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The Faithfulness of God in the Theology of Walter Kasper

A DISSERTATION

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Cardinal Walter Kasper is an important figure in contemporary Roman Catholic theology and church politics. His critics, however, lead one to ask whether his theology presents a viable option in the contemporary theological landscape. This dissertation proposes to analyze and evaluate Kasper's theology from the vantage point of the theme, *Gottes Treue*, or the faithfulness of God. It shows that a notion of faithfulness qualifies Kasper's understanding of history and freedom, categories basic to his theological thinking. Moreover, the faithfulness of God to creation revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit expresses for Kasper the central content of the Gospel. That the reality of salvation consists in divine fidelity implies for Kasper that the Church, as universal sacrament of salvation, carries out its mission through dialogue, which includes ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Conversely, other Christians and Jews bear witness to divine faithfulness in their communities through dialogical encounter with Catholics. Kasper argues that God's fidelity is constitutive of the object of faith and of theological inquiry, namely, theological truth. This correlates with Kasper's “postmodern” conception of tradition as an open system consisting in a dialogical interplay among several *loci*: scripture, the artifacts of the spiritual and intellectual traditions of the Church, the authoritative rulings of its leaders, the supernatural sense of faith common to all the baptized. Kasper's reflections on truth also suggest that the truth of faith will remain essentially beyond our grasp until the end of history. In this regard, however, Kasper's theology has developed. Whereas his early writings emphasized the eschatological dimension of revealed truth, more recent writings make room for a substantial
appréhension of truth in the present through the habitus of faith. To this extent, Kasper's thought proves to be compatible with the Thomistic theological tradition. The present study argues for an expansion of the basic categories of Kasper's theology to make explicit its openness to deeper reflection on the truth of faith as already present in the believing subject.
This dissertation by Mark J. DeCelles fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Systematic Theology approved by William P. Loewe, Ph.D., as Director, and by John P. Galvin, Dr. Theol., and Paul McPartlan, D.Phil., as Readers.

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William P. Loewe, Ph.D., Director

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John P. Galvin, Dr. Theol., Reader

________________________________________
Paul McPartlan, D.Phil., Reader
To Mom and Dad, who introduced me to Christ and who always encouraged me to think about what I believe
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Biblical quotations cited in this study are drawn from the Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition, except where otherwise noted.

All other translations of foreign-language texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.
## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td><em>Confessio Augustana</em> (Augsburg Confession)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDF</td>
<td>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conc/G</td>
<td><em>Concilium</em> (German language edition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRRJ</td>
<td>Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews</td>
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Geschichte, 120-43.


IKZ Internationale katholische Zeitschrift “Communio”

JC Walter Kasper, Jesus der Christus (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1974).


PCPCU Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity


ThQ Theologische Quartalschrift

USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops


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Introduction

Walter Kasper is a major figure in contemporary Catholic theology. Since the election of Pope Francis in 2013, Kasper has served the pope in an advisory capacity, to the point that some have labeled him “the pope's theologian.”¹ This public image was reinforced in February of 2014 when, at the invitation of Pope Francis, Kasper addressed the college of cardinals on the topic of pastoral challenges facing the family.² Since then, Catholic and even secular media outlets have given his views and proposals on the pastoral care of divorced and remarried persons broad exposure. A wave of commentary has followed, ranging from the simple to the scholarly and from glowing praise to biting critique.

Kasper's recent efforts with regard to the pastoral care of Catholic families represents only the latest project in over half a century of dedication to the Catholic Church through his theological, pastoral, and curial work. In spite of young Walter Kasper's desire simply to serve the Church as a priest, Kasper was sent back to the University of Tübingen by his bishop only a year after his ordination to pursue further studies in theology.³ In the decades that followed, Kasper made a formidable contribution to the Church and the academy through his theological work. As professor of theology at Münster and then Tübingen he produced nearly 400 publications including books, scholarly articles, conference papers, public presentations, and


³ WH 40.
popular writings. Many of his major theological works, such as *Einführung in den Glauben*,\(^4\) *Jesus der Christus*,\(^5\) *Der Gott Jesu Christi*,\(^6\) and *Katholische Kirche*,\(^7\) have received international recognition. Kasper was also the principal author of the adult catechism promulgated by the German bishops in 1985.\(^8\)

Nor were Kasper's accomplishments as an academic limited to what he wrote. Kasper has been involved in dialogues between Catholics and other Christian groups since the 1960s. He was the Catholic co-chairman of the first phase of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the early 1970s when it produced its ground-breaking final report, “The Gospel and the Church,”\(^9\) and in 1979 he became a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches as a representative of the Catholic Church.\(^10\) Kasper served as an editor for the third edition of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, a standard reference work for theology, as well as for several renowned scholarly journals such as *Theologische Quartalschrift* (from 1971 to 1989), *Concilium* (from 1972 to 1977), and *Communio* (from 1983 to the present). He  

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also made an important contribution to the reception of the Second Vatican Council in the church universal through his role as special secretary to the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops.\footnote{WH 97-98.}

international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, then in its fourth phase.\textsuperscript{15} In 1999 he was appointed as secretary to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in which capacity he served until 2001, when he became president of the same body and was created cardinal. During his twelve years as bishop and ten at the helm of the aforementioned Pontifical Council, Kasper added over 400 items to his already immense bibliography, to say nothing of his publications since his retirement.

The majority of recent commentators have not seriously engaged Kasper's full body of work, focusing instead on Kasper's 2014 address \textit{The Gospel of the Family},\textsuperscript{16} or his 2012 book \textit{Barmherzigkeit (Mercy)},\textsuperscript{17} or the so-called “Ratzinger-Kasper debate,” mentioned above. At the same time, familiarity with Kasper's work as a whole is on the rise. The Cardinal Walter Kasper Foundation in Germany has fostered this awareness by assembling Kasper's writings in a seventeen-volume set of collected works.\textsuperscript{18} Eleven volumes in this set have already been published,\textsuperscript{19} and Paulist Press has announced that it will be translating the entire set into

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement, Jubilee Volume}, s.v. “Kasper, Walter.”


\textsuperscript{18} WKGS.

English. In addition, several helpful *Festschriften* have been published in Kasper's honor, including *The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper*, which treats a wide range of themes in his thought. Kasper himself, in cooperation with Daniel Deckers, provided a helpful background to his writings by publishing an autobiographical series of interviews in 2008, of which the high points may be found in the first fifty pages of *Katholische Kirche*.

There nevertheless remains a need for an up-to-date English-language introduction to Kasper's work from a single systematic perspective. The present study proposes to engage Kasper's theology from the point of view of one of its major themes, namely, the faithfulness of God (*die Treue Gottes*). As will be shown, Kasper has written about God's faithfulness in books and articles that span his entire theological corpus. He has used the phrase “the faithfulness of God” to designate what he regards as the center of the Gospel and the material criterion of Christian faith; in this sense, divine faithfulness summarizes the core content of Kasper's

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20 Volume five was published in 2015. See Kasper, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*.


22 CK.

23 WH.

24 See KK 19-67.

25 The present dissertation does not take into account the following recent study on account of difficulty of access, and so cannot state to what extent it could serve as an introduction to Kasper's theology: Tiina M. S. Huhtanen, “Event of the Radically New: Revelation in Walter Kasper’s Theology” (licenciate thesis, University of Helsinki, Finland, March 25, 2014).

26 See chapter one, below.
theology. At the same time, Kasper also associated God's faithfulness with a distinctive theory of truth that he articulated at the beginning of his career as an academic theologian; hence, God's “Faithfulness-Truth” calls attention to the philosophical foundations of Kasper's theological project. It also highlights certain important developments in Kasper's thought that affect its relationship to Thomist, transcendental-Thomist, and liberationist approaches to theology. Divine faithfulness, finally, represents an important subtheme in Kasper's ecclesiology, which makes its presence felt both explicitly and implicitly within his writings on ecumenism and Christian-Jewish relations. The faithfulness of God cuts across Kasper's entire body of work, connecting the systematic foundations of his theology with the dialogical ministry of the latter part of his career and with what Kasper regarded as the very heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is unfortunate that time constraints and the boundaries established in the original proposal for this project prevented an examination of the two pieces by Kasper that seem to have received the lion's share of recent attention to his work, namely, *Mercy* and *The Gospel of the Family*. The present study as originally proposed did not anticipate either the election of Pope Francis or the impact this would have on Kasper and his work. It is to be hoped that in spite of these lacunae, the present study of Kasper's notion of divine fidelity may at least shed some light on what Kasper meant when he described Christian marriage as sacrament of the faithfulness of God and when he called mercy the “essence of the Gospel.”

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27 See below, chapter three, pp. 123ff., and chapter four, pp. 169ff.
28 See chapter five, below, pp. 309ff.
29 See chapter six, below, pp. 435ff.
30 See Ehe 332. For discussion, see pp. 145-52, below.
31 See the subtitle of Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*.
Chapter One

Raising the Question: Divine Fidelity as Theme in the Theology of Walter Kasper

By the middle of the twentieth century, Neo-Scholasticism had served as the dominant paradigm for Roman Catholic theology for over a century. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), however, this theological monopoly has fallen apart. No consensus has since emerged among Roman Catholics over the suitability of a single methodology to replace the Neo-Scholastic paradigm. A pluralism of approaches to theology therefore prevails within the contemporary Roman Catholic scene.¹ No single figure plays for Catholic theology today the role that Aquinas had played for its Neo-Scholastic predecessors—notwithstanding the significant differences between Neo-Scholasticism and Aquinas's theology.²

Cardinal Walter Kasper represents one significant voice within this situation of pluralism. Kasper has attempted a creative renewal of the theological tradition stemming from the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School.³ Taking up this School's dialogue with post-Kantian German Idealism, his work has set the basic theological problem of the relationship between faith and reason within the context of the challenges posed by the Enlightenment and the contemporary emergence of historical consciousness.⁴ In the process, Kasper has reflected at

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⁴ See Plov 6-26.
length on the theme of human freedom, both as the basis for an objection to the Christian faith and as its starting point. This in turn has enabled him to make valuable contributions to ecumenical dialogue, especially between the Catholic Church and the churches stemming from the Reformation. 

Because the Tübingen tradition to which Kasper is attached represents staunch commitment to the Catholic faith-tradition, yet does not depend upon a Thomistic philosophical option in the intellectual lineage of Joseph Kleutgen, Gerald McCool has found in Kasper's theology the promising beginnings of a viable Catholic alternative to the transcendental-Thomist theologies of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan.

The question underlying all the other questions to be posed by the present study is whether the promise McCool saw in Kasper's project of renewing the Tübingen tradition has in fact come to fruition, whether Kasper's theology presents a viable option within the present Catholic theological environment. Some theological methods are better suited than others to carry out the task of theology within certain contexts and applied to certain problems. Is Kasper's methodology well adapted to the cultural matrices of the modern era, characterized by an ambiguous interplay between plurality and unity, between the modern ideal of rationality and the critique thereof, between the growth of human power and its use as a tool for oppressing human beings? What does Kasper's theology contribute to the contemporary theological conversation?

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5 Kasper has put his analogy of freedom to broad theological use, among other places in two major works: *Jesus der Christus* (JC) and *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (DG). For commentary on these books, see chapter four, below, pp. 169ff.

6 See the discussion of ecumenical dimensions of Kasper's theology on pp. 19-23, below.


8 So Fiorenza, “Theology: Transcendental or Hermeneutical?,” *Horizons* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 332-35.

I. Kasper's Theology: The State of the Question

A survey of the secondary literature reveals that Kasper's resumption of the Tübingen School's dialogue with German Idealism and Romanticism generated the main features of his theology. Kasper's reflections on history and freedom, two of the basic categories of his thought, acquired their distinctive shape in the course of this dialogue.\textsuperscript{10} This has in the first place equipped him to confront the challenges posed by modern consciousness of history.\textsuperscript{11} Rapid technological and cultural change coupled with the application of critical methods within modern historiography have brought about a sense of instability within the Church and world of today. Whereas Neo-Scholastic theology had attempted to stave off modern anxiety over historical change by constructing the historical witnesses to the tradition as a unified front against theological error, historical-critical scholarship has deconstructed this front by exposing the contrasts, tensions, and even conflicts among these witnesses. This has raised the question of how historical consciousness is compatible with Christian belief in revealed, definitive truth. Kasper's studies in the later philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling provided him with a model for addressing this issue.\textsuperscript{12} Some of Kasper's critics have found in the theology he

\textsuperscript{10} On Kasper's Tübingen heritage and his dialogue with German Idealism as sources for his theological categories, see Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” in CK 80-84; as sources for his category of history, see Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper”; as sources for his category of freedom, see Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme.”

\textsuperscript{11} On Kasper's theology as a response to these challenges, see Plov.

subsequently developed a mediation between the methods of transcendental theology and those of modern historical thought.\(^\text{13}\)

Kasper's reformulation of the doctrine of analogy in terms of freedom was a key element in this task of mediation.\(^\text{14}\) Thus, in the second place, Kasper's dialogue with the Idealists brought him into contact with one of the defining themes of the modern Western tradition, namely, freedom, a fundamental concern of contemporary society, politics, and culture. In drawing an analogy between the sovereign freedom of God and the infinite horizon that conditions human freedom, Kasper formulated a profoundly personalistic doctrine of the Trinity; this in turn created a basis for a new vision of reality, an ontology of freedom and person, with profound implications for ethics, politics, spirituality, and all spheres of human existence. This vision illuminated Kasper's understanding of tradition and its authority not as an imposition on persons that must be rejected as hostile to their freedom but as preconditions and safeguards for the concrete exercise of freedom. The analogy of freedom thereby formed the basis for the historical hermeneutics of tradition that is essential to Kasper's theological method.\(^\text{15}\) His affinity to the hermeneutical turn in Catholic theology and his personalist vision of reality have led a few commentators to conclude that Kasper's theology represents an important Catholic account for the abiding meaningfulness of God-talk that responds not only to the challenges of modernism.


\(^\text{14}\) On the analogy of freedom in Kasper, see Palakeel, Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse, 263-98.

but also to those of postmodernism. As shall be seen, however, not all of his commentators share this judgment.

A. Kasper's Theology and the Problem of Truth in History

The foregoing suggests that one's judgment about the viability of Kasper's theological option would depend on whether or not one thought that a hermeneutical approach was a valid, or at least a serviceable, option within Catholic theology. Modern hermeneutical theorists have made valuable contributions to the work of theology, but they have also bequeathed to theologians some difficult philosophical problems. On the one hand, they have pointed out, in contradistinction to some transcendental approaches to theology, that language does not merely express experience but is also constitutive of experience. They have also provided a model for conceiving of commitment to a tradition and reverence for its classic expressions not as something inimical to reason but as an essential precondition for understanding. On the other hand, modern challenges against the authority of traditions and the integrity of experience have called into question the sufficiency of a merely hermeneutical approach to theology. To meet these challenges, theology cannot stop with a mere interpretation of experience and the theological tradition; it must also establish the relationship between tradition and experience on the one hand and truth on the other.

It is worthy of note that all of the commentators cited above who connected Kasper's theological option with a hermeneutical approach to theology also observed problems in Kasper's account in connection with the question of truth. Patricia Plovanich, for example, has critically

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17 On hermeneutical theology as a Catholic theological option, see Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology,” 43-47.
singled out Kasper's doctrine of truth in her otherwise favorable account of his theology.\textsuperscript{18} In her reading, Kasper has successfully carried out a fusion of horizons (in Gadamer's sense) between the Christian tradition and contemporary historically-oriented thinking.\textsuperscript{19} The descriptions of the structures of historical existence that for Plovanich informed Kasper's theological hermeneutics have provided him with a grammar for a coherent and original account of the relationship between nature and grace; they have led him to a distinctive appreciation for the theological tradition in all its otherness and complexity; they have enabled him to articulate coherent interpretations of doctrines of faith that modern persons have otherwise found difficult to understand. On the same basis, Kasper has disclosed the frequently overlooked eschatological dimension in the theological concept of truth. Precisely this account of theological truth, however, provided the angle from which Plovanich launched her critique.\textsuperscript{20} First, because he identified the event of personal encounter as the means for the mediation of revealed truth, he failed to account for the possibility that persons who have not concretely encountered Christianity might also receive grace and salvific truth. Second, by retrieving the content of all his theological concepts, including that of truth, exclusively from the theological tradition, he seems to have undermined the universal communicability of the truth of the Gospel. Third, because theological truth as an eschatological reality is for Kasper necessarily perceived in an incomplete way in every historical era, he does not appear to have any way to account for the permanent validity and authoritatively binding character of dogma. For Plovanich, the common denominator among all these weaknesses was that “Kasper always locates the certainty about

\textsuperscript{18} On the following, see Plov 272-96.

\textsuperscript{19} Plov 276. On the strengths of Kasper's theological method, see ibid., 274-76.

\textsuperscript{20} For a critical assessment of Kasper's theological method, see Plov 289-96. This assessment refers often to Plovanich’s reading of JC, which appears in ibid., 277-89.
truth, not only about God but about human existence as well, on the divine side of the human encounter with God."\textsuperscript{21} He was unwilling, in other words, "to discuss the character of human existence and of historical reality in a definitive way."\textsuperscript{22} Concluding on a positive note, Plovanich opined that Kasper could perhaps solve these problems by articulating a more explicit account of creation, particularly the created nature or essence of human beings.

Thomas Pröpper likewise acknowledged, albeit in an implicit way, the challenge that the question of truth posed for Kasper's theology.\textsuperscript{23} A student of Kasper's, Pröpper regarded a hermeneutics of tradition as an indispensable element of Kasper's theological project. At the same time, he pointed out that his former teacher wished to distance himself from a relativistic streak that he saw in certain theologies that waved the hermeneutical banner. This is why Kasper insisted on the "propositional character" and "ontological dimension" of dogmatic statements in opposition to any reduction of the truth of faith to its relevance or to a program of faithful praxis.\textsuperscript{24} Pröpper highlighted Kasper's efforts to secure this all-important relationship between theology and truth by means of a transcendental reflection on the conditions for the possibility of human freedom.\textsuperscript{25} It may be asked, however, whether Pröpper thought that Kasper had carried out this transcendental turn in a consistent fashion. On the one hand, Pröpper has apparently construed the central aims of Kasper's theology in a selective way: although he has admittedly drawn from essays on theological method written throughout Kasper's academic career, he has

\textsuperscript{21} Plov 289-90.
\textsuperscript{22} Plov 294.
\textsuperscript{23} On the following, see Pröpper, "Freiheit als philosophisches Prinzip der Dogmatik," 165-71.
\textsuperscript{24} Pröpper, “Freiheit als philosophisches Prinzip der Dogmatik,” 167.
avoided any reference to *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, the book in which Kasper published his earliest systematic treatment of theological truth. This is a notable omission, considering Pröpper's obvious interest in the dimension of truth in Kasper's thought. On the other hand, the main purpose of Pröpper's commentary on Kasper's understanding of dogmatic theology was to introduce his own systematic reflection on the theological task. It may be suggested that in articulating his own Kasper-inspired program, Pröpper intended to iron out the ambiguities he found in Kasper's theology in relation to the question of truth. He seems to have had such ambiguities in mind when he described his own understanding of dogmatic theology as “wahrheitsverpflichtete Hermeneutik des Glaubens,” a truth-bound hermeneutics of faith.

By contrast to Pröpper, Reinhard Hütter has interpreted Kasper's theological method as a hermeneutics in the bad sense. In his plea for a renewal of Catholic theology in a Thomistic mode, Hütter utilized Kasper's *Die Methoden der Dogmatik* as a foil for another methodological proposal, *The Work of Theology*, written by the Dominican theologian Francisco P. Muñiz and published not long before the Second Vatican Council. In his commentary on Kasper, Hütter sympathized with Kasper's intention to maintain an indissoluble link between theology and the tradition of the Church. Kasper's commitment to a thoroughly historicized, Heideggerian worldview, however, has decisively qualified the value of this link.

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26 DW.


28 On the following, see Hüt 376-88.

29 MD.


31 See Hüt 369-76.
For Hütter, the history of theology subsequent to the Second Vatican Council has laid bare the consequences of such a worldview. Following Kasper's lead, Catholic theology has incorporated into its methods a relativistic kind of hermeneutics whose function is to expose the tradition of faith to “a radical comprehensive questioning of all central concepts” of that faith, a questioning process that tends finally to sweep away “the last traces of any propositional content of the faith itself.”  

Because Kasper has admitted “no necessary intrinsic transhistorical correlation between the faith and its object on the one side and, on the other side, the propositions of the articles of the faith as conveyed in the creeds and in dogma,” Hütter did not think that Kasper could account for the truth of the creeds or of other classic Christian dogmatic formulas.  

He has therefore drawn the conclusion that Kasper's theology is rooted in an inadequate understanding of faith. Hütter labeled Kasper's notion of faith as an existential certitudo super omnia, reminiscent of the ideas of the Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann and his students Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. According to such an understanding, the propositional content of faith is ultimately irrelevant.

In highlighting the issue of truth in Kasper's work, Plovanich, Pröpper, and Hütter have indicated a specific problem that touches the foundations of his theology. To be clear, the problem to be addressed is not whether Kasper thinks that there is a reality to which theological assertions refer or whether meaningful theological statements are possible. The actual issue is whether Kasper's historically-oriented thinking is compatible with permanently valid statements of truth. If theology as Kasper understands it bursts open and breaks down all the categories of reason and of classical metaphysics to the point of “incomprehensible affective overload,” if it

32 Hüt 383-84.

33 Hüt 385-86.
can henceforth only employ the categories of personal encounter, has Kasper left any room for 
precise, technical, systematic theological language? Is it possible for Kasper to say of any 
proposition—for example, “God is Triune” or “Jesus Christ is true God and true man”—that it is, 
in some sense, always true or always false? If so, on what grounds? If not, then has Kasper not 
undercut the ability of any believer, to say nothing of the professional theologian or the official, 
authoritative witnesses to the faith of the Church, to take a definitive stand on and witness in a 
decisive way to the truth of the faith? Can Kasper defend the claim that the Church's dogmas are 
true and binding—a basic claim of the Catholic faith and one that Kasper himself has 
unhesitantly asserted—without recourse to a “non-historical” understanding of truth?

The question of truth, then, presents a first criterion and avenue of inquiry for the 
evaluation of Kasper's theology. Does Kasper offer a systematic theology capable of defending 
the truth-claims of the faith-tradition? If not, this would call into question the adequacy of his 
theological methods for an authentically Catholic reflection on the faith. At best, Kasper could be 
appreciated as an example of the concrete, positive type of theologian, who displays a well-
developed sense for the tradition of faith but lacks sufficient tools to synthesize this tradition 
with systematic rigor and clarity. 

B. Kasper's Fundamental Option and the Pluralism of Catholic Theology

A second criterion relevant to the adequacy of Kasper's theology arises from the situation 
of pluralism itself. This situation prompts one to ask: given that Kasper's methodology is not the 
only way to do theology, how does it relate to other theological approaches? Does Kasper 
recognize the limitations of his approach? Can he accommodate the insights generated by other 

35 Envisaged here is von Balthasar's distinction between a more positive-concrete type of theology and a 
more speculative type. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation, 
approaches? Do the results of his methods converge to any degree with those of other theologies? Will his theology allow itself in principle to take criticism from the outside? In a word, does Kasper's starting-point facilitate or at least permit a dialogue with other theological starting-points? Or does it rather exclude other methodologies as invalid or even heretical from the outset? Does it extend this posture of exclusion to only a few theological alternatives, to many, or to all? Does it thus present itself as the only possible way to do theology in continuity with the Christian tradition?

A number of commentators have called Kasper's theology into question on grounds like these. John Galvin found in the account of the resurrection that stood at the heart of Kasper's 1974 Christology text *Jesus der Christus* a basic option for Wolfhart Pannenberg's understanding of revelation-history, a framework that for Galvin could not be reconciled with Karl Rahner's transcendental Christology, in spite of Kasper's apparent intention to salvage elements of the latter.36 Both William Loewe and Aidan Nichols attempted a more expansive inquiry, probing the origins of Kasper's theological option in his commitment to the Tübingen tradition, which commitment took concrete shape in his *Habilitationsschrift* on the later philosophy of F. W. J. von Schelling.37 Notwithstanding some contrasts in the particulars of their analyses, both concluded that Kasper's Schellingian theology carried with it a hefty critical moment, one that excluded other theological options such as Rahner's transcendental theology and Latin American liberation theologies. Nichols found this exclusive character latent in Schelling's rejection of the Idealist attempt to ground human freedom in itself, while Loewe traced this thread beyond Schelling, all the way back to the dialectic of law and gospel found in Martin Luther. Even if one


37 Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper”; Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme.” For Kasper's *Habilitationsschrift*, see DA.
were to argue, contrary to Loewe and Nichols, that Kasper belonged more to the tradition of Heideggerian hermeneutics than to that of Schelling (or Luther), one would still have to explain the critical tendency that both have unearthed. Jack Bonsor, admittedly not commenting specifically on Kasper, has provided one such explanation: transcendental and hermeneutical theologies present an irreducible duality of theological methods.\footnote{38} If Kasper represented the latter, he had to reject the former.

Not all of Kasper's commentators have agreed that Kasper's approach excluded theological options like Rahner's. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (who disagreed with Bonsor's suggestion that transcendental and hermeneutical methods are basically incompatible)\footnote{39} understood Kasper's theology as an attempt, valid at least in principle, to complement a Rahnerian transcendental approach with Tübingen-style reflections on history.\footnote{40} Similarly, Zdenko Joha, who interpreted Kasper's theological option as fundamentally different from that of Rahner, nevertheless thought that Kasper had succeeded in incorporating strategies from both Rahner's and Hans Urs von Balthasar's theologies into his own.\footnote{41} Joseph Palakeel's attempt to combine the historical dynamism of Kasper's “analogy of freedom” with the ontological content of both Rahner's “analogy of man” and von Balthasar's “analogy of love” presupposed that the three were fundamentally compatible.\footnote{42} Against the background of the phenomenon of globalization, Jeffrey Kirch has recently underscored the “social, historical, and liberative

\footnote{38} Jack A. Bonsor, “Irreducible Pluralism: The Transcendental and Hermeneutical as Theological Options,” \textit{Horizons} 16, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 316-28

\footnote{39} On the complementarity of transcendental and hermeneutical approaches, see Fiorenza, “Theology: Transcendental or Hermeneutical,” 332-41.

\footnote{40} Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology,” 42.

\footnote{41} See Joha, \textit{Christologie und Anthropologie}, esp. 72-76.

\footnote{42} On the complementarity of these three “analogies,” see Palakeel, \textit{Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse}, 298; on Palakeel's synthesis, see 299-338.
dimensions” of Kasper's soteriology, dimensions that align with the concerns of the theologies of liberation.\textsuperscript{43} And in a 2013 paper delivered at a conference celebrating Kasper's eightieth birthday, William Loewe shifted his position on Kasper, finding in his Christology a degree of openness both to the “turn to the subject” (through Kasper's implicit appeal to the normative character of religious conversion) and to liberation theology (through his hints at the social and political implications of a concrete, historical praxis of love).\textsuperscript{44} From different angles, these commentators have found a degree of complementarity between Kasper's thought and some of the other important methodological patterns available in Catholic theology today.

The question of the relationship between Walter Kasper and the range of available options on the Catholic theological scene has persisted in the commentaries on Kasper's theology because of its importance for evaluating his work as a contribution to the broader theological conversation in all its diversity. It generates a second criterion by which the present study can evaluate Kasper's theological option. At this point, however, one might raise the further question of whether the relevance of Kasper's theology should be evaluated solely in terms of his contributions to Catholic theology. What about his forays into the still more inclusive conversation among the various Christian churches commonly known as ecumenical dialogue? This raises a third problem for the interpretation and criticism of Kasper's theology.

\textit{C. Kasper's Theology as Ecumenical Theology}

Kasper's theological accomplishments transcend the boundaries of the Catholic Church and its particular theological concerns. After he had served the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart for just over a decade as its bishop, Kasper was appointed by Pope John Paul II to the two


\footnotesize\textsuperscript{44} Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” esp. 88-94.
highest ecumenical offices in the Catholic Church, naming him secretary (in 1999) and then president (in 2001) of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and its subsidiary body, the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. 45 One must imagine that Rome considered him amply prepared for his new post by the ecumenical endeavors of his earlier career. Many of Kasper's earliest essays dealt directly with the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the churches stemming from the Reformation. 46 An active participant in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on both the national (German) and international level, he was involved in the production of the Malta Report in 1971 and the process that led up to the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999. 47 The Vatican recognized his ecumenical accomplishments as early as 1979, when it selected Kasper to be one of twelve Catholic theologians to sit on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. 48 Bishop Kasper's election as co-chairman of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity in 1994 offers yet another testament to his reputation as an ecumenist prior to his nomination to the PCPCU. 49

At the same time, Kasper's appointment to the leadership of the PCPCU was, so to speak, the beginning of Kasper's third career, a “shift in emphasis” both from the broad-ranging pastoral concerns with which he dealt as bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart and from the world of academics


to which he had applied himself as professor of theology at the universities of Münster and Tübingen. Kasper's ecumenical ministry was neither the sole purpose, nor the primary focus, nor the overarching theme of his life's work. Having requested in correspondence with Kasper the cardinal's thoughts on the nearly half-century span of his career, Kristin Colberg reported that Kasper "prefers not to think of himself strictly as a church diplomat, an ecumenist, or an academic." Although he has indeed worn each of these hats, he saw himself in each instance as basically a communicator, translating the Good News into an idiom comprehensible to modern ears. He wrote, "My question is, and was always, how to translate the Christian tradition in the present context and the present context in the Christian tradition."

The present study does not intend to negate Kasper's own self-designation as translator of the Christian message. It may be asked, however, whether these words of a German priest, theologian, and *emeritus* Vatican official might not themselves need to be translated for the North American context. How in particular has Kasper's task of translation been concretely determined by the German provenance of his theology, characterized by a history that included the focal events of the sixteenth-century Reformation and the subsequent tensions between Catholics and Protestants in a region where the religio-political maxim, *Cuius regio, eius religio* ("Whose domain, his religion"), was the law of the land? According to Jerome-Michael Vereb, it was no coincidence that this bitter German experience of division was the soil out of which sprang many of the Catholic Church's ecumenical pioneers: Adolf Herte, Joseph Lortz, Max Metzger, Lorenz

Jaeger, Augustin Bea. Nor was this German experience merely an unconscious reality for Kasper, as he made clear in a series of interviews with Daniel Deckers published in 2008:

How could I lose sight of the Catholic-Protestant dialogue? I grew up in a country that is defined by the difference between Catholics and Protestants and has already suffered unspeakably because of it. I know the plight of many marriages and families divided by confession. For me, ecumenical questions are not theoretical but existential questions, which every pastor among us encounters each day. Each of these questions calls concrete persons and situations before my mind.

What role have the questions of ecumenical dialogue, which Kasper has himself designated as a matter of existential and pastoral urgency, played in his efforts to communicate the Christian faith? More specifically, how have they influenced the way he has formulated the foundations of his theology? From the perspective of such an inquiry, certain observations made by Kasper's critics take on a new significance. It may be recalled that Loewe, in his early commentary on Kasper's theological opus-in-progress, interpreted Kasper's fundamental option as an updated form of Luther's theology of the cross. In a similar vein, Plovanich, pointing out a deficiency in the anthropological and sacramental dimensions of Kasper's thought, called Kasper's theology predominantly a theology of the Word of God. Hütter argued, as mentioned above, that Kasper had taken over a mid-twentieth-century Lutheran notion of faith as an existential and anti-rational certitudo super omnia.

Now it remains to be seen whether these critiques accurately represented Kasper's theology. They seem in any case to support the thesis that in formulating the categories of his theology, Kasper has attempted, whether consciously or


54 WH 231.


56 Plov 290.

57 Hüt 384.
not, whether successfully or not, to mediate between ideas employed in Catholic and evangelical-Lutheran theologies and thus to carry out the work of ecumenism on the level of fundamental theology.

Kasper has aligned himself with the position of both Saint John Paul II and Pope (now *emeritus*) Benedict XVI, Kasper's countryman and former colleague, that ecumenism is not an optional pursuit for Catholics: “Being catholic and being ecumenical are not contradictory but are two faces of the one and same coin.” 58 How has Kasper realized the unity of ecumenical commitment and Catholic identity within his own theology? To what extent does the shape of his thought represent a fitting response to the Second Vatican Council's call for ecumenical commitment on the part of the whole Church, a call confirmed by all of the popes since the Council and by the unflagging efforts of many Catholics to carry the torch of ecumenism through nearly a half-century of ups and downs in dozens of bilateral and multilateral dialogues? Thus is raised a third question germane to the evaluation of Kasper's theology, one to be addressed by this dissertation.

The challenge facing the present study is to identify a perspective on Kasper's theology that can shed light on each of the three questions here discussed. By what means could one bring into focus Kasper's basic methodological option, its relationship to other options, and its ecumenical dimensions while also addressing the question of the truth of dogmatic statements in his theology? It may be argued that an analysis of the idea of divine fidelity in Kasper's thought can provide one such perspective on his theology. This will be the task of the present study.

II. Kasper's Notion of the Faithfulness of God

Kasper's commentators have in general shown little interest in his understanding of the faithfulness or fidelity of God. There are, nevertheless, three reasons that the faithfulness of God presents a promising object of reflection for scholarship on Kasper. First, Kasper has used the language of divine fidelity to designate what he regards as central to the content of faith. Second, important treatments of the topic of truth within Kasper's writings have connected divine faithfulness to the kind of truth that is for Kasper the proper object of theological inquiry. Third, the faithfulness of God can be linked to the theoretical underpinnings of the ecumenical and interreligious ministries that occupied the latter part of his ministry within the Church.

A. The Centrality of the Theme of Divine Faithfulness in Kasper's Thought

Die Treue Gottes, the faithfulness of God, constitutes a recurring theme in Kasper's theology. Kasper often spoke of God as faithful during the 1960s and early 1970s, particularly while discussing the challenges posed by historical consciousness for Christian belief.\(^5\) In such contexts, he tended to contrast the faithfulness of God with the instability and uncertainty caused by rapid technological and cultural change in the modern era. The significance Kasper attributed to the language of divine faithfulness during this decade is indicated by the fact that he incorporated such language into a statement of belief he formulated in 1968 in response to Karl Rahner's call for the development of “short formulas of faith.”\(^6\) Kasper presented his short formula as follows:

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\(^6\) Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 283. For other Kasperean short formulas of faith, see EG 95, 100.
If someone, for example, is convinced in faith that in Jesus Christ the faithfulness and love of God has been bestowed upon him for the sake of others, so that he can hope for his own good and for that of all other persons, and if he lives this out as far as he is able, then he is a Christian, even if perhaps he is not able to recognize and affirm all the implications and explications that the Church has inferred from this faith in the course of two millennia.\textsuperscript{61}

Three years before he published this statement, Kasper formulated a theory of theological truth that he grounded in part in the biblical concept of God's \textit{emeth}, which he understood to connote not only truth and truthfulness but constancy, integrity, and fidelity.\textsuperscript{62} The recurrence of the compound word \textit{Treue-Wahrheit} or “faithfulness-truth” in his writings indicates that Kasper retained at least some elements of this theory of truth throughout his career.\textsuperscript{63} Later on, as the head of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Kasper invoked his notion of God's faithfulness to help him address certain theological questions touching the relationship between Christians and Jews.\textsuperscript{64}

The importance of the language of faithfulness within Kasper's theology may be verified by reference to two of his book-length theological treatises, \textit{Jesus der Christus} and \textit{Katholische Kirche}.\textsuperscript{65} Both of these books contain numerous references to the faithfulness of God.\textsuperscript{66} Beyond a mere arithmetical analysis, however, divine faithfulness lies close to the central content of each book. In particular: in \textit{Jesus der Christus}, Kasper's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus

\textsuperscript{61} “Wer etwa glaubend überzeugt ist und, so gut er es vermag, daraus lebt, dass ihm für die andern in Jesus Christus Gottes Treue und Liebe geschenkt wird, so dass er für sich und alle anderen Menschen hoffen darf, der ist ein Christ, auch wenn er vielleicht nicht in der Lage ist, alle Implikation und Explikation einzusehen und zu bejahen, die die Kirche im Laufe von zwei Jahrtausenden daraus abgeleitet hat.” Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 283.

