard, greedy for power, without mercy”.⁴⁵ This polarisation may be exaggerated, but it is true that the image one has of Ratzinger’s person easily affects one’s analysis of his theology.

An example of a friend is Ratzinger’s former doctoral student Vincent Twomey, who stresses that DI and other CDF documents “should not be considered as Ratzinger’s own theology but rather as authoritative statements of Church teaching”.⁴⁶ Surprisingly, instead of contradicting Twomey’s position, Mong tries to appropriate it by saying that this is the case “in principle”, while in practice “one cannot ignore the fact that Ratzinger’s theological reflections on the topic will be taken into consideration when a particular document is drafted by the CDF”.⁴⁷ Mong refers to Gerard Mannion, who remarks that DI contains “familiar sentiments” to those held by Ratzinger and that “the dividing line between a private theological opinion and official church teaching needs further clarification”.⁴⁸

Such clarification came in 2016 with the publication of the interview book *Last Testament: In His Own Words*. Asked by Peter Seewald about DI, Ratzinger confirmed not only that he did not write it, but also the reason why: “I deliberately never wrote any of the documents of the office myself, so that my opinion does not surface; otherwise I would be attempting to disseminate and enforce my own private theology. Such a document should be grown organically, from the soil of the relevant offices responsible.”⁴⁹ This statement runs counter to two of Mong’s strong claims, namely, that DI represents Ratzinger’s own theological thought and that Ratzinger systematically attempted to make his views normative and silence others. Ratzinger does admit to having played a role in some of the redrafting, and no one would deny that DI reflects some “familiar sentiments”. But this is very different from equating DI with Ratzinger’s personal theology. For example, Ratzinger’s *Stellvertretung* inclusivism is completely absent from DI, and DI’s most controversial

(such as O’Connor, I take it) is “not far removed from the Führer Prinzip in which only those who joined the NSDAP could enjoy the promised land”. See also Fox 2011, whose embittered work Guerriero (2018, 515) modestly describes as “a concentration of gratuitous and improbable statements”.

⁴⁵ Seewald 2008, 139.

⁴⁶ Twomey 2007, 35. This is repeated and explained further on page 38.

⁴⁷ Mong 2015a, 224. The “example” Mong gives here is completely confused, however. He says Ratzinger’s “personal opinions” influenced his “reflections on official church documents”, like his “response to *Dominus Iesus*”. But, of course, Ratzinger’s personal opinions influenced Ratzinger’s personal reflections! The issue is to what degree they determined the theology of the official documents.

⁴⁸ Mong 2015a, 221.

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI 2016, 172. Here, Benedict XVI also reveals that he had personally written the text read by Pope John Paul II at the Angelus following the publication of DI. When the press noticed the difference in style, they claimed that even the pope had distanced himself from Cardinal Ratzinger!

language (like “gravely deficient”) is equally absent from Ratzinger’s personal writings. In fact, Peter Seewald reports Ratzinger’s later confession that in *Dominus Iesus*, “they had not done as well as they might have in their choice of words and in the way it was communicated”.⁵⁰ This is a significant admission that needs to enter the thought of theologians writing on this topic.⁵¹ Even if Ratzinger “assented”⁵² to everything in DI, his personal theology of religions is, in the words of Vincent Twomey, “much richer” than the “bare bones” of this official document.⁵³

As for the case of Jacques Dupuis, it is understandable that Mong sympathises with Dupuis’ painful experience with the CDF. It is hard not to sympathise with him, especially after reading his friend William Burrows’ book *Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition*, which is found also in Mong’s bibliography. But again, one must beware equating Ratzinger with the CDF. Burrows’ own interpretation, based on his conversations with Dupuis and other sources, is that Ratzinger was relying on the work of his secretaries, Tarcisio Bertone and Angelo Amato, who did not really understand Dupuis and whose work in drafting both DI and the early version of the Dupuis Notification was “substandard”. Ratzinger then had to “put the best face” on “work that he would have done much better, had he done it himself”.⁵⁴

It must also be noted that after the publication of the final Notification in 2001, Ratzinger mentions Dupuis as an “eminent advocate” of an attempt to reconcile inclusivism and pluralism.⁵⁵ Many of Benedict XVI’s papal speeches take up core teachings of *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP), which, as Mong rightly notes, Dupuis was instrumental in drafting for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.⁵⁶ It might well be true that Ratzinger was initially (unduly?) suspicious about Dupuis’ theology and that he made mistakes in the process of overseeing the investigation, but I think Mong is wrong to suggest that the investigation “had more to do with Dupuis’ conflict with Ratzinger’s personal theology than with contravening Catholic doctrines”.⁵⁷ If Ratzinger initiated the investigation out of a suspicion of a conflict with one of the two, it would more likely have been the latter, not the former.

⁵⁰ Seewald 2008, 215–216.

⁵¹ Alas, Seewald does not specify the source or content of this statement in any more detail – I suspect that Ratzinger said this to Seewald personally and that the much-exaggerated phrase “gravely deficient” might well count among the choices of words Ratzinger regarded as suboptimal.

⁵² Mannion 2010, 143.

⁵³ Twomey 2008, x.

⁵⁴ Burrows 2012, xxi, 24.

⁵⁵ Ratzinger 2004, 52.

⁵⁶ Mong 2015a, 201. Some of the similarities between Benedict’s teaching and DP are documented in Article 3.

⁵⁷ Mong 2015a, 199.

Now, clearly Ratzinger's life experience is very different from that of a Dupuis or a Mong. Mong is right that Ratzinger is "spiritually and culturally Bavarian",⁵⁸ most comfortable in a Catholic, Christian, Western environment, and that he takes a more theoretical approach to the world religions. Perhaps he also lacks sufficient sensitivity towards the Asian traditions.⁵⁹ Having lived all his life in Germany and Rome, Ratzinger could never say, like Jacques Dupuis, anything like the following: "I went through a conversion by living for so many years in India. If I had not lived in India for 36 years, I would not preach the theology that I am preaching today. I consider my exposure to Hindu reality as the greatest grace I have received from God in my vocation as a theologian."⁶⁰ Indeed, Mong's ultimate concern in his criticism of Ratzinger seems to be to "highlight the gap between a dogmatic understanding of the faith and the pastoral realities of the Asian church",⁶¹ an understandable concern that probably reflects difficult and multifaceted real-life situations and experiences. There might also be something to Mong's point about the necessary distinction between pluralism and relativism, two concepts that Ratzinger tends to treat as one and the same without paying enough attention to their subtleties and differences.⁶²

Unfortunately, however, Mong too easily buys into a distorted narrative about Ratzinger, and this makes his work generally unreliable. The narrative of Ratzinger the *Panzerkardinal*, *Rottweiler Gottes*, Grand Inquisitor, "chief doctrinal conservative of our time",⁶³ etc., has been dominant in the media and some theological circles, but it is contradicted by virtually all who know Ratzinger personally. Siegfried Wiedenhofer, a former assistant of Ratzinger interviewed by Peter Seewald, defines Ratzinger as "a very open and very believing theologian" who "shows the influence of liberal Bavarian Catholicism", adding that the idea of an "inquisitor" is "wishful thinking, projected onto him by his opponents".⁶⁴ He is seconded by the Munich professor Eugen Biser, whom Seewald originally included on his list of Ratzinger's potential critics: "The allegation of being like an inquisitor, so far as I understand, is unjust... I have never found him acting like someone wielding power... My feeling is that this is more a matter of duty in the office he has

⁵⁸ Mong 2015a, 3.

⁵⁹ See Mong 2015a, xvi, 20.

⁶⁰ Cited in Mong 2015a, 202.

⁶¹ Mong 2015a, xxvii.

⁶² Mong 2015a, 169. An argument in this direction is pursued by Lopresti 2009. Lopresti misrepresents Benedict's view of interreligious dialogue, as I show in Article 3, but this does not settle the philosophical debate about the relationship between relativism and pluralism, which falls outside of the scope of this study.

⁶³ Allen 2000, vii.

⁶⁴ Seewald 2008, 96. Liberal Bavarian Catholicism is obviously different from, say, liberal American Catholicism. The "liberal Bavarian Catholicism" of the Munich school in the late 19th and early 20th centuries basically means historical consciousness, critical questioning, and ecumenical openness. For more, see Guerriero 2018, 69–73.

taken on.”⁶⁵ Most instructively, both Peter Seewald and John Allen, who started out as critical journalists, underwent a “conversion” from what we could call “the Ratzinger of the media” to “the real Ratzinger”.⁶⁶ Ironically, then, Mong’s work reflects a gap between a “dogmatic understanding” of Ratzinger and the reality experienced by those who know him.

In conclusion, then, Mong’s book counts as an important critical contribution, but its negatively biased analysis leads to it being unreliable on several points. As some of Mong’s mistakes can be traced back to John L. Allen’s early work, it is fitting that we continue this overview by turning to this influential book. We will also look at Allen’s subsequent repudiation of his earlier approach, something that Ratzinger scholars can no longer afford to overlook.

John L. Allen, Jr.: A Penitent Critic

The sixth chapter of Allen’s 2000 book *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith* (renamed after the papal election as *Pope Benedict XVI: A Biography of Joseph Ratzinger*), is titled “Holy Wars” and includes subsections on Ratzinger’s theoretical and practical “war against pluralist theology”.⁶⁷ Allen relates Ratzinger’s “broad reservations about the ‘spirit of Assisi’” (referring to John Paul II’s interfaith prayer meeting in 1986) and his view that the theology of religious pluralism had become (in the 1990s) “the era’s most grave danger to the faith”.⁶⁸

Allen is right to note that “Ratzinger does not question whether members of other religions can be saved” (!) and that the debate with Dupuis centres on “whether religious pluralism exists de jure as well as de facto”.⁶⁹ Decades before Dupuis, there was a similar controversy in Germany regarding the position of Hubertus Halbfas, who had argued that the aim of missionary activity is not to make converts but to help “the Hindu to become a better Hindu, the Buddhist a

⁶⁵ Seewald 2008, 119. To this, Biser adds: “The great element in his life is renunciation. Even renouncing the completion of his theological work.” These words take on new depth in light of Ratzinger’s subsequent papal election and retirement. To my mind, this insight bespeaks Biser’s accurate knowledge of Ratzinger’s person and character. His and Wiedenhofer’s characterisations also correspond to my own impressions after six years of study.

⁶⁶ See Seewald 2008, 164. See Benedict XVI 2013 about two hermeneutics of Vatican II: “the council of the media” and “the real council”. Ratzinger is very similar: there is a political hermeneutic and a hermeneutic of *fides quaerens intellectum*.

⁶⁷ Allen 2000, 216–256.

⁶⁸ Allen 2000, 218.

⁶⁹ Allen 2000, 218.

better Buddhist, and the Moslem a better Moslem”.⁷⁰ Allen writes that for Ratzinger, mission means “making more Christians, not better Hindus”.⁷¹

The inquisitorial perspective comes to the fore when Allen says that Cardinal Ratzinger’s “doctrinal reservations” about the theology of religious pluralism were of such magnitude that he did not hesitate “to deploy the full powers of his office” to censure theologians in this field.⁷² Allen walks his readers through Ratzinger’s speeches in Hong Kong (1993), Mexico (1996), and Paris (1997), later published in *Truth and Tolerance* and *Many Religions – One Covenant*, taking note of the Cardinal’s critical remarks regarding the theologies of Jacques Dupuis, Raimon Panikkar, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Paul Knitter, and John Hick; he also includes Hick’s 1997 response to Ratzinger.⁷³

After a review of the CDF’s actions against the likes of Anthony de Mello, Tissa Balasuriya, and Jacques Dupuis, Allen looks at what Ratzinger has said about Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. He notes that Ratzinger has (up to this point) devoted “little attention to dialogue with Islam”, instead mostly warning of its nondemocratic nature, which makes no concessions to inculturation. He goes on to say that Ratzinger takes for granted his reading of Hinduism as a “relativist tradition”, and that while Ratzinger has written some appreciative things about Buddhism, his comment about its “auto-erotic spirituality” was “widely seen as offensive”.⁷⁴ In the summary paragraph, Allen concludes the chapter with the following words: “Like Ratzinger’s crusades against liberation theology, feminism, and gay rights, the pall he has cast over ecumenism and interreligious dialogue has had consequences beyond the borders of academic theology. It has contributed to making the world a more fractured, and therefore a more dangerous, place.”⁷⁵

This passage was singled out for criticism not only by Vincent Twomey, who calls it “nonsense”,⁷⁶ but also and more importantly by Joseph A. Komonchak, who in his book review described Allen’s work as “Manichaeism”.⁷⁷ Allen later confessed that this critique “stung” him so that it led to a critical self-examination:

⁷⁰ Allen 2000, 221.

⁷¹ Allen 2000, 224.

⁷² Allen 2000, 235.

⁷³ Allen 2000, 236–240, 243.

⁷⁴ Allen 2000, 254.

⁷⁵ Allen 2000, 256.

⁷⁶ Twomey 2007, 166. Twomey’s book review was originally published in 2001.

⁷⁷ Allen 2005a.

He meant that I was locked in a dualistic mentality in which Ratzinger was consistently wrong and his critics consistently right. I was initially crushed, then furious. I re-read the book with Fr. Komonchak's criticism in mind, however, and reached the sobering conclusion that he was correct. ... It took Fr. Komonchak pointing this out, publicly and bluntly, for me to ask myself, 'Is this the kind of journalist I want to be'? My answer was no...⁷⁸

To this, Allen added: "If I were to write the book again today, I'm sure it would be more balanced, better informed, and less prone to veer off into judgment ahead of sober analysis."⁷⁹ At this time, he was in fact working on another book that he hoped would "be a more balanced and mature account of both Ratzinger's views and the politics that made him pope".⁸⁰ *The Rise of Benedict XVI*, published in 2005, largely succeeds in this goal. For example, there is a very good summary paragraph on the various motivations behind Ratzinger's critique of relativism and his defence of objective truth.⁸¹ However, the downside of Allen's second book from the perspective of Ratzinger studies is that half of it is dedicated to the last days, death, and funeral of John Paul II as well as the following conclave. Almost the entire pontificate of Benedict XVI still lay hidden in the future at the time of writing. Allen did note Benedict's early invitation to the representatives of the world religions "together to become artisans of peace, in a reciprocal commitment to understanding, respect and love", commenting that Benedict's pontificate "may have surprises in store" in this regard.⁸²

It is unfortunate that Allen's ground-breaking first book turned out as unfair as it did, and that his more balanced second book is too timebound to have any long-term significance. Nevertheless, neither is without merits, and taken together, they teach an important lesson of fairness to the growing field of Ratzinger scholarship. Indeed, after the papal election of 2005, the number of portraits of Ratzinger/Benedict and his theology grew rapidly, and some of these are also relevant to the discussion about his contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. It is to these that we now turn in our continuing evaluation of the *status quaestionis*.

⁷⁸ Allen 2005a.

⁷⁹ Allen 2005a. As a biography of Benedict XVI, Allen's work is now superseded by Guerriero 2018.

⁸⁰ Allen 2005a.

⁸¹ Allen 2005b, 177.

⁸² Allen 2005b, 10.

Theological Introductions and Portraits

I have already mentioned the name of Vincent Twomey, one of Joseph Ratzinger's former doctoral students. His 2007 book *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age: A Theological Portrait* counts as one of the better introductions to Ratzinger's theology. For Twomey, the key to understanding Ratzinger is his characteristic of "openness and dialogue".⁸³ Twomey recognises Ratzinger's principle of *Stellvertretung*,⁸⁴ developed in Article 1, as well as his idea of "mutual enrichment" in encounters with world religions, whose moral wisdom can "flow like tributaries into the great Christian vision of reality".⁸⁵ However, regarding Ratzinger's theology of religions, Twomey is content to give only "the tip of an iceberg", leaving a more detailed examination of it outside the scope of the book.⁸⁶

In addition to Twomey's work, the year 2007 also saw the release of the new edition of Aidan Nichols' excellent book *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, an updated republication of an earlier opus that was well ahead of its time in the late 1980s. For the revised edition, Nichols added a chapter titled "The Candidate", with subsections such as "Looking at world religion", "Culture and religion", "Tolerance and faith", "The primacy of truth", "The place of conscience", and "The dictatorship of relativism".⁸⁷ It obviously reflects the publication of Ratzinger's *Truth and Tolerance*, and Nichols' presentation of its contents is generally good and reliable. Article 2 of the present thesis hopes to deepen, nuance and develop some of the issues a little further. Articles 3 and 4, for their part, go to show that while Cardinal Ratzinger may indeed have been "curiously noncommittal"⁸⁸ with regard to Islam, this was to change with the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI.

The next year (2008) saw the publication of two more theological portraits of Benedict XVI, *Christ Our Joy: The Theological Vision of Pope Benedict XVI* by Joseph Murphy and *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* by Tracey Rowland. Joseph Murphy notes the Ratzingerian characteristics of a "search for the truth"⁸⁹ and "dialogue, sensitive to contemporary questions",⁹⁰

⁸³ Twomey 2007, 173.

⁸⁴ Twomey 2007, 55, 153.

⁸⁵ Twomey 2007, 68–69.

⁸⁶ Twomey 2007, 67.

⁸⁷ Nichols 2007, 207–225.

⁸⁸ Nichols 2007, 213.

⁸⁹ Murphy 2008, 8.

⁹⁰ Murphy 2008, 12.

as well as Ratzinger's critique of relativism and religious pluralism as represented by John Hick and Paul Knitter.⁹¹ Other than these references, however, there is not much to be found on our topic in this book. There is more in Rowland, who first calls attention to Ratzinger's frequent point that the Church Fathers found the "seeds of the Word, not in the religions of the world, but rather in philosophy", so that at its origins "Christianity sides with reason" against the pagan "religions".⁹² Later, Rowland dedicates about four pages to the "territory of interfaith dialogue", summarising Ratzinger's views on the basic choice between monotheism and mysticism, as well as his criteria for multireligious prayer. Here, I find some conceptual confusions and interpretive errors, some of which are also repeated in Rowland's 2010 book, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Article 2 hopes to clear these up.