\textsuperscript{62} For Kasper's theory of theological truth, see DW 58-109; on the biblical concept of \textit{emeth}, see DW 65-71.

\textsuperscript{63} On the development of Kasper's understanding of theological truth, see chapter five, below, pp. 309ff.

\textsuperscript{64} For references, see below, p. 43n110.

\textsuperscript{65} On the theme of divine fidelity in JC and KK, see chapter four, below, pp. 169ff.

plays a pivotal role. It complements Kasper's account of the historical Jesus, forming together with this account the two-stage Christology that functioned as his criterion of the two-thousand-year-long Christological tradition that followed the resurrection. This fact highlights the importance of Kasper's claim that the content of faith in the resurrection is God's faithfulness in love. In light of this, it is not surprising that divine fidelity was a recurring theme in the systematic-theological section of *Jesus der Christus*. Nor was *Jesus der Christus* an anomaly in this respect. In *Katholische Kirche*, published almost four decades after *Jesus der Christus*, Kasper again identified the faithfulness of God as that which is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection demonstrated God's faithfulness to human beings as the central event in the history of those divine initiatives through which God reconciled humanity to Godself and brought about communion within the human family. This account set the stage for Kasper's presentation of the Catholic Church—the People of God, Bride of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit—as the communal sign of this faithfulness for the whole world.

In spite of the centrality of this theme in Kasper's theology, no study exists in the secondary literature on Kasper that focuses on the faithfulness of God. Some of Kasper's critics, however, have made reference to divine fidelity in discussing the content of God's self-disclosure to humanity. When Thomas Pröpper, for example, laid out his own program for dogmatic theology inspired by Kasper's thought, he linked this theme to the essential contents of divine revelation as well as the indispensability of the historical ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus to God's act of revelation. He wrote that, apart from the resurrection of Jesus, the “dependable fidelity and power to overcome death” of God's love, and therefore “God himself”

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67 See JC 169.

68 See KK 140; compare 132.
as its source and origin, would not have come to light in history.\textsuperscript{69} The most significant commentary to date on Kasper's understanding of God's faithfulness, namely, Patricia Plovanich's dissertation on Kasper's theological method, likewise treated this theme in connection with the self-revelation of God. Plovanich, who understood Kasper's theology to be essentially a theology of revelation and its self-interpretation in history, connected divine fidelity to Kasper's account of the structure of revelation, its central contents, faith as response to revelation, and the mediation of this revelation in history.

The structure of revelation in Kasper's thought, as Plovanich portrayed it, is deeply intertwined with the faithfulness of God.\textsuperscript{70} According to Kasper, the Scriptures basically speak of God's active, albeit hidden, presence in history. This powerful presence of God comes to light by means of prophetic words of promise. In other words, God's self-revelation takes place within a history, or rather, creates a history structured by divine deeds of power and interpreting words. There is a dialectical relationship between the words and deeds: “words interpret events; then later events confirm and empower the interpreting words.”\textsuperscript{71} Kasper finds in this historical dialectic of revelation a typological pattern: each event of revelation confirms what was revealed in the past, fulfills past words of promise in a new and unexpected way, and promises an ever-greater event in the future. But just as human words of promise and commitment address a subject, inviting a response that forms a new relationship and a new identity-in-relation,\textsuperscript{72} so for


\textsuperscript{70} On Kasper's conception of the history of revelation, see Plov 150-70.

\textsuperscript{71} Plov 154-55.

\textsuperscript{72} J. L. Austin discussed the various effects of performative utterances, such as promises, in \textit{How To Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955}, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Oxford University Press, 2009). Louis-Marie Chauvet built on Austin, among others, in discussing the relationship-building dimensions of language. See Chauvet, \textit{The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of
Kasper, God's revelatory word takes shape in history only in a dialogical context: it addresses a free subject, invites him or her to personal communion with God, and if that subject responds positively, it establishes a new relationship and opens up new possibilities in history. Revelation shapes human identity by bestowing meaning and intelligibility on the indeterminate, ever-changing character of historical being. When God proves to be the subject who accepts the human person fully and affirms her or his identity in love, the person discovers in turn that, in the midst of the uncertainties of personal existence, she or he is unwaveringly accepted and loved by God. Thus, the dialogue of revelation “discloses the divine fidelity and love which is the source of human well-being and salvation.” Revelation bestows a sense of meaning on its recipient, and in the rhythm of promise and fulfillment confirms and reinforces the recipient's identity as the subject addressed by God.

Plovanich understood the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the climax of Kasper's account of revelation history, since Jesus is for Kasper the person in whom “divine address and human response come together in a definitive way.” According to Plovanich, then, Jesus Christ has for Kasper disclosed the content of revelation in an unsurpassable way, and the faithfulness and love of God for humanity is a key component of this content. In his ministry of preaching the Kingdom in word and deed, Jesus lived out perfect obedience or openness to God and selfless love for his neighbor. His life “exemplifies a new way of human existence,” a new model for a meaningful human life. Yet the radical newness of his obedience and service conflicts with a

the Body, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001). Kasper was aware at least of Austin's work. See DG 120n53.

73 Plov 161.

74 Ibid., 171. On Jesus as the paradigmatic event of revelation-history, see 171-87.

75 Ibid., 175.
historical era and a social order governed by the law of selfishness, and Jesus's unwavering freedom in the face of this conflict leads to his death. Through the resurrection of Jesus, God “confirms [Jesus's] humanity as the revelation of the meaning of human existence and of history.”\(^76\) The humanity of Jesus, however, embraces his crucifixion as well as his itinerant ministry. By vindicating Jesus's obedience unto death on the cross, God demonstrates that he so radically loves humanity “that he embraces and redeems all of human life, even death.”\(^77\) In light of the resurrection, therefore, the cross reveals the ultimate Ground of existence to be self-giving love. This means that all of human existence and human history is “imbued with and sustained by God's fidelity and creative love.”\(^78\) The ambivalent dimensions of human existence prove to be signs or pointers directing human persons toward encounter with the ground of their existence, who is the gracious and loving God. This in turn frees people from the anxiety that impels them selfishly to secure their own existence, as well as from the structures of sin built on this self-centered foundation. For Kasper, then, the resurrection is both “God's ultimate self-disclosure and his definitive word about human existence.”\(^79\) Plovanich summed up both dimensions in a single sentence: “The resurrection is the definitive confirmation of God's fidelity to humanity.”\(^80\) It is God's guarantee that the new model of freedom presented in the life of Jesus will free one from anxiety so that one can in turn freely give of oneself to another in love.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 180.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 177.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 182.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 178-79.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 179.
According to Plovanich, Kasper understood the act of faith to consist in entering into a relationship with God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ, however, is for Kasper the definitive sign of God's faithfulness. Divine faithfulness therefore relates to the faith as its content, that which has been revealed and is received and accepted in the act of faith. Kasper understood God's self-revelation in history to consist of two indivisible aspects: divine address and human response. Consequently, a positive human response to revelation, faith, in every era of human history is for Kasper indispensable for the continued presence in history of the revelation effected once for all in the person of Christ. Plovanich thus raised the question, what is faith for Kasper? In his (for Plovanich, unsystematic) treatment of faith, Kasper found a fundamental continuity between Old Testament and New Testament presentations of faith. In the religion of Israel, faith consisted

in the recognition that Yahweh is the firm foundation of life. Because He is faithful to his people, Yahweh is the only source of a trustworthy life sphere. Then, to believe means to say 'Amen' to Him, to enter into covenant with Him, and to base one's existence on Him.

Thus faith, for Kasper, is fundamentally a personal or existential act of trust in God's faithfulness. It is also a renunciation of self in the sense of a denial of one's capacity to provide oneself with “a trustworthy life sphere.” Christianity modified this picture by proposing the life of Jesus as “the primary analogate of faith.” The revelation of God's love and fidelity for humanity revealed in Jesus Christ” has taken its place at the center of the faith act. Basing one's existence on God means for the Christian being conformed to the pattern of life presented in

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81 On Kasper's understanding of faith, see ibid., 193-204.
82 Ibid., 194.
83 Ibid., 194.
84 Ibid., 266.
Christ, a life of total openness to the Father's will and total availability for others. Like Christ, the Christian believer, as well as the believing community, become signs of God's abiding presence in history through their words and deeds. Thus faith always involves a certain content and ethos, since without these, one could not bear witness to God's fidelity in the concreteness of one's life.

When the believer and the believing community witness to the faithful love of God in proclamation and praxis, they become instruments through which God's revelation in Jesus Christ is mediated in history. In this history of the mediation of this revelation, just as in the history of revelation leading up to Jesus Christ, God continues to accompany his people in power.\footnote{On the mediation of God's universal self-revelation in Jesus Christ within the horizon of world history, see ibid., 188-92.} The transmission of revelation through history is not exempt from historical conditions: it is subject to ambiguity, uncertainty, risk and failure. This need not discourage the person or community of faith, however, since Jesus Christ has demonstrated the unbreakability of God's faithfulness. The advent of Christ has qualified all subsequent history. “In him all historical ages are shown to be encompassed by the presence of God. History itself is revealed to be the time of God's fidelity and promise to human persons, the time of his dialogue with them.”\footnote{Ibid., 191.} If in Jesus Christ God has overcome even death, then no failure, no calamity is so great that it lies beyond God's power to save. So even though God has 'not yet' put to an end the difficulties of historical existence, these challenges are not too great for the believer to bear. In Christ, the Christian is
certain that God is Lord over history, and is 'already' transforming the world through the power of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{87}

Along these same lines, Plovanich has provided a sketch of Kasper's theology of the nature and mission of the Church as a moment in his theology of revelation.\textsuperscript{88} For Kasper, the essential task of the faith community—the community who teaches that God is a faithful God and who acts according to this conviction—is to be a living sign or sacrament of the abiding presence of God in history.\textsuperscript{89} Kasper has called the mission of the Church historical in two senses. On the one hand, God directs the Church toward the transformation of the world by means of its proclamation of revealed truth in word and deed. This transformation, which is the Church's mission, will remain incomplete as long as history continues, ending only in the eschaton. On the other hand, the very revelation that is present in history through the Church's active faith remains present in the Church, albeit under the conditions imposed by history, that is, in an anticipatory but incomplete way. Even after two thousand years of ecclesial tradition, the Church continues to discover new aspects of the one mystery of faith. Moreover, sometimes the dialogue of revelation fails, and human fault obscures certain aspects of divine truth. For both reasons, the Church must submit its teaching and forms of life to constant renewal. So the Church preaches the Gospel under the Spirit's inspiration, even as the same Spirit leads the Church into the fullness of truth. The “constant horizon” of this historical tradition process is “God's fidelity and promise of history's eschatological fulfillment which is prefigured in Jesus

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 192. Plovanich noted that in his later writings, Kasper attended more closely to the work of the Holy Spirit in the mediation of revelation, whereas his earlier writings tended to highlight the role of faith in this mediation.

\textsuperscript{88} On the role of the Church in the mediation of revelation, see ibid., 204-07.

\textsuperscript{89} See ibid., 165, 196-98.
Christ.” In the Spirit, God remains present with the Church even through uncertainty, persecution and failure. In the midst of all difficulties the Christian may carry on with confidence the work of mediating the Gospel to the present, knowing that God's purposes will not be frustrated.

Plovanich and Pröpper have shown that for Kasper, divine fidelity expresses the content of God's free self-disclosure in revelation, above all in the history and fate of Jesus Christ. Plovanich in particular has highlighted several distinctive features of the message of God's faithfulness as articulated by Kasper. She has indicated its correlation with the theme of history: God's hidden but reliable presence in history is for Kasper that which gives stability in the midst of historical change. She has likewise teased out the connection between divine faithfulness, Kasper's personalistic image of God, and his conception of revelation and faith in terms of personal relationship. The faithfulness of God expresses the divine character, God's steadfast commitment to his people, which establishes the meaningfulness and intelligibility of historical existence. Kasper has expressed in the relational language of fidelity what the first letter of John said in terminology approaching the ontological: in God's inmost depths, by virtue of the divine nature, God is Love.

The foregoing discussion has also shown that attending to divine fidelity highlights the eschatological aspects of Kasper's thought. The faithfulness of God expresses the existential impact of what God has 'already' achieved in Jesus Christ and continues to accomplish today. For the person and the community who fully relies on God, God can overcome any difficulty. Confidence in God's fidelity removes one's anxiety to secure one's own existence and frees one for self-giving love. This perspective is realistic about the difficulties of historical existence. The

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90 Ibid., 205-06.
exact form of the future remains uncertain and indeterminate, and because of this, anxiety and selfishness will often overcome trust and love. Nevertheless, history stands under the sign of Jesus Christ. Standing firm in the love of God, women and men can face what is ‘not yet’ with confidence, courageously following the promptings of the Spirit, since the future is borne by God's promise in Christ to abide with his disciples “to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

This brief literature review lends support to the claim that divine fidelity is a significant theme in the work of Kasper. This alone suggests that an inquiry into the theme of God's faithfulness in Kasper's theology might constitute a valuable contribution to the literature on Kasper. Beyond this, however, the above-mentioned commentaries have also hinted at the significance of divine fidelity for the structure and methods of Kasper's theology, and thus for its capacity to illumine his basic theological option. The connection between this theme and Kasper's theological methods becomes clear when one attends to Kasper's writings about theological truth.

B. Divine Faithfulness and the Truth of Theological Inquiry

Besides pointing out the problematic character of Kasper's notion of theological truth, Plovanich and Hütter have provided a clue regarding the source of the problem. Plovanich's critique correlated the account of theological truth Kasper articulated in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes in 1965 with the methods he employed in his 1974 Christology text Jesus der Christus.91 One common thread she found in these two texts was Kasper's “insistence that the definitive character of theological truth lies in God's fidelity, not in the human expression of it.”92 This represented for Plovanich an instance of Kasper's unwillingness to speak in a definitive way of

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91 For Plovanich's reading of the account of truth articulated in DW, see Plov 225-41. On her critique of Kasper's account of truth, see above, pp. 11-13.

92 Plov 295.
the human dimension of the divine-human encounter that is revelation. In other words, Plovanich found Kasper unwilling to commit himself to a doctrine of human nature. “[W]ithout the proposal of such a ‘nature,’ one is lacking one half of the explanation of theological truth which always involves a concrete human hearer as well as God who is faithful to his word.” Hence Plovanich's proposal that an expanded reflection on anthropology could correct the deficiency in an otherwise one-sided account of the certainty of theological truth.

Hütter likewise recognized a connection between divine fidelity and Kasper's understanding of truth. Quoting a passage in Die Methoden der Dogmatik where Kasper explicitly linked truth to fidelity, Hütter judged that Kasper was uniting a truth-concept “purportedly retrieved just recently by the efforts of historical-critical exegesis” with a philosophical hermeneutics in the tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer. Hütter made this observation at the very head of his critique of the relativistic tendencies in Kasper's theological method. Because Kasper understood truth as “a fundamentally historical phenomenon and ultimately an eschatological promise,” Hütter could not see how Kasper's methodological proposal was at all capable of securing the enduring content of the articles of faith. According to his analysis, Kasper has predicated his theology on a one-sided understanding of faith as certitude with regard to what it does “not yet” see, trust in a promise that continues to await its fulfillment. Consequently, his account does not adequately reflect the “already-now” presence in the believer of the beatitude that is the object of Christian hope. Hence he cannot provide any grounds for the permanent validity of the propositions in which the faith is expressed.

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93 Plov 294.
94 Hüt 379.
95 Hüt 379.
96 See Hüt 384-87.
Thus Plovanich and Hütter, although they approached Kasper's theology from different angles, converged on a critique of the connection Kasper drew between the faithfulness of God and theological truth. Plovanich's judgment issued from her examination of Kasper's writings on method up to the 1980s, although her critique focused especially on *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* and *Jesus der Christus*. Hütter proceeded by different means, comparing Kasper's *Die Methoden der Dogmatik* to Muñiz's *The Work of Theology*. Plovanich's account made several references to Kasper's concept of divine faithfulness while Hütter made only one, though he consistently expounded the impact of the connection Kasper drew between faithfulness and truth on his understanding of the Christian *kerygma*, of the articles of faith and of the nature of faith itself. The fact that both accounts, in spite of their differences, converge on Kasper's link between theological truth and divine fidelity provides a strong argument in favor of an investigation into Kasper's understanding of the fidelity of God.

A second convergence between these two critiques suggests a direction for the proposed investigation. Although Plovanich and Hütter have attended to different texts, the ones on which they focused—*Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, *Methoden der Dogmatik*, *Jesus der Christus*—were published between 1965 and 1974, that is, within the first decade of Kasper's career as a professor of theology. Both have likewise noticed the influence of Heidegger and Gadamer on Kasper's writings on truth. Now in both of these regards, the studies of Plovanich and Hütter differed from that of Thomas Pröpper.97 On the one hand, Pröpper's synthetic account drew from methodological writings spanning Kasper's whole university career (up to 1989). On the other hand, by highlighting the role of a transcendental reflection on freedom in stabilizing Kasper's account of truth, Pröpper pushed into the background any influence on Kasper's theological

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97 See the discussion of all three commentaries on pp. 11-16.
option that might have been exerted by a hermeneutical philosophy indebted to Heidegger and Gadamer. One wonders, then, whether an analysis of Kasper's understanding of divine fidelity in the latter part of his career might disclose a shift away from the relativistic and historicist tendencies that Plovanich and Hütter observed in his early work. This suggests the value of examining the development of Kasper's understanding of the faithfulness of God in connection with the truth claims of Christian faith.

The critiques of Kasper's account of truth hint at still another line of inquiry for an investigation of his notion of divine faithfulness. As noted above, Plovanich thought that an augmentation of Kasper's theology in the realm of theological anthropology, that is, a more explicit account of human nature, could fill in, as it were, the missing half of his account of the truth of revelation. Plovanich regarded his theology as open in principle to such an anthropological supplement, although it was unclear to her whether his duties as the (then newly elected) bishop of Rottenberg-Stuttgart would preclude his making this kind of adjustment. William Loewe has since picked up on Plovanich's suggestion, proposing an avenue by which Kasper's theology could be so supplemented. Already in 1980, Loewe's critique of Kasper's fundamental theological option had pointed out elements of openness to the modern “turn to the subject” in Kasper's early theology, although at that time he interpreted these elements as inconsistent with the overall direction of his theological work.99 In 2013, however, Loewe spoke instead of an implicit appeal to religious conversion in Kasper's Christological methodology, on the basis of which he thought it possible to augment Kasper's set of theological categories with

98 Plo 295.

“such notions as conversion, symbol, and the imagination.” For Loewe, such a modification would equip Kasper with a norm capable of identifying the stable content of the faith amidst the historical fluctuation found among the witnesses to the faith-tradition. If Loewe is correct, then the adjustment he proposed would address Hütter's concern to safeguard the propositional content of the faith from the threat of historicism.

The question this raises for the present study is what Kasper's developed notion of divine fidelity reveals about the capacity of his theology to accommodate the “turn to the subject” in this sense. To be more specific, how has Kasper related the doctrine of creation to the faithfulness of God? Might one find grounds in his understanding of God's faithfulness for talking about the relatively independent existence and activity of creatures, and of human beings in particular, in a definitive way? In the development of Kasper's description of theological truth, has he made room not only for speaking of the divine address but also of the human response as definitively and permanently true?

To summarize: A study focused on the topic of divine fidelity in Kasper's thought has the potential to make an important contribution to the literature on Kasper's understanding of truth and dogma. The value of such a study will depend in part on whether it can provide an answer to two key questions. First, how has Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness developed since he first drew a connection between faithfulness and theological truth? Second, to what degree does the faithfulness of God as Kasper understands it provide an opening for an adequate account of the human being in her or his reception of and response to divine revelation?

The frequency with which serious commentaries on Kasper's theology have broached the topic of truth leads one to conclude that the time is ripe for a study of divine fidelity in Kasper's

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100 Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” 91.
thought. There is, however, still another angle from which one could confirm the timeliness of such a study, namely, the connection between divine fidelity and Kasper's contributions to ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue.

C. Divine Faithfulness and Kasper's Ministry as “Dialoguer”

The remarks offered earlier concerning Kasper's correspondence with Colberg raised the question whether Kasper's ministry as head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews was a mere addendum to his life's work, or whether it revealed something important about the basic orientation of his thought. To answer this question would seem to require some means by which to approach Kasper's basic theological orientation. The foregoing discussion, however, has indicated that an inquiry into Kasper's notion of divine fidelity can provide one such approach. This is because the faithfulness of God corresponds for Kasper not only to what he regards as the central content of the Christian faith but also to a structural or methodological principle of his theology, namely, the truth that is the object of theological inquiry. This prompts one to ask: can one demonstrate a connection between Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness and his involvement in ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue? If so, then an investigation into this Kasperean theme would not only disclose something of the basic shape of his theology but would also enable one to address the relative weight of the ecumenical dimension therein.

There does not seem to be any commentary that has connected Kasper's notion of divine fidelity with his ecumenical or interreligious ministry. Without entering into a detailed discussion, however, a few passages may be cited here to support this connection. Kasper's writings on the sacrament of marriage have presented marriage as “the symbolic re-presentation
of the faithfulness and love of Christ for his bride, the Church.”

For Kasper, however, the image from the letter to the Ephesians of Christ's unbreakable, faithful love for the Church (5:25-32) was not an abstract, romantic notion but a statement about the concrete relationship between the Church and Christ, including all its ups and downs. This relationship emerged out of a history that began with the covenant struck with Adam and Eve, progressed through the Noachic and Mosaic covenants and reached its high point in Jesus Christ. Yet even after Christ, Kasper noted, this relationship has been realized in different grades or degrees, which allows one to speak of elements or vestiges of the Church and even of churches outside of the Catholic Church. In other words, the faithfulness of Christ to the Church has come to pass in history in a differentiated fashion. The tension between the present situation of division and the one Church Christ intended, just like the tension between God's intention for marriage and the actual situation of Christian marriages today, is for Kasper a result of sin and a mark of the intermediary situation of the present time, the birth pangs of the renewal of creation. According to Kasper, however, the Church must in the meantime do what it can, without giving up its doctrinal convictions, to witness God's faithfulness and love as authentically as possible within the actual situation of the world. This for Kasper includes entering into dialogue.

In a similar way, Kasper has in his recent ecclesiology text *Katholische Kirche* connected divine fidelity with ecumenical and Jewish-Christian relations by way of an explanation of the Church's identity as the People of God. According to Kasper, the meaning of the Second Vatican Council's description of the Church as the People of God comes to light not through

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101 Ehe 332; compare 338-39, 341, 343-45. For an in-depth analysis of Kasper's writings on marriage, see pp. 144ff., below.

102 On the following, see Ehe 352-54.

103 On the following, see KK 180-90.
sociological analysis but through its disclosure in the biblical history of salvation. “The Old Testament message of the People of God is thus the story of God's loving election, mercy, leadership and unbreakable fidelity.”

In speaking of the Church in these terms, the Council has for Kasper contextualized its ecclesiology within the whole of salvation history: as seed of Abraham and messianic people, the Church is to be a blessing to all nations, an effective sign of God's fidelity to the whole world. This same image has established a basis for a more positive relationship between Jews and Christians than has been realized in much of their shared history. God's unbreakable fidelity has been shown for Kasper in the fact that the rootstock of Israel has not been torn out and supplanted; on the contrary, all God's promises to Israel have received in Jesus Christ their definitive “Yes.”

The wild olive branch of the gentile Church has not replaced Israel as the “new” people of God, but has through its faith in Christ been grafted to the Jewish rootstock, from which it draws vital strength. Kasper likewise pointed out that the image of the people of God as employed by the Council has underlined an ecumenical consensus over the nature of the Church, since the divine promise of fidelity is not the special property of the ordained ministers of the Church but pertains first of all to the whole priestly people of God as an aid for their messianic mission.

From the two passages cited, one can discern a distinctive feature of the link Kasper has drawn between his dialogical ministries and divine fidelity: for Kasper, the faithfulness of God implies a basis for a positive relationship and a fruitful dialogue not only between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community, but also between it and other Christian churches. This connection between ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue is not entirely Kasper's own.

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104 KK 183; cf. 182.

105 See KK 186.

106 See KK 185.
Through the efforts of Cardinals Augustin Bea and Johannes Willebrands, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews was established and attached to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1974, decades before Kasper was nominated to head these bodies.\(^{107}\) Cardinal Bea in particular was deeply concerned both with relations between Christians and Jews and with the various movements for Christian unity.\(^{108}\) Kasper, however, articulated his own theological rationale for this link. Within his discussion of the unity of the Church in *Katholische Kirche*, Kasper considered under the single heading of “Das Drama der Spaltungen” (The Drama of Divisions) both what he called the *Urriss* or primordial split between church and synagogue and the several historic divisions between churches—the break with the Assyrian Church of the East, with the oriental-orthodox churches, the eastern Orthodox churches, and finally the churches of the Reformation.\(^{109}\) According to Kasper, each of these divisions constituted a sinful contradiction of the essence of the Church, which is called to be a sign and instrument of the *communio*-unity God intends for the whole world. The current situation of division thus expresses God's eschatological judgment against the Church. This is not to say that the unity of the Church has for Kasper ceased to exist within history and has become purely a matter of eschatological hope. Rather, unity is both a permanent characteristic of the Church and a permanent task facing the Church. Consequently, Kasper designated both ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue as integral dimensions of the mission of the Church.


\(^{108}\) On Cardinal Bea’s ecumenical activity, see Vereb, *Because He Was A German*; on his concern for Christian-Jewish relations, see Johannes Willebrands, “Cardinal Bea's Attitude to Relations with the Jews,” *PCPCU Information Service* 101 (1999): 166-68.

\(^{109}\) On the following, see KK 230-32.
It is notable in this connection that Kasper has often employed the language of God's faithfulness in his contributions to Jewish-Christian dialogue.\(^{110}\) To cite just one example: in a November 6, 2002 address at the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College, Kasper broached the topic of divine fidelity within his discussion of the “thorny question” of Christian missionary activity among Jews.\(^{111}\) For Kasper, Christianity and Judaism have a complex relationship that embraces both a common heritage and irreducible differences of identity. On the one hand, Kasper pointed out that the patrimony shared by Jews and Christians alike, which includes “the covenant and promises of the one unique God,” is not merely a common history that lies behind them; on the contrary, if one takes Romans 3:3-4\(^{112}\) and 11:29\(^{113}\) seriously, not only the Jew but also the Christian can affirm “that God's covenant with Israel by God's faithfulness is not broken;” it is a living and effective reality even today.\(^{114}\) On this basis, he concluded that the Christian category of mission “understood as call to conversion from


\(^{112}\) “What if some [of the Jews] were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every man be false.”

\(^{113}\) “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”

Reprising themes from his reflections on the role of the community of faith in the historical mediation of revelation, he noted that both traditions oppose “the pessimism, skepticism and nihilism in our midst” with hope in God and can therefore together witness before the world “to the openness of history toward the future and to the unwavering hope of completion which God alone can and will fulfill at the end of time.”

On the other hand, Christians believe that the one covenant and the promises of God have received “their definitive and irrevocable Amen” precisely in and through Jesus Christ. Consequently, for Kasper, Jewish-Christian dialogue cannot be understood as a demand that either Jews or Christians surrender their identities; dialogue must also permit Christians to witness to their faith in Christ and in this limited sense to engage in a “mission to the Jews.” The faithfulness of God does not imply uniformity and sameness, but includes the element of difference that makes dialogue possible.

If Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness has provided him with a kind of bridge over the Urriss between the Jewish and Christian traditions, all the more might one expect this concept to provide a common point of reference for different Christian communities. A survey of Kasper's numerous writings on ecumenical topics, however, reveals that Kasper has rarely mentioned divine fidelity in connection with ecumenism. Nevertheless, it may be argued that the substance of what Kasper meant by divine fidelity played an important role in his ecumenical writings. A demonstration of this thesis will necessarily depend upon an in-depth analysis of Kasper's understanding of this term, which will be developed in the course of this study. For the moment, however, it will suffice to assert that Kasper's notion of divine fidelity includes an element of

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 464.
freedom and novelty that he closely associates with the work of the Holy Spirit. If this should prove to be the case, then it would imply that the numerous references to the Holy Spirit found in Kasper's contributions to ecumenical dialogue all bear some relation (to be more precisely determined by the present study) to his idea of the faithfulness of God.

As it happens, in at least one of the rare instances in which Kasper spoke of God's faithfulness in an ecumenical context, he attributed this fidelity to the Holy Spirit. In his conclusion to the section of *Katholische Kirche* in which he discussed ecumenical dialogue, Kasper commented on an attitude of impatience and disappointment over the sluggishness and difficulty of ecumenical progress today in comparison to the years immediately following Vatican II. He himself could not identify with this attitude. On the contrary, Kasper expressed his gratitude for the vast progress that has been made over the past fifty years, measuring this in terms not only of agreed documents but of a new consciousness of the unity of all Christians in their faith in the triune God and their common mission to proclaim God's Reign of freedom, justice and peace in the world. All this has confirmed for Kasper that the Spirit is at work in the ecumenical movement. Thus he concluded: “If we are confident that ecumenism is an initiative of the Holy Spirit, then we may be confident in the face of all difficulties that the Spirit is faithful and is leading what he himself has set in motion to its completion.”

The foregoing discussion has indicated a connection between Kasper's notion of divine fidelity and the foundations of ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue. It has shown that the theme of God's faithfulness emerged explicitly within Kasper's writings on Jewish-Christian relations. It has also hinted that faithfulness plays a role in Kasper's contributions to ecumenical

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118 See KK 438-39.
119 KK 439.
dialogue, although this role is for the most part implicit in these writings. It finally raised an important question for the present study of divine faithfulness in Kasper's thought, namely: how does Kasper relate divine faithfulness with his theology of the Holy Spirit? The answer to this question will be important for disclosing the ecumenical significance of divine fidelity in Kasper's thought.

III. The Structure of This Study

At the conclusion of the present review of literature on Kasper, the thesis of the present study may be stated. Walter Kasper's concept of divine fidelity represents a basic determination of his fundamental theological option. As both an expression of the central content of revelation and a determinant of the structure of his theology (through its close link with his concept of theological truth), it articulates his Catholic alternative to the formal and material principles of the Reformation. It constitutes a point of contact with Protestant and Jewish theological concerns and generates a framework for progress in ecumenical dialogue.

This dissertation proposes to analyze the notion, *die Treue Gottes* (the faithfulness of God) in the theology of Kasper. Chapter two will begin this analysis by contextualizing the idea of divine faithfulness in reference to other major themes of Kasper's theology that have emerged from commentaries on his work, namely: history, freedom, and the doctrine of analogy. Its intent is to indicate that the idea of divine fidelity is not an all-determining principle in Kasper's thought but itself takes shape in relation to other fundamental structures and basic concerns in his theology. Additionally, this exercise will help situate the present dissertation within the existing body of secondary literature on Kasper, especially dissertations and articles that deal with the overarching themes of his work.
Against the background of the themes explained in chapter two, chapter three will make a first attempt to determine the content of Kasper's concept of divine faithfulness. It will pursue this goal by way of an analysis of Kasper's usage of the term, *Treue*, faithfulness or fidelity, in German, French, and English-language publications between 1962 and 2011. This section of the present study will distinguish between attributions of faithfulness to creatures and of the same to God, cataloging the range of meanings in each case. It will then inquire into the relationship Kasper has drawn between creaturely and divine fidelity, with reference especially to Kasper's writings on the sacrament of marriage. This chapter will synthesize a provisional description of Kasper's notion of divine fidelity, an aid to the task of providing an account of the development of Kasper's thought on this subject.

Chapter four will test the thesis that the concept of divine faithfulness expresses what Kasper considers the central content of the Gospel. It proceeds on the premise that Kasper envisaged the books *Jesus der Christus*, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, and *Katholische Kirche* as a kind of theological trilogy. That is, while each of these books represents a distinctive phase of development within Kasper's thinking, all nevertheless reflect his intent to recapitulate the whole Gospel message from a single systematic perspective (Christology, theology of God, ecclesiology). Chapter four will therefore inquire into the role of divine fidelity in these three books. This inquiry will indicate to what extent divine fidelity expresses what is central to the Christian message at each of three different moments in Kasper's theological career. It will attend to one of the questions raised earlier in this chapter, namely, the relationship between divine fidelity and Kasper's pneumatology. This procedure will yield a developmental account of the central themes of Kasper's theology and in particular of the theme of God's faithfulness.
Chapter five will address questions of truth and method in connection with Kasper's notion of divine fidelity. Like chapter four, chapter five will employ a developmental approach: it will trace the connection Kasper has drawn between faithfulness and truth through the course of his writings on theological truth, method, and tradition ranging from 1962 to 2011. This chapter will pay particular attention to the question of Kasper's openness to the concerns of other theological approaches, especially those that take their cue from the modern turn to the subject. It will also show that Kasper's understanding of the faithfulness of God decisively shapes his account of the tradition of the Church as well as of the truth that it mediates within history.

Chapter six will attempt to determine the role played by the theme of divine fidelity in Kasper's contributions to Jewish-Christian and ecumenical dialogue. Because the language of fidelity rarely appears in Kasper's writings on ecumenical topics, this chapter will proceed in a somewhat different manner than those that precede it. It will build upon the results of the previous chapters, utilizing the description of divine faithfulness as material and formal principle of Kasper's theology generated by the previous chapters as a hermeneutical key to Kasper's "dialogical" essays. It will argue that Kasper's understanding of divine fidelity points to the basis of and a framework for the relations between the Catholic Church, the Jewish community and the churches and ecclesial communions stemming from the Reformation. In this way, chapter six will argue that divine fidelity highlights the foundations in Kasper's theology for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Having completed its examination of the place of God's faithfulness in Kasper's theology as a whole, this study will conclude with critical reflections on Kasper's theology as illumined by divine fidelity. It will assess the strengths and weaknesses of this theme as a structural element in
Kasper's theology, especially as this relates to his ecumenical and interfaith ministry and to his understanding of truth.
Chapter Two

Basic Categories in Kasper's Theology: History, Freedom, Analogy

In addressing the situation in which Christian faith in general, and Catholic theology in particular, has found itself in the modern age, Walter Kasper has spoken of a time of crisis. During his first decade as a professor of theology, Kasper noted that in the eyes of some believers, contemporary Western culture had come to resemble the routing of belief in its struggle against the forces of unbelief, in which God is dead and Christianity has lost its relevance.¹ In this situation, some perceive the pluralism of theologies and opinions within the Church and the resulting confusion among the faithful as a wound sustained by the Church, or by belief itself, as a result of its defeat. Thus, Kasper noted, these Christians label the present state of affairs a *Glaubenskrise*, a crisis of faith.² They see within and without the Church signs of its imminent destruction and prepare themselves for the apocalyptic struggle between truth and error.

In taking up the language of crisis, Kasper was not endorsing the thoroughly pessimistic view of some of his contemporaries. He instead reminded his readers that the Greek term *krisis* originally referred to an *Entscheidungssituation*, a “situation of decision,” an opportunity for a new beginning, a *kairos*.³ Kasper wrote that the crisis of the age called for a decision on the future forms and structures of Christian faith, since the existing structures and forms were no longer adequate. He pointed out that the Church has passed through such crises at several points in its history: the era of Constantine, the Gregorian reform, the Reformation. It has undergone

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¹ EG 13. In the cited passage, Kasper was playing on an image from Goethe.

² EG 14-15.

³ See EG 15-16.
momentous changes without departing from the one faith of the Apostles. The history of the Church, then, gives the believer reasons for hope and courage to take a decisive stand in the present situation. This hope that the Church will always remain in the truth was for Kasper constitutive of Christian faith, since it is grounded in God's definitive eschatological promise in Jesus Christ. Because God's work of salvation was accomplished in Christ once for all, and because the Church is the normative sign and instrument of this salvation in Christ, it follows that there will always be a Church, even if its form remains subject to perhaps considerable change. Kasper argued that Christian hope excludes two extreme attitudes, one that sees only decline in the Church and one that evaluates all Church history until the present as a catastrophe. The authentic believer has hope for the Church in the face of historical change because of God's infallible fidelity.

The selections from *Einführung in den Glauben* cited above illustrate several notable features of Kasper's theological style. In the first place, they demonstrate his consciousness of the impact of rapid historical change on Christian faith and theology. Second, they showcase Kasper's posture of openness to these developments. Kasper did not regard the instability of the present as something purely deleterious; on the contrary, he recognized that this phenomenon had thrown into relief certain aspects of Christian faith that might otherwise go unnoticed. In particular, this instability reminds one that even as venerable institutions disappear and whole cultures and societies become unrecognizable, God will remain faithful to the created world and to the Church Christ established. Third, these remarks reveal the eminently practical bent of

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4 EG 150.
5 EG 163.
6 EG 151.
7 EG 150-51.
Kasper's theology. He did not consider trust in divine fidelity to be an opiate for the believer, a comforting alibi for inaction, but rather a source of courage and a spur for the faithful, motivating them to become active agents within the Church and history, facing the challenges of the present head-on.

These introductory reflections lead to the following point. Kasper's notion of God as faithful plays an important role in his proposal to reframe theology in terms of history and freedom. Conversely, the categories of history and freedom as Kasper understands them provide the background without which his way of talking about divine fidelity would remain unintelligible. In order to grasp what Kasper means when he says that God is faithful, one needs to know something about how Kasper understands history and freedom.

The goal of this chapter will be to introduce Kasper's concept of divine fidelity by discussing the conditions that according to Kasper modify every attempt to speak about God within contemporary discourse. It begins by describing the interlocking categories of history and freedom that form the background of Kasper's theology, which includes his account of God's faithfulness. It will then discuss how Kasper made use of these categories to restore the foundations of the doctrine of analogy in dialogue with contemporary thought. It intends thus to disclose the contours of Kasper's particular style of theological discourse, of which his talk about God as faithful is an important instance.

I. History and Freedom as Grammar of Kasper's Theology

Those who have attempted to summarize the basic orientation of Kasper's theology have often called attention to two categories as foundational to his thought: history and freedom. Each
author has generally highlighted one or the other as the more basic category.\textsuperscript{8} Regardless, however, of which they regard as prior, many have noticed that both play a significant role in his theology.\textsuperscript{9} Indeed, Kasper's allusions to the philosophical or metaphysical background that his theology presupposes have betrayed a certain indecision over whether this background is better termed an ontology of freedom, a metaphysics of the person or a “metahistorics.”\textsuperscript{10} What seems to be more important than deciding whether Kasper regarded one or the other as more fundamental is to observe how the two relate to one another in his thought.

The first part of this chapter will focus on three essays in which Kasper elaborated his concept of history. These essays indicate the philosophical heritage of Kasper's notion as well as his own contributions to this tradition.

A. History as a Theological Category

As has already been noted, several of Kasper's commentators have observed that history forms the horizon of Kasper's theological reflections.\textsuperscript{11} The introduction to this chapter described one instance in which Kasper connected modern consciousness of history to the “crisis of faith” in which his contemporaries found themselves and to the movements of renewal intended to

\textsuperscript{8} On Kasper's theology as a historical hermeneutics of tradition, see Plov; Hütt. On freedom as foundational category in Kasper's thinking, see Pröpper, “Freiheit als philosophisches Prinzip der Dogmatik” (see p. 10n15, above), 165-71; Palakeel, “Walter Kasper: Analogy of Freedom,” in \textit{The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse} (see p. 10n13, above), 263-98. On the influence of Schelling's understanding of history and philosophy over Kasper's fundamental option, see Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper” (see p. 7n3, above); on the importance of Schelling's concept of freedom in Kasper's thought, see Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme” (see p. 7n3, above).


\textsuperscript{10} On the philosophical background to contemporary theology as an ontology in terms of freedom and person, see Kasper, “Einer aus der Trinität . . . ’Zur Neubegründung einer spirituellen Christologiein trinitätstheologischer Perspektive,” in TK 1:227; as a metaphysics of love and a relational metaphysics of person, see Kasper, “Christologie und Anthropologie,” in TK 1:216; as a historically and personally defined ontology, see JC 22; as a “metahistorics,” see Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” in GG 20.

address this crisis. Similarly, in “Kirche und Theologie unter dem Gesetz der Geschichte?”
Kasper explicitly framed this crisis in the language of Ernst Troeltsch and Gerhard Krüger as the “problem of history.”\textsuperscript{12} Describing his European context in the late 1960s, Kasper observed that new developments in science and technology as well as dramatic changes in social structures and cultural mores have given rise to an acute consciousness of the historical dimensions of reality. This apparently all-encompassing historicization of reality has in turn created polarization. There are, on the one hand, those fascinated by and indeed hungry for the new and different; one thinks today of the young person glued to her or his iPhone constantly checking his or her favorite news sites, if not Facebook or Twitter. On the other side are those bewildered and disoriented by the dizzying pace of changes, fearful that the traditions, principles, and institutions that shape their lives, which once appeared solid and unchangeable, may soon crumble and disappear. Kasper saw such polarization emerging not only outside but even within the Church, particularly since Vatican II. Among other places, he found these dynamics at work in sincere Christians and their feelings of betrayal and scandal when they see ideas and structures once espoused by the Church, which they themselves defended as non-negotiable, suddenly opened up to discussion and exposed to the possibility of change.

Kasper discerned behind this polarization an ideological clash between two basic patterns of thought.\textsuperscript{13} The Catholic Church in its theology has preserved an intellectual tradition with roots in the thought-world of Western antiquity. This classical \textit{Denkform} conceives of reality as something essentially static, composed of eternal essences that operate according to the laws of their natures. Classical philosophy, and the medieval thought that succeeded it, tended to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Gesetz 49. On historical consciousness and polarization in the Church, see ibid., 49-50.

\textsuperscript{13} On the clash between classical static and modern historical thought-forms, see Gesetz 50-51.}
consider change as something accidental, an outward appearance on the surface of a vast, unchanging order of being. In this way of thinking, it makes sense to conceive of the Church as a bastion of truth in the midst of a torrent of philosophical fads, political movements and whatever other ephemeral trends might emerge out of the rapids of history. By contrast, modern thinking tends to consider not eternal essences but history and change as the most basic realities. Natural sciences have contributed much to this way of thinking. Paleontology has demonstrated that many things happened on this planet before human beings even appeared on the scene. New forms of historical and anthropological research have shown that human beings themselves have changed quite a bit, having adopted a multitude of different social, ethical, and religious forms and ideas over the centuries. Such results would seem to undercut the claims of any particular ethical or religious order to be grounded in an eternal order of being. Against this background the German Idealists conceived even of being and truth in terms of act, movement and development. The contrast between the modern thought-world and traditional forms of theology could hardly be starker.

In his attempt to resolve this conflict between history and theology, Kasper took as his point of reference the primordially historical character of Christianity itself.14 Indeed, Kasper conceived of the revelation attested in the Old and New Testaments as a sort of dialogue between God and human beings that takes place in history, which culminates with God emptying his very self into history in Jesus Christ.15 For Kasper, this biblical vision of a relationship between God and humanity that develops over time was a singularity in the history of religions; one could

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15 Gesetz 52. On dialogue as basic to the structure of Kasper’s theology, see below, pp. 98-100.
even call modern historical thinking a secular consequence of the biblical view. Kasper thus accepted the legitimate concerns of historical thinking and indicated the need to restore to theology what it lost when it adopted the static categories of classical thought.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Kasper uncritically adopted the contemporary understanding of history. In a sense this would have been impossible, since no one, monolithic “contemporary understanding of history” exists. One must ask, then, which conception of history Kasper thought suitable for elaborating the mysteries of Christianity. Terms like 'history' and 'historicity' sometimes connote indifferentism and relativism, ways of thinking that are hostile to Christianity and its claim to teach saving truth. A theologian who wishes to speak in historical categories must therefore choose his concept of history carefully.

What then are the sources of Kasper's distinctive understanding of history? Aidan Nichols provided a useful hint when he noted that Kasper spent nearly his entire academic career at the University of Tübingen and went on to call him “a pure product of the Catholic Tübingen School.” Indeed, in orienting his theological program, Kasper more than once looked back to the example of the nineteenth-century theologians who made up the Catholic Faculty of the University of Tübingen. History was a major theme of their theological contributions. Thus, the

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16 Gesetz 57.
17 See Gesetz 58. Kasper quipped that in the winning entry to an essay contest on the concept of “historicity” (Geschichtlichkeit) sponsored by the Göttingen Academy of Sciences, Gerhard Bauer identified around seventeen different senses in which the term is used in contemporary discourse.
18 Gesetz 58.
19 Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme,” 16.
Catholic Tübingen School offers a promising avenue for the present investigation of Kasper's historical thinking.

_B. Tübingen's Historical Vision of Christianity_

The Eberhard-Karls-Universität-Tübingen has over the past two centuries acquired a reputation among German universities for its lively engagement with diverse streams of thought.\(^1\) Founded in 1477 by Count Eberhard im Bart of Württemberg under the auspices of Pope Sixtus IV, the university came under Protestant control less than sixty years later, as a result of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg's reconquest of the region. Following its reorganization in the years 1534 to 1537, Tübingen became a stronghold of Lutheran orthodoxy in Germany, having established an _Evangelisches Stift_, a Protestant seminary whose alumni include Johannes Kepler, Friedrich Hölderlin, G. W. F. Hegel and F. W. J. von Schelling. When classical studies at Tübingen declined in the wake of the Thirty Years' War, Duke Karl Eugen of Württemberg shifted the university's focus towards the natural sciences. Despite his efforts, it was not until the nineteenth century that Tübingen underwent a significant academic revival. In 1817 the university added a faculty of Catholic theology and a public economy faculty to its four original faculties, and in 1863 Tübingen became the first university in Germany to form a distinct faculty for the natural sciences. The university also introduced degree programs for history and _Germanistik_ (German studies) and strengthened its natural science and medical programs through greater specialization. In the meantime, the evangelical theology faculty under the leadership of Ferdinand Christian Baur revitalized their curricula by adopting historical-critical methodologies within New Testament studies. While increasing its emphasis on medicine and the

\(^{21}\) For a brief history of the University of Tübingen, see LThK, s.v. “Tübingen, Universität”; NCE, s.v. “Tübingen, University of.”
natural sciences, Tübingen continued well into the twentieth century to house the largest theological faculty in Germany.

The nineteenth-century scholars who gave the Catholic theology faculty at Tübingen its distinctive ideological character came to be recognized as the founders of the theological tradition now known as “the Catholic Tübingen School.” This School sought to revitalize the Catholic intellectual tradition by way of a critical encounter with contemporary thought. Practically speaking, this meant confronting the movements that defined Germany's intellectual landscape during the faculty's formative years (1812-87), namely, German Idealism, Romanticism and historicism. One could find such a confrontation in the work of Johann Sebastian von Drey, the founding father of the Tübingen School, who developed “an organic and historical frame of reference” for theology in dialogue with Kant, Fichte and Schelling. Within this framework Drey conceived of tradition as the living, developing, unfolding presence of divine revelation in an historical world. This in turn allowed him to speak theologically about the development of dogma. Another member of this faculty, Johann Adam Möhler, sought early in his career to elaborate the experiential dimensions of Christian faith in dialogue with Schleiermacher. While he later distanced himself from subjective idealism, Möhler continued to utilize the ideas of romantic idealism to express the objectivity of revealed truth as presented in historical tradition. Through these and similar efforts, the Catholic Tübingen School sketched a

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23 That is, from the publication of Drey's programmatic “Revision des gegenwärtigen Zustandes der Theologie” to the death of the last of the School's “first generation,” Johannes Evangelist von Kuhn. See LThK, s.v. “Tübinger Schule I: Katholische Tübinger Schule.”

24 Dietrich and Himes, introduction to The Legacy of the Tübingen School, 12.
new Catholic vision of Christianity within the horizon of nineteenth-century Germany's newfound consciousness of history.

The Catholic Tübingen School developed a notion of history that simultaneously engaged Enlightenment concerns and criticized Enlightenment rationalism, that at once took the tradition seriously and maintained a critical distance from it. According to Elmar Klinger, the historical framework adapted for theological use especially by Drey and Johannes Evangelist von Kuhn opens up an approach to theological thinking in which 'the other' is integral. On the one hand, these representatives of the Tübingen School affirmed that personal judgment, as distinct from what is affirmed by religious tradition, is constitutive of theology. To this extent they agreed with Kant and Lessing that autonomous reason can and must render judgments over exterior authorities and traditions. On the other hand, Drey and Kuhn acknowledged the historically conditioned character of thinking in general. The individual theologian can transcend this cognitive contingency only in dialogue with the 'other' encountered through the tradition. In this sense the theologian depends on the other in exercising her or his own reason. This differentiates Drey and Kuhn from the Enlightenment rationalist, who effectively elevates the rational judgment of the present-day thinker to a place of privilege and superiority over against the supposed irrationality of tradition. Thus, for Klinger, the conception of history championed by the Catholic Tübingen School has room for the 'new' and the 'other,' which yields new possibilities for speaking of the relationship between nature and grace in a postmodern context.

Like Klinger, Kasper evaluated the legacy of the Catholic Tübingen School against the background of his contemporary problematic. In “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” Kasper observed that a host of intellectual and cultural differences separate the present age from the milieu in which nineteenth-century German Catholic theology took shape. The salient historical developments include the rise of the positive sciences and of the historical-critical method, the influence of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy, which poses the question of being no longer within the substance-accidents framework but in the horizon of time and history, and the new emphasis on eschatology and the Reign of God in contemporary theology. Because of these and other changes, it makes sense to ask whether the Tübingen School’s project of dialogue with German Idealism, historicism and Romanticism is still relevant today, or whether it has in the meantime become a trite and otiose endeavor. On the other hand, one may ask of contemporary culture, with its unabashed affirmation of the particular over the universal, of individual autonomy over community, of scientific reason over tradition, whether it has dealt adequately with the challenge of the Enlightenment. Citing Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Kasper pointed out that “the dialectic of all Enlightenment” was at play in the present cultural context: human beings’ efforts to realize their humanity more fully have led to a dehumanization of the world; in gaining the power to manipulate the physical world, human beings have subjected themselves to the same powers of manipulation. The transformation of all aspects of existence into material for building the future—the historicization of reality—has turned out to be a threat to human beings and their future. Kasper concluded that his contemporaries had not yet adequately dealt with the Idealist problem of mediating between

26 On the intellectual climate within which Kasper weighed the achievement of the Tübingen School, see “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 9-14, 18-20.

human beings and the world, between freedom and necessity. The problem of the Enlightenment was still at the heart of the problem of history. Nineteenth-century Tübingen theology was dealing with these same problems, but from the point of view of a culture innocent of contemporary historicist baggage, one that did not take individual autonomy and the radical changeability of reality for granted. The peculiarly postmodern uncertainty of the future of humanity thus gives new occasion to consider the achievement of the Catholic Tübingen School.

From the vantage point of the contemporary problem of history, Kasper pointed out that the Tübingen theologians strove to advance a distinctly historical form of theology that nevertheless preserved the place of definitive truth in history.\textsuperscript{28} History for them was not something separate from rational, conceptual thought; rather, they considered history to be fundamentally thought and reason—“objective spirit,” to use the language of German Idealism.\textsuperscript{29} They likewise maintained the converse: reason realizes its innate possibilities in history. One can observe this self-realization of reason taking place in the historical development of theology. A living tradition maintains the continuity of a reasoned elaboration of faith in the midst of historical change, and an historical institution, the Church, safeguards that tradition over time. The Church, however, does not exist for its own sake or simply to preserve the continuity of an intellectual tradition; rather, its function is to maintain a living connection between the world today and the Church’s own “Beginning in Fullness,” namely, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{30} The Catholic Tübingen School ultimately referred the problem of historical change and

\textsuperscript{28} On the historical shape of the theology of the Tübingen School, see Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 14-27.

\textsuperscript{29} On the idea of historical tradition as objective spirit, see Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” in TK 1:87-90. Compare his discussion of the “objective,” ecclesial form of truth in “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 21-27.

\textsuperscript{30} On the Anfang in der Fülle as norm of the tradition of the Church in Johann Adam Möhler's thought, see Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 25.
definitive truth back to the problem of God. How is it possible to speak of God in a way that preserves both God's sovereign freedom to speak a definitive word in history and the freedom of human beings to accept or reject this truth without compulsion?

The question of history has led to the question of the relationship between God and creation, between divine sovereignty and human freedom. It has thus raised the question of freedom and of its relationship to the category of history. Understanding the close link between freedom and history in Kasper's reflections will provide the necessary background to a discussion of his doctrine of analogy. It will also help clarify his relationship to his Tübingen heritage, since Schelling has exercised crucial influence over Kasper's understanding of freedom and history.

C. The Interlocking of Freedom and History in Schelling's Philosophy

The founders of the Catholic Tübingen School had in common their commitment to the Church, their orientation to history and their openness to various contemporary streams of thought, among other things. Nevertheless, there were differences among these thinkers; each had his own distinctive style and approach. Thus one may ask where within this school Kasper found a model for his theology. Aidan Nichols has suggested that Kasper's work has been a continuation of Franz Anton Staudenmaier's theological project, which in turn took its cue from the thought of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. Kasper has indeed judged Staudenmaier's theology to be something quite congenial to contemporary streams of thought. Nichols's suggestion would also explain why Kasper devoted his Habilitationsschrift to

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31 On the contributions of the Tübingen School to the question of the relationship or analogy between human and divine freedom, see “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 27-32.

32 Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme,” 19.

33 See Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 18.
Schelling's later philosophy.\textsuperscript{34} If Kasper inherited his enthusiasm for history from the Tübingen School, it seems likely that Schelling was an important influence for Kasper's distinctive concept of history.

Kasper acquired from his studies in Schelling an understanding of history closely tied to Schelling's notion of freedom.\textsuperscript{35} In taking up and adapting this doctrine of history for theology, Kasper was therefore also affirming what he saw as the legitimate concerns of Schelling's post-idealistic philosophical project and the doctrine of freedom that was its central feature. It is a sign of Schelling's influence that Kasper closely connected his notion of history to freedom and the concrete conditions necessary for its realization.

According to Kasper, the basic question addressed by Idealist philosophy was how to mediate between the freedom of human beings and the remainder of reality.\textsuperscript{36} The Idealists asked: How is free human existence possible in a world where freedom is threatened by compulsion and necessity in its various forms? Freedom was thus a fundamental concern for Schelling's philosophy as well as for the intellectual tradition he inherited from Kant and shared with Fichte and Hegel. These thinkers saw a profound interconnection between freedom and the philosophical act.\textsuperscript{37} They understood freedom to be the faculty by which one abstracts from one's immediate, present, sensible experience and enters into thought. As such, freedom was for the Idealists the medium in which philosophical argumentation takes place; it is not a conclusion to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} DA. For discussion, see pp. 81-98, below.
\item \textsuperscript{35} The following summarizes Kasper, “Die Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem in der Philosophie Schellings,” in GG 33-47.
\item \textsuperscript{36} On the notion of freedom developed by the German Idealists, see “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 33-34.
\item \textsuperscript{37} That thinking and freedom mutually presuppose one another came to expression in another way in Schelling's reflections on the Absolute, the reality of which he thought human beings could only grasp in an act of freedom. See pp. 81-98, below.
\end{itemize}
be drawn from philosophy but its very presupposition. Since, however, it is necessary to abstract from immediacy in order to remember the past and plan for the future, free activity depends for its part on abstract thinking. Given this tight interconnection between freedom and thought, Schelling could easily conclude that no truly human life was possible apart from freedom; he could even describe freedom as the essence of the human being.\footnote{Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 34-35.}

In Kasper's reading, however, freedom was for Schelling more than an abstract characteristic of man. Rather, when Schelling considered freedom in the concrete, he saw a task yet to be accomplished.\footnote{On Schelling's understanding of freedom as project, see Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 34-35.} One experiences one's own freedom as something unconditioned in itself, yet whenever and wherever one encounters freedom, one finds only a limited and conditioned freedom. Freedom protests these limits and strives to transcend them. This self-transcendent thrust of human freedom had revolutionary, even anarchistic consequences for Schelling. Particularly in his early thought, Schelling considered God to be a limitation on freedom; on this premise, to presuppose freedom also meant to presuppose a practical atheism.

The same principle of freedom would bring about a very different kind of revolution within his later thought.\footnote{On the reversal of Schelling's practical atheism, see Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 36-38.} After the deaths of Hegel and Goethe, Schelling came to regard nihilism rather than God as the greatest threat to human freedom. He found the seeds of this nihilism in the theism of the Western tradition, which emptied the world of all value by applying all worldly value to God. Western philosophy culminating in Hegel had portrayed this God as the logical conclusion of its philosophical speculations: “Gott am Ende.”\footnote{Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 36.} In Hegel, however, this...
'God at the end' came to his end, since Hegel could conceive of God as a living and effective reality in the world only at the end of the historical process; until then, God could exert no power or influence over the thought and activity of human beings. Because of Idealism's domestication of God, freedom has been abandoned to its own devices and has lost its orientation. Schelling found a solution to this nihilism only by taking a step beyond his prior Idealist philosophy and by drawing up a new 'philosophy of Christianity' grounded not in the metaphysical tradition but on the inner exigencies of freedom. Thus the basic thrust of his philosophical project—the perfect realization of human freedom in the world—led him from atheistic presuppositions to new foundations for discourse about God.

During the course of its development, Schelling understood his philosophy as a Cartesian 'free science' which had been liberated from and rendered independent of all exterior authorities. He regarded his philosophy as a continuation of the 'project' of Christianity, which, by introducing the notion of freedom, had overturned the classical notion that fate or necessity was the ultimate, all-encompassing reality. This historical datum illustrates Schelling's claim that the concrete relationship between freedom and the factors that post its limits is dynamic; in any given time and place one encounters as pregiven both forces that threaten one's freedom and liberation from such forces in constantly changing proportions. The horizon of Schelling's free philosophy was history, the overarching, dynamic process oriented towards a definitive mediation between freedom and necessity. Because of its orientation to the future possibilities and conditions of freedom, Schelling's philosophy was no merely speculative endeavor but a thoroughly political philosophy. Like Fichte and Hegel, Schelling recognized that the individual

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42 On freedom as a historical, political, and practical reality, see “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 38-41.

43 See also DA 66 and pp. 85-86, below.
realizes his or her freedom only through an encounter with another free person. The other, and by extension the political community, plays an indispensable role in creating the conditions for the individual's freedom. Although this statement makes Schelling sound rather conservative, he envisioned a freedom more radical than the political order of his time allowed. He imagined a future relationship between church and state in which the church would become a prophetic advocate for freedom over against the state, an institutional safeguard against civil tyranny.

A future social order may yet preserve freedom from many forms of political compulsion. Yet could it finally provide solid grounds for freedom's claim to absolute value, thereby safeguarding human beings from the frustration of their freedom and from the threat of nihilism? Kasper found in Schelling's grappling with this question of freedom the motive for his efforts to overturn the idealist problematic from within. Unsatisfied with various human efforts to realize freedom in its fullness—art, mysticism, science—Schelling concluded that every inner-worldly attempt to liberate freedom absolutely would turn out to be an impersonal 'law' that necessarily imposed restrictions on freedom. Does this mean that necessity rather than freedom will have the final word? Schelling concluded that only an encounter with an infinite freedom could provide satisfactory conditions for the full realization of human freedom, that is, that free persons can only find orientation and vindication for their freedom if there exists a God who, sovereign over all systems of necessity, is willing and able to enter into relationship with them and so provide these conditions. This, according to Kasper, is why Schelling set aside Idealist philosophy's methods, particularly its rejection of authority exterior to the self, and took up a new approach to

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44 Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 40; see also Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” 23, 28. For discussion of the impact of this principle on Kasper’s thought, see below, pp. 72, 99, 162, 180, 200-1, 261, and 319.

45 On the development of Schelling's later philosophy, see Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 41-43, as well as below, pp. 88-92.
the problem of freedom, which will be discussed below in more detail. In this 'positive philosophy,' Schelling turned from *a priori* reflection to history in search of an already accomplished mediation between freedom and necessity—God's self-revelation in history. Surrendering the Idealist ambition to conceptualize all of reality in a vast synthetic System, positive philosophy approaches reality not as a system of necessity but as a history ultimately grounded in the free Providence of God. This vision of history whose fundamental reality is freedom and mystery finally provided Schelling with solid grounds for affirming the inviolability of human freedom in the face of all attempts to master freedom, whether conceptually or through force.⁴⁶ In this way, positive philosophy offered the hopeful prospect of a way of thinking about freedom that could finally do freedom full justice.

Kasper criticized Schelling for remaining essentially within the Idealist framework he himself denounced.⁴⁷ Since Schelling conceived of God's freedom as a necessary postulate of human freedom, he subjected even God's freedom to necessity and thus failed to safeguard its character as freedom. Nevertheless, Kasper found in Schelling's philosophy of freedom valuable resources for overcoming the *aporie* of the Enlightenment. Although Schelling retained a variety of Idealist structures in his thought, he nevertheless implicitly abandoned the Idealist project of comprehensive systematization. The key difference was his consistent option to consider freedom as it is concretely realized in relationships and in community, instead of conceptualizing freedom in abstract terms. These concrete, historical realizations of freedom defy being reduced into a closed system of thought. Similarly, Schelling did not attempt to ground truth and revelation in concepts, systems, or ideologies but in mystery, hiddenness, and unknowing, for

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⁴⁷ For Kasper's evaluation of Schelling's philosophy of freedom and its theological significance, see “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 43-47.
only the openness of reality grounded in mystery leaves room for human freedom. In order to safeguard freedom, freedom must surrender the ambition to justify itself speculatively; it can only hope to find this justification in the concreteness of history. Against this background faith, that is, trust in a God who acts freely in history and promises human beings the fulfillment of their freedom, becomes a meaningful possibility.

As a result of his studies in Schelling, Kasper firmly attached the notion of freedom to his historical framework for theology. Thus, Kasper's categories of freedom and history mutually interpret one another. On the one hand, since the Idealist tradition regarded freedom as the beginning and end of philosophy, Schelling too described history in terms of freedom: history is the horizon in which freedom realizes itself. On the other hand, the peculiarity of Schelling's Idealism was that he posed the question of freedom in terms of its concrete realization in history: in relationships, in political and legal systems, in each person's noblest endeavors. Consequently, history is for Kasper all about the fulfillment of freedom, but conversely, freedom can only attain its fulfillment through history.

**D. Kasper's Understanding of History and Freedom**

Kasper laid out his own understanding of history in “Kirche und Theologie unter dem Gesetz der Geschichte.” He proceeded according to a pattern that is characteristic of his theology. First, he presented the contemporary situation that formed the context of and occasion for his reflections on the category of history in theology. Second, he reviewed the Christian tradition, beginning with the testimony of the Bible, to clarify the relationship between history and Christian faith. Third, he offered his own reflections on the meaning of history and

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48 Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 45-46. Kasper found in Schelling a parallel to Heidegger's articulation of the “ontological difference” and its consequences for establishing a permanent place for mystery in philosophy.

49 On the basic pattern of Kasper's theological method, see the whole of Plov, but esp. 6, 263-69.
historicity in light of both. In the course of this discussion, the influence of Schelling's construction of the categories of freedom and history emerged in Kasper's descriptions of the relationships between history and historicity, between objectivity and subjectivity, between the absolute and the provisional in history, and between God and human beings.

Kasper situated the reflections on history recorded in “Kirche und Theologie unter dem Gesetz der Geschichte” within the context of a crisis of history that had become the occasion for considerable confusion and unrest in the Church.\(^50\) He explained that this crisis involved a clash between a metaphysics of static essences that forms the background of traditional theology and newer forms of thought that consider movement and change to be the most fundamental realities. In view of this impasse, Kasper attempted a recovery of certain historical dimensions of Christian faith that had been muted or relegated to the background by the classic synthesis between theology and metaphysics. He summarized this theology of history in four points.\(^51\)

First, Kasper distinguished the Old and New Testaments from the mythologies of ancient nature religions on the grounds that the Bible deals with the unique and unrepeatable deeds of God in particular times and places.\(^52\) The content of Christian faith is in this sense an 'objective' history of God's dealings with human beings. This prohibits any one-sidedly existential interpretation of the faith that would treat Christianity exclusively as a matter of interior religious experience, ushering God out of the world by boxing him into human consciousness. Second, however, the historical realities on which Christianity depends are not merely facts of history but

\(^50\) On the problem of history, see Gesetz 49-52, as well as pp. 50-51 and 53-55, above.

\(^{51}\) Kasper provided a more detailed exposition of his theology of history in “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” discussed on pp. 100-3, below. See also Kasper's article on the same topic in *Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-70), s.v. “History III: Theology of History.”

\(^{52}\) See Gesetz 52-53.
God's work of salvation. One can only experience salvation in history if one experiences it as salvation for oneself, that is, if one experiences it in faith. Christianity therefore presents history as an ellipse with two foci, an interplay between a content exterior to oneself and the interior appropriation thereof, a process involving call and response, a dialogue between God and human beings.

Third, this dialogue does not always reach a happy conclusion: people do not always accept the message of salvation, and even when they do, they sometimes distort the message. One can therefore distinguish between the general history of God's dialogue with humanity and the particular history in which this dialogue succeeds. While Kasper thus distinguished between world history and salvation history, he did not separate them into two chemically pure realms; on the contrary, he found the two mingled even within the Church in its 'militant' or 'pilgrim' state. Fourth, however, the two histories will ultimately merge into one, since the whole of creation is dynamically ordered towards God's self-communication in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Theologically speaking, this universal dynamism is for Kasper why all of reality must ultimately be understood as historical in character and why a style of argumentation in theology that proceeds from static essences cannot fully do justice to the Christian mystery. History and historicity therefore represent fundamental categories for Christian faith, and contemporary consciousness of history presents an opportunity for faith to rediscover itself.

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53 See Gesetz 54-55.
54 Gesetz 55.
55 Gesetz 55.
56 Gesetz 55-56.
57 Gesetz 57.
Kasper's recovery of the innate historical dimensions of the Christian tradition set the stage for his critical reception of modern historical thinking. One can observe this, for example, in his descriptions of time and temporality.\(^{58}\) While there is no one modern concept of history or of historicity, the common horizon of all such concepts is time. Time is for Kasper a fundamental determination and an inner dimension of each finite being. All finite existents make use of time in order to unfold the latent potentialities of their being in a successive process of becoming and change. So Kasper described time as a thing's self-advancement into the potentialities of its own being.\(^{59}\) He then raised the question of how this temporal change is to be measured. Observing that the various systems that have been used to measure time, some more precisely than others, are ultimately arbitrary, he repeated Aristotle's conclusion that only the human being makes any measure of time possible.\(^{60}\) Citing Augustine's definition of time as "distantio animae,"\(^{61}\) Kasper argued that one experiences time through memory and foresight, faculties by which one can freely extend one's spirit beyond the present moment; this enables one to compare the past and future to the present and thus to measure time. He therefore distinguished between time as an 'objective' dimension of finite beings and the temporality by which a human being 'subjectively' measures those changing beings. This result bestowed new meaning on Aquinas's axiom, "Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver".\(^{62}\) All knowledge is apprehended according to the temporal condition of the knower. Thus for Kasper, human knowledge never transcends human temporality, but is always in some way contingent upon the

\(^{58}\) On time and temporality, see Gesetz 58-59.

\(^{59}\) "Zeit ist von daher ein Sich-Vorstrecken in die Möglichkeiten seines Seins." Gesetz 58. Kasper cited Karl Rahner as the source of this insight.


\(^{62}\) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.75.5; *Summa contra gentiles* 1.43.
time and place of the knower. That one apprehends the truths of salvation history only in a concrete act of faith proves to be a special case of this general epistemological rule.\footnote{63}{Compare the idea of \textit{modus} operative in the doctrine of tradition developed by the Roman School; see below, pp. 323-24.}

The same human freedom that secured Kasper's distinction between objective time and subjective temporality played a central role in his explanation of the categories of history and historicity.\footnote{64}{On history and historicity, see Gesetz 59-61.} Since freedom for Kasper enables both recollection and foresight, the free person is not absolutely bound by the laws of time that govern all other beings. I can distance myself from my past and my present through my hopes, dreams, and plans for the future. Because of my freedom I am open to the new, the underivable, the surprising, and through this openness I can effect a new beginning in time: I can make history. Now statements like these give one the impression of a radically open and revolutionary doctrine of history in which nothing is exempt from the possibility of historical change. Kasper therefore qualified these remarks by asking in the spirit of Schelling about the concrete conditions that make possible the human being's openness to the future in freedom. Just as the free person becomes conscious of his or her freedom only by the example and invitation of another free person, so the person's capacity for history-making activity—his or her historicity—presupposes that person's encounter with a living history. Thus the basic structures that characterize and support a living history—community, tradition, language—are for Kasper essential dimensions of the person's historicity.\footnote{65}{Plovanich noted that Kasper's methodology of identifying community, language, and tradition as existential structures of human existence has its origin not in Idealist historical dialectics but in Heidegger's phenomenological method. See Plov 51.}

The freedom to act historically exists concretely only as an acceptance or a rejection of something pregiven in a certain tradition and a certain community. Kasper drew together

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concrete determinateness and openness to the future in his description of historicity as “that peculiar constitution of human existence whereby the human being is always on the way between past and future, freedom and necessity, individuality and sociality.” By specifying the invariant structures that constitute his understanding of historicity, Kasper distanced himself from the relativistic connotations of some contemporary historical thinking.

Patricia Plovanich has offered some helpful clarifications to Kasper's account of history and historicity. Plovanich found united in Kasper's description of historicity three “polarities” that together summarized what she called his philosophical anthropology: the polarity of facticity and transcendence, that of past and future, and that of individual and community. Drawing from Kasper's various early essays, Plovanich pieced together an account of the human condition: human beings are on the one hand finite, limited by bodiliness and by necessities such as natural law, and on the other hand capable of freely transcending these limitations. She went on to show that Kasper specified his understanding of human finitude and transcendence through two other polar pairs: the human person is conditioned by his or her past, yet capable of the new and different; he or she receives the conditions that enable his or her freedom from society, culture, and language, but has the freedom to question social and cultural forms and thus to effect change. Thus, since Kasper described historicity as existence in the tension between these three polarities, he could also say that the human being “is freedom and historicity in its own peculiar entanglement with subjection, 'thrownness,' necessity and tradition.”