The following year (2009) saw the publication of yet another pair of books on Ratzinger's theological vision: James Corkery's *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions & Legitimate Hopes* and Thomas P. Rausch's *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision*. Both are good books, simultaneously sympathetic and critical, but in treating Ratzinger and the world religions both make the mistake of beginning with *Dominus Iesus*. Although both authors are aware of the different tone of Ratzinger's personal writings, the DI paradigm determines their analysis.

In the case of Corkery, who mistakenly assumes Ratzinger's authorship of *Dominus Iesus*, it is first argued that for Ratzinger, dialogue "belongs above all to the evangelizing mission of the Church and, as such, is much less about hearing from, appreciating and being enriched by the other than it is simply about proclamation".⁹³ Having said this, Corkery is then positively surprised to find in Ratzinger's personal writings – the 1997 essay on interreligious dialogue – "an 'opening' that is softer in tone than *Dominus Iesus* and that promises a less 'hard-line' approach to interreligious conversation than that document adopted."⁹⁴ The exact same pattern is repeated by Rausch, who brings up the famous DI quote about the "gravely deficient" situation of non-Christians as many as three times.⁹⁵ He says that "Ratzinger's emphasis on evangelization in *Dominus Iesus*" fails to communicate that interreligious dialogue "is not simply a means of evangelizing but a way

⁹¹ Murphy 2008, 45–48.

⁹² Rowland 2008, 62.

⁹³ Corkery 2009, 100.

⁹⁴ Corkery 2009, 103.

⁹⁵ Rausch 2009, 29, 61, 144.

of approaching the mystery of God's truth".⁹⁶ But of course this exactly corresponds to Ratzinger's position, as found in the – surprise – "more positive essay" from 1997, which is briefly and secondarily treated by Rausch in the very next paragraph.

Both Corkery and Rausch note Ratzinger's concern with relativism and the Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict XVI. Rausch writes that Benedict "wants a dialogue with Islam, but, unlike his predecessor, he also calls for reciprocity in relationships, that is religious freedom for Christians in Muslim countries (a mosque in Rome but not a church in Riyadh), not as a quid pro quo but as the honouring of a basic human right".⁹⁷ The Regensburg address "managed to lift up these questions of reason and faith, and thus of human rights and religious authority in Islam, as well as Islam's attitude toward violence done in its name".⁹⁸ Here Rausch touches upon a vital theme, developed at length in Article 4.

In 2010, Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion published *The Ratzinger Reader*, a collection of representative writings by Joseph Ratzinger on various theological topics, preceded by generally high-quality introductions by the editors. The introductions in chapter five, which is the one relevant to our topic, are written by Gerard Mannion. The debate surrounding *Dominus Iesus* and Ratzinger's critique of relativism are mentioned, of course, and consideration is given to the topics discussed in Articles 1 and 2.⁹⁹ Critical voices are heard, as are those of Ratzinger's defenders. In the introduction to Ratzinger's article on *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, Mannion tries to downplay Ratzinger's inclusivism and instead chooses to emphasise his "unswerving conviction of the superiority of Christianity to other faiths".¹⁰⁰

Another helpful volume on Ratzinger's theology, edited by John C. Cavadini, was published by University of Notre Dame Press in 2016 under the title *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*. This book includes Robert M. Gimello's interesting chapter on Buddhism in Ratzinger's theology of religions. Among other things, Gimello clarifies the oft-quoted comment that Ratzinger made in 1997 in a French interview, where speaking about Buddhism he used the term *auto-érotisme spirituel*. Gimello writes that the quote has been widely misinterpreted, for it speaks about the impulse that has led some ill-informed Christians to Buddhism, not about Buddhism itself. Thus, it is about what Buddhism appears (*apparaît*) to offer to many in the West who have not studied it

⁹⁶ Rausch 2009, 62.

⁹⁷ Rausch 2009, 38.

⁹⁸ Rausch 2009, 39.

⁹⁹ Mannion 2010, 142–148.

¹⁰⁰ Mannion 2010, 154.

seriously. Gimello concludes that we see in these remarks not so much a denigration of Buddhism as another condemnation of modern solipsism, relativism, and superficiality.¹⁰¹

German Contributions

Of works published in German, I would first like to mention an interesting collection of articles from 2013, titled *Der Theologenpapst*, which includes an excellent essay by Roman A. Siebenrock on Ratzinger's theology of religions. Siebenrock realises the nature of DI and leaves it aside, choosing instead to begin with Ratzinger's answer to Seewald's question about how many ways there are to God: "As many as there are people."¹⁰² Siebenrock briefly acknowledges Ratzinger's Barthian-influenced version of soteriological inclusivism (Article 1),¹⁰³ then moves on to present a commendable analysis of Ratzinger's 1964 article on mysticism and monotheism. Overall, Siebenrock notices a two-step approach, where juxtaposition and contrast are followed by integration and reconciliation. First, difference is emphasised, but then, there is a search for a connection and a convergence.¹⁰⁴ This two-step approach is taken up and applied in Article 2 to what Ratzinger calls "interreligious ecumenism" and to interreligious prayer.

Another noteworthy collection of articles in German is *Kirche – Sakrament und Gemeinschaft*, published in 2011 in the Ratzinger-Studien series of the Pope Benedict XVI Institute in Regensburg. In particular, there are two papers that relate to the question examined in Article 1, the salvation of non-Christians. Lothar Wehr looks at one of the passages Ratzinger uses to argue for the salvation of non-Christians (Matthew 25:31–46) from an exegetical perspective. He concludes that although such soteriological intent falls outside of the scope of this text's original meaning, this interpretation can be given to it today, without being completely arbitrary, as a development of some basic Matthean ideas.¹⁰⁵

Even more relevant for our purposes is Walter Andreas Euler's article on Ratzinger's ecclesiology and theology of religions. Euler writes about the axiom *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*,

¹⁰¹ Gimello 2016, 119.

¹⁰² Siebenrock 2013, 370–371; see Ratzinger 1996, 32. It is also interesting to read Seewald's recollection of this question and answer: "I really did not know what he would say and had been inclined to suppose that he would use some sort of formula. The answer came back like a pistol shot. There were as many ways to God, he said, as there were people; since ultimately, each person had his own path" (Seewald 2008, 227).

¹⁰³ Siebenrock 2013, 373–374 n. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Siebenrock 2013, 375, 384, 386.

¹⁰⁵ Wehr 2011, 53.

which had, as Ratzinger observes, largely lost its credibility by the 1950s.¹⁰⁶ Euler chides “council enthusiasts” for imagining that Vatican II abolished this axiom, which to them has a smell of the dark ages.¹⁰⁷ Against such a view, Euler cites *Lumen Gentium* 14, in which the dogma is in his view “unequivocally retained” and even made a *Personprinzip* in relation to those who know the Church’s teaching; otherwise it is said to remain a *Sachprinzip*.¹⁰⁸ Referring to Ratzinger, who is presented as tackling these difficult issues “in full accord with Holy Scripture and Tradition”,¹⁰⁹ Euler says that the *Sachverhalt* of Cyprian’s *Salus extra ecclesiam non est*, being “rightly understood”, says nothing about who is saved but only speaks about the powers at work in each instance of salvation.¹¹⁰

Euler’s presentation is a mixed bag. I think we should first openly acknowledge, as Benedict XVI himself does, that what we are dealing with here is a 20th-century reinterpretation of *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, representing a “profound evolution of dogma”, and that the older, exclusivist interpretation has indeed been abandoned. For Ratzinger, the axiom is not so much a treasure of tradition or a hallmark of orthodoxy to be passionately defended; rather, it appears more like a dogmatic stumbling block that must be carefully explained to make Christian belief possible in the first place in our day and age. As a dogmatic axiom it cannot be erased from the Church’s consciousness, more important is that it be “rightly understood”, which in all honesty entails a rather radical departure from the more traditional and literal meaning. Moreover, given Ratzinger’s view regarding those who are ultimately saved (which is evident, for example, in *Spe Salvi*), I do not think he would really agree with Euler’s interpretation of the *Personprinzip*. For Ratzinger, in heaven there are undoubtedly many who knew of the Catholic Church’s teaching but remained content with their Protestant or even Muslim “openness to God”.¹¹¹

Another 2016 publication by the same Pope Benedict XVI Institute includes a reflection on the Regensburg lecture by Gerhard Cardinal Müller, then Prefect of the CDF and previously Bishop of Regensburg. Ten years after the event, Müller calls the lecture a discourse of “prophetic

¹⁰⁶ Euler 2011, 367 n. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Euler 2011, 367.

¹⁰⁸ Euler 2011, 368–369.

¹⁰⁹ Euler 2011, 383.

¹¹⁰ Euler 2011, 369.