66 Gesetz 60.
67 See Plov 53-54.
68 Plovanich described these polar structures in greater depth in Plov 35-52.
69 Gesetz 60. Plovanich offered a somewhat different translation of this passage; see Plov 54.
Plovanich also made explicit the complementary and interdependent character of Kasper's notions of history and historicity.70 Although Kasper developed a notion of historicity closely linked to the human subject, he did not clearly specify an objective counterpart to historicity, contrary to what one might have expected in view of his discussion of time and temporality. Plovanich argued that Kasper's writings require such a counterpart, and she named it 'history.' She defined history in this sense as “that series of cultural matrices which are the external expression of the ages-old encounter of human persons with their various worlds, an encounter which yields cultural institutions, mores, and language.”71 This concept of history and Kasper's notion of historicity mutually presuppose one another, just as history and freedom presupposed one another in Schelling's thought.72 So when Kasper in another essay described history as the dialectical interaction between person and world, he was speaking of the all-encompassing framework that embraces both history (in Plovanich's sense) and historicity, the developing process in which each mutually influences the other.73

This dialectical understanding of history and historicity undergirds the objective, subjective, and developmental aspects of Christian faith that Kasper retrieved in his historical rereading of the biblical witness. In the first place, the notion of history described here points to the inextricably tradition-bound character of faith. Just as history creates the conditions required for the subject to realize her or his historicity, so tradition is the medium in which the faith of the

70 On the category of history and its relationship to Kasper's notion of historicity, see Plov 54-59.

71 Plov 56.

72 Plovanich specified this relationship of mutual presupposition by describing historicity as the ontological presupposition of history and history as the ontic presupposition of historicity. “Thus history and historicity are complementary concepts for Kasper, as objective to subjective reality,” Plov 57; see also Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 141.

73 This broader definition of history may be found in Kasper, “Die Gottesfrage als Problem der Verkündigung: Aspekte der systematischen Theologie,” in Die Frage nach Gott, ed. Joseph Ratzinger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1972), 150. Plovanich made a note of this in Plov 54-55; compare 50.
believing subject is nurtured, fed, and comes to maturity. Such an account of tradition as the specifically Christian counterpart to history need not be understood as a denial of the free, personal quality of faith as long as one remembers Plovanich's clarification of the personal or dialogical character of history: history expresses the encounter between persons of the remote past and the worlds in which they lived. From this perspective, what enables tradition to perform its indispensable function for faith is ultimately its capacity to effect an encounter between contemporary subjects and the normative witnesses to Christian faith. Tradition thus reflects that basic insight of Schelling and the other Idealists that an encounter with a free subject is needed to awaken the freedom of another subject.

So, in the second place, Kasper's notion of historicity, which complements this notion of history, means that faith may be understood an act of a free subject in history, undeducible from conditions outside that subject. My believing is not identical with the way people have (supposedly) always believed in the past; my faith is a new, unrepeatable choice, not a rejection of the tradition of faith but a personal engagement with it, which necessarily involves courage and risk. Kasper had no intention of denying a real continuity between the faith of the Fathers of the Church, say, and that of authentic believers today; he rather wished to affirm that such continuity is a new, undeducible occurrence involving the free activity of believing subjects. In this sense, Kasper could state with Kierkegaard that “truth is subjectivity.” Since the one truth of faith is realized anew in each historical believer, its realization naturally takes new forms in different historical epochs. The present age of cultural upheavals may well prove to be an

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74 On the implications of Kasper's notion of historicity for the theological category of faith, see Gesetz 61-62.

75 Gesetz 61. Here, among other places in Kasper's writings, there seems to be some receptivity to the “turn to the subject” as represented, for example, by Lonergan's dictum, “objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.” See Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 265, 292.
opportunity for aspects of the one faith that have perhaps been forgotten or neglected to reemerge with a clarity that was not possible until now. In his concept of historicity, then, Kasper contextualized the turn to the subject within the broader framework of historical consciousness.

The interplay between history and historicity in Kasper's conception makes room for the definitive, the unchanging, the absolute, and thus for divine revelation and tradition even within the rushing stream of historical change. According to Kasper, the free, historical human being is constantly transcending her or his finitude, breaking out of enslavement to the past, renewing social and cultural institutions, creating new beginnings in history. This unceasing movement, which is the driving force behind history, could not be sustained without hope. Consequently, Kasper considered hope both the ground on which freedom is possible and, since history and freedom mutually condition one another, an essential structural moment of history. This very fact implies that if hope were ever to reach its term, attaining its definitive satisfaction and so coming to rest, then both freedom and history would also come to their end, having lost their inner dynamism. Nevertheless, if the hope inscribed on the human heart is not to remain forever frustrated, it must somehow be capable of making contact with the definitive reality that history itself prohibits hope from possessing. For Kasper, then, the provisionality characteristic of freedom, historicity, and history does not exclude the possibility of discovering definitive truth within history; the meaningfulness of history in fact depends on that possibility.

Before concluding this treatment of the categories of freedom and history as presented in “Kirche und Theologie unter dem Gesetz der Geschichte?,” it is worth noting how Kasper here described the definitive reality that he identified as the 'whence' of human hope, which bestows

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76 On the implications of Kasper's notion of historicity for the theological category of faith, see Gesetz 62ff.

77 Gesetz 63; see also Kasper, “Freiheit als philosophisches und theologisches Problem,” 46.
intelligibility and meaning on history. If hope is the mode in which one apprehends the absolute in history, then, Kasper reasoned, such realizations of absolute reality are simultaneously definitive and provisional; their unchangeability can never be neatly separated from their susceptibility to change. Thus claims to definitive truth always involve an element of personal commitment, trust, and even risk. Kasper judged this result to be fully in harmony with the biblical understanding of truth, describing this biblical truth-concept not as a correspondence between a word and that which always and everywhere 'is,' but between the word and that which will be on account of the divine promise. “Truth is thus always bound with historical faithfulness [mit geschichtlicher Treue]; it is always a pledge, a promise, to whose truth one must commit oneself in faith and whose validation comes only afterward . . . The truth of faith is a road whose last horizon is a promise.” Explaining Jesus's words in Matthew 28:20 in conjunction with Exodus 3:14 as both an epiphany of God's unbridled freedom and a divine pledge to accompany the Church on its mission to the nations “to the close of the age,” Kasper presented the God of Jesus Christ as the Bible's answer to the problem of history, who by freely confirming his fidelity to the covenant people inspires confidence in believers that no crisis, no upheaval will ever frustrate the work of salvation entrusted to their care.

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78 On covenant-relationship with the God of Jesus Christ as answer to the problem of history, see Gesetz 63-66.

79 On Kasper's understanding of theological truth, see chapter five, below, pp. 309ff.

80 Gesetz 63.

81 “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

82 The RSV offers three different translations for the name of God as revealed in this verse: “I AM WHO I AM”; “I AM WHAT I AM”; “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.” The last of these is closest to Kasper's interpretation: “I shall be there, where I will be there; I shall be with you in the here and now of your history, freely and uncontrollably, yet certainly and faithfully [gewiss und treu].” Gesetz 63-64. Compare pp. 125 and 230-31, below.
This last section of “Kirche und Theologie unter dem Gesetz der Geschichte?,” whose implications have yet to be unpacked, suggests that the faithfulness of God lies at the very core of Kasper's theological vision of history and freedom. The question of its importance to Kasper's basic option is the topic of the present study, a topic to be discussed in greater depth beginning with chapter three.\footnote{See below, pp. 123ff.} For the moment, however, it is necessary to address the question of how it is possible to speak of God as faithful at all; in other words, it must be asked how history and freedom fit into Kasper's account of analogical discourse about God. The present investigation will therefore turn its attention from Kasper's general categories to his doctrine of analogy.

E. Summary and Conclusion

With his notions of freedom and history Kasper has laid foundations for a distinctive pattern of theology. The confusion of the faithful that arose from the advent of historical consciousness motivated him to attempt a renewal of the historical dimensions inherent in Christian faith. This renewal effort was also a resumption of the project of the Catholic Tübingen school. Kasper, like Staudenmeier, took his cue from Schelling, who saw freedom and history as mutually interdependent. In adapting Schelling's concept of history for theological use, Kasper molded it into a *via media* that sublates the concerns of a pure objectivism and a radical existentialism, situating both perspectives within a still broader developmental horizon. This led him to a renewed doctrine of analogy.
II. Speaking Historically about God

History and freedom, understood in the senses described above, raise the question of God. According to Kasper, the possibility of free activity in history finally depends on whether some transhistorical point of reference, an ultimate Goal of history, exists and can be apprehended in time. Only the hope that one's efforts are not in vain but may somehow, someday lay hold of what is ultimately meaningful is capable of sustaining the human being's constant drive towards self-transcendence. But how is one to understand this definitive reality? Is it an exalted Idea, a perfect Society of the future, an anonymous Life Force, or a transcendent, personal Being? Is it an all-powerful, eternal, absolutely good God? How can one justify speaking of that which is definitive in history using such terms? Can one conceive of it, understand it, speak rightly of it at all? And if not, does that mean that there really is no such reality? Are freedom and history ultimately absurd?

In his 1965 Habilitationsschrift, titled Das Absolute in der Geschichte: Philosophie und Theologie der Geschichte in der Spätphilosophie Schellings (The Absolute in History: Philosophy and Theology of History in the Later Philosophy of Schelling), Kasper explained that questions like these motivated the philosophy of F. W. J. von Schelling in all its twists and turns. This book confronted Schelling's philosophy, particularly in its incipient theological dimensions, with the problematics of contemporary theology, especially the relationships between nature and grace, creation and covenant, the human being and God. By facilitating this confrontation, Kasper was attempting to effect a renewal of theological language about God's nature and his activity in history. Much of Kasper's subsequent theological career could be understood as his attempt to unpack the results of this dialogue with Schelling in its significance for contemporary theology.
William Loewe and Aidan Nichols have questioned whether the theological project that grew out of this *Habilitationsschrift* ought to be welcomed within the broader Catholic theological conversation. As noted in the previous chapter, both Loewe and Nichols found Kasper to be peculiarly critical of other theological options, tracing this critical moment back to the later Schelling and his rejection of the German Idealist tradition of which he had been a part.\(^8^4\) According to Loewe's reading, Kasper understood the later Schelling's transition from negative to positive philosophy as a repudiation of practically all of Western metaphysics, and by extension of any theology that predicated itself on a metaphysical philosophy, on the grounds that they are incapable of contributing to knowledge of God.\(^8^5\) Noticing that Kasper repeatedly connected the relationship between Schelling's negative and positive philosophies with that between law and gospel, Loewe inferred that Kasper's theology represented a sophisticated revival of Luther's theology of the cross.\(^8^6\) He concluded that Kasper's critical posture toward his contemporaries arose from a stance on the relationship between theology and philosophy heavily informed by Luther's dialectic of law and gospel.\(^8^7\) This basic theological option isolated Kasper “from that broad stream within the tradition of Roman Catholic theology which has honoured the practice of natural theology and found particular value in the analogy of being.”\(^8^8\)

Kasper's attitude toward the doctrine of analogy bears significant consequences for an evaluation of his theological option. If Kasper in fact intended to reject an understanding of analogy that would admit the possibility of a natural theology, he would indeed have placed

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\(^8^4\) See Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 35-38; Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme,” 20-22; see also the discussion on pp. 16-19, above.


\(^8^7\) Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 42, 44.

\(^8^8\) Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 42.
himself in opposition to the vast majority within the Catholic theological tradition. Such a critical stance would likely have a decisive impact on his construal of the relationship between God and human beings, with consequences for his theological anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology—in a word, for the whole edifice of his theological thought. Much depends on how Kasper formulated the conditions that make speaking of God possible today.

The discussion that follows will argue that Kasper in his critical and constructive conversation with the later Schelling was aiming not to repudiate the Catholic tradition of analogical discourse (despite apparent statements to the contrary) but to engage creatively with this tradition and to renew it. In doing so it will not deny that Kasper did in fact advocate a de-hellenization of dogmatic theology in the first decade of his academic career. For this reason his early theology warranted the critical questions leveled by Loewe and Nichols. It will be argued, however, that in spite of his early opposition to basic tenets of Western philosophy, Kasper committed himself to a Catholic doctrine of analogy from the beginning of his theological career, and this commitment, rather than the theological fad of de-hellenization, was decisive for his later thought. The first part of this discussion will summarize the results of Kasper's confrontation with Schelling in view of its significance for Kasper's reformulation of the doctrine of analogy. Then, in a second section, it will examine the development of Kasper's own understanding of analogy in terms of history and freedom.

A. Analogy in Schelling

Especially in his early writings, Kasper argued that the problems of German Idealism have become pressing problems for the modern age, conditioned as it is by historical

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89 On de-hellenization in Kasper's early work and its impact on his understanding of theological truth, see pp. 338-40 and 360-64 below.
Consequently, Kasper was particularly interested in his *Habilitationsschrift* to explore the later philosophy of Schelling, since it was above all in these later reflections that Kasper found Schelling overcoming this Idealist problematic from within. At the same time, Kasper did not dismiss Schelling's earlier philosophy as something bearing merely historical significance, providing the context without which one could not rightly understand his later work. On the contrary, Kasper maintained that even within Schelling's later philosophy, his earlier work continued to play a constitutive role. In other words, the breakthrough that produced the impetus for Schelling's later philosophy had its roots in certain key insights within his earlier philosophy, whose validity he continued to maintain even as he rejected other elements of his former thinking.

Kasper considered Schelling's grasp of what he called *das Absolute* (the Absolute) to be the most important and fundamental of these key insights. For Schelling, *das Absolute* designated the transcendental condition for the possibility of knowledge. When I know something, I typically know it on the grounds of something else: I know it is daytime because I can see sunlight coming through the blinds. Schelling observed, however, that if I know everything I know on the basis of something else, then my knowledge would be based on an infinite regress. If I am to maintain that I know anything at all, there must be some self-explanatory reality, something I know on no other basis than the reality itself. This 'absolute point' is the ultimate ground of my knowledge. Since my knowledge of the Absolute finds its sole basis and justification in the very reality of the Absolute, Schelling could say that in the Absolute, *Denken und Sein*, thought and existence, are identical. He understood the Absolute to

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91 On Schelling's transcendental deduction of the Absolute, see DA 43-49.
be the horizon of all knowledge and the ground of its unity. Yet its significance for Schelling was not merely epistemological; the Absolute is not simply 'in my head' but a reality. It was for him the foundation of all metaphysics, the philosophy of nature as well as the philosophy of history.

Because the Absolute is such a singular reality, one knows it in a different way than one knows all other knowables. The Absolute is not a genus or an individual instance of a class of things, since this would make it relative to a multiplicity and therefore not absolute. It cannot be objectified in a concept, since one would have to explain this concept in terms of other things, and the Absolute has no conditions prior to itself. For Schelling, one cannot “conceive” the Absolute at all, but one can acquire a certain “intellectual perception” (intellektuelle Anschauung) of it in the “reaching out” (Vorgriff) toward it that takes place in the activity of spirit. One does not come into contact with the Absolute by demonstrating it through a syllogism but by presupposing it, by positing it in an act of freedom, by stepping outside the limits of sensible knowledge in abstraction, in Ekstase, in a free act of self-transcendence. Only the unconditioned self-determination of spirit present in one's acts of knowing and willing could explain one's capacity to apprehend the Absolute at all. Schelling could therefore call this mode of knowing the spirit's perception of itself (Selbstanschauung des Geistes).

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92 DA 45; see also 52.
93 DA 46, 48, 50. Schelling affirmed even in his late philosophy that no philosophy exists that does not proceed from the Absolute.
94 On knowledge of the Absolute, see DA 49-54.
95 DA 52.
96 DA 45, 52, 54, 58.
97 DA 53, 58.
philosophy of the Absolute, and therefore his entire metaphysics, found its basis in the freedom of the human subject. It is a “metaphysics of the I.”

The prospect of a speculative clarification of the Absolute, which is the unconditioned condition of all knowledge, presented an attractive goal for Schelling's philosophy. Not only would such an achievement render all reality speculatively transparent, but in so doing it would accomplish the more important goal of disclosing the meaningful context that gives freedom its orientation and purpose and so makes meaningful activity possible. Even in his early thought, however, Schelling recognized the difficulty of this task. Attracted as he was to the pantheism of Spinoza, for example, Schelling had to reject Spinoza's notion of absolute being as “absolute Object,” since every object is dependent on a subject and thereby disqualifies itself as a candidate for the Absolute. Thus, in a second key insight, Schelling proposed in his practical philosophy to mediate the Absolute in time not through speculative thought but through the free activity of finite spirit. He understood the human spirit as a dynamic coalescence of infinite and finite, which distinguishes itself as spirit through an unending process of self-perception, self-presentation, and self-realization in the world, reproducing itself in its infinitude through a succession of finite acts. Since the Absolute is present in the unconditioned character of freedom, spirit's free, historical activity is also a realization of the Absolute in the world. Moreover, since these finite presencings of spirit are always partial and provisional, the Absolute enters history without becoming an object. Schelling's turn to history transformed the problem of conceiving

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98 DA 46.
99 On the function of the Absolute in Schelling's philosophy of freedom, see DA 54-62.
100 DA 56.
101 On Schelling’s practical philosophy as solution to the problem of freedom and the Absolute as well as anticipation of his philosophy of history, see DA 59-62.
the Absolute, apparently insoluble for speculative philosophy, into the practical problem of realizing the absolute character of freedom progressively in time. From this perspective Schelling could understand the ideas and principles of speculative philosophy as postulates at the service of practical philosophy, anticipations of practical decisions. He thus proposed a historical program aimed at the realization of freedom in the world as a new strategy for apprehending the Absolute in time.

This turn to history, however, brought into relief a nagging tension in Schelling’s thought between a practical philosophy of freedom and a speculative, transcendental philosophy of nature—a tension that he had inherited from Kant’s division of reality into the realm of natural necessity, apprehensible by “pure reason,” and that of spirit and freedom, which is the domain of “practical reason.” Schelling was plagued by the question of how one could reconcile these two realms within a single philosophy, how one could mediate between freedom and necessity. In a first attempt to effect this mediation, he arrived at a third key insight that formed the basis of his philosophy of history. Schelling realized that the conditions for the possibility of the free act of self-determination included a number of concrete historical factors, which have already been noted in the above discussion of Schelling’s notion of freedom: the interactions among free subjects, the legal codes that govern these interactions, and the institutions authorized to enforce these laws. These factors make up the social and political conditions of human existence.

Since these conditions have changed historically, and since such changes have also changed the

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103 See DA 59.

104 On Schelling’s first attempt to develop an a priori philosophy of history, see DA 66-72.

105 See DA 66-67, as well as the discussion on pp. 65-66, above.
degree to which human beings have consciously realized their freedom, it is possible to imagine a future social order in which freedom can attain its highest possible realization. On this basis Schelling could speak of a goal of history, namely, the construction of such a perfectly just and free social order, of a division of history into successive eras in which spirit becomes ever more conscious of its freedom, and finally of an Idea, or a Providence, that unifies and guides history toward its goal.  Having deduced the existence of this unifying Idea, Schelling thought he had grasped the ground of meaning and purpose apart from which freedom could only be regarded as absurd. He had taken an important step toward a mediation of the human spirit to itself, a reconciliation between its finitude and its self-transcendent thrust toward the Absolute.

Having thus achieved a certain conceptual clarification of history, Schelling then took up the more ambitious task of reconciling the two halves of his philosophical enterprise. In his “Identity Philosophy” he articulated the principle by which he hoped to unite his philosophy of history with his philosophy of the Absolute: absolute Identity is identical to the identity of thought and being as it is present in history.  By this he meant that the Idea or unifying Principle of history, in which all the individual and often opposed events of history will be reconciled and brought to synthesis at the end of history, is identical with the Absolute: the provident God is none other than the transcendent God. Then the history of the realization of freedom is also the history of the self-realization of the Absolute as such, the process by which the Absolute will prove its “Godhood” (*Gottheit*) by actively bringing about the fulfillment of the world.

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106 See DA 68-70.
107 DA 72.
This principle, the “identity of identity and identity,” provided Schelling with a point of departure from which he hoped finally to unify his philosophical system. Yet it contained an ambiguity: does the principle of identity mean that the Absolute cannot finally be distinguished from the process of finite spirit's self-realization which is history?\textsuperscript{108} This would mean a relapse into Spinoza's pantheism and his “absolute Object,” which Schelling had already rejected as something less than absolute. To rectify this weakness became his central philosophical concern until he finally changed course within his later thought.

With his doctrine of analogy Schelling reached a fourth important insight, one by which he hoped to be able to maintain his identity principle while purifying the resulting notion of the Absolute from all contingency.\textsuperscript{109} Schelling reinterpreted his identity formula as a non-invertible proposition whose subject was the Absolute and whose predicate was the identity of thought and being in finite spirit. There is a qualitative difference between the subject and the predicate of such a proposition, since the predicate has its ground in the subject, but not vice versa. Schelling’s clarified identity formula thus included a distinction: the Absolute and finite spirit are infinitely different. It nevertheless posited a similarity or analogy between the subject and the predicate. This similarity justified a “correspondence of perspectives” which permitted him not only to consider finite spirit before the horizon of the Absolute, but also to consider the Absolute in terms of spirit, freedom, and person.\textsuperscript{110} The correspondence of perspectives laid the foundations for a doctrine of revelation in history. Just as finite spirit can become objective in the sense that it can leave its mark on history through free activity without ceasing to be subject, so

\textsuperscript{108} DA 75-76.

\textsuperscript{109} On Schelling’s doctrine of analogy as a first clarification and corrective to his identity principle, see DA 75-79.

\textsuperscript{110} DA 77.
absolute Spirit can reveal itself progressively in history while transcending the historical
process.\footnote{Compare DA 66 with 78-79.} Schelling thus acknowledged an analogy, rather than a symmetrical identity, between
the self-realization of the Absolute and the dialectical interaction between spirit and world. He
envisaged the culmination of this analogous-dialectical process as a perfect realization of the
\textit{Gottheit} of absolute Spirit at the end of history.\footnote{DA 80.}

Yet Schelling was not finally satisfied even with this modification of his identity
philosophy. Although he had attempted with his principle of analogy to exclude any dependency
of the Absolute upon finite reality, the Absolute he conceived in this way ultimately required
creation as the medium in which revelation, and thus its own self-realization, could take place.\footnote{See DA 77-81.}

Each subsequent modification of his identity philosophy yielded a concept of God who was
living and active, yet who was tied up with the world and history in a relationship of
dependence.\footnote{On Schelling's subsequent attempts to correct deficiencies in his identity philosophy, see DA 81-86.}

Every God Schelling could imagine turned out to be conditioned by something
else, thus tantamount to an object. And an Absolute who is not absolute can never absolutely
ground freedom. Why did these efforts fail? Schelling's identity philosophy represented his most
thoroughgoing attempt to come to grips with absolute truth—to mediate between the Absolute
and history—through the transcendental methods of Idealist philosophy. While these methods
cannot disclose the “that,” the actual existence of concrete realities, they possess considerable
power to anticipate and construct the “what,” the natures of these realities through \textit{a priori}
deduction. With the Absolute, however, Schelling's methods had reached an insuperable limit.
While he could apprehend an Absolute that excluded every kind of contingency, he repeatedly
failed to identify this Absolute with any historically accessible reality. He could not construct an Absolute who was in no way dependent on the world, yet was at the same time göttlich, that is, living and effective in history. Schelling's philosophy could not say “what” the Absolute is; it could only declare “that” it exists. It only produced a purely abstract, “negative concept” of God, which could not be verified in experience.\footnote{See DA 118.} In light of its limitations, Schelling began to apply the label “negative philosophy” to this earlier pattern of his reflections.\footnote{On the strengths and limitations of Schelling's identity-philosophy, which he later termed his “negative philosophy,” see DA 111-24.}

Negative philosophy's failure to mediate between freedom and necessity, between the Absolute and history, catalyzed a profound shift in Schelling's thought. Because negative philosophy could only state 'that' there was an Absolute, because it could not effect an \textit{a priori} construction of its essence, it had also failed to disclose the meaningfulness of reality.\footnote{Schelling did not repudiate the intuition of the Absolute as such but his own attempt to derive a solution to the problem of mediation solely on this basis. See DA 111.} Consequently, it could not unlock the dark mysteries of being and of freedom; both might well turn out to be absurd. The threat of nihilism loomed. For the sake of freedom, Schelling would not tolerate this result. Seeking a solution to this \textit{aporia}, he reconsidered the basic presuppositions of his thought. In his earlier philosophy, Schelling had followed Spinoza in assuming that the Absolute would not condescend to enter history in order to mediate between freedom and necessity.\footnote{DA 59.} He thought that finite spirit had been left to accomplish this mediation by its own devices, independently of any authority exterior to it—hence his attempt to effect this mediation conceptually, by means of the identity principle. But what if the Absolute had in fact accomplished the self-mediation of spirit within history? If this were the case, then there

\begin{itemize}
  \item [115] See DA 118.
  \item [116] On the strengths and limitations of Schelling's identity-philosophy, which he later termed his “negative philosophy,” see DA 111-24.
  \item [117] Schelling did not repudiate the intuition of the Absolute as such but his own attempt to derive a solution to the problem of mediation solely on this basis. See DA 111.
  \item [118] DA 59.
\end{itemize}
remained only the question by what means this mediation might be realized in the present day. This question was the motivation for positive philosophy. Positive philosophy was Schelling's proposal for a new philosophical program that could complete the task that negative philosophy left unfinished. It was not simply a negation of negative philosophy; on the contrary, it validated and utilized the results of negative philosophy, although it did so not within the Idealist framework of Schelling's identity philosophy but from a new methodological standpoint.

Positive philosophy turned to experience in its search for the event of mediation within history. It did not begin as negative philosophy did with pure, aprioristic thought; its principle was the “Prius,” that which stands before all thought and above all experience. Its starting-point was a free act of ekstasis or submission to the mediation of the Prius, an act that involved surrendering one's status as subject (in the self-sufficient sense of Idealism) and to this extent sacrificing one's reason. Schelling could nevertheless defend this act of ekstasis, which he also called faith (Glaube), on reasonable grounds: first, because reason could apprehend the existence of this Prius through “metaphysical experience,” meaning neither pure empirical data nor a priori thought but experience mediated by reason; second, because this act of self-surrender promised to give reason access to the already-accomplished mediation between freedom and necessity and so to provide reason with what it could not provide itself, namely, an adequate understanding of itself and of reality. Schelling envisaged this ekstasis as a turn to history, where the Prius renders himself immanent in free historical activity. Negative philosophy sought a proof of the Gottheit of absolute Spirit but could not construct it; positive philosophy looked for the Prius to confirm his own Godhood over the course of history. This process disclosed

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119 On Schelling’s positive philosophy, see DA ch. 7, esp. 130-48.
120 DA 135-36.
121 DA 129-30.
historical signs that according to Schelling confirmed the starting point of positive philosophy. Since this search could not come to a close until the end of history, the faith of positive philosophy involved giving up negative philosophy's ambition to formulate a complete system of knowledge. This meant awaiting in hope the perfect realization of the Providence of the Prius at the end of history. When reason submits to the provisionality of history, it receives the mediation of the Prius: the transcendent becomes immanent, Being becomes conceptual. The negation of negative philosophy is itself negated by positive philosophy, and the Prius comes to thought. The content of this thought, of course, would be no object but that which precedes knowledge and precludes objectification; the resulting knowledge would therefore have to be called “non-knowledge,” a *docta ignorantia*.¹²² Without rendering reality an object to be manipulated, the revelatory activity of the Prius within history nevertheless discloses to faith the meaning of reality and thus finally carries to completion the mediation of the human spirit to itself.

It may be observed that, in Kasper's reading, there is no question of a repudiation of negative philosophy within Schelling's later thought.¹²³ To be sure, the intention of positive philosophy was to abandon the methods of negative philosophy along with its would-be unifying principle, Schelling's “identity of identity and identity.” Nevertheless, positive philosophy did not surrender but in fact presupposed a number of key insights and strategies developed within his negative philosophy: the negative concept of the Absolute attained through the *ekstasis* or self-transcendence of finite spirit; the turn from solitary self-reflection to an analysis of the concrete outworking of freedom in history; a philosophical eschatology that connected the meaningfulness of history (Providence) with its end; an understanding of the infinite qualitative

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¹²² See DA 138-40.  
¹²³ On mutual interdependence between negative and positive philosophy, see DA 148-52.
difference between the Absolute and finite spirit that nevertheless made room for the free revelatory activity of the Absolute within history. More importantly, Schelling's transition from negative to positive philosophy was driven by the very goal that had motivated his negative philosophy: the mediation between freedom and necessity. When the impotence of negative philosophy to effect this mediation became clear, negative philosophy became for Schelling an appeal to reason to submit to the mediation of the Prius and embark on the project of positive philosophy. Thus, far from opposing one another, positive and negative philosophy represented two interconnected phases in Schelling's single philosophical project.

Loewe made much of the fact that Kasper had interpreted Schelling's transition from negative to positive philosophy within the context of Luther's law-gospel dialectic. Indeed, Kasper considered Schelling's Lutheran background an essential piece of the puzzle he sought to construct in his Habilitationsschrift, with which Kasper hoped to disclose the theological significance of Schelling's later philosophy in general and of his transition from negative to positive philosophy in particular. In Kasper's estimation, however, Schelling was no slavish disciple of Luther; he rather filled out this theological framework with original content. In particular, Schelling used the grammar of law and gospel within his philosophy of mythology not to posit a strict opposition between pre-Christian religion and the Christian dispensation, but to express both the newness of Christianity over against the general history of religion as well as a basic coherence between the two. Using this framework to locate Schelling's thought against the background of the ongoing theological debates over the relationship between nature and

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125 On the significance of Luther's law-gospel dialectic for understanding the relationship between Schelling's negative and positive philosophy, see DA 114, 119-24, 139n97, 150-52, 164-68; compare 84-86.

126 See DA 360, 361-68.
grace, faith and reason, theology and philosophy, Kasper discovered in Schelling a surprising affinity not to Karl Barth or traditional Lutheranism but to Catholic thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and Henri de Lubac. Kasper could therefore justify choosing Schelling as a dialogue-partner and indeed an ally in the task facing his theological contemporaries to reforge the Catholic understanding of analogy.

Kasper argued that Schelling's Denkform, a “dialectic in ontological and transcendental difference,” offered building blocks for a compelling response to the accusations leveled by Heidegger against the Catholic theological tradition and its use of the analogy of being. Kasper understood the classical notion of analogy as schwebende Mitte, an “oscillating middle” between univocal and equivocal speech, between negation and affirmation, which did not consist in a concept of being that comprehended both God and world but in a “correspondence of proportions” between the two. What for Kasper exposed Scholastic theologians to Heidegger's charge of “forgetfulness of being” was their tendency to collapse the tension characteristic of analogy on the side of univocation, usually by making superficial use of the via negativa to transform one predicate into another, more refined yet still univocal predicate that could then safely be said of God himself. To counteract this tendency, contemporary retrievals of analogy have taken up the transcendental starting-point, which implies that all univocal statements are made against the background of an absolute horizon that can neither be conceptualized nor described univocally. Because it did not clearly affirm the dynamic character of the analogy-

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127 DA 150-52, 365-68.
128 DA 425. On the significance of Schelling's thought-form for a renewal of the Catholic doctrine of analogy, see 425-26, 427-34.
129 DA 428.
130 DA 428. On the “forgetfulness of being,” see also DG 77.
event, however, even transcendental theology remained exposed for Kasper to the same
instability that compromised Scholastic theological discourse. Because Schelling, by contrast,
specified that the Absolute is known precisely in the dialectical movement of spirit in history,
characterized by a dynamic interplay between infinite and finite, his thought-form has the power
to clarify the dialectical moment in transcendental thinking while preserving the classical
structure of analogy as an “oscillating middle between affirmation and negation” rather than a
static, univocal “analogous concept.” Such a Schellingian renewal of the doctrine of analogy
would highlight the historical dimension of analogy, which for Kasper repeatedly transcends
both the via positiva and the via negativa in the via eminentiae, constantly pointing beyond itself
towards the ever-greater God.

Schelling's philosophy has provided a foretaste of the dynamic potential of a
dialectically-formulated theory of analogy. This potential was visible especially in Schelling's
positive philosophy, in which God's historical deeds pointed beyond themselves not so much
towards God's ever-greater essence (as in the analogy of being) as towards the ever-greater
future, when the Gottheit of God would be fully revealed in history. At the same time, they
pointed back to the mystery of his plan of salvation from eternity. In this perspective, the most
profound truth that unifies and gives meaning to all of reality was not unchanging being but
history, namely, the eternal salvific will of God, which has unfolded in a free historical dialogue
of salvation between God and human beings and culminated in God's self-communication to
humanity in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Schelling’s thought-form offers theology a third
way that avoids both a decline into an ever-more abstract “science of conclusions” and an escape

131 DA 429.

132 On the following, see DA 430-34.
from history into a content-free existentialism. In this view, the role of theology in the ongoing dialogue between God and humanity would be to use dialectical speculation to facilitate a re-presentation (Vergegenwärtigung) and anticipation (Vorausnahme) of the salvific will of God expressed in the kerygma. This would indicate that the teachings of Scripture and tradition are to be interpreted as finite presencings of a truth in itself inconceivable, a hermeneutical principle Kasper later called the *reductio in mysterium*. From this perspective, every statement of tradition must be understood as a self-transcending formula, pointing beyond itself to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Doctrine would thus be interpreted neither through an exclusively ontological nor through a narrowly existential lens, but primarily within the eschatological horizon of salvation history.

The foregoing has shown that Kasper's interest in Schelling included a critical evaluation of some of the ways in which the analogy of being has been deployed by the theological tradition. It seems, however, that the Schelling-inspired posture Kasper assumed toward the Catholic tradition was not so undifferentiatedly critical as Nichols and Loewe thought. Attending for the moment to the Schellingian roots of Kasper's attitude toward his theological contemporaries, one may distinguish between Schelling's evaluation of the philosophical tradition that came before him and his treatment of negative philosophy. On the one hand, according to Kasper's report, Schelling dealt with the pre-critical metaphysical tradition as one would expect a successor of Kant to deal with it: critically. This attitude carried over into Schelling's later philosophy, where he broadly criticized the metaphysical theology of the

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133 On neoscholastic theology as a “science of conclusions,” see MD 61; compare DA 432.

134 DA 431.

135 On Kasper's notion of *reductio in mysterium*, see below, pp. 169-72. On Kasper's notion of truth, see chapter five, below, pp. 309ff.
schools. On the other hand, Kasper insisted that negative and positive philosophy as Schelling conceived them formed a unity, a single philosophical movement. Although their methods were distinct, they complemented each other, which meant that positive philosophy could safely take over certain thought-structures and concepts from negative philosophy, for example, Schelling's understanding of the concrete conditions that make freedom possible and his dialectical model for the activity of spirit in history. Just as negative philosophy required positive to complete its mediating task, so positive philosophy presupposed negative to set its agenda. In short, while a dialectic of mutual presupposition existed between negative and positive philosophy, the same could not be said of Schelling's philosophy vis-a-vis the rest of metaphysics.

One could make sense of this difference by distinguishing between two types of philosophy, one that tries to render the entirety of reality speculatively transparent, another that chooses instead to observe the fundamentally mysterious character of reality while pursuing its inquiry. For Schelling, Hegel's idealist System presented the exemplar of the former kind of philosophy. Rightly or wrongly, Schelling seems to have read this same pattern into the metaphysical philosophies of yore. And with the collapse of his Identity Philosophy, Schelling recognized the hybris of Hegel's system in his own methods. When he spoke of negative philosophy, however, he was reinterpreting and transforming his own philosophical system. Negative philosophy is chastened philosophy, a philosophical 'system' that has recognized and admitted the folly of its systematic ambitions. In humbly surrendering this ambition and ceding its task to positive philosophy, negative philosophy found redemption as a partial

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136 This humble admission is precisely what allowed negative philosophy to understand its conception of the Absolute as a negative concept. According to Kasper's reading, Schelling would have agreed with Loewe when he wrote that “the employment of a negative mode of discourse” might well indicate “the mind's fidelity to the transcendent mystery which is the source and goal of the dynamic of reflection.” Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 45. Schelling's point was not to condemn negative philosophy as prideful but simply to point out positive philosophy as its necessary complement. The via positiva does not annul the via negativa but perpetually stands in tension with it.
explanation of reality, and the dialectical movement of spirit it disclosed became in the hands of positive philosophy a vehicle (an analogy) for the self-revelation of the mystery of the Prius in history.

This distinction between philosophies open or closed to the dimension of mystery present in reality sheds light on how Kasper's attitudes toward philosophy, theology, and analogy were shaped by Schelling. First, if the distinction applies, then there is no question of a repudiation of philosophy as such in Kasper's thought. Loewe admitted this to a certain extent when he described Kasper's “dialectical” treatment of philosophy: an acceptance of philosophical categories into theology for hermeneutical purposes followed a rejection of philosophy as a way to sure knowledge about God.137 Second, this distinction amounts to a criterion that can be used to distinguish between philosophies that are appropriate and those that are inappropriate for theological use. Philosophy's willingness or unwillingness to be a merely partial explanation of reality, its openness or closedness to the dimension of mystery, determines whether it is capable or incapable of dialogue with theology, suitable or unsuitable for bringing revealed truth to conceptual expression.138 In this perspective, Kasper's criticism of other theological options could be explained as a holdover from the sweeping use that Schelling made of this criterion. As the following section will show, however, Kasper's criticisms never amounted to an absolute

137 Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 39-40. In analyzing a subset of the relationship between theology and philosophy, Joseph Palakeel, and to a certain extent also Zdenko Joha, observed that a “dialectical” relationship exists between anthropology and Christology in Kasper's thought. This dialectic was not, however, Luther's dialectic between law and gospel. Palakeel quoted Kasper who summarized the relationship in the following way: “Christology presupposes anthropology, surpasses it and perfects it.” See Kasper, “Christologie und Anthropologie,” 215; Palakeel, “Walter Kasper,” 297; Joha, Christologie und Anthropologie (see p. 13n25, above), 236-237, 240, 246; and below, pp. 105-9 and 116-18.

138 Loewe noted that Kasper distinguished between philosophies more or less appropriate for theological purposes. According to Loewe, however, the criterion of this distinction was the historical character of revelation. See Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 40. It may be suggested that openness to mystery, hence to analogy as Kasper understood it, was a major concern lying behind Kasper's option for a philosophy, ontology, and metaphysics oriented to history, freedom, and person.
rejection of all of these theological approaches in their core concerns. The fact that Kasper thought he could place Schelling in dialogue with Aquinas and de Lubac shows that he distinguished between Schelling’s critical stance toward the philosophical tradition and his positive contribution to the theological conversation; making this distinction allowed Kasper to distance himself gradually from Schelling’s critical tendencies in subsequent judgments of other philosophies and theologies. As Kasper’s thinking developed, his purpose in following the example of Schelling’s *Denkform* became ever more apparent: he did not intend to repudiate but to renew the Catholic tradition of analogy. The present study thus turns to Kasper’s own thought on the question of analogy.

**B. Kasper’s Appropriation of Schelling**

Kasper found in the trajectory of Schelling’s philosophical development a line of thinking that pointed beyond the Idealist problematic, which sought absolute truth and a definitive systematic account of reality through speculative dialectics, toward what he called a historical-dialogical form of thought. In his identity philosophy, Schelling sought a conceptual mastery of all reality by means of his principle of identity, through which he attempted to render the Absolute conceptually transparent. In his later philosophy, he recognized this and the endeavors of the whole Idealist tradition as speculative assertions of the absolute self-sufficiency of the thinking subject. Schelling’s failure to arrive at a meaningful ground for freedom by these means prompted the new endeavor of his positive philosophy, which attempted to transcend pure

139 Nevertheless, Kasper’s early rhetoric thoroughly relativized the work of his theological contemporaries. In Loewe’s words, Kasper’s option for Schelling “provides the criteria by which he judges and finds wanting the wide sweep of current theological positions surveyed above.” Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 42. “On the basis of this understanding of theology Kasper stakes out for himself a place in the theological centre of the contemporary situation” (ibid., 44).

140 See DA 151-52, 176n163, 178, 282. For Kasper, a historical, dialogical, personalistic analogy for the relationship between God and human beings was part and parcel of the Catholic nature-grace problematic and a legitimate concern of the law-gospel dialectic; see 114, 119-24, 150-51.
thought and so to seek a reconciliation between freedom and necessity within the contingent realm of history. Without prejudice to the authentic achievements of negative philosophy, positive philosophy recognized that the solitary subject could not carry out this mediation alone; its only hope was to encounter Another who could. With this transformation of horizons, the problem facing Idealist dialectics became a search for such an encounter in history, for a God who was willing and able to enter into relationship (dialogue) with human beings.

In spite of this impressive result, Kasper did not think that Schelling's philosophy had completed the transition to a truly dialogical thought-form. He could not therefore find in Schelling's thought—apart from some significant modifications—adequate foundations for Catholic or Christian discourse on God. According to Kasper, Schelling's description of revelation as mere historical events, acts of the Prius in history that functioned as signs for faith, implied that the meaning of such historical events was ultimately transparent to speculative reason, which therefore had no need of a revealed word to provide a normative interpretation of revelation history. History, however, will admit not only a Christian interpretation but also atheistic, deistic and other readings. Because Schelling did not acknowledge his dependence on the interpretive word of the biblical tradition, he failed to recognize the necessity of a concrete call to conversion in order to bring about the subject's renunciation of self-sufficiency and trusting dependence on the mediation of the Prius. He did not consistently articulate the analogy between one's dependence on an encounter with another free subject for the awakening of one's own freedom—an insight basic to his negative philosophy—and one's need to encounter an unconditioned Freedom for the sake of one's own unconditional fulfillment. Kasper concluded

141 On the gap between Schelling’s thought-form and the historical and dialogical analogy Kasper sought to draw between human persons and the tripersonal God, see DA 174-78; compare 281-84.

142 DA 175-77.
that Schelling's thinking remained locked within the presuppositions of Idealist philosophy, since for him, speculative thought was fully sufficient to clarify the meaning of revelatory events. The breakthrough to a coherent account of how one could speak of God's self-revelation in terms of freedom and history had not yet been reached.

It fell to Kasper to develop such an account. The question of analogy was fundamental to his whole theological program, just as it had been for the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School. Nevertheless, Kasper did not present a systematic treatment of analogy until 1982, when he published his book-length synthesis on the theology of God, Der Gott Jesu Christi. Between Das Absolute in der Geschichte and Der Gott Jesu Christi, he gradually developed and assembled the pieces that formed the foundations of his Schelling-inspired doctrine of analogy. As Kasper's goal was to implement a critical corrective within this area, it should not be especially surprising that his initial essays on this topic functioned to set him apart from the broader tradition of analogical discourse. It may be argued, however, that as Kasper gradually shed his commitment to the project of de-hellenizing Catholic doctrine, his writings served more and more to place him in a posture of dialogue with the aforementioned tradition.

1. Contributions in the 1960s

While he was completing his Habilitationsschrift on Schelling, Kasper sketched his own theology of history in an essay titled “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte.” Having not yet fully developed his own account of the relationship between philosophy and theology, Kasper decided in this essay to contribute to a growing body of Catholic literature not a philosophical reflection on time and history, as he would later attempt in “Kirche und Theologie unter dem Gesetz der Geschichte,” but a retrieval and development of the New Testament's vision of
The biblical authors placed the life and destiny of Jesus Christ at the center of the history of the covenant between God and his chosen people, which they in turn understood to be the central narrative within human history. From this perspective, they regarded the *aeon* or age—the exterior aspect of time, the *Zeitgeist* whose character to a significant extent determined the lot of individuals and nations alike—as an intramundane reality that in spite of its apparently all-encompassing influence was not the final age and so would one day pass away. The present *aeon* thus stands in an ambivalent relationship to the will of God revealed in Christ. It is the commission of the Church to clarify the salvation-historical significance of the present and thus to aid each person in discerning the moment when that one is called by God to decisive action, one's hour or *kairos*. For Kasper, this qualitative vision of time and history could be adequately summarized neither by reference to a philosophical schema—time as cyclical, linear, pendulum-like, dialectical, organically growing—whose relationship to salvation was inherently ambiguous nor as a matter of pure existential decision removed from any objective context. Rather, Kasper preferred to describe history in terms of a dialogical tension between two poles which pointed toward a future reconciliation between the two—a personal encounter, a covenant-history—whose high point the Christian could then recognize in Jesus Christ.  

According to Kasper, the fact that one can be subject to the conditions of one's own *aeon* yet transcend these conditions in obedience to one's own hour cannot be due solely to one's own power but ultimately depends on God as Lord of time and of history. Kasper thus found foundations for his biblical understanding of time and history in a Schellingian retrieval of the

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144 Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 72, 79.

traditional doctrine of God. The centerpiece of this retrieval was Kasper's emphasis on the sovereign freedom of God, which embraces the two key aspects of Schelling's understanding of absolute Spirit: his transcendence or independence of the conditions of history and his living and effective presence or immanence in history. This starting-point suggested to Kasper a dialectical formulation of the traditional divine attribute of eternity: God so transcends time that even within time he is not beholden to time. Without compromising the mystery of God's self-revelation in the Incarnation, such a description of God's eternity not as timelessness but lordship over time begins to indicate how God's entrance into time in Christ is an intelligible possibility and not a contradiction of divine eternity. Kasper found the ultimate foundations for divine freedom before history in the doctrine of the Trinity: God's own unity and simultaneity is not annulled by but revealed in its profundity in and through the personal freedom of each of the divine Persons.

If, however, one were to try like Barth to derive a whole theology of history from this one point, one would risk overlooking the abiding difference between revelation and faith, or that between the two “unconfused” natures of Christ (Chalcedon). By contrast, from Kasper's Christological and dialogical perspective, divine lordship over history does not overwhelm and crowd out but rather makes room before God's eternity for the relative independence of creation

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146 On the foundations for the biblical vision of time in the doctrine of God, see Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 82-85.


149 On Barth's doctrine of divine election, see Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 85-86.
history and for the dignity and value of the creature's historicity. To be sure, this independence is not absolute. The celebration of festivals betrays a “natural” experience of history as borne and supported by the inbreaking of eternity into time. It is for Kasper precisely in the free person's responsibility before that which is eternally valid that her or his historical activity realizes its own proper dignity. So the advent of eternity in history that takes place in God's self-revelation does not violate history's relative independence but condescends to the laws of historicity even as it brings these to fulfillment. Considered in the concrete, however, God's offer of grace comes into conflict with sin, lies, and violence in every historical era. Salvation history therefore finds itself in a perpetual tension with world history, which can never be fully reconciled until its consummation in God's Reign. In sum, Kasper understood history as a self-transcendent reality, and he thereby justified positing an analogy between history and God's salvific will: analogia historiae.

In 1966 Kasper formulated another account for speech about God that focused not on history but on an analogy between human and divine freedom. Here Kasper addressed the issue of God-talk against the background of contemporary atheism and its legitimate core concern, which he took to be the preservation of human freedom. Building upon his 1964

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150 On the dignity of history and historical spirit before God's eternity, see Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 86-90.

151 On the concrete outplaying in time of the tension between salvation history and world history, see Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 90-100.

152 Kasper, “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte,” 100.


essay, Kasper reflected on the problems raised by John A. T. Robinson's book *Honest to God* and modern atheism from the standpoint of a dialogical frame of reference. He proposed that all talk about God must continually point back to its *Sitz im Leben* in a lived relationship with God, which for Christians means referring such discourse back to the cross and resurrection of Jesus. On the cross, God reveals the radicality and limitlessness of his freedom, which extends even to the point of pouring himself out into what is apparently the opposite of God, freedom unto death. Yet the incomprehensible greatness of God's sovereign freedom does not become a danger to human freedom, since on the cross this freedom proves to be a loving and gracious freedom for human beings. God's freedom embraces death, endures it, and thereby redeems it.

Kasper's rule helped him to rectify common misunderstandings of traditional language for God. From this perspective, terms like 'otherworldly' (*jenseitig*), 'exalted' (*hoch*), and 'above' (*oben*) do not mean that God is remote from the lives of human beings but that God's words and deeds originate outside of the necessities and predictabilities of the laws of nature and history, that everything on earth stands under the Lordship of divine grace. Kasper thought it equally true to say that God is present in the depths (*Tiefe*) of human persons, that God as gracious freedom is with human beings and near them in an intimate way. Taken together, God's *Höhe* and his *Tiefe*, God's objective otherness and nearness to human subjectivity, converge on the notion of “person” as an appropriate analogy for God. Yet this word, too, could for Kasper

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156 On lived relationship with God as source of and criterion for images of and discourse about God, see “Unsere Gottesbeziehung angesichts der sich wandelnden Gottesvorstellung,” 112-16, 119. There is a certain resonance between this criterion and Bernard Lonergan’s notion of conversion. See the conclusion of the present study, below, pp. 587-95.


become distorted if it were to become detached from the relationship of faith that gives rise to all discourse about God. Even to say that God “is,” God “exists,” might be to speak wrongly of God if one presupposed that “being” includes “objective” realities ascertainable by “neutral” observers but excludes what is perceived in the believer’s experience of faith.

One sees operative here something similar to the way Schelling’s positive philosophy both negated and affirmed the concepts it adopted from negative philosophy. The act of faith or *ekstasis* in the direction of history that formed the basis of his positive philosophical method relativized all concepts and all systems, breaking them open and making use of them to bring historical experience to expression, however inadequately they may do this.

In the two essays just mentioned, Kasper did not clearly describe the role played by philosophy in interpreting the biblical witness. He had not yet fully articulated the hermeneutical structure of his theology, which typically emerges in his writings as a dialogue between the contemporary situation, including contemporary philosophy, and the tradition of the Church. “Möglichkeiten der Gotteserfahrung heute” represented a significant step in the direction of such a clarification. In this essay Kasper argued that changes in the cultural and linguistic factors that condition one’s experience of reality have ushered God out of the world of experience. He concluded that a contemporary restoration of theological discourse had to involve a fundamental reflection on experience in general and on the conditions that allow one to experience God today.

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162 On the basic pattern of Kasper’s theological method, see the whole of Plov, but esp. 6, 263-69.
163 Erfahrung 120-43.
164 On the importance of a new reflection on experience for the renewal of contemporary God-talk, see Erfahrung 120-24.
Noting the pervasive influence that the natural sciences and technology have exerted on the way human beings perceive the world today, Kasper observed that these have imposed subtle limits on the present-day human capacity for experience.\textsuperscript{165} The positive, natural sciences have tended to emphasize the empirical, 'objective' dimensions of experience while downplaying the active role of the subject, as well as that of tradition and language, in organizing her or his experience. Yet experience involves interaction between subject and object even in the positive sciences: an historically and culturally situated subject generates both the models used to interpret experience and the interests that motivate these inquiries and experiments, among other things. The human sciences point to still another dimension of experience, one not accessible to natural scientific methods. Human life involves experiences not only of the empirically ascertainable kind but also of a depth-dimension, the meaning of the realities one encounters. Indeed, life would be unlivable apart from some experience of the significance for life of the various components of the world in which human persons dwell. Kasper further argued that even these experiences would remain fragile and fragmentary apart from still another dimension of experience, namely, experiences of meaningfulness of the whole of life and of the whole of reality. It was especially within this realm of comprehensive meaning that Kasper found new possibilities for speaking of 'metaphysical experience' (in the sense of Schelling's philosophy) and experience of God.

This theory of experience laid the groundwork for a recovery of three experiential approaches to speech about God: the cosmological, anthropological-transcendental, and

\textsuperscript{165} For Kasper's critique of modern accounts of experience and his own account of the same, see Erfahrung 124-33.
historical-experiential approaches.\textsuperscript{166} According to Kasper, the cosmological approach (exemplified by St. Thomas's “five ways”) explicated an “ontological experience” of the depth-dimension of reality, the “Being of beings,” the Ground of unity amidst all multiplicity and change.\textsuperscript{167} These were not for Kasper airtight proofs of God's existence so much as interpretations of a common experience of reality as a whole in the language of the Christian tradition: “. . . and everyone calls this God.”\textsuperscript{168} Kant's objection to the cosmological proofs arose out of the collapse of a once practically universal experience of reality as cosmos. The classical and medieval sense of worldly order has been shattered, rendering the cosmological approach ambiguous. So the human being has been thrown back upon himself or herself and must seek stability and certitude elsewhere. Human subjectivity presents a promising candidate, since in the subjective conditions for the possibility of knowledge one finds both an infinite openness to reality and a 'light' that illuminates this reality. Contemporary theologians, above all Karl Rahner, have interpreted this “transcendental experience” in terms of God.\textsuperscript{169} For Kasper, however, Feuerbach's critique demonstrated that these experiences, too, are ambiguous. He therefore found it necessary to construct a third approach.

Kasper admitted that his account did not entirely do justice to either the cosmological or the anthropological approach.\textsuperscript{170} His aim was to present an historical-experiential starting-point

\textsuperscript{166} On cosmological-ontological and anthropological-transcendental approaches to theology (natural theologies), see Erfahrung 124-33.

\textsuperscript{167} Erfahrung 133.

\textsuperscript{168} Erfahrung 133. Kasper was citing a phrase that appears in one form or another at the conclusion of each of Thomas Aquinas's “five ways.” See Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae} 1.2.3.

\textsuperscript{169} Erfahrung 134.

\textsuperscript{170} Erfahrung 133.
as a viable alternative, a mode of entry into faith suitable for a historically-conscious age.\textsuperscript{171} This historical approach begins neither with a stable cosmic order nor with the solitary subject but with the interplay between human beings and the world that Kasper has called history. Human beings live in a world mediated by other people, by society, tradition, and language, all of which impart meaning to the world. This raises the question whether the world as a whole, whether history as such is meaningful. Experiences of meaninglessness in the world are all too common. Yet in the face of the absurdities of reality, human beings strive onward, living as if their lives meant something, living in the hope that the meaning of the whole will one day become clear. If this meaningfulness is the goal toward which historical experience points, it is also the presupposition and ground of this experience: one could not perceive meaninglessness or wish for meaning except on the basis of a pre-apprehension of meaning.\textsuperscript{172} One experiences the meaning of the whole as surprising, contingent, something that one did not produce by oneself. Meaning for Kasper possesses a mysterious depth dimension which makes itself known only indirectly, through traces and signs. The best available analogy or model for such experiences is a relationship with another person.\textsuperscript{173} The Christian tradition has interpreted these as experiences of the triune God.

In “Möglichkeiten der Gotteserfahrung heute,” Kasper presented a Schellingian philosophy of historical experience as a contemporary mode of entry into faith, indeed as a natural theology (although Kasper had not yet adopted this language). While Kasper was clearly promoting this historical approach over the cosmological and anthropological approaches, he ultimately relativized all three. “In none of these models do we have God just as he is 'in and for

\textsuperscript{171} On Kasper's historical approach, see Erfahrung 134-38.
\textsuperscript{172} See Erfahrung 135-36.
\textsuperscript{173} Erfahrung 136-37.
himself—how could such a thing be possible?—rather, we encounter him precisely as he gives himself to be known under the conditions of a certain experience of reality.” Each points out a basic human experience and interprets it through the lens of the faith tradition. Each experience could also be interpreted atheistically, although one must ask atheists if they can give a better, more comprehensive account of these experiences. Kasper thus qualified the value of every natural theology: they are invitations to faith, not substitutes for faith. By no means did he absolutely exclude other theological options.

2. Contributions after 1970

While Kasper's writings on theological language prior to 1970 showed a certain openness to theological styles besides his own, his subsequent publications showed evidence of a deeper dialogue with different strands of Catholic tradition. In “Name und Wesen Gottes: Problem und Möglichkeit des theologischen Sprechens von Gott,” Kasper offered a Schellingian retrieval of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of God. Analyzing Thomas's doctrine of divine names, Kasper found in Thomas a precursor to Schelling's transcendental deduction of the Absolute. Thomas argued that univocal speech presupposes the possibility of uniting two different univocal concepts in meaningful statements, which in turn presupposes some similarity between the two concepts. He concluded that there must exist an overarching common factor that realizes itself in

174 Erfahrung 133.

175 Erfahrung 137.

176 It was already noted above, p. 93, that Kasper intended to bring Schelling into dialogue with important representatives of the Catholic tradition such as Aquinas and Henri de Lubac. Kasper's long-standing interest in Aquinas also came to expression in an academic paper he wrote prior to his Habilitationsschrift on Aquinas's Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. See WH 34. It is argued here, however, that during the 1970s, Kasper renewed his dialogue with Aquinas and so signaled a shift in his relationship to the movement to dehellenize Catholic doctrine. On this topic, see pp. 390-429, below.


178 On Thomas's doctrine of divine names, see Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 181-83.
the analogous correspondence between different concepts and realities. This factor is the final ground of the unity, as well as the distinctness, of all realities. This overarching reality cannot be a genus, since it must comprehend not only specific differences but different genera as well. The final ground is not some sort of super-concept; it eludes conceptual definition, and can only be brought to speech through indications and tendencies.

Kasper qualified the conventional interpretation of Thomas's “five ways” (*Summa theologiae* 1.2.3) as “proofs” for God's existence by interpreting them in the light of this doctrine of analogy. Where Thomas used the term *demonstratio* to describe his arguments for God's existence, Kasper argued that this could best be translated by the term *Aufweis* (presentation or exposition) instead of the more common *Beweis* (proof). He reasoned that Thomas did not intend to develop proofs as they are usually understood today, that is, in the language of modern empirical science, but rather, following the logic of analogy, to interpret philosophically-clarified human experience as open to and tending in the direction of revealed truth. Thus, in each of the five 'ways' Thomas began with an experience of finite realities and showed that these realities did not have their ground within themselves. So they had to be grounded in “a self-grounding absolute Being” (*ein sich begründetes absolutes Sein*). In his *De Veritate* Thomas offered a similar argument based on the self-reflection of the human spirit: one can only apprehend the finite as finite against the background of an infinite, absolute horizon, which one implicitly apprehends in one's finite act of knowledge. Like Schelling's negative philosophy, each of

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179 On Thomas's arguments for the existence of God, see Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 183.

180 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 183.

181 See Aquinas, *De veritate* 1.9. Kasper's account of Aquinas's argument resembles Karl Rahner's transcendental approach to the question of God.
these 'proofs' yielded a “negative concept” (negative Begriff) of God: while they allow one to say “that” God is, they do not tell one “what” he is, but only what he is not.  

The negative character of this result raised for Kasper the question of how Thomas could justify saying of this self-grounded absolute Being that “everyone calls this God.” How could any one name, even “Qui est,” be appropriate for the Unconditioned, which transcends all concepts? Thomas’s solution, according to Kasper, was to reinterpret classical metaphysics in such a way that it manifested the biblical relationship between God and creation. Thomas wanted to show that reality points to God as its final ground while avoiding any pantheistic identification of God with Being understood as the “form of all things.” To achieve this, he conceived of the relationship between God and world as “aktuelles Geschehen der Seinsmitteilung von Gott her und zur Welt hin”—the actual event of the communication of being from God to the world. It followed for Thomas that being is essentially event. This led to a renewal of the classical definition of God, for if God is Being as such, he is at the same time pure Act. This had important consequences. On the one hand, it preserved the infinite qualitative difference between God and creatures: to “be Being” is something wholly other than to “have being,” that is, to participate in being. On the other hand, Thomas presented each creature, each contingent historical existent as a unique event, a divine communication of being to the world, which thus constitutes in its very contingency and historicity a likeness of God as actus

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182 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 183.
183 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 183-84.
184 On Aquinas’s revision of metaphysics as foundation for his doctrine of divine names, see Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 183-87.
185 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 184-85.
186 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 185.
purus. For Kasper this meant that contingency, historicity, and history were not for Thomas mere epiphenomena on the surface of a vast, unchanging order of being, but the grammar of God's self-expression. Therefore Thomas could justify naming God by the names of creatures, which image God as unique acts of God's creative power in the world. Following the Christian philosophical tradition, Thomas identified “Qui est” as the most appropriate name of God. But his understanding of being as act and event meant that “Qui est” referred first of all to “der wirkmächtigen Gegenwart Gottes in der Welt”—the living, effective presence of God in the world, or in Schelling’s language, the Gottheit of God.188

Contrary to the attitude of suspicion with which Kasper approached metaphysical theology in his earlier writings, he gave high marks to Thomas's doctrine of God, finding in it an exemplary mediation between the “hellenistic-metaphysical” and the “biblical-historical” traditions of theological discourse.189 By utilizing the metaphysics of his day in a critical and creative fashion as the grammar of his God-talk, that is, by reformulating this framework so that it could more adequately express the dynamic relationship between God and human beings narrated in the Bible, Thomas was able to maintain the all-important link between God and history without falling into the Idealist trap of identifying God with worldly being and thus making God dependent on the world. Kasper concluded that a comparable mediation was to be desired within his own generation and the changed parameters of its intellectual-cultural situation. He himself took up this task in class lectures that he revised, re-revised, edited, and (in 1982) published as a book-length treatise on the triune God, Der Gott Jesu Christi.

188 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 186.

189 On the contemporary significance of Thomas's doctrine of divine names, see Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 188-90.
In the first part of *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Kasper synthesized and refined the reflections he published in the four foregoing essays. Since knowledge of the revelation of the triune God presupposes that one can speak meaningfully about God, Kasper introduced his Trinitarian theology by taking up once again the question of how one can speak about God at all. As in “Unsere Gottesbeziehung angesichts der sich wandelnden Gottesvorstellung,” he situated the question of God in the context of the “atheism of the masses,” arguing that the central motivation for atheism's objection to Christianity was its desire to preserve human autonomy in the face of a crushing 'theonomy,' that is, a kind of totalitarian rule of the law of God over human freedom. Kasper did not think that the great atheist thinkers had provided an alternative to Christian faith that convincingly safeguarded human freedom. At the same time, he found in contemporary theology's divided response to atheism, manifested in the opposition between 'Catholic' apologetic-dialogical and 'Protestant' dialectical approaches, an *aporia* that ran to the very roots of theology, to the relationships between substance and relation, reason and revelation, philosophy and theology. In this situation Kaser thought that the time was right for a reformulation of natural theology on the basis of a Schellingian understanding of freedom and history.

By adopting the term 'natural theology' Kasper was not endorsing the notion of nature found in classical philosophy, which he regarded as too static. He instead found his starting-point in the Scholastic axiom, “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.” This suggested to him a theological definition of 'nature' as that which grace presupposes and perfects. In this light,

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190 On the question of God in contemporary discourse, see DG 13-28.
191 On modern atheism's objections to faith in God, see DG 29-67.
192 On the quandary facing modern theology, see DG 68-91.
193 On natural theology, see DG 92-106.
natural theology would refer to an investigation of the (concrete) presuppositions or conditions for the possibility of Christian faith. Accordingly, Kasper's natural theology reflected upon the experiential and linguistic conditions that make possible a knowledge of God in faith. A natural theology demonstrates that when human reason is properly understood, it does not preclude faith but shows it to be a reasonable human option, one that yields clarity, meaning, and understanding of the mysteries of existence.

Kasper's new natural theology updated the reflections on experience that appeared in “Möglichkeiten der Gotteserfahrung heute.” This chapter of Der Gott Jesu Christi reiterated his dynamic, historical understanding of experience as an active interplay between free subjects and the world, while adding some notable clarifications. Explaining his earlier notion of an “experience of meaning,” Kasper spoke of an “experience of experience,” connecting this with what Karl Rahner and Johannes B. Lotz called “transcendental experiences” and with what Anglo-Saxon philosophers called “disclosure situations.” For Kasper, these terms point to a dimension of mystery in experience that does not cohere with the empiricist ideas that have so colored the thinking of the present. Nevertheless, one could not adequately account for these experiences, much less explain them as experiences of God, simply by appealing to experience. One would also have to say something about what it means to give an adequate account, and whether it is permissible to speak of God in such an account. Since there are no explanations without words, the task of explaining experience raises the question of language.

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194 DG 104.

195 On experience of God, see DG 106-16.

196 DG 112-14.
Kasper's reflections on language presented his own attempt at a renewal of the doctrine of analogy, such as he called for in “Name und Wesen Gottes.” He found a bridge between contemporary philosophies of language and the classic doctrine of analogy in Heidegger's understanding of metaphor as an event of Being breaking into language. Linguistic analysts have understood language as a condition for the possibility of experience that organizes reality and imparts meaning to it, but they have for the most part left unanswered the question of whether it discloses or imposes this meaning on reality. Metaphor overcomes this ambiguity as a form of language that transcends the limitations of a closed language-game from within, disclosing the 'new' and 'more' of reality by combining the terms of the language in a novel, creative way.

Kasper found similar developments in the history of the classical doctrine of analogy. The Platonic notion of analogy as “principle of unity of all reality” was transformed by way of the via negativa from a closed cosmological or ontological continuity of reality into a docta ignorantia that dynamically points beyond itself to God the Ever-Greater. This implied a relativization but not an annulment of the unifying thrust of the via positiva. The via positiva stands permanently in tension with the via negativa; this tension gives rise to a via eminentiae, an oscillating center that mediates dynamically between the two and points beyond them both.

According to Kasper, contemporary discourse has underlined the need to renew this traditional corrective. He cited Barth's rejection of the analogia entis, noting, however, that Barth subsequently proposed an analogia relationis or analogia operationis that structurally

197 On the connection between contemporary philosophies of language and the classical doctrine of analogy, see DG 116-28.

198 DG 126-27.


200 On Kasper's analogy of freedom and its motivations in contemporary theological dialectics, see DG 129-31.
mimics the *analogia entis*. Kasper took this as evidence that the formula 'analogy of being' has today been misunderstood to mean a return to the static, ahistorical Platonic notion. Thus Kasper, utilizing categories from Schelling's negative philosophy, proposed the relationship between finite freedom and its infinite, transcendental horizon as analogous to the relationship between human beings and God. This 'analogy of freedom' expressed the infinite qualitative difference between God and creation as intended by the *analogia entis* while opening up the possibility that knowledge of God could be mediated through a personal act of ekstasis toward historical reality similar to that described in Schelling's positive philosophy. Kasper regarded this result as a historical “analogy of being” within the “analogy of faith.”

In his discussion of knowledge of God, Kasper attempted to amend the deficiencies in his earlier treatment of the classical proofs of God's existence in “Möglichkeiten der Gotteserfahrung heute.” Interpreting these arguments through the lens of his analogy of freedom, Kasper developed sympathetic readings of both the cosmological and the anthropological approaches. For Kasper, the various cosmological arguments expressed in their common core the experience of astonishment that arises from the underivable facticity or contingency of being: reality as we know it could just as easily not be, and yet it is. One thus experiences in reflection on finite reality a primordial Ground, which, like the unconditional element in finite freedom, cannot be explained on any more primordial basis. For its part, the turn to the subject has disclosed the infinite openness of human freedom that no finite object will satisfy. The encounter between two free subjects fleshes out freedom's hope for an infinite fulfillment: finite freedom hopes to

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201 DG 131; compare 128. In other words, Kasper thought he had reproduced Hans Urs von Balthasar's and Gottlieb Söhngen's synthesis of the Catholic doctrine of analogy within the horizon of freedom. See also Palakeel, “Walter Kasper,” 284.

202 On the cosmological argument, see DG 133-36; on the transcendental-anthropological argument, see 136-39.
encounter an infinite, perfectly fulfilled freedom and thus to realize its own fulfillment. Thus, Kasper offered a recovery of both cosmologically- and anthropologically-oriented theologies that was congruent with his Schellingian foundations. At the same time, he continued to present his third option, the historical-experiential approach, as a still more comprehensive perspective that fulfills the legitimate concerns of the other two.203

As he already had in “Möglichkeiten der Gotteserfahrung heute,” however, Kasper relativized all three paradigms, the historical-experiential as well as the other two. Each constituted for Kasper a theology “from below” that could offer at most a “solidly-grounded invitation to faith”: each demonstrates that the act of faith in God is a reasonable choice.204 None, however, constituted an absolute proof of God's existence. The groundless Ground can offer no more convincing grounds for one to commit oneself totally to it in faith other than itself and its promise to clarify the meaning and intelligibility of all reality;205 a pre-apprehension of an encounter with infinite Freedom that would fulfill finite freedom's infinite longing is not a guarantee that this fortuitous encounter will in fact take place.206 Likewise, an openness to signs of God's work of salvation in history can only yield confirmation (Erweis) of his Godhood; reason can supply no definitive proof (Beweis) of the same before the end of history.207 This is because no argument can give one the knowledge of God available through the personal

203 On the argument from the philosophy of history, see DG 139-43.

204 DG 132-33.

205 DG 135-36.

206 DG 138-39.

207 See DG 143.
commitment of faith: only God can vouch for God.208 Thus the criterion for legitimate speech about God that Kasper posited in “Unsere Gottesbeziehung” still holds.

In this new context, however, Kasper made it clear that this criterion did not exclude natural theology. Only an account of the reasonableness of faith yields the categories and concepts that make it possible for faith to express its understanding of itself.209 By contrast to the natural theologies already discussed, Kasper understood Anselm's ontological proof as a catalyst to a shift in perspective from a theology “from below” to an approach “from above” that seeks to confirm the truth of faith by demonstrating its power to bring order and meaning to reality.210 This shift implies no repudiation of the arguments 'from below,' however, since the argument 'from above' always presupposes and utilizes the categories of some natural theology. Just as Schelling's negative and positive philosophy in their irreducible differences nevertheless formed an indissoluble unity, so Kasper could conceive of no theology from above that did not correspond to some theology from below, nor a theology from below without one from above.211

III. Conclusion

Kasper spent more than a decade working out the significance of Schelling's philosophy for his own theological thought. In Der Gott Jesu Christi, however, he finally made it clear that he had no intention of eschewing either the doctrine of analogy or the time-honored Catholic tradition of natural theology; he was rather engaged in a creative reformulation of the

208 See DG 132, 143, 148, 158-59. On the question of the basis of faith, see pp. 417-29, below.

209 See DG 130-31.

210 On the transition to a theology from above in the ontological argument, see DG 148.

211 On the structure “from below” – “from above” in Kasper's theology, see Plov 134, 282-90.
experiential, linguistic, and metaphysical foundations of both. By design, this new formulation made room for legitimate variety and historical change in the explanation of Christian faith.

The primary structure within Kasper's theology on which the possibility of pluralism depends is his distinction between theologies 'from below' and 'from above.' Theology from below is natural theology, which makes explicit the openness of philosophical discourse to revealed faith, that is, Christianity. It shows that faith is not a matter of blind trust but something congruent to the demands of right thinking, a responsible choice. As a reasonable invitation to faith, natural theology can be understood by a non-believer and in this sense does not depend on faith in divine revelation; it is something relatively independent from a theology positively grounded in revelation, a theology from above. Theology from below also provides the categories without which a theology from above cannot reasonably express its content. For all this, however, a theology from below cannot eliminate the need for a reasoned explication of the revealed truths of faith. By disclosing the openness of philosophy to revelation, theology from below also demonstrates the limits of philosophy, disclosing its character as an expression of a 'natural desire for the supernatural.' Thus theology from above not only presupposes a natural theology but also adds new content that surpasses and perfects its corresponding theology from below. That is, just as theology from above depends for its intelligibility upon the concepts provided by a theology from below, theology from below likewise depends upon theology from above.