¹¹¹ See Article 1. For an evaluation of Ratzinger from the perspective of someone who really wants to unequivocally retain this medieval dogma *eodem sensu eademque sententia*, see the Sedevacantist Peter Dimond’s book review of *Truth and Tolerance*. Dimond regards Ratzinger’s rejection of soteriological exclusivism and his admission of the existence of “pagan saints” as “astounding apostasy” and “bold heresy”, a clear denial of the dogmatic teaching of the Council of Florence that “all those who are outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the everlasting fire”. From this perspective, Ratzinger the archconservative is actually Ratzinger the ultraliberal! Even worse, Dimond concludes: “He is not even remotely Catholic.”

power and truth” and “a manifesto of dialogue between religions and cultures” on the foundation of reason.¹¹² He also refers to the Muslim response in the form of *A Common Word* – a document signed by 138 scholars – as “a historic event of the first rank”.¹¹³ But most interestingly, and in a manner that is very relevant for the argument of Article 4, Müller says that “the modern phenomenon of international terrorism in its political-ideological or political-pseudoreligious versions cannot be confronted simply with an appeal to reason and tolerance”.¹¹⁴ He shows the way forward with a brief hermeneutical argument of his own, however simple and provisional. While not entering into the world of Muslim interpretations, Müller suggests that the beginning of Surah 1 (and almost all successive surahs), the *Basmala* (“in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”), appears as the hermeneutical key to all that follows in the Qur’an, disallowing any justification of violations against humanity.¹¹⁵ As indicated in Article 4, something like this needs to be developed further if it is to be credibly argued that “the heart” of Islam is antithetical to violence.

There are, of course, other German commentaries on the Regensburg lecture, such as the 2006 *Glaube und Vernunft: Die Regensburger Vorlesung* by Gesine Schwan, Adel Theodor Khoury, and Karl Cardinal Lehmann, as well as English ones, like James V. Schall’s *The Regensburg Lecture*. But there is not much to add here: both books agree that the central question in terms of the dialogue with Islam revolves around the problem of religion and violence, which is the starting point of Article 4.¹¹⁶

Finally, the standard criticisms of Ratzinger and *Dominus Iesus* (or Ratzinger as *Dominus Iesus*) are obviously available in the German language as well. A prime example is *Theologie und Ideologie bei Joseph Ratzinger* by Hermann Häring, from 2001. But given the foregoing explanations, there is no need to engage this topic any further.

French and Spanish Contributions

In the French language, I have been able to identify and make use of the following relevant books: Vincent Guibert’s *Le dialogue interreligieux chez Joseph Ratzinger* (2015), Georges Dwaillibi’s *Le Pape Benoît XVI et l’Islam, entre dialogue et rivalités* (2011), and Vincent Aucante’s *Benoît et l’Islam*

¹¹² Müller 2016, 29, 33.

¹¹³ Müller 2016, 34.

¹¹⁴ Müller 2016, 36.

¹¹⁵ Müller 2016, 37.

¹¹⁶ Lehmann 2006, 133; Schall 2007, 26.

(2008). According to Guibert, Benedict XVI brought “an inestimable theological profundity to the dialogue of the Catholic Church with the other religions”,¹¹⁷ wishing to contribute “to a rational and pragmatic dialogue between the religions rather than seek a mystical convergence that would level the historical and religious differences and that could lead to a form of relativism”.¹¹⁸ For Benedict, “interreligious dialogue is above all listening to the Logos”.¹¹⁹

Guibert wishes to offer corrections to two misunderstandings. First, one of the early criticisms of Benedict XVI was that he combined the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) with the Pontifical Council for Culture, sending the president of the PCID, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, to Egypt.¹²⁰ Guibert explains that this was not an expression of distancing oneself from interreligious dialogue but rather emphasising its close ties with intercultural dialogue. Second, Guibert points out that the Regensburg lecture was also misinterpreted, as it only aimed at a condemnation of religiously motivated violence and an affirmation of the positive link between religion and reason.¹²¹ Guibert also underlines the fact that Benedict XVI promoted interreligious dialogue not as a passing option but as a constitutive element of what the Church is, being based on continuous dialogue of the Trinitarian God with humankind.¹²² Finally, he says that the aim of interreligious dialogue is not simply the establishment of peace but the discovery of the truth.¹²³ This is a good analysis, although here we face the problem exposed and examined in Article 3 also in the French literature, for George Dwailibi’s position is that Benedict XVI “excludes dogmatic and theological debate from the field of interreligious dialogue”.¹²⁴ How can the aim of interreligious dialogue be the discovery of truth, if theological and dogmatic debate is excluded?

The emphasis in Dwailibi’s analysis falls more on the question of religious liberty and the concept of reciprocity.¹²⁵ Commenting on the Regensburg lecture and Benedict’s interreligious strategy in general, Dwailibi says that the pope has the aim of creating an interreligious common front in terms of three things: the relationship between faith and reason, the relationship between

¹¹⁷ Guibert 2015, 7.

¹¹⁸ Guibert 2015, 8–9.

¹¹⁹ Guibert 2015, 8–9.

¹²⁰ See, e.g., Shortt 2006, 143.

¹²¹ Guibert 2015, 7.

¹²² Guibert 2015, 36.

¹²³ Guibert 2015, 43.

¹²⁴ Dwailibi 2011, 72.

¹²⁵ Dwailibi 2011, 19, 112.

religion and violence, and the relationship between religious liberty and the management of politics both in the West and in the Muslim countries.¹²⁶

Finally, Aucante's book consists of an introduction and a collection of texts that take up more than half of the space (the same is true for Guibert). The core of the analysis is correct and confirms what others have found: the relationship between faith and reason is central for Benedict and is connected to the problem of religiously motivated violence. Whereas John Paul II emphasised prayer and the mystical way, Benedict XVI wanted to direct dialogue with Islam towards a more rational exchange.¹²⁷

Pablo Blanco has written a fair amount in the Spanish language on the theology of Joseph Ratzinger, including some on his theology of religions. As the title suggests, Blanco's study *Joseph Ratzinger: razón y cristianismo: la victoria de la razón en el mundo de las religiones* highlights Ratzinger's view of reason as a central element in Christianity's "victory" in the world of religions.¹²⁸ Yet, despite the title, there is not much in the book that explicitly deals with the theology of religions; instead the focus is on faith and reason from various perspectives. However, Blanco does correctly present some of Ratzinger's relevant ideas, such as the priority of the phenomenological approach over against the soteriological one, and the interpretation of Matthew 2 as implying a *praeparatio evangelica* in the religion of the Magi.¹²⁹ As a whole, the book serves as a reliable presentation of Ratzinger and some of his central ideas, but not so much as a critical or original analysis.

The same applies to *La teología de Joseph Ratzinger* by the same author. Blanco emphasises Ratzinger's idea that Christianity finds its predecessors in the Logos tradition of the philosophers more than in the pagan religions. Christianity distinguishes itself from the mystical religions through relationship with a personal God, together with an acceptance of critical reason.¹³⁰ Blanco's treatment of *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* resembles that of Mong, Mannion, and Euler – knowing full well what the sources say and even quoting some of it, yet claiming almost the opposite in the analysis. Blanco says that it is "clear that *extra Ecclesia, ulla salus*" [sic!] and that Ratzinger "maintains the necessity of the Church for salvation", which leads to "the necessity of proclaiming Christian truth and dialogue with other religions".¹³¹ Rather, in Ratzinger the necessity of dialogue

¹²⁶ Dwailibi 2011, 37.

¹²⁷ Aucante 2008, 27, 67.

¹²⁸ Blanco 2005, 118–119, 227.

¹²⁹ Blanco 2005, 72.

¹³⁰ Blanco 2011, 164–165, 371–372.

¹³¹ Blanco 2011, 379–381.

and proclamation is rooted in the dialogical nature of God and the Church, as well as the natural impulse to share the good one has received or discovered – *bonum diffusivum sui*.

Finally, in addition to Blanco's work, there is a short Spanish-language book by Cardinal Carlos Amigo Vallejo, the Archbishop Emeritus of Sevilla, titled *Convivencia y diálogo: Benedicto XVI y los musulmanes*. The book's attitude towards Benedict is positive, and it presents to the general audience some of Benedict's sayings on such unsurprising themes as religious liberty, respect, dialogue, peace, violence, and relativism. However, there is nothing by way of a scholarly analysis.