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212 Palakeel could only have insisted that Kasper's writings on the doctrine of analogy “should be read together with Balthasar's analogy of love and the analogy of man in Rahner” because he regarded Kasper's work as a renewal and not a repudiation of the Catholic tradition of analogy. Palakeel, “Walter Kasper,” 298.

213 Palakeel has pointed out that Kasper's interpretation of the relationship between Christology and anthropology paralleled the threefold mode of his “analogy of freedom”: Christology presupposes anthropology (via positiva), but surpasses it (via negativa) and brings it to perfection (via eminentiae). Palakeel, “Walter Kasper,” 297; see also TK 1:215. Joha's analysis of Jesus der Christus arrived at the same result by correlating the structure of Kasper's Christology with his use of the Scholastic axiom, “Die Gnade setzt die Natur voraus und vollendet sie.” Joha, Christologie und Anthropologie, 236-237, 240, 246. It is suggested that the relationship between Christology and anthropology in Kasper's thought also holds between positive or dogmatic theology and natural theology.
above to determine philosophy's relationship to the integrity and salvation of creation. There is then for Kasper both an irreducible difference and an unbreakable link between theology from below and theology from above, just as there was between Schelling's negative and positive philosophies.

This distinction between a positive theology of revelation and a natural theology means that theology is not tied to any one philosophical system. It makes room, in other words, for historical development in philosophical discourse. Thus Kasper could justify his option to set aside neo-Scholastic presuppositions in favor of a Schelling-inspired historical metaphysics grounded in freedom. Admittedly, Kasper's initially vigorous defense of his own theological foundations sometimes appeared to leave little, if any, room open for other philosophical and theological options. When he finally abandoned the dehellenizing tendency of his early theology, however, he was able to understand his original theological option as complementary to other approaches and not exclusive of them. In his historical and experiential approach to the question of God, Kasper was simultaneously attempting to account for the truth in both the cosmological and the anthropological models and to broaden their horizons by way of a posture of openness (ekstasis) to new experiences of meaning in history. In this way he hoped to show that his own approach constituted what might be called a 'relatively adequate' theology from below. All such theologies from below must, however, remain open to improvement in principle, since they merely aim to offer a grammar in which to express God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Revelation is and will ever remain greater than all human attempts to bring it to speech and to conceptual clarity.

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Kasper's doctrine of analogy discloses certain general features that characterize appropriate speech about God. These features correspond to the historical character of analogical language. On the one hand, the reality of God cannot be captured in a concept. God is ever greater than every finite, time-conditioned attempt to express the divine reality. On the other hand, one can and must speak of God, however inadequate one's attempts to conceive God may prove to be. Theological utterances always point beyond themselves to the experience of a lived relationship with God. This experience in turn is embedded in a history, the dialogue between God and human beings that culminated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A variety of concrete conditions make experience of and speech about God possible. In particular, both are impossible apart from the Church, the community of believers stemming from Christ, who in word and deed witnesses to and makes present God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ becoming effective in different times and places through the working of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of humankind. The ecclesial character of God-talk takes the form of a mediation or, if you will, a dialogue between past and present. This is to say that Christian language about God is bound on the one hand to the normative content of the tradition, which preserves the Church's authentic responses to the challenges facing the proclamation of the good news in the past; yet on the other hand, it must communicate this normative content in view of the newness of God's saving work in the present historical context, the living presence of the Spirit in the world and in the hearts of women and men of good will. In short, analogy is not a free-for-all; some ways of speaking about the lived relationship between God and human beings attested by the tradition reflect this reality of faith better and communicate it more effectively than others.

One criterion for the adequacy of one's God-talk is whether or not it does justice to the developing character of this relationship, which is reflected in the 'promise-dimension' of the
utterances of tradition. As promise, these utterances can never be annulled; they nevertheless point beyond themselves toward an even greater fulfillment in the future. The tension between promise and fulfillment is therefore constitutive of Kasper's understanding of analogy. This is to say, however, that the ultimate ground of analogy is that which binds divine promise to future fulfillment: the creative fidelity of God. As the present study argues, *die Treue Gottes*, the faithfulness of God, has a special status in Kasper's thought; it shapes both the content and the form of his theology.
Chapter Three

Speaking of God as Faithful

The last chapter examined basic structural elements in Walter Kasper's theology that conditioned his discourse about God as faithful. Similarly, this discussion explicated his understanding of analogy as well as the categories of freedom and history in which he articulated that understanding. The tension between past and present, or more specifically, between promise and fulfillment, is constitutive of Kasper's notion of analogy. This implies, however, that the faithfulness of God, which ultimately grounds the dynamic unity between promise and fulfillment, is embedded within the basic structure of his theology. Hence, the following consideration of God's faithfulness in Kasper's theology deals both with a special topic of theological reflection and a foundational structure of his thought.

The goal of the present chapter will be to determine precisely what Kasper meant when he described God as treu, faithful. Its first task will be to lay out the linguistic background that has influenced the particular relational and theological connotations of the German noun Treue. Kasper did not use the language of faithfulness in a vacuum. At the same time, he employed this terminology in an original way. Hence, this chapter will also examine the role Treue played in Kasper's theological reflections. It will distinguish between die Treue as Kasper predicated it of God and the other ways in which Kasper used the term. This chapter will focus on how Kasper explained the faithfulness of God in his theological reflections on marriage. In these writings, Kasper addressed the crucial question of how the faithfulness of God relates to the faithfulness that human beings manifest toward one another. The conclusion of this chapter will summarize
Kasper's account of human and divine faithfulness, pointing out strengths and unresolved tensions.

I. *Die Treue* as Theological Language

A. Theological and Linguistic Background

The authoritative six-volume German language dictionary *Duden* defines the adjective *treu* in the following manner:

1. a) reliable, constant in one's attitude or disposition (toward some matter or other person) . . .  
   b) (of a partner or spouse) not entering into other sexual relationships, not cheating on the other through adultery, et cetera . . .  
   c) (colloquial) unwaveringly, steadfastly clinging to someone or something, devoted . . .  
   d) reliable or constant (in view of one's capacity or function on behalf of another): a *treu* servant . . .
2. (colloquial) innocent, a bit naive, of a childlike spirit . . .
3. see *getreu*, sense 2 [i.e., corresponding exactly to some other thing].

Most of the senses of *treu* describe a person who is stable, dependable, and loyal; this stability and loyalty may even be carried out to a fault, as is especially clear in definition (2). In these cases the noun form, *die Treue*, refers to the state of character itself. This character is manifested in the person's relationships, especially in loyalty to a person or group. It has a special meaning in the marital relationship. It can also be used to describe one's relationship to oneself, one's willingness to stick to one's own decisions or to a set of principles or ideals. Only in sense (3) does *treu* describe a relationship that is not specifically personal. In this case, A is *treu* to B if A

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corresponds closely to B, as an image reflects its archetype, or as a good translation correctly communicates the sense of its original.

In the realm of Christian theology, Treue and closely related words have been used to translate a variety of biblical terms formed from the Hebrew stem יָּאמֶן (‘mn), which denotes firmness, reliability, and trustworthiness. Used in this biblical sense, the German phrase die Treue Gottes describes YHWH's enduring relationship to human beings, which is a constant theme of the Old Testament. The Scriptures found God's faithfulness reflected in the experiences of the covenant people, including God's assistance for the needy supplicant, the stability of the cycles and processes of the created world, fulfillment of the promises God made to the patriarchs, and the experiences of Israel under the judges and the monarchy. The same theme is present in several biblical titles for God—Father, Shepherd, Rock—as well as the name God gave himself in Exodus 3:14, which expresses God's commitment to remain with his people. God expects the unconditional faithfulness and loyalty of his covenant people in response to his own faithfulness. The Bible testifies, however, that God has continued to keep faith with Israel in spite of their unfaithfulness. The prophets both during and after the Babylonian Exile based their words of consolation on this conviction (see Ezek. 37; Mal. 3:6).

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4 See Exod. 34:6 (“The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’”); Isa. 49:7 (“Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”); Ps. 143:1 (“Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications! In thy faithfulness answer me, in thy righteousness!”); Deut. 7:9 (“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful god who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”)

5 Particularly when it is understood to mean, “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.” See the discussion of the meaning of the name of God in NCE, s.v. “Yahweh”. On Kasper's interpretation, see pp. 230-31, below.

6 “Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all sides, and bring them to their own land . . . They shall not defile themselves any more with their idols . . . but I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse
Theologians have differently interpreted the theme of *Gottes Treue* within their reflections on the Scriptural data.\(^7\) The Church Fathers drew on the Greek philosophical concept of immutability to express the biblical notion of divine fidelity. According to Karl-Heinz Menke, this Patristic emphasis on divine unchangeability obscured God's freedom to determine himself and to allow himself to be determined through a covenant with his creatures. Within Anselm's theory of satisfaction and its successors, the faithfulness of God was translated as God's absolute justice, which required payment for sin equal to the sin's gravity. Karl Barth for his part took up the insight that God's justice is identical to his mercy and expressed this reality in the language of fidelity. The triune God “reveals himself . . . to be Faithfulness (*als die Treue*), who 'does justice' to the otherness of the sinner so unconditionally that he does not constrain the sinner but rather, in the event of the Incarnation of the Son, puts himself in the sinner's place, where sin proves to be crucifying hatred.”\(^8\) Following Barth's lead, some contemporary theologians have retrieved the language of God's covenant-faithfulness (*Bundestreue*) to express the dimension of personal relationship that was lost in the concept of immutability.

Kasper has used the adjective *treu* and its cognates in many of the senses described above. The primary interest of the present study is Kasper's understanding of *Treue* as it applies to God. Precisely this, however, raises the question of how *die Treue Gottes* relates to other instances of *Treue* in Kasper's usage. The following analysis, therefore, will begin by examining them . . . I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant . . . My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore” (Ezek. 37:21, 23, 26-28). “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).

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\(^7\) The following account of the theological interpretation of God's faithfulness is drawn from Karl-Heinz Menke, “*Treue Gottes II: Systematisch-theologisch,*” in LThK 10:214-15.

\(^8\) Menke, “*Treue Gottes II: Systematisch-theologisch,*” 215.
the concept of faithfulness as Kasper has applied it to creatures; only then will it proceed to discuss Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness and to relate the two.

B. Patterns in Kasper's Usage

1. *Treue* in the creaturely realm

As will be demonstrated later, Kasper had something very distinctive in mind when he used the phrase *die Treue Gottes*. By contrast, when he has applied terms like *treu*, *Treue*, and *getreu* to the realm of creatures, he has tended to use them in a colloquial or non-technical way. In this sense, *Treue* differs from some better-known keywords in his theological vocabulary, such as *Freiheit* (freedom), *Geschichte* (history), *Person*, or *Dialog*. Nevertheless, when he predicated *treu* of human beings, Kasper's usage fell into certain discernible patterns.

Kasper has rarely used the term *treu* and its cognates in the sense of accurate likeness or exact correspondence. In his dissertation on tradition, Kasper described the Church as “treues Bild” (exact image) of Christ, and in his *Habilitationsschrift* he spoke of the body as the “getreue Abdruck” (true imprint) of the soul.\(^9\) In both instances, he was expounding the writings of another author rather than communicating his own thoughts. When he used the term *treu* and its cognates within his own theological reflections, Kasper was generally speaking about the character and behavior of a person, namely, his or her constancy and reliability. The object or term of such a person's *Treue*, however, could belong to one of a number of different classes.

According to Kasper's usage, a person or group before whom one has a certain obligation may be the object of one's *Treue*, as a good witness is faithful to the one whom she or he witnesses, or as a Christian may be loyal to the Church in general or to the Pope in particular.\(^10\) To this category

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\(^9\) LT 132; DA 245.

\(^10\) For examples of faithful witnesses, see LT 279, 281; for loyalty to the Church, see Kasper, “Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen” (see p. 24n59, above), 402; Gesetz 50; for loyalty to the Pope, see LT 21.
one might also add the loyalty or faithfulness to the Earth manifested by the person who hopes and prays for the redemption of the world in solidarity with the rest of creation. Faithful spouses exhibit a distinct kind of Treue to one another when they fulfill the vows of their marriage. A student or disciple might be treu to a certain teacher or school of thought, as Hubert Beckers adhered to Schelling's thought, or as Schelling himself was faithful to the spirit, though not to the letter, of Kant's philosophy. One may be the object of one's own Treue, by faithfully following one's own conscience, or by rigorously holding oneself to the principles of one's philosophy, as Schelling did, according to Kasper. Finally, Kasper's usage would also have allowed one to be treu to a non-personal reality, principle, law, or cognitive content.

When Kasper invoked the concept of Treue on this creaturely level, he did so most frequently in reference to the Church's, or the individual Christian's, adherence to the faith tradition. This has been a common subject of Kasper's reflections; it is closely related to the problem of history addressed in many of his early essays. For Kasper, adequate speech about God emerges out of the tension between the definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, to

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12 See Ehe 338-340; ZT 469-71.

13 See DA 16, 45.

14 See DA 32, 259, 272.

15 Examples include adherence to the law (Gesetestreue), as in Kasper, “Wesen und Formen der Busse,” in GG 314, and faithful preservation of the deposit of faith, as in Kasper, “Neue Inhalte der Glaubensvermittlung?,” ThQ 165 (1985): 235.


17 On the problem of history in Kasper's writings, see pp. 53-55, above.
which the preaching of the Apostles is inextricably linked, and the concrete recipient of this revelation, who in general is at home in a different historical and cultural context than Jesus and the Apostles.\textsuperscript{18} This account suggests that the Christian missionary must take into account the distinct intellectual and cultural presuppositions that form the horizon of her or his addressee, so that she or he may well need to use different words than the first evangelists to proclaim the same Gospel. There is, however, a temptation among Christians to collapse this tension in the direction of past forms of proclamation in an attempt to preserve the integrity of the \textit{kerygma}. Those who put this tendency into practice typically justify themselves on the grounds of fidelity, \textit{Treue}, to the tradition.

It is possible, then, to understand \textit{Treue} as a strict, static adherence to a certain cultural-linguistic paradigm as the normative and exclusive pattern for communicating the faith. Such an adherence would negate the historical consciousness that motivated Kasper's retrieval of analogy as well as his whole theological enterprise. Given this conflict, one might expect him to have avoided the language of fidelity altogether. Instead, he has usually counterbalanced the term \textit{Treue} and its cognates with a complementary word or phrase wherever there was a risk of misunderstanding. For example, Kasper did not describe the mission of the Church in the world simply as “der unbedingten Treue zum Ursprung,” unconditional fidelity to her origin; he rather set this fidelity in tension (\textit{Spannung}) with the Church's catholicity, the challenge to become all things to all people.\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, dogma functioned for Kasper as a witness to and a support for the gospel precisely to the extent that dogma provided new forms and expressions for the Church's confession of faith, so that this novelty does not undermine but in fact facilitates the

\textsuperscript{18} On the impact of history on the criteria for adequate speech about God, see above, pp. 98-118.

\textsuperscript{19} Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 90.
Church’s *Treue* to its tradition.\(^{20}\) It would thus be a mistake to confuse “Treue im Glauben,” adherence to the faith, with insistence on those past forms that have since proven to obscure the truth of the Gospel.\(^{21}\) On the contrary, if one wishes to preserve these forms as true (*treu*) and holy testimonies to the faith, one must relinquish the temptation to make them into idols by absolutizing them.\(^{22}\) In any case, Kasper saw no contradiction between adherence to the faith and openness to new questions and developments.\(^{23}\) Using dialectical formulations like these, Kasper clarified the content of *Treue*, emphasizing its historical, dynamic dimension.

Why has Kasper repeatedly used the concept of *Treue* in these contexts when it lends itself so easily to an ahistorical misunderstanding? By doing so, Kasper has affirmed the legitimate concerns of those who wished to preserve the tradition. At the same time, he has been trying to draw this concern back to its ultimate foundations. While *Treue* to the tradition has in fact been interpreted in a strictly cognitive or objectivist sense, namely, rigorous and exclusive adherence to certain formulas, Kasper wanted to call to mind the personal or dialogical dimensions of this attitude.\(^{24}\) When he spoke of the *Treue* of Christians to the faith of the Church, he meant a dynamic faithfulness and loyalty to God through the mediation of the ecclesial community. While such faithfulness includes proper respect for the teaching authority of the Church, the primary referent of this faithfulness is not a slate of unchanging propositions or a


\(^{22}\) Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 94.


\(^{24}\) In an essay on tradition, Kasper quoted Hegel, who reinforced the personal dimension of faithfulness to tradition. Hegel wrote that the work of tradition is not like that of the housekeeper, who “faithfully” keeps custody of what she receives like artifacts or curios in order to preserve them unchanged. On the contrary, tradition belongs to the world of spirit, in which one remains oneself to the extent that one gives oneself away. See Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 84.
party platform but a living, developing relationship with God, capable of adaptation to historical change. For Kasper, *Treue* means first of all a person's steadfast love for and devotion to a person, and second, on account of this relationship, trust in the word of this person.

It is only where *Treue* could be misunderstood as an attitude directed primarily towards an impersonal, unchanging cognitive content that Kasper saw the need for a clarification that accommodated historical change. In this way, Kasper's usage has distinguished between this more ambiguous sense of *Treue* and the kind of *Treue* that clearly referred to a personal relationship. Where he wished to draw special emphasis to this distinction, Kasper has linked the concept of *Treue* with that of *Liebe*, love. He has most often used the dyad of love and faithfulness to describe the relationship that exists between spouses, although he has also used it to describe other loving relationships, such as the faithfulness and love that Christians manifest toward one another. The topic of spousal fidelity will be treated at greater length below when considering Kasper's writings on Christian marriage. It will suffice for the moment to observe that Kasper considered a person's *Treue und Liebe* for another, or in other words, the person's faithful, unconditional love for and acceptance of the other, to be a special act of freedom in relationship that reveals and realizes the absolute, definitive dimension of freedom within that relationship. It may be said that on those relatively rare occasions where Kasper spoke of the faithfulness and love of human beings for one another, he was expressing his own distinctive, technical sense of the term *Treue*. Faithfulness in this personal, relational sense became for Kasper an analogy for the character of God revealed in God's dealings with humanity.

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26 For instances of *Treue und Liebe* that point to relationships other than marriage, see Ehe 346; ZT 482.

2. Treue as applied to God

As one shifts one's focus from the faithfulness Kasper predicated of creatures to the faithfulness of God, one notices that Kasper also linked die Treue Gottes to certain balancing or clarifying concepts. Just as Kasper has spoken of the love and faithfulness of human beings for one another, so he spoke of God's faithfulness and love, as well as God's mercy and faithfulness, God's faithfulness and salvation, God's love, fidelity, and creative power, and the trustworthiness and power of God's Word. By writing in this fashion, Kasper was to a certain extent emulating the Bible, which, for example, described the Lord as “a merciful and gracious God, abounding in grace and faithfulness” (Exod. 34:6). Along the same lines, Kasper has often predicated Treue of God by means of a compound word, such as Bundestreue (God's fidelity to the covenant), Schöpfertreue (God's faithfulness as creator), and Treue-Wahrheit or Treuewahrheit (God's Fidelity-Truth). This constellation of concepts indicates the background against which one can begin to discern the general contours of Kasper's notion of Gottes Treue.


In the first place, by associating Treue with God's mercy, love, and graciousness, Kasper placed Gottes Treue within the realm of dialogue or personal relationship, as opposed to the semi-personal or impersonal contexts that govern some senses of the term Treue. The significance of this fact emerges when one asks, Who or what is the object of God's faithfulness? One way to answer this question would be to say that God is faithful to his promises, that is, God is good for his word, he honors his covenant. Kasper would of course agree with all of these statements. They nevertheless suffer from an ambiguity: does God's faithfulness so understood consist in a kind of legalistic adherence to the terms of an agreement, or does it have some deeper ground? In this connection, it is interesting to note that when Kasper used the compound Bundestreue, covenant-faithfulness, he has usually indicated that the object of this faithfulness transcended the interests of the covenant people narrowly understood. For example, in a dispute with Jürgen Moltmann, Kasper stated that it was only in the universal perspective afforded by the analogia entis as proposed by the Catholic tradition that it becomes possible to understand the cross “as expression of surpassing fulfillment and of God's irreducible covenant-fidelity to his creation.” In this statement the whole of creation stands out as the all-embracing object and beneficiary of God's covenant with his people. Kasper presupposed the same broad horizon in another passage where he explained the eschatological hope for universal peace and justice that


32 There is a debate in exegetical circles over the proper understanding and translation of the Old Testament concept of God's chesed that revolves around this question. See Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), s.v. “hsd.”

33 „Erst in dieser universalen Perspektive . . . wird das Kreuz als Ausdruck der überbietenden Erfüllung und der unableitbaren Bundestreue Gottes zu seiner Schöpfung verständlich.“ Kasper, Zur Sachfrage,” 351-352.
belongs to biblical faith: “The whole point is the hope that in the end, God will prove himself to be God, that he will assert his prerogative as Creator and hold fast to his covenant-fidelity.”\(^{34}\) In this passage, however, the emphasis was on the other partner in the relationship, namely, God himself, who in adhering to his *Bundestreue* proves his Godhood and sovereignty over creation. In short, Kasper understood God's faithfulness to his covenant not within the legalistic framework of obligation to the covenant people but from a broader relational perspective, namely, the free, historical 'dialogue of salvation' between God and the whole of creation.\(^{35}\) This means that for Kasper, God's faithfulness to the covenant implies God's faithfulness to all of creation, both of which rest upon God's faithfulness to himself.

When one keeps in mind the importance of the dialogue-relationship between God and creation within Kasper's notion of divine fidelity, one can more easily discern the relationship between creation in general and the covenant people as distinct objects of the fidelity of God. For example, Kasper has spoken of God's faithfulness in Jesus Christ to the Church, sometimes connecting this with the spousal imagery of Ephesians.\(^{36}\) Like the compound *Bundestreue*, this usage at least suggests that God is faithful in a 'narrow' sense to a delimited historical community. Yet if one wishes to understand the life, death and resurrection of Christ—the eschatological sign of his faithfulness to the Church—in its full significance, one must consider it, according to Kasper, in view of the question of the meaning of the whole of history and of creation. Against this background, the resurrection points to the historical faithfulness of God to

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\(^{34}\) “Es geht um die Hoffnung, dass Gott sich am Ende als Gott erweist, dass er sein Schöpferrecht durchsetzt und sein Bundestreue durchhält.” Kasper, “Politische Utopie und christliche Hoffnung,” 152.

\(^{35}\) On Kasper's understanding of history as dialogue, see above, pp. 68-78.

his creation and brings this to fulfillment in an anticipatory way.\textsuperscript{37} For Kasper, God's fidelity to the world and to human beings, which is revealed in Jesus Christ, means that God unconditionally accepts me, my fellow human beings, and the world.\textsuperscript{38} Because God is faithful, I can be sure that the world and its history are not headed down a path towards meaninglessness and nothingness, but that God will be all in all in the end.\textsuperscript{39} Kasper has expressed the same point in metaphysical language: because God's \textit{Treu in der Liebe} is not immobile but realizes and verifies itself in time, particularly in the history of Jesus, it may also be said to unite being and time.\textsuperscript{40} So Christ's faithfulness to the Church constitutes the free and undeducible historical fulfillment of God's \textit{Schöpfertreue}, his faithfulness as creator to all human beings, to the world, and to the whole of creation.\textsuperscript{41} For Kasper, the former surpasses, and thereby includes the full realization of, the latter: God's faithfulness to his promise to pour the Holy Spirit out upon believers in the Church in all ages secures the meaningfulness and continuity of the history of the whole world.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{40} See Kasper, “Jesus und der Glaube,” 30.

\textsuperscript{41} This unity-in-distinction reflects that between the dialogue of salvation history in general and the special history in which human beings respond to God's faithfulness with faith. See above, pp. 100-3, and Kasper, “Perceptions of Faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” \textit{Universitas} 27 (1985): 13.

\textsuperscript{42} “Die Kontinuität der Geschichte ist begründet in der Treue Gottes zu seiner Verheissung, in seiner Macht, sie im Heiligen Geist in der Kirche auch durchzusetzen.” Gesetz 64.
Both of these aspects, however—Bundestreue and Schöpfertreue, faithfulness to the believing community and to all of creation—ultimately have their ground in God's own constancy and reliability, his faithfulness to himself. Admittedly, Kasper has left this fundamental aspect of Gottes Treue implicit far more frequently than he has directly expressed it. In some cases he has hinted at God's Treue to himself by omitting direct reference to the object of this Treue. At other times Kasper has closely associated the Godhood of God, who God is in himself, with historical perseverance in Treue. On occasion Kasper has specified God as the object of his own faithfulness. In an article on method written toward the end of his professorship at Tübingen, Kasper argued that the task of systematic theology could not include the development of a 'system' in the Idealist sense, since the proper object of theology is the mystery of God, and such a system could only succeed in explaining away the divine mystery.

On the other hand, God does not frustrate the human being's capacity to know him, since he is not capricious but treu, faithful or reliable: “God corresponds to himself in his speech and activity.” Hence God's work of creation corresponds to his work of salvation (the analogia entis), the words and symbols of revelation correspond to one another (the analogia fidei), and theology is free to explore these correspondences and interconnections in a systematic fashion.

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44 See Kasper, “Politische Utopie und christliche Hoffnung,” 152; EG7 80. Compare Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 296, where he associated God's lordship (Herrsein), sovereignty (Herrschaft), and glory (Herrlichkeit) with divine love and fidelity.


Faithfulness understood in this sense points to the very mystery of God as the ground of the meaning of history and of the salvation of the world. By emphasizing this aspect, Kasper was not canceling out the irreducibility of human freedom or the openness of history to the new; on the contrary, he wished to state the ultimate presupposition for both. There can be no authentic dialogue between God and human beings if God is not faithful to himself. The objects of *Gottes Treue* thus point back to the horizon of salvation history. Indeed, at the end of an article explaining his notion of history as dialogue, Kasper put the matter quite succinctly: “God is ever the same, he is faithful to himself and to us.”

Besides highlighting the dialogical framework of Kasper's thought, the notion of *Gottes Treue* expressed by Kasper's usage points to what he regarded as the core mysteries of Christian faith. By connecting *Treue* to fundamental theological terms like creation, grace, covenant, salvation, and truth, Kasper underlined the centrality of God's faithfulness to his theological project. Some examples of this usage have already been cited. Kasper presented the claim that God is faithful as a fundamental aspect of the Bible's message. The mysterious depth-dimension, the Christological center that unifies the Scriptures could for Kasper be found in their proclamation of “Gottes Treue und Heil in Jesus Christus,” God's faithfulness and salvation in Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus can only be rightly understood against the background of God's creative *Treue*, meaning both God's fidelity to creation as well as his creative, overbidding fidelity to his promises. This faithfulness to humanity, which God revealed in an

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48 “Gott ist immer derselbe, er ist sich und uns treu.” Gesetz 66.

49 Kasper, “Wissenschaftspraxis der Theologie,” 266; see also Kasper, “Kirche als Ort der Sündenvergebung,” 1.


unsurpassable way in the cross and resurrection, infallibly grounds the certainty of faith that the Reign of God will come and that it will be the reign of the freedom of the sons of God.\textsuperscript{52} God proves his very Godhood by holding fast to his covenant fidelity.\textsuperscript{53} One can even say that God is \textit{Treue} in person.\textsuperscript{54} In other words, God's historical Fidelity-Truth (\textit{Treue-Wahrheit}) forms the basis of Christian faith.\textsuperscript{55} It also forms for Kasper the basis of Catholic belief in the indefectibility of the Church, which the Spirit graciously protects from falling away from this truth.\textsuperscript{56} Extending this insight, Kasper inferred that every one of the Church's doctrinal statements could be understood as infallible to the extent that it testified to the one saving truth of \textit{Gottes Treue}.\textsuperscript{57} For him, the task of speculative theology consisted in again and again pointing out the one Fidelity-Truth of God reflected in the many truths of the faith.\textsuperscript{58} With statements like these Kasper made his own an idea he found early on in Barth, who identified Christ himself with God's mercy and faithfulness towards human beings.\textsuperscript{59} When Kasper spoke of the faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus Christ, he was pointing at the heart of Christian faith.

There is one passage among Kasper's many occasional essays that underlines the centrality of \textit{Gottes Treue} to his understanding of the Gospel message more clearly than any other. In a 1968 plea for reforming the way the Church deploys word and sacrament in the

\textsuperscript{52} Bindung 355.

\textsuperscript{53} Kasper, “Politische Utopie und christliche Hoffnung,” 152.

\textsuperscript{54} EG7 80.

\textsuperscript{55} Kasper, “Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu vor dem Forum historischer Kritik,” 241.


\textsuperscript{57} Bindung 356.

\textsuperscript{58} Kasper, “Wissenschaftspraxis der Theologie,” 267; see also “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 196-97.

\textsuperscript{59} DA 366.
execution of its mission, Kasper added his voice to Karl Rahner's in calling for the development of short formulas of faith that, without prejudice to the authenticity of the faith tradition in its present state of development, could express the whole of the Christian faith concisely, in all its simplicity and power. It is telling that “Gottes Treue und Liebe” occupied the center of gravity in the short formula Kasper himself proposed:

If someone, for example, is convinced in faith that in Jesus Christ the faithfulness and love of God has been bestowed upon him for the sake of others, so that he can hope for his own good and for that of all other persons, and if he lives this out as far as he is able, then he is a Christian, even if perhaps he is not able to recognize and affirm all the implications and explications that the Church has inferred from this faith in the course of two millennia.

In this pithy statement of faith, Kasper distilled the active love that constitutes the Christian life, the hope that sustains this life of love, and the faith that gives rise to this adamant hope into what he considered its essential mystery: the faithfulness and love of God given to human beings in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. To this extent, one may say that die Treue Gottes was Kasper's answer to what he considered an indispensable task for the theology of his day, namely, to carry out a reductio in mysterium that anchored the teachings of the Church in their variety and complexity to the single mystery that gives them their meaning and coherence.

In summary it may be asked: what did Kasper understand to be the content of divine faithfulness? For Kasper, to say that God is faithful to creation meant that God in his freedom loves and accepts human beings and the world in a complete, unconditional, irrevocable way.

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60 See Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 308.

61 “Wer etwa glaubend überzeugt ist und, so gut er es vermag, daraus lebt, dass ihm für die andern in Jesus Christus Gottes Treue und Liebe geschenkt wird, so dass er für sich und alle anderen Menschen hoffen darf, der ist ein Christ, auch wenn er vielleicht nicht in der Lage ist, alle Implikation und Explikation einzusehen und zu bejahen, die die Kirche im Laufe von zwei Jahrtausenden daraus abgeleitet hat.” Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 308.

62 On Kasper's notion of reductio in mysterium, see pp. 169-72, below.

To say God is faithful to himself was to affirm that who God is, God's very Godhood, constitutes the source and ground of God's faithfulness to the world, his unfathomable love and mercy for his creatures.\(^\text{64}\) God reveals his faithfulness to creation and to himself in the merciful words and acts of forgiveness God extends toward human beings even when his faithfulness is not reciprocated.\(^\text{65}\) In this way, the faithfulness God has shown and continues to show his chosen people in the 'special' history of salvation (God's Bundestreue) becomes a sign of his faithfulness to the world in the 'general' history of salvation (God's Schöpfertreue). This self-manifestation of God's Faithfulness-Truth in history represented for Kasper an answer to Schelling's unflagging quest for an Absolute who is not a bloodless first principle but a living God, in whom alone human freedom could find its fulfillment.\(^\text{66}\) As the mystery of God's salvific will had provided Schelling with his key to the meaning of history, freedom, and reality, so for Kasper, Gottes Treue summarized the Gospel and the entire history of salvation.

Kasper further specified his concept of Gottes Treue by way of two closely related dialectical pairs: faithfulness and hiddenness, faithfulness and newness. With these pairs Kasper expressed the personal character of God's fidelity while deepening its temporal and historical content. In his 1975 essay on naming God, Kasper observed a twofold aspect to the biblical experience of God, who is on the one hand free, transcendent, hidden, beyond human control, yet on the other hand turns toward human beings, addressing them, making them promises and remaining treu to his word and to them.\(^\text{67}\) These two experiences were for Kasper united in the

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\(^\text{65}\) See ZT 510; Kasper, “Kirche als Ort der Sündenvergebung,” 1.


\(^\text{67}\) Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes” (see p. 109n177, above), 178.
name of God revealed in the burning bush (Exod. 3:14). The analysis of Kasper's doctrine of analogy in chapter two discussed a similar passage in which he linked God's Höhe, exalted transcendence and lordship, with God's Tiefe, gracious and intimate nearness to human beings; he found both of these aspects expressed when Christians have spoken of God as person. When Kasper addressed the problem of history, he described God's faithfulness as a definitive reality in history and as a solid foothold in history. Yet it would be a distortion of his intentions to separate this admittedly impersonal-sounding description of God from his assertion that God is a Thou, a person. He was saying that something like a personal reliance upon God (faith) provides the stable and secure foundation that human beings need in order to live a free, hopeful, joyous, and courageous human life. Since this foundation necessarily involves definitive truth, God's faithfulness is also present in history in the form of truth. But this Fidelity-Truth is not present in an impersonal, static way, such that it would cancel out the mystery of God. It is because God's faithfulness in history cannot for Kasper be separated from God's hiddenness that the dogmas of the Church always involve both a definitive and a provisional element. This allowed Kasper to distinguish between the Sache or christological center of the faith and the dogmatic and kerygmatic statements that serve to articulate, explain, and safeguard this center, although he did

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68 On Kasper’s interpretation of Exod. 3:14, see pp. 230-31, below.


70 See Kasper, “Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen,” 414; Gesetz 64.

71 See EG7 80; compare Kasper, “Perceptions of Faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” 13-14. Kasper considered the relationship of faith to be analogous to but not entirely like relationships with human persons; see EG7 77-78.


not think this *Sache* could be neatly separated from concrete expressions thereof.  

He thus had no qualms about criticizing a traditional explanation of the indelible mark of priesthood as a “per se stable ontological reality,” which apparently rendered it susceptible to human control, in favor of a more personalistic theory that understood it as a sovereign promise of fidelity to the community of faith, a promise that could be trusted but not controlled.  

The temporal and historical dimension of this hiddenness and faithfulness of God came even more to the fore when Kasper connected God's faithfulness with the newness of God's action in history. In one presentation of his theology of history, Kasper conceived the structure of history according to “the typological and sacramental thinking of Scripture and patristic theology,” from which he derived two complementary “laws” of salvation history:

- a) the law of continuity throughout and in spite of sin and the cross, by virtue of the divine fidelity; 
- b) the law of orientation to a new and greater future. The antitype is always greater than the type; the last things are not just the restoration of the first, but their Easter transformation.

Divine fidelity is, as it were, the golden thread that links type with antitype, promise with fulfillment, and thereby stitches together and binds the whole tapestry of salvation history. As mentioned earlier, God's faithfulness reaches into the past, embracing not only the history of God's covenant with Israel in all its ups and downs, but also the prehistory of that covenant, which began with God's free act of creation. Faithfulness to the covenant presupposes faithfulness to the world God created. Yet God's faithfulness did not mean for Kasper a mere repetition or restoration of the past. It involves an orientation to the future, to free choices and their consequences, to circumstances and conditions that cannot be anticipated beforehand. For

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75 Kasper, “Das priesterliche Dienstamt,” 229.

Kasper, faithfulness involves the new and surprising in history.\textsuperscript{77} The phrase \textit{schöpferische Treue}, creative fidelity, therefore has a double meaning in his writings: God's definitive commitment to his act of creation and the creative newness of the words and deeds with which God brings creation to its unpredictable fulfillment, surpassing all expectations.\textsuperscript{78} There is a concrete history of salvation which in its many twists and turns manifests the ever-surprising novelty of God's faithful love.\textsuperscript{79} Kasper articulated the creativity of God's faithfulness in Trinitarian terms, since for Kasper, it is the Spirit who, in faithful continuity with the forms of the previous tradition, continues to render Jesus Christ present here and now in ever new ways.\textsuperscript{80}

\begin{quote}
God is ever the same, he is faithful to himself and to us, but he is also—according to a saying from Augustine—the youngest of us all, new every day, incomprehensibly new, so that precisely when we think we have grasped God, we must learn anew that what we have grasped is not he.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\textit{C. Conclusion}

When Kasper called God faithful, he was uniting his reflections on history as the horizon of a contemporary understanding of reality with a personal and relational way of talking about God. In speaking of the faithfulness of God, Kasper added historical content to his analogy between divine and human freedom, specifying that human beings encounter God not only as free, but as a trustworthy and reliable agent in history. At the same time, he was expressing the specifically soteriological content of his theology of history, the ultimate ground of hope for history's future fulfillment. What the foregoing analysis of Kasper's usage has not explained,

\textsuperscript{77} See Kasper, “Evangelium und Dogma,” 204-5.


\textsuperscript{79} See Ehe 353; ZT 506-7.

\textsuperscript{80} Kasper, “Das Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition: Eine pneumatologische Perspektive,” ThQ 170 (1990): 186; see also Gesetz 64.

\textsuperscript{81} Gesetz 66.
however, is precisely how his notion, *die Treue Gottes*, relates to his more general notion of *Treue*, the faithfulness of human beings. Kasper's writings on marriage fill this gap, rounding out the present account of the analogy between divine and human faithfulness in his writings.

II. The Analogy of Faithful Love

In his theological writings on marriage, Kasper sought to provide solid theological grounds for a renewed pastoral practice toward married Christians and those who seek marriage. This endeavor involved Kasper in a fundamental theological reflection on God, human beings, and salvation history. Apropos the present study, Kasper elaborated within these reflections his understanding of human faithfulness, divine faithfulness, and the relationship between the two.

Prior to his elevation to the episcopate, Kasper wrote three essays that dealt directly with the topic of marriage.\(^82\) The first, “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche in Ehe und Familie,” originally appeared in 1967 and was republished in *Glaube und Geschichte* in 1970.\(^83\) This essay dealt with the theological understanding of sacraments in general and of marriage in particular as well as the Church's pastoral care of married and divorced couples. The second, *Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe*, expanded on most of the themes addressed in “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche”

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\(^{82}\) The present study will not treat the pastoral letters on marriage written or co-written by Kasper during his tenure as bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, nor the sequels to these letters. The theological content of these writings essentially mirrors that of the essays he wrote prior to 1989. Nor will it consider any items on marriage published on or after 2014, since these were published after 2011 and so fall outside the scope of this study. See Kasper, *Die Weitergabe des Glaubens in Ehe und Familie* (Rottenburg: Bischöfliches Ordinariat der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 1990); Oskar Saier, Karl Lehmann, and Walter Kasper, *Zur seelsorglichen Begleitung von Menschen aus zerbrochenen Ehen, Geschiedenen und Wiederverheirateten Geschiedenen: Einführung, Hirtenwort und Grundsätze* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Bischöfliche Ordinariate der Oberrheinischen Kirchenprovinz, 1993); Saier, Lehmann, and Kasper, *Zur Seelsorge mit Wiederverheirateten Geschiedenen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Bischöfliche Ordinariate der Oberrheinischen Kirchenprovinz, 1994); Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014).

\(^{83}\) Originally published in Kasper, *Alte Fragen – Neue Antworten? Neue Fragen – alte Antworten? Probleme der Theologie in Kirche und Seelsorge heute* (Würzburg: Echter, 1967), 9-35; later republished in GG (as Ehe) and in *Die Liturgie der Kirche* (WKGS 10), 425-52. This study will make reference to the text found in GG.
while adding a section that addressed the phenomenon of civil marriages. Of the three essays in question, this was the only one published in book form. It enjoyed broad publication, with two German editions (1977, 1981) and translations into English (1980, 1983) as well as several other languages. Thereafter (1982) Kasper touched on a new set of issues including contraception, childrearing, and cohabitation in “Familie als Hauskirche oder: Was heisst Ehe als Sakrament?” These three essays were addressed to distinct concrete situations and thus developed different aspects of Kasper's theology of marriage. They also differ somewhat in theological style. All three, however, reflect at some length on the anthropology and theology of Treue.

A. Freedom, Faithfulness, and God: Marriage as “Verwirklichung der Kirche”

In the introduction to “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche in Ehe und Familie,” Kasper observed a gulf between the theology of marriage and contemporary pastoral practice that rendered the former irrelevant while subjecting the latter to confusion and unrest. Among the factors that contributed to this gulf, he identified a paucity of theological reflection over the meaning of the sacramentality of marriage as well as a failure to explain adequately the relationship between the theology of the sacrament and the Church's norms regarding the unity and indissolubility of marriage. To address these deficits, Kasper proposed a fourfold inquiry dealing with, first, the sacraments in general, second, the anthropological background to the

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86 On the contemporary situation facing Christian spouses, see Ehe 330-31.
sacrament of marriage, third, the relationship between marriage as a created reality and the same as part of the order of salvation, fourth, the theological grounds for Church teaching on marriage.

As background to a renewed theology of marriage, Kasper proposed a theological and anthropological retrieval of sacramental theology.\(^{87}\) Theologically, Kasper endorsed the efforts of Odo Casel and others to restore a patristic understanding of the sacraments, which viewed them as symbolic mediations of the one event of salvation in its different aspects. From this perspective, the sacrament of marriage could be described as an effective symbol of the “Treue und Liebe Christi zu seiner Braut, der Kirche,” that is, as a sign that renders God's faithfulness and love in Jesus Christ present to Christian spouses as strength and support for their marriage.\(^{88}\) Such a statement, however, presumes a basic grasp of a symbolic or sacramental experience of reality that cannot be taken for granted today. Hence Kasper also proposed to recover the anthropological and experiential dimensions of sacramental theology by tying the sacraments to certain Knotenpunkte or key moments of human life.\(^{89}\) Experiences such as birth, consciousness of personal guilt, the choice of a marriage partner, and death are simultaneously inscribed in the biological and social nature of human beings and given over to human freedom; they crystallize the fundamental situation of the human person as one both determined by natural and historical conditions and at the same time capable of self-determination. Kasper regarded these Knotenpunkte as symbolic representations of personal existence, which address one in one's consciousness of freedom, calling one to make a decision here and now about one's existence as

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\(^{87}\) On the theological and anthropological background to contemporary sacramental theology, see Ehe 331-36. For a more detailed treatment of this background, see Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 285-310; Kasper, “Wort und Symbol im sakramentalen Leben,” 87-99.

\(^{88}\) Ehe 332.

\(^{89}\) See Ehe 334-36.
a whole. For Kasper, then, an adequate account of the sacrament of marriage must explain in what sense marriage constitutes this kind of decision-situation.

Insofar as marriage is a fully human and personal reality, it involves the definitive engagement of freedom on the part of each spouse. Kasper considered sexuality to be no mere biological reality but a determination of the entire person, closely tied to the person's freedom.\(^90\) Marriage in its various historical forms has thus always involved a choice by which one is united to one's spouse in at least a relatively exclusive manner.\(^91\) Kasper used Gabriel Marcel's anthropology of promise to articulate the unique character of the marital act of faithfulness.\(^92\) According to Marcel, to make a promise of faithfulness to another is to transcend the present moment by determining oneself in view of the future. With my promise I make a commitment that liberates me from the changing conditions and moods of my future. Faithfulness to one's own promise is both a self-binding and a supreme act of freedom, a victory of freedom over time and change; it is a creative act by which one takes possession of oneself and one's own freedom. Thus, in the promise of marriage and in faithfulness to that promise, one determines oneself; one brings one's freedom to fulfillment in a unique and unrepeatable way.

For Kasper, the act of faithfulness that takes place in marriage is not only an act of self-determination but an act of hope and trust, a self-transcendent act.\(^93\) No one can be faithful in a vacuum; one is faithful to another person. When I promise to be \textit{treu} to another, I trust that the other person is worthy of my \textit{Treu}, that she will reciprocate faithfulness for faithfulness. I must trust, because I cannot know with certainty what the other person will do in the future. As a

\(^90\) Ehe 336-37.
\(^91\) Ehe 337-38.
\(^92\) On Marcel's phenomenology of the promise, see Ehe 338.
\(^93\) On the self-transcendent character of the marital promise, see Ehe 338-40.
matter of fact, I cannot even know with certainty whether I myself will live up to my vow. To promise my faithfulness is to take a risk and to embark on an adventure with another person. It is to transcend my capacity to control my circumstances in an act of hope by which I implicitly entrust myself to life and to the future. Even on the level of anthropology, then, faithfulness involves a reaching out in freedom toward the absolute and definitive in history. But is such an act of hope well-founded, or will my groping for the absolute ultimately prove vain? According to Kasper's account, the promise of faithfulness turns out to be an open question that cannot be answered by anthropology alone in any unambiguous way. Human faithfulness points beyond itself toward the realm of faith and theology.

Kasper found a decisive clarification of the anthropology of marriage in the testimony of revelation, particularly as found in the two accounts of creation in Genesis. According to his reading, the Yahwist (see Gen. 2:4b ff), operating from within an admittedly patriarchal framework, nevertheless expressed in symbolic fashion the mutual orientation of men and women to partnership, their equal dignity as partners, and the fulfillment each attains through the act of self-transcendence toward the other. The Priestly author (see Gen. 1:1-2:4a) expressed the same content while abstracting from the Yahwist's cultural framework when he linked the sexual difference to his assertion that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. As Kasper explained it, “The human being as man and woman reflects the love, faithfulness, and creative power of God.”

The divine commands to be fruitful and to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28), which the Priestly author tied closely to this fundamental anthropological claim, showed that he did not intend to divinize sexuality but to show that it is a created good

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95 Ehe 341.
with a purpose connected to the meaning of human life and to that of the whole of reality. The creation accounts revealed sexuality as a blessing and a responsibility, interiorly oriented toward a future fulfillment in the history of salvation.

The New Testament presupposed and confirmed the dignity of marriage as it had existed in the created order while bringing it into a close connection with God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{96} The Old Testament had already taken up the language of marriage and fidelity as a grammar with which it expressed God's loving relationship with his people. This came to expression in a new way in Ephesians 5:32,\textsuperscript{97} which identified the \textit{mysterion} or hidden inner meaning of marriage with the bond of faithfulness between Christ and his Bride, the Church.\textsuperscript{98} This implied to Kasper that all spousal love and fidelity, and not just that between Christians, has its ultimate source and support in the still greater fidelity of God himself. Human fidelity is thus a reflection of and a participation in God's fidelity.\textsuperscript{99} In Jesus Christ God has definitively revealed his faithfulness to his people, which continues to unfold in history in the enduring bond between Christ and the Church. At the same time, Christ revealed the deepest nature of marriage itself. The author of the letter to the Ephesians taught that the service, obedience, love and faithfulness that characterize life in the Spirit could be realized in a singular way within the marital relationship. Kasper thus considered marriage, as the most intimate and comprehensive instance of love of neighbor, to be the Christian \textit{Ernstfall}, the “test case” for discipleship, in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[96] On marriage in the New Testament, see Ehe 343–46.
\item[97] “This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.”
\item[98] Ehe 344.
\item[99] Ehe 345.
\end{footnotes}
which God's faithfulness makes its mark on the here and now of everyday experience in the
faithfulness of husband and wife.\textsuperscript{100}

Kasper argued that the Church's teachings on marriage emerged from reflection upon the
love and faithfulness of spouses, which finds its foundation and fulfillment in the faithful love of
God in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{101} The sacramentality of marriage, that is, its status as an effective sign of
God's love and faithfulness, was for Kasper primarily a consequence not of its having been
directly instituted by Jesus himself—a difficult claim to demonstrate—but of the biblical truth
that the love of spouses for one another and for their children really and uniquely mediates the
love of God. Kasper identified the promise of fidelity exchanged between the partners as the
sacramental sign of marriage; this position did not exclude but included the public and ecclesial
dimension of this promise.\textsuperscript{102} The grace of the sacrament consists for him in the faithfulness and
love of God as it supports, strengthens, perfects and sanctifies the love and faithfulness of
husband and wife; this grace includes liberating the spouses from “powers and principalities” as
they manifest themselves in the flesh (\textit{remedio concupiscentiae}) and integrating romantic and
sexual love into the spouses' lives of love and service as disciples of Christ (\textit{sanctificatio et
consecratio}).\textsuperscript{103} Kasper finally considered the indissolubility of marriage to be a sign and a
pledge that the faithful love God promised to the world irreversibly in Jesus Christ would always
remain effective in this marriage as a source of strength, support, healing and forgiveness.

\textsuperscript{100} Ehe 346.

\textsuperscript{101} On the theological tradition's teachings on marriage, see Ehe 346-51.

\textsuperscript{102} Ehe 348-49.

\textsuperscript{103} Ehe 349-50. While Kasper addressed the sanctifying aspect of the grace of marriage here, he did not
introduce the Scholastic terms \textit{sanctificatio et consecratio} until ZT 481-82.
Kasper was aware that a significant percentage of Catholics, including many who had divorced and remarried, were living outside of the Church's norms for marriage. He was convinced, however, that a deeper reflection on the theological foundations of marriage could provide new perspectives with which to address this pressing pastoral problem. Kasper observed that the archetype for spousal faithfulness in the letter to the Ephesians was not Christ and the eschatological Church, purified of every spot and wrinkle, but Christ and the historical, pilgrim Church composed of sinners. The faithfulness of God to his wayward people has taken myriad concrete forms throughout the history and prehistory of the Church, including the blessings of the Creation accounts and the covenant with Noah, which culminated in God's definitive self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Even in the present situation, different persons and communities participate in the reality of the Church to different degrees, as the Second Vatican Council's recognition of _vestigia ecclesiae_ and even churches in the proper sense outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church have made clear. Kasper therefore asked whether a more concrete, dynamic perspective on the reality of God's faithfulness and mercy in history might not also suggest an understanding of the sacrament of marriage that admits of different levels or degrees of perfection. He in no way intended to undermine the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, which is rooted in the definitive character of God's faithfulness to the Church in Jesus Christ. He noted, however, that the Eastern churches, who accept the principle of indissolubility, nevertheless permit remarriage in some cases as an avenue of penance and mercy for divorced

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104 Ehe 352.
105 Ehe 353; see Eph. 5:25-27.
106 Ehe 353.
Might a more flexible approach to the pastoral care of divorced and remarried Christians also be possible in the West in light of God's merciful condescension to sinful humanity in the history of salvation?

**B. Love, Mercy, and Faithfulness: Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe**

When Kasper published the first edition of *Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe* in 1977, a decade after “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche in Ehe und Familie,” the situation of the Church had changed. Postconciliar excitement had begun to settle down, and the controversial encyclical *Humanae vitae* was approaching ten years of age. Kasper’s theology had also developed in the interim: he had published his major contribution to Christology, *Jesus der Christus*, in 1974, and had begun in his debate with Moltmann to refine his position on the relationship between the order of creation and the order of salvation. Although much had happened in ten years, Kasper remained convinced of the timeliness of theological reflection on marriage. He found that a vast discrepancy continued to exist between Church teaching on marriage and the beliefs and practices of the faithful in this realm. Kasper regarded this divide as all the more unfortunate, since he considered marriage one of the few venues remaining in contemporary culture in which experience regularly comes into contact with faith. The urgent task on which he had embarked in 1969—to communicate the riches of biblical and traditional teaching on marriage—remained unfinished. Hence, in *Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe* Kasper resumed his earlier efforts,

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108 JC.


110 On the new situation facing Christian marriage, see ZT 453-55.
strengthening their foundations with more extensive historical research and deepening his analysis on several points.

Chapter one, “Die menschlichen Werte der Ehe,” reflected the softening of Kasper's rhetoric towards metaphysically- and anthropologically-oriented theological approaches that became apparent in the development of his doctrine of analogy.111 Noting the distinct understandings of marriage presented by various cultures in different historical eras, Kasper highlighted Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of marriage as an exemplary presentation of the dignity and intrinsic value of marriage within the order of creation.112 Today, however, the anthropological and metaphysical presuppositions Thomas took for granted have been uprooted by a technological culture which denuminizes the natural and social world while stressing the human being's capacity to change his or her environment.113 In this new situation the personal and affective reality of marriage has come to the fore, while respect for its biological, social, and institutional dimensions has declined. Kasper therefore attempted a renewed synthesis of the human values of marriage on the basis of a personal, historical understanding of reality.114 He proposed to base this new anthropology of marriage on personal love between husband and wife.

In “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche in Ehe und Familie,” Kasper had relied heavily upon the witness of Scripture to spell out many of the authentic creaturely goods that belong to marriage.115 His 1977 treatment, however, proceeded according to his conviction that a phenomenology of love that did not directly depend on Scripture could provide a foundation

112 ZT 455-58.
113 See ZT 459-61.
114 See ZT 461-63.
115 See Ehe 340-43.
broad enough to account for the dignity of marriage as a created reality. Kasper described love as a profound, primordial reality.\textsuperscript{116} According to his account, the human person realizes his or her dignity to the extent that he or she is fully accepted and affirmed in his or her unique personhood. Hence it is only in the mutual self-transcendence of personal love, in accepting and being accepted by the other, that one first comes to oneself and to one's fulfillment as a person. Human sexuality, however, was for Kasper an integral aspect of one's personhood.\textsuperscript{117} He thus considered marriage, understood as the mutual acceptance of husband for wife and of wife for husband, to be the uniquely comprehensive form of personal love in which sexuality finds its place in the integral human dignity of each partner. Now such a full acceptance of the other in love presupposes justice toward the other, which gives the other their due; thus, marriage as personal love includes certain institutional elements to protect the rights of each partner.\textsuperscript{118} Moreover, personal love does not remain closed in on itself but spontaneously realizes itself beyond the lovers themselves: so marital love bears fruit in the world, especially (though not exclusively) through children, and involves the spouses' responsibility before society.\textsuperscript{119} Finally, love as an unconditional acceptance of the other excludes provisionality: hence for Kasper, marital love meant faithful love, love that tends toward indissolubility.\textsuperscript{120}

In the last section of his first chapter, Kasper proposed to explain this faithfulness in love, “Treue in der Liebe,” on the basis of the nature of love itself.\textsuperscript{121} He began this section with a

\textsuperscript{116} See ZT 463-64.
\textsuperscript{117} See ZT 464-65.
\textsuperscript{118} See ZT 465.
\textsuperscript{119} See ZT 466-68.
\textsuperscript{120} See ZT 469-71.
\textsuperscript{121} ZT 469.
discussion not of love, however, but of freedom. He argued that the human being, unlike other animals, is open to the world in such a way that the person himself or herself is indeterminate and incomplete. From this perspective, freedom is more than the arbitrary choices that one could subsequently reverse by choosing the opposite; besides this, and in opposition to this, freedom involves the capacity to make definitive choices, to determine oneself in an irreversible way. Freedom in this more profound sense realizes itself in faithfulness. Kasper thus generalized Marcel’s anthropology of promise, arguing more succinctly than before that faithfulness belongs to the fulfillment of freedom as such. All the more does the free, unconditional love and acceptance of a man and a woman for one another reach its fulfillment in a mutual definitive act of faithfulness. By virtue of this free act, a milestone in the history of the spouses, each takes a definitive stand before the other, determining himself or herself through this relationship to the other. Kasper was able to adduce from this point the features of spousal faithfulness discussed earlier: faithfulness has a dialogical structure; it offers a new freedom vis-a-vis time and constitutes a victory over time; faithfulness involves self-transcendence toward the unforeseeable and unconditioned, and is therefore an act of hope. Even in the order of creation, marital faithfulness involves a religious dimension, although different cultures have brought this to symbolic expression in different ways. For Kasper, then, human faithfulness provides a grammar with which the faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus Christ could be spelled out. He found creaturely marriage to be open to a gracious determination and fulfillment by divine revelation.

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122 On the connection between freedom and faithfulness, see ZT 469.
123 ZT 469.
124 ZT 470.
125 On the structure of spousal faithfulness, see ZT 469-71.
126 ZT 471.
*Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe* organized the traditional materials relevant to a Christian understanding of marriage differently than “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche in Ehe und Familie.” In the book, Kasper treated the sacramentality of marriage, its unity and indissolubility, and the phenomenon of civil marriage in three separate chapters. This allowed him to offer a more extensive systematic account of each topic while bolstering the scriptural and traditional foundations of his argument. The content of his presentation, however, fell along the same lines.

The second chapter analyzed a broader selection of passages from the Old and New Testaments, which together drew marriage as a created reality into a close connection with God's relationship to his people. Kasper again found the pinnacle of scriptural teaching on marriage in the letter to the Ephesians, which not only presented spousal love and faithfulness as a reflection of its archetype, the relationship between God and humanity, but as an effective sign and an epiphany of the faithfulness and love of God definitively bestowed on the world in Jesus Christ and made present in all ages through the Church. Such a biblically-grounded sacral view of marriage was simply taken for granted until the twelfth century, when a certain degree of secularization beginning to affect the socio-political structure of Christendom forced the Church to make explicit its understanding of marriage as sacrament.

Kasper distinguished three aspects of the sacramentality of marriage. First, just as Kasper had previously identified the grace of the sacrament as the love and faithfulness of God made effective in the relationship between husband and wife, so he could say here more concisely that

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127 For Kasper's revised treatment of the Bible's teachings on marriage, see ZT 471-77.

128 See ZT 475-77. Kasper offered here a somewhat different interpretation of the word *mysterion* in Ephesians 5:32 than he had in Ehe 344, but he ultimately drew the same conclusion.

129 See ZT 477-78.
marriage is a sign of Christ.\textsuperscript{130} Jesus Christ is the definitive and unsurpassable revelation of God's faithfulness in history, since in Jesus God communicates himself as love without reserve, and this faithful love finds a perfect response in his faithfulness and obedience to the Father unto death. Second, since the Church is the comprehensive sacrament of God's love and faithfulness in Christ present in the world today, marriage necessarily involves an ecclesial dimension, which Kasper found expressed especially in the Second Vatican Council's designation of the family as 'domestic church.'\textsuperscript{131} While this represented a shift in emphasis from “Die Verwirklichung der Kirche in Ehe und Familie,” Kasper nevertheless maintained his earlier position, that the sacramental sign of marriage is the spouses' mutual promise of fidelity.\textsuperscript{132} On this basis he argued in the fourth chapter that even a validly-contracted civil marriage participates not only in the human values but even in the ecclesial dimension of marriage as such, albeit in an imperfect way.\textsuperscript{133} Finally, he continued to understand marriage as an eschatological sign pointing to the wedding feast that is yet to come: marriage declares its own non-ultimate status before the ever-greater future and affirms the equal dignity of consecrated celibacy as a special sign of the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{134}

\textit{Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe} renewed Kasper's plea for a more nuanced pastoral response to the unique situations of divorced and remarried Christians in contemporary Western

\textsuperscript{130} See ZT 479-82.

\textsuperscript{131} See ZT 482-85; on the family as domestic church, see Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church \textit{Lumen gentium}, no. 11.

\textsuperscript{132} ZT 483.

\textsuperscript{133} See ZT 510-19. His point was that the Church ought to be able to affirm the positive value of a marriage concluded outside the Church, and even to recognize the sacramentality of a marriage so celebrated between Christians, where to marry in this way would violate canon law. Provided that the couple did not intend to flout the norms of the Church, Kasper considered their intention to marry as Christians do sufficient to satisfy the intrinsic ecclesial dimension of the sacrament of matrimony.

\textsuperscript{134} ZT 485-87; see also Ehe 350-351.
societies. His point was not that the Church should abandon the principle of indissolubility but that it should be careful to interpret it correctly, as a promise of grace through which God brings about healing, forgiveness, and new life. Jesus's teachings on marriage in the Gospel, in particular his prohibition of divorce, could easily be misunderstood as a mere strengthening of the law. One can avoid this pitfall only by interpreting these statements in light of the inner tendency of love toward its definitive realization in fidelity, on the one hand, and in light of Jesus's message of the coming Kingdom of God on the other hand. In this perspective, Jesus's teachings on marriage are a prophetic and messianic promise of divine assistance and an invitation to make use of marriage as an avenue of grace provided by God for human fulfillment, as well as a protection for wives against a husband's unilateral will to divorce. According to Kasper, the evangelists Mark and Matthew, the apostle Paul, and Church Fathers like Origen, Basil, and Ambrosiaster showed their appreciation for the fundamentally gracious orientation of Jesus's teachings on marriage by consistently affirming the principle of indissolubility while interpreting it in a way that addressed the peculiar needs of their specific communities. Kasper considered this the consistent pattern of the tradition's teaching and practice on marriage. Even as the Catholic Church of the second millennium adopted the admittedly strict policy on divorce that prevails today, it nevertheless made provisions for certain new situations emerging out of worldwide missionary activity by means of the so-called “Pauline privilege” and “Petrine privilege.” Finally, where the Council of Trent circumspectly affirmed a correspondence

135 On the interpretation of Jesus's prohibition of divorce, see ZT 487-90.


(Entsprechung) between the Gospel and the Catholic Church's teachings and practices respecting marriage, Kasper found the possibility of affirming the validity of the contrasting practices of the Orthodox tradition.\textsuperscript{138} Such accommodations would have been impossible if the Church interpreted the prohibition on divorce as a dead letter and a rigid law.

Turning to the contemporary situation, Kasper considered it necessary to affirm unambiguously, in continuity with the whole Western tradition, that a sacramentally concluded and consummated marriage is indissoluble, since it constitutes an unbreakable divine promise of grace for spouses and their family.\textsuperscript{139} For Kasper, however, this fact did not prohibit but rather obligated the Church to strive to embody God's graciousness and mercy for spouses in its practices and regulations governing marriage.\textsuperscript{140} He suggested that changes to ecclesiastical policies and practices might be appropriate in certain cases, for example, where remarried Christians regretted and sought to do penance for their divorce yet found themselves morally obligated to their second marriage since they had had children.\textsuperscript{141} He thought that it might be possible for the Catholic Church, as it has been for Orthodox churches, to recognize and even celebrate the human value and dignity of such a marriage without placing it on a par with the first (still valid) marriage. In support of this possibility, he pointed to the history of salvation, in which God has provided merciful accommodations to repentant sinners without denying the reality of their sin. “God does not let us go under after the shipwreck of sin, yet he does not simply let us transfer to a comfortable new ship; he rather offers us the helpful plank of penance,

\textsuperscript{138} He was referring to canon 7 from the Council of Trent's decree on marriage (DS 1807). See ZT 499-502.

\textsuperscript{139} ZT 504.

\textsuperscript{140} ZT 504-5.

\textsuperscript{141} See ZT 503, 505-9 (esp. 509).
so that we can save our lives.”

Kasper was convinced that no real conflict existed between affirming and safeguarding the value of unconditional faithfulness in marriage, on the one hand, and renewing and extending the Church's practice of penance to the new situations of divorced and remarried Christians today, on the other hand.

The point of both perspectives is the one Treue Gottes, which supports and sanctifies human Treue and takes on the burden of remaining faithful even to the one who has not kept faith, leaving open to him a possibility of salvation on the path of penance.\[143\]

C. Sex, Love, and Faithfulness: “Familie als Hauskirche”

With the publication of Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe, Kasper had finished his theological heavy lifting on the topic of marriage. Nevertheless, the reality of marriage in society did not cease to develop at the close of the 1970s, as the propagation of various forms of contraception, the appearance of new family structures, and the growing phenomenon of cohabitation demonstrated. “Familie als Hauskirche oder: Was heisst Ehe als Sakrament?,” a talk Kasper delivered at the 1982 Deutscher Katholikentag in Düsseldorf, presented a short summary of Kasper's theology of marriage and fidelity as well as an application thereof to contemporary issues. The present inquiry concludes with a brief look at this piece, which confirmed Kasper's previous statements about human and divine faithfulness from a slightly different angle.

One of the new contributions Kasper made with this piece was a revised anthropology of the love that exists between men and women.\[144\] In this new account, he distinguished three main aspects: sexual love, erotic or affective love, and self-giving love or agape. While sexual and erotic love each contribute something unique over and above self-giving love as such, neither

\[142\] ZT 507.

\[143\] “Bei beiden Gesichtspunkten geht es um die eine Treue Gottes, die die menschliche Treue trägt, heiligt und im Pflicht nimmt, die aber auch dem untreu Gewordenen noch die Treue hält und ihm auf dem Weg der Umkehr eine Möglichkeit des Heils offen lässt.” ZT 510.

\[144\] For the following, see Kasper, “Familie als Hauskirche,” 520-22.
constituted for Kasper a fully personal and human form of love in isolation from *agape*. Only the love that integrates all three sufficed for Kasper to form the basis of a lasting marital partnership between a woman and a man. By insisting on the role of *agape* in bestowing on love its proper dignity, Kasper was renewing a claim he had first advanced in his earlier writings on marriage: love is realized in faithfulness.\(^{145}\) There is no such thing as provisional or probationary love; it is a transcendence of self in a complete and unconditional acceptance of the other person or it is a shadow of the real thing. Although “Ehe ohne Trauschein” might seem to be an attempt to personalize love by removing its institutional element—namely, the *Trauschein* or marriage certificate—Kasper found in this new arrangement a weakening of love's personal character.\(^{146}\) “There is no love without faithfulness, without sacrifice, renunciation, and service.”\(^{147}\) Where love appears in this integrated, fully personal form, however, there manifests itself, according to Kasper, a mystery that points beyond itself, transcending the human capacity for control. It proves to be a gift and a grace.\(^{148}\) This is for Kasper what the Church means by calling marriage a sacrament. The love between men and women finds its ultimate source and foundation in God, whose faithful love for humanity continues to unfold in history in the love and faithfulness of Christ for his Bride, the Church.\(^{149}\)

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\(^{145}\) See Kasper, “Familie als Hauskirche,” 521-22.

\(^{146}\) See Kasper, “Familie als Hauskirche,” 529-30.

\(^{147}\) “Liebe is ohne Treue, ohne Opfer, Verzicht und Dienst nicht zu haben.” Kasper, “Familie als Hauskirche,” 530.

\(^{148}\) See Kasper, “Familie als Hauskirche,” 522.

\(^{149}\) See Kasper, “Familie als Hauskirche,” 523.
III. Conclusion

One can find in Kasper's theology of marriage a conceptual link between his general use of the term *Treue* and his attribution of *Treue* to God. This link makes possible the synthetic account of Kasper's understanding of human and divine faithfulness that the present chapter, by way of a conclusion, will provide. The German word *Treue*, faithfulness, can refer to a number of distinct character traits whose common element is constancy and reliability in one's relationship to another person or thing. It takes on a special meaning, however, in light of the categories of history and freedom that shaped Kasper's theological anthropology. Two main aspects may be distinguished. First, human beings differ from other animals because of their incompleteness, indeterminacy, and openness to the world. Because of my human heritage, I am not beholden to a bodily and instinctual constitution so adapted to one environment that my survival in another environment would be impossible. This, however, places the burden on me and my freedom to choose my direction, my environment, my relationships, and myself. A person remains unfinished and fragmentary as long as he or she puts off making the definitive decisions which alone can determine the future course of his or her life. In Kasper's language, freedom attains its fulfillment in faithfulness, that is, in free commitment to an act of self-determination. One is truly free to the extent that one is faithful to oneself.

Neither freedom nor faithfulness can be achieved in a vacuum, however. One of the great lessons Kasper learned from Schelling was to attend to the concrete conditions that make freedom possible.\(^{150}\) The most basic of these conditions is that freedom only emerges in dialogue

with another freedom. It is not enough that one should simply determine oneself. One's faithfulness to oneself necessarily takes place in view of, and even at the mercy of, other people. My act of self-determination would be impossible if my neighbors, or my society at large, did not in some basic way recognize, respect, and accept my right and competence to determine who I shall be. The measure of my capacity to determine myself is the measure to which I am accepted and affirmed by another in my dignity as a person. Likewise, the measure of my neighbor's freedom is the measure of my affirmation of her or his personhood. In this sense, freedom finds its fulfillment in love. However, just as the act that fulfills my freedom is always a committed act, so the love that brings fulfillment is not partial or provisional, but love of the kind that accepts the person in her or his wholeness and integrity—the good and the bad, the soul and the body, the individual and the network of relationships, the past history and the unwritten future. Such an unreserved, unconditional love can only be realized as faithful love. So faithfulness to oneself and faithfulness before another point for Kasper to two aspects of the wholeness and fulfillment of human existence.

Faithfulness in each of these senses involves an act of self-transcendence. Since one can never fully anticipate the future, a permanent commitment always involves unknowns and risks. For one reason or another, I may someday regret my decision and wish to reverse it. And when I make a mutual commitment with another, I certainly do not know in any absolute sense whether he or she will someday choose to break it. Faithfulness brings me face to face with my finitude, with my inability to control the other person and our future. The question therefore arises: is it really wise to take this leap, to commit myself in this way? Can I really trust this person? Can I even trust myself? Or am I setting myself up for failure, frustration, and disappointment? In that case, is it perhaps better not to try? On what grounds can I trust that my act of faithfulness will
lead to a fulfilling life? These questions deal with the meaningfulness of human freedom as well as the conditions that make a human life possible. They ultimately touch on the question of the meaning of the whole of reality. In the spirit of Kasper, one may say: only if the ground of reality is perfectly faithful, is Faithfulness in person, can I hope that my commitments will not entrap me but set me free. Thus, Kasper's anthropology of faithfulness raises the question of God.

Hints and signs of an all-embracing 'ground' of faithfulness can certainly be found in creation, for example, in the love and faithfulness that exists between husband and wife. The same faithfulness has come to expression in a new way in the history of the people of Israel. In the Old Testament, God selected Israel to be his chosen people among the nations and so made a covenant with them. The Scriptures have again and again testified to the unfailing faithfulness of this God to his covenant, in spite of the failings and infidelities of Israel. For Christians, however, this same God has revealed his faithfulness in an unsurpassable way in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the New Covenant in whom God definitively and irrevocably commits himself to the world. In Christ God “takes away the sin of the world,” embracing his creation and all its history, in all its brokenness and inhumanity, with faithfulness and mercy. God has promised to strengthen and support in their faithfulness and love those who accept his grace with faith and trust, and he makes good on this promise by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the world in every age and place. The community of the faithful is the permanent sign of God's faithful love at work in the world until the end of time. Christ's faithfulness to his Spouse, the Church, is manifested above all in the faithful love, service, mercy, and forgiveness of Christians for one another and for the world. This faithfulness becomes real and effective in a special way in the 'domestic church,' that is, in the love and faithfulness of Christian spouses and families. But neither the family nor the Church ever exhausts the surpassing newness of God's
mercy and faithfulness in the Holy Spirit. Thus, Christians continue to discern the signs of the
times and to reflect on how the ever-surprising faithfulness of God can adequately be proclaimed
and lived within the world today. They are sustained in this ongoing historical task by their hope
and trust in the triune God, who can be trusted absolutely, since God is faithful to himself.