Other Contributions

Though my primary dialogue partners in this overview are Ratzinger scholars, or books on Ratzinger/Benedict, I should also mention some other relevant contributions. First, there is the relatively influential early commentary on Benedict XVI's engagement with Islam by the Jesuit Samir Khalil Samir, who participated in a closed seminar with the pope and select experts in September of 2005. According to Samir, Benedict's "essential idea" is that dialogue with other religions "cannot be essentially a theological or religious dialogue, except in the broad terms of moral values; it must instead be a dialogue of cultures and civilizations".¹³²

For Samir, this "step towards cultural dialogue is of extreme importance", for in his experience of dialogue with the Muslim world, "as soon as talk begins on religious topics, discussion turns to the Palestinians, Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, in other words all the questions of political and cultural conflict. An exquisitely theological discussion is never possible with Islam: one cannot speak of the Trinity, of Incarnation, etc."¹³³ That Benedict XVI took this line is also confirmed by the Muslim philosopher Tariq Ramadan. Ironically, however, Ramadan's complaint is that it was impossible to talk theology with Benedict XVI. He reads like a reversed mirror image of Samir:

In the course of our encounters, the last one in Rome in 2009, it proved impossible to broach theological fundamentals and principles: the discussion quickly turned to our respective practices, and to the treatment of Christian minorities in the Orient. Of course we could point

¹³² Samir 2006.

¹³³ Samir 2006. Yet, the real-life example Samir provides as evidence seems to me to suggest the contrary: "Once in Cordoba, in 1977, a conference was held on the notion of prophecy. After having dealt with the prophetic character of Christ as seen by Muslims, a Christian made a presentation on the prophetic character of Mohammad from the Christian point of view and dared to say that the Church cannot recognize him as a prophet; at the most, it could define him as such but only in a generic sense, just as one says that Marx is 'prophet' of modern times. The conclusion? This question became the topic of conversation for the following three days, pre-empting the original conference." But does this not mean that Christians and Muslims were dialoguing about theology for three days?

to shared values, but even then, dialogue rapidly veered off into comparisons, reciprocity and even competition. Debate on the treatment of Eastern Christians cannot and must not be avoided; discrimination is a fact and Muslims must respond in full candour, but this cannot become a pretext for shirking fundamental theological questions...¹³⁴

How does this – the other side of the story that forms the backdrop for Article 3 – fit with Benedict’s oft-noted vision, emphasised by Viviano and others, that the “purpose of dialogue is to discover the truth”? In Washington in 2008, Benedict XVI spoke about this emphatically, recommending that dialogue “not stop at identifying a common set of values, but go on to probe their ultimate foundation”.¹³⁵ How could Benedict XVI speak and act so self-contradictorily? Or are Samir’s and Ramadan’s reports perhaps exaggerated or excessively coloured by their subjectivity?

Another noteworthy contribution in the same vein is the Italian philosopher Marcello Pera’s book *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christians*, which Pope Benedict XVI has publicly endorsed on multiple occasions.¹³⁶ In this book, Pera argues that because Christianity and Islam are theologically incompatible, truly interreligious dialogue is “simply impossible”.¹³⁷ Strangely, he seems to think that if dialogue were to be truly interreligious, “then Christianity and Islam would have to be the same religion expressed in different words”, and “the whole dispute would be reduced to normal questions of interpretation within a single religious archetype... a peripheral dispute concerning details”.¹³⁸ Pera suggests that since interreligious dialogue could really only produce friendly conversation, verbal adjustment, or syncretism, Benedict XVI has rejected it and opted for a “dialogue of cultures” instead.¹³⁹ While there is next to nothing by way of documented evidence in Pera’s analysis of Benedict, the really puzzling factor here is Benedict’s public endorsement of the book. Making some sense of this is a crucial part of the task in Article 3.

Article 3 also mentions a contribution by the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum, who has actually commented on Ratzinger’s approach to the religions on several occasions, influencing some other early interpreters. In his book *Amazing Church*, Baum identifies Ratzinger with *Dominus Iesus* and says that “the dialogue blessed by Cardinal Ratzinger is quite different from the dialogue

¹³⁴ Ramadan 2013.

¹³⁵ Benedict XVI 2008.

¹³⁶ Most recently, in a previously unpublished letter, Benedict XVI has said that the vision of this book “remains inalienable to me”. See Tornielli 2018.

¹³⁷ Pera 2008, 136.

¹³⁸ Pera 2008, 135–136. This argument is very confusing. Is not “interreligious” dialogue by definition something that takes place between different religions? What Pera is talking about is more properly *ecumenical* dialogue, even though even there the disputes are by no means merely “peripheral” and about “details”.

¹³⁹ Pera 2008, 136.

across boundaries fostered by John Paul II".¹⁴⁰ Baum believes that engaging in interreligious dialogue with the aim of converting the other "would be immoral" and that Ratzinger's proposal "reflects an ethical horizon that the Church has left behind".¹⁴¹ In a subsequent book, *Signs of the Times*, Baum says that some of Benedict XVI's speeches in the first months after his election seemed to suggest that he had "changed his mind and now followed the teaching of his predecessor", but later pronouncements, especially Regensburg, revealed that this judgment was hasty and that "he has remained faithful to his own theology".¹⁴² In a yet later piece, Baum argues that while Benedict had refused to recognise "anything of God" in other religions up to 2006–2007, he underwent a dramatic conversion thanks to *A Common Word* and became a promoter of interreligious dialogue in 2008–2009.¹⁴³ Baum's rash conversions reflect not so much the "zigzag" impression given by some of Ratzinger/Benedict's words and deeds (Article 3), but rather the superficiality of his own analyses. In 2016, a year before his death, Baum argued in a last article that interreligious dialogue should include listening to secular voices, and that support for this can be found in the writings and actions of Benedict XVI.¹⁴⁴

The inclusion of agnostics at the interreligious meeting in Assisi in 2011 is noted also by Dermot A. Lane in his book *Stepping Stones to Other Religions: A Christian Theology of Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Moreover, he mentions Benedict's speech against religiously motivated violence, examined in Article 4, as a positive contribution. "Many will welcome the question posed by Benedict about the true nature of religion, the inclusion of non-believers in the dialogue, the recognition of the contribution that agnostics can make to dialogue, the clear separation from religion from violence, and the appreciation that *all are pilgrims* of truth and peace."¹⁴⁵

Other than this, Lane's analysis of Ratzinger/Benedict's contribution to interreligious dialogue follows a familiar narrative: a tough line in *Dominus Iesus*, a striking commitment to dialogue at the beginning of the pontificate, and the controversial shift of the Regensburg lecture, which moved Catholic-Muslim dialogue to the centre of attention.¹⁴⁶ Lane also indicates that "some detect an additional shift" from interreligious to intercultural dialogue, but wisely remarks that "it

¹⁴⁰ Baum 2005, 119–120.

¹⁴¹ Baum 2005, 120.

¹⁴² Baum 2007, 122.

¹⁴³ Baum 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Baum 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Lane 2011, 87.

¹⁴⁶ Lane 2011, 79–84.

may be premature to read too much into this particular emphasis” and that it would be “difficult to deny the legitimacy of inter-religious dialogue with Muslims”, given *Nostra Aetate*.¹⁴⁷

Finally, I would like to mention Eamon Duffy’s treatment of Ratzinger/Benedict’s life and pontificate in *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, which conveniently summarises a popular understanding of the matter at hand by highlighting the cases of Dupuis, *Dominus Iesus*, Michael Fitzgerald, and Regensburg. The Dupuis case betrayed Ratzinger’s “anxieties about the dangers of relativism”, whereas DI (with its famous “gravely deficient”) expressed “Ratzinger’s determined insistence on the uniqueness of Christ and the centrality of the Roman Catholic Church to human salvation”.¹⁴⁸ Fitzgerald’s exile is seen as an indication of Benedict XVI’s “steely scepticism about what he regarded as his predecessor’s imprudent overtures towards non-Christian faiths”, while the Regensburg speech is remembered mainly for the unfortunate “uproar” it caused, not the unprecedented dialogue it led to.¹⁴⁹ While this may well reflect the most widespread impressions on our topic, we have seen – and will continue to see – that there is much, much more than this to “Ratzinger and the religions”.

Conclusion

In the preceding overview of the *status quaestionis* we have come to appreciate what an interesting and multidimensional field of study “Ratzinger and the religions” really is, despite its relatively minor role in Ratzinger scholarship thus far. We have explored English, German, French, and Spanish contributions and registered the variety of approaches and views regarding Ratzinger and his theology.

I have argued that it is a mistake to read Ratzinger’s theology of religions and his approach to interreligious dialogue through the lens of CDF investigations (which are a matter of collaborative effort and duty of office) and pronouncements, especially the “worst” phrases of *Dominus Iesus* (such as “gravely deficient”), when these are not found in his personal writings and speeches. I have also pointed out the connection between where one stands on the question of the “two Ratzingers” and what one thinks of Ratzinger/Benedict’s contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. The “conversions” of John Allen and Peter Seewald in this

¹⁴⁷ Lane 2011, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Duffy 2014, 391–392.

¹⁴⁹ Duffy 2014, 398–399.

regard, as well as the voices of those who have known Ratzinger personally, deserve to be noted before making any sweepingly critical assessments of Ratzinger's person and thought.

In terms of theological issues, we have detected some key tensions in the literature. The first one has to do with Ratzinger's position with regard to exclusivism and inclusivism. Some scholars try to portray Ratzinger as a soteriological exclusivist who firmly and faithfully upholds the old dogma of *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, while others take it for granted that Ratzinger has no problem with the salvation of non-Christians.

The second – and even more puzzling – discrepancy regards Ratzinger/Benedict's view about the possibility, nature, and aim of interreligious dialogue. According to one opinion, Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI's view of dialogue is necessarily theological, as it emphasises that the ultimate goal of interreligious dialogue is to discover the truth. According to another opinion, however, Benedict XVI thinks that theological dialogue should be set aside as an impossibility, and interreligious dialogue should be replaced by a dialogue of cultures.

Those who propagate this latter view have made special reference to the dialogue with Islam and the concepts of reciprocity, religious liberty, reason, and religiously motivated violence. But can violent Islamism be defeated simply with appeals to reason and tolerance? These are some of the questions and problems underpinning the four articles of the present dissertation. Next, I will proceed to a closer consideration of their respective backgrounds and contributions.

The Articles: Backgrounds, Contributions, and Further Questions

Below I discuss each of the four articles, explaining how and why I selected these particular topics, outlining what I consider to be each article's most important contributions, and offering some thoughts about possibilities for further research.

Article 1: Joseph Ratzinger's Soteriological Inclusivism

Due to a personal history of interest in (and struggle with) the difficult dogma of *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, I was attentive from the outset to what Ratzinger has to say about the salvation of followers of other faiths. The debate between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism has of course been the central element in Christian theology of religions for decades, and I soon noticed that it

was present also in *Truth and Tolerance*, despite the fact that Ratzinger criticises reducing the theology of religions to this one issue.

Ratzinger's rejection of soteriological exclusivism in *Truth and Tolerance* is unambiguous, and I soon observed that he takes a very relaxed view towards the final fate of non-Christians. The problem in Ratzinger studies is that Ratzinger's reputation as a conservative apparently makes it difficult for certain people to come to terms with his position here. It does not fit the paradigm of the progressive critics any more than that of the conservative Ratzinger fan club. This is not to deny that there are positive exceptions on both sides, but even those who recognise Ratzinger's inclusivism usually do it briefly and one-sidedly, mentioning only the subjective aspect (conscience, etc.) or the objective aspect (*Stellvertretung*).

In light of this situation, there was a need for an extensive and honest treatment of Ratzinger's soteriological inclusivism. I believe Article 1 succeeds in making several valuable contributions, which can be summarised in three main points.

First, it is necessary to differentiate between the question of truth and the question of salvation when speaking about "inclusivism". Within the question of salvation, following Gavin D'Costa, there is a further difference between structural inclusivism and restrictivist inclusivism. Ratzinger is a restrictivist inclusivist, meaning that he believes followers of other religions can be saved, but not in and through their religions *as such*.

Second, Ratzinger's version of inclusivism *combines* a subjective aspect and an objective aspect. The subjective aspect means that the non-Christian is helped towards salvation by the silent presence of God in his conscience and whatever in his religion helps him towards faith, love, truth, self-transcendence, and God. The objective aspect refers to *Stellvertretung*, the vicarious representation of Christ and the Church "for the many". This is an ecclesiological and Catholic version of a Barthian dynamic.

Third, though even as pope emeritus Benedict XVI favours *Stellvertretung* inclusivism, he recognises its hypothetical nature. It did not make its way to the Church's official teaching in *Dominus Iesus* or Benedict XVI's papal magisterium. However, the model is connected to Ratzinger's original interpretation of purgatory, which was interestingly raised to the status of a papal teaching in *Spe Salvi*.¹⁵⁰ Here, the optimism of Ratzinger's soteriological inclusivism is evident, as he suggests that the "great majority of people" will be saved in the end.

¹⁵⁰ One cannot help noticing the tension between Ratzinger's professed unwillingness to "disseminate his private theology" as prefect of the CDF and the introduction of some of his own theological theories in *Spe Salvi*. To solve the

I believe Article 1 strongly documents Ratzinger's position over the decades with clear texts. However, critical reactions are obviously possible, and there is room for further research. First, it might be objected that Gavin D'Costa also speaks of two kinds of exclusivism, "restrictive-access exclusivism" (based on election) and "universal-access exclusivism" (based on a requirement of *fides ex auditu*, even if satisfied post mortem),¹⁵¹ in which case Ratzinger could be classified as a universal-access exclusivist. One might do this if one wishes to define the terms in such a way, but I do not think D'Costa's subdivisions of exclusivism are useful as they stand. In order to really count as exclusivism, "universal-access exclusivism" should simply refer to a form of exclusivism (i.e. denying salvation to non-Christians/Catholics) that is not based on predestination or limited atonement (i.e. "restrictive-access") but on a lack of explicit faith, baptism, or Church membership. Implicit faith and post-mortem solutions are better seen as inclusivist than exclusivist, for they concern those who are empirically outside the Christian faith or Church. Moreover, Ratzinger's purgatorial solution is best described as *fides ex visu*, not *ex auditu*.

But what about the normative level? How might Ratzinger's position be criticised or exploited through more constructive theological arguments? A weakness immediately suggests itself here: it seems that Ratzinger's real *starting point* is not revelation or dogma but simply the modern conviction that exclusivism (or even pessimistic inclusivism, where only a few non-Christians might perhaps be saved) cannot be true. Revelation and dogma are then reread on the basis of this conviction. A conservative critic could point out that one should first expound the data of revelation and dogma in the original sense, then faithfully keep it and guard it, and challenge the world with it, rather than agree to conform to its way of thinking. On the other hand, a liberal critic could easily apply to other doctrines the method Ratzinger uses here, asking why we could not do the same sort of rereading there. If the Council of Florence can be turned upside down on such a central issue as salvation, why stick with *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* or *Pastor Aeternus*?

A final critical point dogmatically, ecumenically, and exegetically, is Ratzinger's apparent equation of Pauline *pistis*, considered axiomatically to be necessary for salvation, with a rather vague "openness to God" or "self-transcendence", whose content need not be clearly defined. It could be asked whether or not we can exegetically find out what Paul meant and whether or not this is authoritative. Is it not the case that Paul was speaking specifically about faith *in Christ*?

tension, one might consider the difference between the authority and position of prefect and pope, or pay attention to the cautious and tentative nature of the language in *Spe Salvi*.

¹⁵¹ D'Costa, 2009, 7, 29–32.

If the concept of implicit faith is raised, it should be asked whether or not this implicit *pistis* also effects what explicit *pistis* effects (justification, etc.). For further research, it could be interesting to compare Ratzinger's inclusivistic soteriology with his interpretation of St. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith in the context of ecumenical dialogue. Ratzinger's criticism of Rahner might also have to be reconsidered: given this view of *pistis*, are not "the great majority of people" (all those in whom there is an "ultimate openness to truth, to love, to God", as in *Spe Salvi*) actually implicit believers in Christ and, as such, anonymous Christians?

Article 2: Two Ways, Two Steps: On Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of Religions

It is clear that a collection of articles such as that of the present dissertation cannot exhaustively deal with every aspect of Joseph Ratzinger's theology of religions. Yet, while I was reading *Truth and Tolerance* and reflecting on the choice of topics for the four articles, I realised that I could not omit Ratzinger's "most comprehensive articulation of his theology of religions",¹⁵² the 1964 article on the unity and diversity of religions, where Ratzinger offers "an original interpretation, based on research he had done while still a professor at the university".¹⁵³ This article is supplemented by similar considerations found in the 1997 piece on interreligious dialogue, "a gem of an essay".¹⁵⁴ I think these two contributions need to be emphasised as a corrective to the distorted view of Ratzinger's theology of religions based on phrases such as "gravely deficient" (*Dominus Iesus*) and "things only evil and inhuman"¹⁵⁵ (Regensburg).

The downside is that there is not so much originality in analysing this aspect of Ratzinger's thought, for it has already been presented by several earlier commentators (e.g. Viviano, Nichols, Rowland, Mannion, Blanco). However, I noticed some discrepancies and mistakes in the existing analyses, most of which are also rather brief. Consequently, the first contribution of Article 2 consists of offering a fuller and more accurate presentation of this aspect of Ratzinger's theology.

The second contribution consists in taking up Roman Siebenrock's helpful observation that Ratzinger's treatment of the world religions is characterised by a two-step approach, the first step emphasising truth and difference, the second seeking reconciliation and integration. In addition to bringing this insight over from the German to the English-language literature, I apply it to

¹⁵² Viviano 2013, 205.

¹⁵³ Baum 2007, 122.

¹⁵⁴ Echevarria 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Benedict XVI 2006.

Ratzinger's views about "interreligious ecumenism" and interreligious prayer, two cases where previous scholarship has tended to one-sidedly emphasise the first step.

It must be admitted that there is a difference between these two questions and that the second step is much less explicit in Ratzinger in the case of interreligious prayer. Undoubtedly, Ratzinger is rather sceptical about multireligious and interreligious prayer. Yet, there is an opening in Ratzinger's position inasmuch as he does not completely exclude multireligious and interreligious prayer but offers criteria instead. Therefore, the third contribution of this article is that, in consideration of these criteria, I suggest three cases of interreligious prayer that might be acceptable (interreligious families, missionary situations, and prayers to saints). I hope this, while tentative, will be of interest not only to Ratzinger scholars but also more widely to scholars of interreligious dialogue, especially those thinking about the question of interreligious prayer.

The material covered in this article also provides plenty of incentives for further discussion. The adequacy of Ratzinger's categorisation of religions into "two ways" could be critically discussed in greater detail with reference to data from religious studies. It could be compared with typologies offered by other theologians. The arguments for the theistic way could be scrutinised in a more comprehensive way. In terms of the "second step", one could ask why Ratzinger uses the term interreligious "ecumenism" and what it would entail in practice if one were to work towards an integrated theism where the mystical element would be truly "decisive". Would someone dare to try writing a systematic theology from this perspective? Finally, as I suggest in the article, further discussion on Ratzinger's criteria for interreligious prayer would also be welcome.

Article 3: Mission Impossible? Pope Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue

This article is chronologically the first (in order of publication) and by far the longest of the four articles. I also regard it as the most interesting and puzzling. Its basic problematic is evident in the literature review. From an early stage in my research I noticed a curious tension in Ratzinger/Benedict and in the secondary literature: some texts emphasised that the goal of interreligious dialogue was the discovery of the truth, and this usually came with a link to mission, whereas other texts seemed to deny the possibility of "interreligious", "religious", or "theological" dialogue altogether, suggesting a shift to "intercultural" dialogue. As nobody's account seemed to fit all the evidence, in search for clarity on this complicated problem, I carefully read through all the relevant sources from the late 1990s until the end of the papacy. The results should merit

consideration in any serious future discussion of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's views on interreligious dialogue.

The first and most important contribution of the article is the clear identification of the problem and the development of tools to tackle it. For this purpose, I named the two lines of thought the "truth/mission model" and the "culture/values model", even though it turns out that there exist different versions of both and they need not be mutually exclusive. I show that despite a shift in emphasis towards the "culture/values" model at the beginning of the pontificate, the "truth/mission" model was not abandoned by Benedict XVI; accordingly, the labelling of interreligious or theological dialogue as "impossible" is an exaggeration, mostly deriving from the writings of Samir Khalil Samir and Marcello Pera. Also, there is a confusing mingling of "interreligious" or "religious" and "theological" dialogue in these sources. Interreligious dialogue is a much wider concept than simply theological dialogue, as explained in the PCID document *Dialogue and Proclamation*. It is subdivided into dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience. This seems like a solid framework, both conceptually and theologically, and commentators would do well to stick to it for clarity's sake. Benedict XVI himself takes it up in London in 2010, even after endorsing Pera's book *Why We Call Ourselves Christians* (whose influence may be seen in how theological exchange is downplayed, yet not denied):

The *dialogue of life* involves simply living alongside one another and learning from one another in such a way as to grow in mutual knowledge and respect. The *dialogue of action* brings us together in concrete forms of collaboration, as we apply our religious insights to the task of promoting integral human development, working for peace, justice and the stewardship of creation... Then at the level of formal conversations, there is a need not only for *theological exchange*, but also sharing our spiritual riches, speaking of our *experience* of prayer and contemplation, and expressing to one another the joy of our encounter with divine love.¹⁵⁶

The second important contribution of the article is a thorough discussion of Benedict XVI's 2008 letter endorsing Marcello Pera's book. I argue that the letter is misleadingly titled by the publishing newspaper; it is very carefully worded by Benedict XVI, and the apparent affirmation of the "impossibility" of interreligious dialogue is thrice qualified, so that one must be extremely cautious against oversimplifications. I also show that the exchange with Pera seems to have influenced Benedict to make him emphasise that *fundamental religious choices* are not up for negotiation in

¹⁵⁶ Benedict XVI 2010b, emphases added.

interreligious dialogue. Benedict's final position, which includes the consequent admission that interreligious dialogue does not aim at converting the other, is best explained in his 2012 speech to the Roman Curia, whose analysis I would regard as the third most important contribution of the article. I would like to stress this profound speech as definitely counting among the most important sources for Benedict's view of interreligious dialogue, even though it has received nothing like the attention it deserves in the literature. Here, Benedict XVI stays faithful to his characteristic emphasis on truth, but he nuances it to fit the idea that interreligious dialogue does not aim at conversion.

I hope that Article 3 offers a stimulus for the theological community, especially scholars of Ratzinger/Benedict and all those reflecting on the nature of interreligious dialogue and its relationship to mission. Due to the article's length and breadth, there is a lot of potential for further discussion, both on a system-immanent level and on a more normative or constructive level. As for the former, I continue to be somewhat puzzled by the unlikely zigzag in Ratzinger/Benedict's actions and emphases, and I wonder if there is a better way of harmonising the material. As for the latter, I wonder how, exactly, a fundamental religious choice (*scelta di fondo*) should be defined. Is (adherence to) each and every dogma, for example, a *scelta di fondo*, or is it something more basic?

Another possibility worth considering would be to refrain from a universal definition of what the aim or purpose of interreligious dialogue should or should not be. Why could the parties not set the goal on a case-to-case basis? Why could the goal not *sometimes* be conversion, especially if the two parties understand and agree that this is in fact the goal and have no problem with it? One can easily imagine this happening between student friends, for example, who are getting to seriously know, challenge, and be challenged by another religion for the first time.¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, in most cases of dialogue (of life, of action, and formal exchanges), conversion is not the goal. The same would apply to questioning of fundamental choices. There are different kinds of believers, weak and strong, young and old, committed and not so committed, and depending on these and other variables they might or might not be willing to question their faith, probe its foundations, and discuss fundamental choices in terms of a definitive yes or no. In any case, whether debating the ultimate truths of religion or simply learning about each other, this would be interreligious dialogue.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, the story of the friendly dialogue, debates, and conversion related in Qureshi 2016.

Article 4: From Violence to Witness via Reason and Faith: The Interreligious Message of Pope Benedict XVI

Since the Regensburg lecture is the first thing that comes to mind for almost anyone thinking about Benedict XVI and interreligious dialogue, I knew I had to deal with its argument in some way, even though the lecture was not even directed at an interreligious audience and only marginally touched upon interreligious dialogue.¹⁵⁸ However, I quickly noticed a common feature between Regensburg and some of Benedict's speeches to Muslims in the emphasis on reason as God's gift and the concomitant rejection of violence. The condemnation of religiously motivated violence was also at the heart of Benedict's pivotal speech to the representatives of the world religions he had invited to Assisi in 2011. Thus, I knew that this had to be the topic of the fourth article. Like all the previous articles but perhaps more than any of them, Article 4 is the result of a great deal of intellectual wrestling, even to the point of frustration and anguish, and of several rounds of rewriting.

The first contribution of this article is to identify peace and the rejection of religiously motivated violence, indeed all violence, as the central interreligious message of Benedict XVI. This goes together with an Enlightenment-inspired idea about the true "nature" of "authentic" or "genuine" "religion" and is closely connected to the broader vision of a common interreligious witness in a world threatened by radical secularisation. Since religiously motivated violence serves as a counter-witness to the cause of religion, religions must unite in defending peace and condemning violence. Then they can also bear witness to the place of God in public life and to the spiritual dimension of human life in society.

The second contribution of the article is to critically examine the arguments Benedict XVI uses in trying to get this message across. As Samir Khalil Samir points out, a key strategy seems to be to engage the world religions, especially Islam, at the level of reason and human rights, avoiding questions of revelation and faith. The intention is to build on common ground, strengthen a shared conviction, and reduce the possibility and impact of violent interpretations. My questions

¹⁵⁸ I think it is appropriate to share here the footnote Pope Benedict XVI added to the official text of the Regensburg lecture after the whole media scandal. The controversial quote from Emperor Manuel II Paleologus reads as follows: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." Benedict XVI's added footnote reads: "In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur'an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic." See Benedict XVI 2006.

are: To what extent can this approach be effective? Does it help to say that God is reasonable and that violence is irrational, if the target group's authoritative sources say that God commands or endorses violence in certain cases? Does not God's word weigh more than a pope's?

The third contribution of the article concerns a further twist to the argument, arising from an analysis of Ratzinger/Benedict's Augustinian-Bonaventurian framework, which requires that reason be illumined by revelation and faith to really be itself and to see properly. Surprisingly, Benedict XVI applies this theological and epistemological framework interreligiously to Christians and Muslims. This raises a lot of questions, for obviously the contents of Christian and Muslim revelation and faith are not the same. Against all of Benedict's best intentions, does this strategy not cut both ways and give potential Jihadists a theologically sound paradigm to justify religiously motivated violence?

I have a lot of questions about Benedict's approach. In Regensburg, the pope referred to the problem of peaceful and violent verses in the Qur'an, including the problem of the doctrine of abrogation, but in his speeches to Muslims, he never brings the Qur'an or the sources of the Islamic tradition into dialogue with his interreligious message. Granted, we cannot expect the pope to enter into long discussions of Quranic interpretation in a limited interreligious address during an apostolic journey, but, should the dialogue about the true nature of religion not include at least some recognition or interpretation of what the religions' authoritative sources say? Would it not serve Benedict's purposes better to draw from the best of the Islamic tradition (that is, the best from his Christian point of view) to argue that Islam itself, rightly understood, supports his case? The details of such an argument, of course, are another matter. In any case, as noted earlier, Cardinal Müller seems to agree with this line of thought. One issue might simply be the lack of in-depth familiarity of Islam, even among leading Catholic hierarchs. In this sense, we are still at a very early stage of this kind of dialogue.

There is also considerable room for further questions that are not explicitly explored in the article. I will briefly mention two: pacifism and revelation. First, does Benedict's wholesale rejection of "all forms of violence" entail absolute pacifism? I think the answer must be negative. In 2004, Joseph Ratzinger said that the Allied intervention in World War 2 "ultimately benefited also those against whose country the war was waged", which demonstrates that "absolute pacifism is unsustainable".¹⁵⁹ In the next breath, though, he said that we must "very carefully" ask whether

¹⁵⁹ Ratzinger 2007, 86.

“something like a ‘just war’ is still possible today”, which suggests that Benedict’s rejection of violence can be formulated as total, for it would only admit exceptions in very rare and extreme situations. On the other hand, what if the Muslim also agrees to condemn “all forms of violence”, except whatsoever ends up being regarded as “just war”?

Second, does Benedict’s interreligious usage of the concept of “revelation”, as in his speech to Muslims in Cameroon, mean that he accepts that there is a true divine “revelation” in Islam? Again, I am inclined to say no; rather, Benedict XVI should be seen as speaking from the perspective of the belief system of each religion. In other words, what he really means is “belief in revelation”. The other option would too boldly contradict Benedict’s consistent and well-attested position – evident, for example, in his farewell speech to the Roman clergy – of there being “*one God, one incarnate God, thus one word of God, that is truly God’s word*”, while in other religions there is “religious experience, with a certain human light from creation”.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, an interesting subject for further research would be to study the ambiguity in Ratzinger/Benedict’s usage of such central theological concepts as “revelation”, “God”, and “truth”. I have found myself wondering on more than one occasion if Ratzinger/Benedict means “[what I/we believe about] God” or “the [general/monotheistic] concept of God”, “[what I/we believe/know to be the] truth” or “the concept of truth”. Which of the two is meant in a given sentence obviously affects the nature and scope of the claim being made.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

At the end of this introductory overview, I would like to draw together some conclusions gathered from the entire study. As much of my research has involved working through one-sided and

¹⁶⁰ Benedict XVI 2013.

¹⁶¹ As a starting point for the analysis, one could take the important autobiographical confession in Ratzinger 2002, 262–263: “I must say that I felt very strongly within myself the crisis of the *claim of truth* during the decades of my teaching work as a professor. What I feared was that the way we use the *idea of truth* in Christianity was sheer arrogance, yes, and even a lack of respect for others. The question was, how far may we still use it? I have really thoroughly explored this question. In the end I could see that if we abandon the *concept of truth*, then we abandon our foundations. For it is characteristic of Christianity, from the beginning, that the Christian faith does not primarily transmit practices or observances, as is the case with many other religions, which consist above all in the observance of certain ritual rules. Christianity makes its appearance with the claim to tell us something about God and the world and ourselves—*something that is true* and that enlightens us. On this basis I came to recognize that, in the crisis of an age in which we have a great mass of communications about truth in natural science, but with respect to the questions essential for man we are sidelined into subjectivism, what we need above all is to *seek anew for truth*, with a new courage to *recognize truth*.” (Emphases added.) It is obviously one thing to doubt specific Christian truth-claims and another thing altogether to doubt the concept of truth as such.

misguided interpretations, I will first summarise the key results in the form of a list of seven misunderstandings regarding Ratzinger and the world religions, countered by positive corrections that point to some of the essential building blocks of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. After this I will offer a simple *summa summarum* with a few concluding reflections.

"Ratzinger and the Religions" in Seven Points

The erroneous claims are in italics, followed by the corrections.

1. *Joseph Ratzinger wrote Dominus Iesus in order to make his theology, according to which followers of other religions are in a "gravely deficient situation", the official teaching of the Church.* Joseph Ratzinger signed but did not personally write *Dominus Iesus* (DI). Later, Ratzinger also admitted that DI contained some unsatisfactory language. Ratzinger's own theology is much richer than DI and more open in its approach to the world religions.
2. *Ratzinger was a dogmatic exclusivist, who saw Catholicism as the only way of salvation.* Ratzinger was a restrictivist inclusivist and a soteriological optimist, who believed that the great majority of people will ultimately reach salvation through Jesus Christ. Even though the non-Christian religions are not in themselves paths to salvation, the good elements in them can put people on the right path. The Church as the Body of Christ performs a salvific service of vicarious representation for the whole world. If there is an openness to God in the non-Christian, Christ will receive him in a purgatorial encounter of fiery grace and love.
3. *Ratzinger was against John Paul II's Assisi meetings and interreligious prayer.* Ratzinger had some criticisms of the 1986 Assisi event but attended the next one in 2002, showing his principled approval of exceptional instances of multireligious prayer. He also said that John Paul II broadened his thinking on interreligious dialogue. In 2011, as Benedict XVI, he organised his own interreligious meeting in Assisi, which extended the dialogue to include secular truth-seekers. Ratzinger distinguished between multireligious prayer and interreligious prayer, and while he was pessimistic about the latter, he did not completely reject it but instead proposed three fundamental conditions for it.
4. *Ratzinger took a negative view of the Asiatic religions, seeing no common ground between them and Christianity. He called Buddhism "spiritual auto-eroticism".* Ratzinger emphasised

the ultimate difference between the monotheistic and mystical paths, but he thought that Christians and followers of the mystical way also share points of commonality and have a lot to learn from each other. The Asiatic religions can remind Christians of the apophatic and mystical element in their own tradition. The quote about “spiritual auto-eroticism” referred to the impulse of some Westerners based on a superficial understanding of Buddhism, not so much to Buddhism per se.

5. *For Ratzinger, interreligious dialogue was really only about converting others to Christianity.* Ratzinger emphasised the search for truth in interreligious dialogue and criticised a false ideology of dialogue that relativised the religions and discarded the idea of conversion. However, interreligious dialogue can also be a matter of mutual enrichment and purification. As pope, Benedict XVI affirmed that interreligious dialogue can take various forms, such as common social action, and that while dialogue aims at drawing closer to the truth, its goal is not the conversion of the dialogue partner.
6. *Pope Benedict XVI regarded interreligious dialogue as an impossibility, hoping to replace it with intercultural dialogue.* Benedict XVI promoted a dialogue of religions and cultures. From the beginning of his papacy to its end, he affirmed not only the possibility but also the necessity of interreligious dialogue (dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience). Theological dialogue might be difficult, but it is not impossible. It meets its limits in the fundamental decisions of faith, which are not under negotiation in interreligious dialogue, though they can always be explained and clarified.
7. *Benedict XVI took a “hard-line” approach to Islam, considering it a violent religion.* Benedict XVI regarded Islam as a multifaceted phenomenon. He wished to strengthen the Church’s alliance with all the currents of Islam that are open to dialogue. Benedict XVI saw Islam as an ally against radical secularism, stressing the need for a common witness to God and peace. Benedict’s message to Islam highlighted non-violence, human rights, and religious liberty, with a special emphasis on the relationship between faith and reason.

Summa Summarum

Put as simply as possible, the above points could be summarised by saying that Ratzinger/Benedict XVI was not as negative regarding the theology of religions/interreligious dialogue as many have

thought he was. On the other hand, the fact that Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's words and deeds have given rise to so many negative judgments and misunderstandings does support the conclusion that we have not been dealing with his strongest area.

The importance of Ratzinger/Benedict's contribution for the fields in question is best left for theologians of religions and interreligious dialogue to judge. My own impression is that apart from the prominence of his influential offices, the theological contribution is perhaps not a major one, but it is a contribution worth considering nevertheless, and it includes some threads that could grow into something more significant if picked up on and developed by other scholars and religious leaders. The most lasting contribution probably consists of the (deliberate or otherwise) provocation made by the Regensburg lecture, which led to a new historical phase in Christian-Muslim dialogue, exemplified by *A Common Word* and the Catholic-Muslim Forum. This development has continued under Pope Francis with such milestones as the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, signed together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.¹⁶²

With this study, I hope to have contributed to a better understanding of a topic that has been of interest to Joseph Ratzinger for the past sixty years, a topic that remains a work in progress in theology and in the Church. In the words of Benedict XVI's farewell speech to the clergy of Rome, "we are still working to understand better the interlinked realities of the unicity of God's revelation... and the multiplicity of religions, [with] which we seek peace and also hearts that are open to the light of the Holy Spirit, who illumines and leads to Christ".¹⁶³

¹⁶² Francis & Al-Tayyeb 2019.

¹⁶³ Benedict XVI 2013. Translation amended.

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