So—to borrow an image from group theory—a whole natural theology can be 'generated'
from the 'kernel' that is Kasper's notion of faithfulness. To put this another way, Kasper's
discourse about the faithfulness of God mirrors the structure of the analogy he has drawn
between divine and human freedom, which was discussed in chapter two. The resemblance
between this 'analogy of freedom' and the 'analogy of faithfulness' elaborated in the present
chapter is not accidental. The language of faithfulness highlights a personal and concrete
dimension of Kasper's philosophy and theology of freedom that could be lost if one restricted
oneself to the language of freedom alone. By speaking not simply of freedom but of faithfulness
and love, Kasper has pointed out the ambiguity of the term freedom. Freedom can in fact be
deployed in a shallow, fleeting, non-committal, or selfish way. And for some, this is the primary
if not the only meaning of freedom. Faithfulness to oneself and faithfulness to another offer a
different vision of freedom. They disclose a new possibility for freedom in its capacity to
transcend one's immediate interests in view of another person and in view of the future. They
indicate in a precise way how freedom points to hope for human fulfillment and renders faith in
God an authentic human possibility.

In an analogous way, faithfulness clarifies what it means to speak of God as free. Terms
like sovereignty, Lordship, transcendence, and exaltedness all speak of God's freedom to create
and to save. God's activity stands above all systems of necessity; nothing can compel God to act.

See above, pp. 98-118.
By themselves, however, such expressions of God's freedom can be misunderstood or distorted into an image of God utterly contrary to Christian faith: a capricious divine tyrant who does whatever he wants, indifferent to the good of his creatures. To avoid such distortions, one must preserve what Kasper has sometimes called the dialectical tension between freedom and necessity. The language of faithfulness serves to balance what would otherwise be one-sided expressions of God's freedom. God is free to create or not to create, but God is also faithful to his act of creation: God continues to will the good of his creatures, even after the Fall and its consequences. God is free to bestow his blessing on a people in the form of a covenant, but God also remains faithful to this covenant, making it a lasting instrument of his blessings. God is free to save his creation however he pleases, yet God demonstrates the depth of his faithfulness by entering into solidarity with humanity in the incarnation of his Son and by sending his Holy Spirit to redeem and sanctify creation from within. God remains free to work outside the normative means of salvation, but God is faithful to the Church Jesus founded in the signs and instruments of grace he entrusted to the Church's care. To speak of God as faithful is to speak of God's freedom as he manifests it in gracious concern for the world, in condescending to make this grace accessible to human nature, and in the trustworthiness and stability of the mediations of this grace.

The language of faithfulness also highlights an element of historicity to which the language of freedom does not always do justice. Freedom involves changing the conditions of the present in view of the future; it is the capacity to make history. For Kasper, however, it is precisely one's autochthony, one's embeddedness in a history, a community, and a tradition, that creates the conditions for one's exercise of freedom. By itself, the term freedom does not necessarily call to mind its own roots; in some contexts it might even evoke the idea of
emancipation from these roots. The word faithfulness, on the other hand, implies precisely that
tension between past and present that Kasper deemed essential to the responsible, mature
exercise of freedom. I can only be faithful to myself if I adhere now to the committed decisions
of my past; I can only be faithful to another if I continue to accept the other along with his or her
history. It is not just any free activity, but only the mature exercise of freedom denoted by
faithfulness that safeguards the conditions of freedom and is for this reason capable of making
history. Only when I freely act in solidarity with other human beings, and not just for myself,
when I act to forward the interests of the world, and not just my own—in a word, only when I act
out of responsibility before history do I and others become capable of transcending the past and
effecting a new beginning in history. Faithfulness to the world, faithfulness to our common
history, faithfulness to the people of the past enables me to be responsible also to the people and
the world of the future. Faithfulness is historically-conscious freedom.

Yet the term faithfulness has its limitations. The have already been encountered in the
discussion of Kasper's usage. Both the German Treue and the English 'faithfulness' sometimes
connote a rigid adherence to the past that makes no room for novelty and change. This sense of
faithfulness is distinct from faithfulness in the special or technical sense described in the
previous paragraphs, a personal and dynamic way of being. It is because of this ambiguity that
Kasper often found it necessary to counterbalance the language of faithfulness with language that
emphasized novelty. This was the case with Treue in general as well as with Gottes Treue in
particular. God is faithful, but he continues to realize this faithfulness within history in new and
unexpected ways. Put another way: just as faithfulness complements talk of God as free, so
God's sovereign freedom over history complements his faithfulness to himself and to humanity.
This limitation serves to confirm what Kasper's doctrine of analogy had already claimed in principle: no one analogy can exhaust the incomprehensible mystery of God.

The complementarity between Kasper's analogy of freedom and his analogy of faithfulness indicates that Kasper's notion of faithfulness is intricately intertwined with his fundamental theological option. This is because Kasper's historical analogy of freedom is nothing less than the grammar in which he articulated his theology. One can verify this claim by examining the pivotal role played by this analogy in Kasper's major works of systematic theology, above all in his 1974 synthesis of historical Jesus scholarship and the Church's Christological tradition (Jesus der Christus) and his 1982 retrieval of the Church's Trinitarian confessions of faith (Der Gott Jesu Christi). Given the significance of the analogy of freedom in Kasper's work, the complementarity of freedom and faithfulness in his thought implies that one may profitably apply the perspective generated by the analogy of faithfulness to the interpretation of Kasper's systematic theology. The present study therefore turns to its analysis of Kasper's great theological syntheses.
Chapter Four
The Faithfulness of God in Kasper's Principal Dogmatic Works

Chapter three argued that when Kasper spoke of God as faithful, he was pointing to what he regarded as central to the Christian faith. As evidence of this, one need only recall the Kurzformel or short formula of faith he penned in 1968, which described the mystery of salvation as the bestowal of God's faithfulness and love on human beings in the person of Jesus.1 This, however, raises the question: in what does the centrality to the content of the faith that Kasper attributed to the faithfulness of God consist? In a course he began teaching in 1970 as an introduction to the study of theology, the lectures of which he published as a book in 1972, Kasper connected Karl Rahner's call to develop short formulas of faith with the question of identifying a material criterion for the content of faith.2 Noting that the New Testament authors regarded the saving work of God in Jesus Christ as the central point of Christian faith, he argued that all subsequent developments in the history of dogma attained their intelligibility and authority as concrete confessions within different historical situations of the one saving truth revealed in Christ.3 While Kasper did not claim that this Christological criterion authorized theologians to trim back those dogmatic outgrowths they could no longer recognize as expressions of the center of the faith, he nevertheless found in it the possibility of differentiating the content of Christian faith according to the hierarchy of truths, and in this sense, of engaging

1 See Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” in GG 308. For discussion, see pp. 138-39, above.

2 On the content of faith and its criteria, see EG7 89-105; on short formulas of faith, see ibid., 97-99. While Rahner was also aware of the critical potential of short formulas, he seems to have been more interested in their utility for communicating the faith to non-Christians. See Karl Rahner, “The Need for a ’Short Formula’ of Christian Faith,” in Theological Investigations, vol. 9, Writings of 1965-67 I, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 117-26.

3 See EG7 90-95.
in a material criticism of the tradition.⁴ Thus Kasper could speak of Sachkriterien or material criteria of faith, the purpose of which was not a reduction of the material content of faith but rather the right interpretation of this content.⁵ Kasper's articulations of the Christological center of faith in short formulas represented, among other things, his attempt to accommodate within Catholic theology a concern expressed by the Reformers in their proposal of the “material principle” of the Reformation, justification by grace alone.⁶ In brief, the faithfulness of God, understood as an expression of the Christological center of faith here described, constituted for Kasper a Catholic alternative to the Protestant material principle, a hermeneutical key to the dogmatic tradition.⁷

As was observed in the last chapter, however, the language of faithfulness was not the only way Kasper articulated the center and criterion of Christian faith.⁸ This was pointedly illustrated in his Einführung in den Glauben, where he proposed new short formulas of faith that did not speak of God as loving and faithful but as salvation, hope, and peace for all humankind.⁹ He made this choice in spite of the fact that he still considered the faithfulness of God a

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⁴ EG7 97-98. On hierarchy in the truths of Catholic doctrine, see Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis redintegratio, no. 11.

⁵ EG7 98-99.


⁷ It is not implied here that discerning material criteria of faith is an originally Protestant concern. To name just one example from the Catholic tradition, Augustine articulated what amounted to a material criterion (the Trinity and the incarnation of divine Wisdom for the purification of human souls) and a practical criterion (love of God and love of neighbor) as principles basic to his biblical hermeneutics. See Augustine, De doctrina christiana 1.

⁸ For other terms that for Kasper express this center, see above, p. 137.

⁹ For the short formulas of faith Kasper published in 1972, see EG7 98, 103-4.
fundamental aspect of biblical faith. This illustration raises several questions about the place of *Gottes Treue* within Kasper's theology. How did his understanding of the center or material criterion of faith develop over the course of his theological career? Does the analogy between divine and human faithfulness articulated in the previous chapter of this study continue to shed light on his presentation of this center throughout the development of his thought? Did Kasper continue to use the language of fidelity to designate this center, or did he drop this language at some point, thinking that the essence of the faith could be better expressed in other terms? Can one maintain that the faithfulness of God is for Kasper the material principle of faith within his later as well as his earlier theology?

This study proposes to address these questions by examining three books in which Kasper pursued in a sustained argument what he understood to be the task of systematic theology, namely, to carry out a “christological concentration” or a *reductio in mysterium* of the various traditional expressions of the content of faith by gathering them around their central point and interpreting them in this light. Accordingly, the present chapter will deal with Kasper’s *Jesus der Christus*, Der Gott Jesu Christi, and *Katholische Kirche*, since each represents an attempt to express the whole of Christian faith in a single synthetic movement. Kasper himself described the first two of these three books as contributions to a theological task

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10 See for example EG7 91.


12 JC.

13 DG.

14 KK.
he regarded as much needed within the post-conciliar period, the task of *Konsolidierung*, that is, of presenting the inner unity, beauty, and richness of a Catholic vision of reality.\(^\text{15}\) Although he acknowledged that theology after Vatican II had made progress toward the sought-after renewal of the Church by applying historical, sociological, and ideological critiques to the theological tradition, he argued that these efforts had to be complemented by a properly theological criticism of the tradition, which only a positive statement of the heart of the faith could generate.\(^\text{16}\) By Kasper's own account, however, it was not his intention to express his vision in only two books, but to round out his Christology and Trinitarian theology with a book-length reflection on the theology of the Church.\(^\text{17}\) He thus regarded *Katholische Kirche: Wesen – Wirklichkeit – Sendung* as the last installment of a theological trilogy, in spite of the long lapse between its publication and those of the previous two books.\(^\text{18}\)

Each of these three books, *Jesus der Christus, Der Gott Jesu Christi*, and *Katholische Kirche*, represents a more or less complete systematic statement of Kasper's theological thinking at the time of its publication. Since the task of this chapter is to investigate the developing relationship between *Gottes Treue* and the center and criterion of Christian faith in Kasper's theology, it will proceed by examining the role of divine fidelity in these three texts.

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\(^\text{16}\) See KK 44; Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft” (see p. 136n45, above), 192-96, 198-99.

\(^\text{17}\) WH 81-82; KK 21. Admittedly, Kasper indicated in his interview with Deckers, which took place three years before he published *Katholische Kirche*, that he had made an attempt to fill this gap with the “brief blueprint” of ecclesiology with which he introduced the eleventh volume of his collected works. See Kasper, *Die Kirche Jesu Christi: Schriften zur Ekklesiologie I* (WKGS 11), 15-120.

\(^\text{18}\) See KK 15.
I. The Faithfulness of God in Jesus der Christus

A. Historical Context: A Transitional Period

The book Jesus der Christus emerged from a Christology class Kasper taught over the course of his first decade of teaching as a member of the faculties of Catholic theology at the universities of Münster (1964-70) and Tübingen (beginning in 1970), and also as a guest lecturer at the Gregorian University in Rome. It therefore developed during Kasper's formative years as an academic theologian. It bears all the marks of his early thought: his attention to the problem of history, his dialogue with the thinkers of German Idealism, especially Schelling and Hegel, his identification of theological truth with divine fidelity. By Kasper's own account, it also reflects a certain fascination on his part with the theme of pneumatology, a topic of great importance to his colleagues at Tübingen, Hans Küng, Ernst Käsemann, and Jürgen Moltmann, not to mention his forebear Johann Adam Möhler. At the same time, its publication took place in the middle of the eleven-year long conflict between Hans Küng and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. During this period, Kasper displayed an ambivalent attitude toward Küng's theology, sharing many of Küng's concerns about the Roman Curia's concrete deployment of ecclesiastical authority while distancing himself from Küng's ever more acute attacks on claims to authority within the Church. This distancing ran concurrent with other important developments in Kasper's

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20 On Kasper's understanding of history and his dialogue with German idealism, see chapter two, above, pp. 50ff.; on his early notions of tradition and truth, see below, pp. 316-75.

21 See KK 26, 44-45.

22 On the conflict between Küng and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, see below, pp. 375-90.
understanding of tradition, truth, and theological method. One can therefore describe the decade 1964-74 as a transitional period in Kasper's young career.

This decade was also a transitional period for the Catholic Church and the world. It comprised the first ten years following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. Signs of considerable unrest became manifest throughout the world church during this decade, highlights of which included the student revolutions of the late 1960s and the worldwide reaction to Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*, as well as the above-mentioned Küng affair. Within this revolutionary atmosphere Catholic theology answered the Council's call for a more biblically-grounded and pastoral theology by turning its attention to questions touching its own foundations and methods, questions with profound implications for the whole theological landscape. In Central and South America, this turn to foundations took the form of the pioneering research that laid the groundwork for the newly emerging theologies of liberation. One effect of these developments was the transformation of already existing renewal efforts within Catholic Christology into a full-blown paradigm shift. Whereas neoscholastic Christology took as its starting point the dogma of the Council of Chalcedon, the newer contributions of Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, and others sought “to render a genetic and evaluative account of the

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23 According to Joseph A. Komonchak, the Second Vatican Council ushered in the end of an era, the collapse of a particular social and cultural form of Roman Catholicism that had been built up during the nineteenth century and that prevailed up to the time of the council. See Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 18 (1997), 353-85.

24 That Kasper's early theology participated in this turn to foundations is illustrated by, among other texts, his *Die Methoden der Dogmatik* (MD). For a discussion of the revolutionary tone of this text from the perspective of post-conciliar developments within Catholic theology, see Hütt 369-88.


entire christological tradition” with the aid of new historical research into the life of Jesus.27

Along with Küng and Schillebeeckx, Kasper blazed this new trail with the publication of *Jesus der Christus*.

**B. The Narrative of Jesus der Christus**

A brief analysis of the structure of *Jesus der Christus* will provide a preliminary orientation for the present inquiry. Kasper divided his Christology text into three parts: “The Question of Jesus Christ Today” (“Die Frage nach Jesus Christus heute”); “The History and Fate of Jesus Christ”; “The Mystery of Jesus Christ.” In the first part, Kasper assessed the situation facing Christianity in the 1970s as background for the study of Christology. In response to the *aporie* encountered by contemporary Christological proposals, he proffered a Christology that attempted to utilize a soteriological perspective to bridge the gap between modern “quests for the historical Jesus” and recent efforts to translate a traditional, metaphysical Christology for modern ears.28 Kasper's proposal took the form of a rereading of traditional Christological reflection on the two natures of Christ, human and divine (part three) as a binding interpretation, but also an abbreviation, of an older Christological pattern that distinguished between two stages or states of Jesus' existence, “in the flesh” and “in the spirit” (part two).29 This suggests that Kasper's account of Jesus's history and fate, his recovery of the ancient two-stage Christology that he found summarized in the confession, “Jesus is the Christ,” formed the foundation for his systematic reflections and the core of his entire argument in *Jesus der Christus*. More specifically, Kasper maintained that the basic principle of his two-stage “Christology of

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29 See JC 41-43.
reciprocity”—the crucified Jesus is the risen Christ, exalted in the Spirit, and conversely, the Risen One is none other than the Crucified—was at bottom an articulation of the content of faith in the resurrection. Kasper's account of the resurrection is thus key to his whole Christological project.

These observations put into perspective the following account of the faithfulness of God in Kasper's *Jesus der Christus*. On the one hand, it must be admitted that in the first 150 pages of *Jesus der Christus*—the first half of the book—Kasper did not once speak of divine faithfulness. On the other hand, within the forty-four pages in which Kasper explained his understanding of the resurrection, he applied the language of *Treue* to God no fewer than twelve times. He made several additional references to the faithfulness of God within his lengthy systematic reflections, though not with the same frequency as in his discussion of the resurrection of Jesus. This implies a close link between Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness and a critical element of his account of the person and fate of Christ, his treatment of the resurrection. The reading of *Jesus der Christus* that follows will attempt to flesh out what this preliminary inquiry suggests, namely, that divine fidelity plays a key role in this book.

1. Openness to God's faithfulness in the contemporary situation

In the first part of *Jesus der Christus*, Kasper situated the Church and the churches with their present theological and Christological debates against the backdrop of the human being's perennial struggle to attain an integral, flourishing existence—to bring into harmony the public

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30 See JC 171-72, 175-76, 179-80, 271. This principle in turn justified Kasper's contention that the cross and resurrection together form the central content of faith in Jesus as the Christ; see ibid., 43-44.


32 See JC 207-8, 220, 262, 271, 312.
and private spheres of her or his life. The theological conversation following the Council, especially the discussion over political theology, the theologies of secularization, and Latin American liberation theologies, raised the question of the relevance of Christian faith in the geopolitical situations of the modern world even more pointedly than had the Council itself. These discussions triggered a re-examination of the fundamentals of Christian faith: debates over ecclesiology gave way to renewed debates over Christology. For Kasper, Moltmann's identity-relevance dilemma aptly described the subsequent situation of theology: on the one hand, by asserting the relevance of Christianity for today, one calls into question the ways in which it has traditionally determined its identity; on the other hand, by retreating into a defense of traditional formulas, one risks surrendering their relevance.

Two recent movements to renew the theology of Jesus's person and work bore out for Kasper the consequences of this dilemma. On the one hand, while Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, and Wolfhart Pannenberg were pursuing a worthwhile goal in attempting to elicit the contemporary significance of the Council of Chalcedon by interpreting its doctrine against the background of different strains of contemporary thought, in practice, Kasper thought they had ultimately replaced the normative role of the story of Jesus with a normative metaphysical framework: they won relevance at the cost of identity. On the other hand, the efforts of a second wave of Christological researchers to move beyond merely interpreting dogmatic formulas by way of a historical-critical investigation of the reality these formulas claim to interpret—the self-

33 On the situation facing twentieth-century Christology, see JC 13-15.


35 On the state of Christological research in the postconciliar period, see JC 16-20.
revelation of God in the history of Jesus of Nazareth—in many cases read into this history their own philosophical agendas and so fell victim to the same dilemma. Emblematic of this phenomenon for Kasper was Klaus Schäfer's contribution to the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Synode's 1970 conference publication *In Sachen Synode.*\(^{36}\) In Kasper's judgment, Schäfer's attempt to get behind the presuppositions and biases of the dogmatic tradition to the “cause” espoused by the historical Jesus ended up transforming this “cause” into a cipher for still another comprehensive philosophical framework, namely, a Marxist social critique: relevance at the cost of identity.\(^{37}\)

According to Kasper, the early Christian confession, “Jesus is the Christ,” made the startling claim that what had taken place in the man Jesus was nothing less that the reconciliation between historical particularity and universal significance, between being and meaning, identity and relevance.\(^{38}\) The difficulties encountered by twentieth-century Christology have raised the question of how both the relevance and the concreteness of the confession of faith could be maintained in the modern situation: how one could preserve the reciprocal relationship between the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ, between Jesus's uniqueness and his universal significance, without falling to one side or the other.\(^{39}\) This question set the stage for Kasper's formulation of the tasks facing modern Christology.\(^{40}\) His account of the theological situation suggested that one course was no longer tenable: the alternative between historical and metaphysical methods had to be rejected. If the aim of Christology is to disclose the power of

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38 *JC* 15.

39 *JC* 20.

40 On the tasks of Christology, see JC 20-26.
Christian faith to remedy the malaise of the modern world, it must henceforth commit itself to being both “historically determined” and “universally accountable.”\(^{41}\) By this he meant that a theology of the salvific ministry of Jesus (functional Christology) should not be formulated in such a way that it excluded from the outset any reflection on Jesus's inner constitution (ontological Christology), and that ontological Christology in turn should not be constructed as a closed system independent of or even indifferent to soteriological considerations. Only if historical and ontological Christologies remain open to a reciprocal unity between the person of Jesus and his salvific work will they be capable of carrying out what Kasper regarded as the primary task of Christology, to become a “soteriologically determined Christology.”\(^{42}\) There is no Christology from below without a corresponding Christology from above; functional and ontological Christologies need to work in tandem.

After formulating these tasks, Kasper provided building blocks for the proposed bridge between functional and ontological Christologies, and thus also between historical and metaphysical Christologies, with the aid of his historical analogy of freedom.\(^{43}\) By 1974, Kasper had not yet systematically formulated his doctrine of analogy to the extent that he would by 1982, when he wrote *Der Gott Jesu Christi*.\(^{44}\) Nonetheless, freedom, both divine and human, is a pervasive theme within *Jesus der Christus*. To a certain extent, this theme appears coded in the language of the new and undeducible.\(^{45}\) “The category of the unique and new belongs to the

\(^{41}\) JC 20, 21.

\(^{42}\) JC 23.

\(^{43}\) On the analogy of freedom in Kasper's theology, see above, pp. 98-118.

\(^{44}\) See DG 92-150.

\(^{45}\) For a critique of Kasper's use of the concept of newness in his Christology, see below, pp. 188-93.
realm of freedom.”46 The freedom of a person to achieve something new in history, however, is always conditioned by concrete natural, social, political, linguistic, and economic factors, and a person's relationships with other free persons represent (according to Hegel as well as Schelling) the most primordial of the conditions on his or her freedom.47 It is here suggested that this tension between newness and facticity, as well as the closely related tension described in chapter three between freedom and faithfulness,48 is characteristic of Kasper's presentation in Jesus der Christus. On the one hand, this tension discloses the basic situation of human beings as open to salvation.49 This is why Kasper's categories of freedom and faithfulness are able to generate a natural theology that render intelligible such special theological categories as God, sin, grace, and salvation, as chapters two and three of the present study have argued.50 On the other hand, Kasper advanced the thesis that an account of the mystery of Jesus Christ and of the Trinity in terms of freedom is the key to an entire biblical vision of reality, an historical ontology in terms of freedom and person.51 An analogy of freedom, then, functions in Jesus der Christus to facilitate a mediation between Christology's historical, ontological, and soteriological tasks.

Kasper used this historical analogy of freedom as a criterion for evaluating and appropriating the ideas and methods of the Christological movements of his day. In the background of his critique of the radical opposition between the person of Jesus and the faith-tradition of the Church posited by the liberal quest for the historical Jesus stood not only inner-

46 “Zur Freiheit gehört die Kategorie des Einmaligen und des Neuen.” JC 70.
47 See JC 238, 263-64; on the place of this principle in Schelling’s thought, see pp. 65-66, above.
48 See above, pp. 162-68.
49 On the analogy of freedom as starting-point for an historically oriented natural theology and a 'searching Christology,' see JC 63-71.
50 See above, pp. 98-118 and 162-68.
51 See JC 22.
theological considerations—for Kasper, Christians today have access to Jesus in the Holy Spirit through authentic, ecclesial faith—but also his analysis of concrete freedom, which for Kasper comes to its realization only within a historical community and tradition. This critique did not constitute a rejection in principle of the use of historical methods within theology, as Kasper's more favorable response to the "new quest" showed. The analogy of freedom nevertheless revealed the inherent limitations of these methods: because they approach the past by analogy with the present, they are by themselves incapable of discerning the underivably new, the dimension of transcendence entering into history, which is precisely what Christians claim has happened in Jesus. Nor would anthropological methods of interpretation suffice as a supplement to a historical approach if these methods would demythologize even the hope for a radically new beginning in history that alone makes possible the meaningful exercise of human freedom. Kasper approved of Karl Rahner's transcendental approach for showing that human knowing and willing involved a pre-apprehension of an infinite, inconceivable mystery, which meant that talk of an encounter with the divine mystery in time could be understood as an answer to the hope inscribed in human freedom rather than a mere remnant of a pre-modern numinous view of the cosmos. At the same time, Kasper wondered whether Rahner might not have

52 On this point the present study agrees with William Loewe, who identified authentic faith or religious conversion as the starting-point of Kasper's Christology. See Loewe, "Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect," in CK 88-89.

53 See JC 36-38.

54 See JC 38-40.

55 JC 40-41.

56 On the analogy of freedom as a criterion for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate demythologization, see JC 53-56.

57 See JC 56-59. Kasper in fact utilized transcendental methods within his historically-oriented Christology; see ibid., 63-71. Hence Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's description of Jesus der Christus in "Systematic Theology" (see p. 7n1, above), 42. For a more detailed discussion of the deployment of transcendental method in Kasper's Christology, see the whole of Joha, Christologie und Anthropologie (see p. 13n25, above), but esp. 124-38, 252-76.
deduced so much from his transcendental reflection that he overdetermined God's self-revelation in Christ, thus failing to do justice to God's sovereign freedom to decide not only the fact of the redemption of the world but also the concrete means by which God would bring it about.\textsuperscript{58}

For its part, Kasper's analogy of freedom represents an indeterminate pre-apprehension of the divine within human hope that receives its definite content in the event of revelation, when it encounters concrete signs of God's faithfulness in history.\textsuperscript{59} Reflecting on the transcendental conditions of freedom in history, Kasper supplied the \textit{praemambula} to his Christology in the form of a provisional sketch of God as the living God of history, who is capable of bringing about that which cannot be derived from the conditions that prevail in the present: a qualitatively new beginning in history, a future that is something more than a repetition of what has been.\textsuperscript{60} He thus formulated the structures of his Christology in order to anticipate the revelation of God's faithfulness to creation and covenant in the person of Jesus Christ. In compliance with this approach, Kasper proposed to carry out the task of allowing history to determine the content of Christology by grounding his Christology not in a purely historical criterion but in the unity or reciprocity between the “earthly Jesus” (recovered by historical methods) and the risen Christ accessible to authentic faith.\textsuperscript{61} Such a formulation of the criterion of Christology treats historical data as self-transcending signs, potential vectors of the reality of salvation already apprehended in hope, \textit{loci} of transcendental experience and thus of a possible revelation of the faithfulness of


\textsuperscript{59} This follows from the conclusion of chapter three; see pp. 162-68, above.

\textsuperscript{60} See JC 65ff.

\textsuperscript{61} JC 41ff.
God within history. Conversely, by reading the metaphysical tradition as an interpretation of this two-stage Christology of reciprocity, Kasper has maintained the universal significance of the dogmatic tradition while opening it up to a more dynamic picture of God, a God capable of free, creative involvement in human history, a God who could be conceived as faithful.

2. The history and fate of Jesus as parable of God's faithfulness

Kasper's transcendental reflections on freedom formed the necessary philosophical background to his discussion of the revelation of the faithfulness of God in the history of Jesus. According to Kasper's account, the structure of human transcendence points human beings beyond themselves in search of concrete signs that God is living and effective in history. In this sense, the historical analogy of freedom illuminates the hidden meaning of history as the narrative of God's faithfulness to the world. In the second, central section of Jesus der Christus Kasper moved from these preliminary reflections to his narrative Christology, his account of the history and fate of Jesus. In this section, Kasper proffered a synthetic summary of historical Jesus research as it stood in his day (at least within the German-language context). That which history discloses, however, is not the whole story. Using his analogy of freedom, Kasper repeatedly highlighted the self-transcendent elements of the history of Jesus, which pointed beyond the dimension of categorical history and toward the dimension of the meaning of history as a whole, toward a definite interpretation of human transcendence: toward the theological dimension. The history of Jesus posed a question to its listener, the question of God's faithfulness, which Kasper considered inseparable from the question about Jesus's resurrection. Apart from the 'more' given

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62 See JC 70-71.

63 See JC 42-44, as well as pp. 195-212, below.

64 On Kasper's Christology as a narrative Christology, see Robert A. Krieg, Story-Shaped Christology: The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ (New York: Paulist, 1988), esp. chapter two.
in the proclamation of the resurrection and its hearer's assent in faith, the story of Jesus remains incomplete. As “climax” of the story of Jesus, however, the resurrection cannot be understood without its beginning and middle, the self-transcending signs of Jesus's historical ministry and death. Kasper summarized the interdependence between history and kerygma in his story of Jesus with formulas of reciprocity: the Crucified is the Risen, and the exalted Christ is none other than the historical Jesus.

Kasper presented his history of Jesus as an open question, which was for Kasper identical to the basic question confronting first-century Palestinian Jewish hope, the question of the coming Reign of God. This in turn implicitly included the question about the faithfulness of God. Jesus's language about God's imminent Reign would have been understood by his audience as addressing their hope for the effective establishment of peace and justice in the world by the power of God, for a reign of freedom in which all forms of slavery and oppression, to tyrants and warlords as well as to those anonymous forces which threaten human flourishing (powers, principalities, demons), would be overcome.\footnote{See JC 84-85.} This hope originated in Israel's historical experience of YHWH as the living God and Lord of history, the one who liberated them from slavery, led them through the desert, gave them victory over their enemies, and raised up judges, prophets, and kings to maintain justice and peace among them. To the Greek understanding of God as a self-contained, perfect, immovable essence Kasper juxtaposed this biblical vision of God as “God of the way and of guidance.”\footnote{JC 207.} Other experiences, however—war, injustice, and especially the destruction of the kingdom and the leading of the nation into exile—called this fundamental Jewish hope in God into question. This question did not mean the end of Jewish

\footnote{See JC 84-85.}
\footnote{JC 207.}
faith, however, but led to its creative transformation: particularly in the apocalyptic literature, Jewish hope now took the form of eschatological expectation that at some future time, God would establish a divine reign, radically overturning the conditions of the present age and ushering in a new aeon of justice. The hope of first-century Jews for the resurrection of the dead originated in this context, emerging out of the same faith in YHWH “as Lord over life and death, who holds everything in his hand, to whom everything belongs and on whom one can rely unconditionally, even beyond death.”

In his earthly ministry Jesus took up this question of hope in God's faithfulness and radicalized it, uniting it with his very identity. By Kasper's account, the person of Jesus could not be pigeonholed; he burst all categories, including those of his first-century Palestinian Jewish context. He was not a Pharisee, nor a rabbi, nor a zealot or revolutionary, nor a monastic separatist, nor even a mere prophet, but something more: “more than Jonah,” “more than Solomon” (Matt. 12:41-42). He presented himself wholly in relation to his “cause,” God's Reign of love breaking into history. Jesus identified his own cause with the cause of God; consequently, one can only decide who Jesus was by deciding at the same time who God is. If the long-awaited new aeon really was present in some mysterious way in Jesus, that would mean that his personal way of being, his teaching and ministry revealed the Godhood of God, God's

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67 JC 86-87.
68 JC 168-69.
69 For a summary of Kasper's portrait of the historical Jesus as a figure of beispielloser Originalität, see JC 75-82. The exegetical consensus on which this portrait rested, however, has since fallen apart. For a more sober appraisal of Jesus's discontinuity from, but also continuity with, his first-century Palestinian context, see John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracles (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
70 JC 82.
eschatological glory.\textsuperscript{71} According to Kasper, however, Jesus shattered Jewish expectations by presenting this divine glory as God's sovereign freedom in love, manifested in loving nearness, mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance of human beings.\textsuperscript{72} Kasper found in Hegel's phenomenology of love an apt analogy for the revelation of divine love that took place in Jesus: since the love of God unites while preserving distinction, the Reign of God also means the humanization of humankind, liberation, reconciliation, and the fulfillment of the meaning of human history.\textsuperscript{73} Jesus proclaimed that the long-awaited fulfillment of God's faithfulness to creation was imminent, indeed, that it was already coming to pass in his words and deeds of power. He thus hoped to elicit from his listeners the response of conversion (\textit{Umkehr}) and faith, of total trust and reliance on God's love and mercy coupled with total self-abandonment to the cause of God's love for human beings.\textsuperscript{74} Such an act of faith, however, would have implicitly and necessarily involved a decision about Jesus himself. Jesus linked the question of God's faithfulness to the question about his own person.\textsuperscript{75}

The fact that Jesus's ministry ended in rejection and execution did not settle but rather heightened these questions. According to Kasper, the radical and scandalous character of Jesus's message earned him enemies among the religious leaders of Israel, who wished to eliminate him for undermining the fundamentals of Judaism while claiming to be a prophet; these leaders took him to Pontius Pilate, leveling against him the charge of claiming to be the Messiah, and Pilate

\textsuperscript{71} See JC 92-93.

\textsuperscript{72} See JC 93-98.

\textsuperscript{73} On the soteriological dimension of the Reign of God, see JC 98-103; on Hegel's phenomenology of love as bridge between God's Reign and human salvation, see ibid., 97-98. This phenomenology plays an important role in Kasper's account of Jesus's divine Sonship. See below, pp. 197-98.

\textsuperscript{74} See JC 95-96.

\textsuperscript{75} On the hiddenness of Jesus's claim about himself, see JC 117-22.
executed him. Kasper's admittedly problematic claim that Jesus was rejected von Israel in seiner Gesamtheit, “by Israel as a whole,” seems to have the following meaning: although Jesus addressed his own people in the hope that they would believe in his message of the new aeon (and implicitly, in him), some of Jesus's listeners, including the aforementioned religious leaders, rejected it (and him) outright, at times even violently; others, who were not hostile to Jesus, nevertheless did not commit themselves to his message and thus, by not answering the question, effectively answered “no”; still others, who at first said “yes” in a radical way—namely, his disciples—wavered in their commitment at the decisive hour, leaving Jesus to face his death alone. The important point for Kasper was that in spite of the various “noes” his message received, which would otherwise have implied that his ministry in service of the Reign was a complete failure, Jesus himself said “yes” through his unconditional trust in the faithfulness of the One he called Abba and through his unwavering commitment to the Reign even unto death. Jesus embodied the faith he hoped to elicit from his audience, and in his act of faith the Reign of God was effectively present in the world. According to Kasper, Jesus understood his death in continuity with his ministry on behalf of God's Reign. The rejection Jesus faced raised the question of the Reign in a new way, and Jesus's answer was to trust God to manifest the new aeon in some way through his imminent death. This, however, raised other

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76 On the circumstances of Jesus's death, see JC 132-34.

77 JC 91, 143; compare 120.

78 On Jesus's attitude toward his death, see JC 134-40.

79 In ascribing faith to Jesus, Kasper was following Hans Urs von Balthasar, among others. See JC 130-31, 139-40, 143. On faith as manifestation of the Reign in history, see ibid., 96.
questions: did the One Jesus called Father vindicate his faith, or did God let him down in the end? If the latter, then does not Jesus's message of salvation lose all credibility?\(^{80}\)

The history of Jesus poses a question that, according to Kasper, history alone cannot answer.\(^{81}\) Kasper noted that history has indeed recorded the continuation of Jesus's ministry in the appearance and growth of Christianity following Jesus's death; it has traced the origins of this new movement to the preaching of the disciples of Jesus, who claimed that God raised Jesus from the dead, who even gave up their lives out of their conviction that Jesus was alive; it has found an explanation for their activity in faith accounts that state that the risen Jesus appeared to them after his death. Kasper denied, however, that the truth of these accounts could be verified by history, noting that the data might be interpreted in other, if not all equally plausible, ways: perhaps Jesus's disciples fabricated the story, and even emptied the tomb themselves, or perhaps they all hallucinated at once and simply thought they saw Jesus. No mere historical data could ever provide a sufficient basis for faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

Just as Kasper found a purely objectivist, apologetical argument for the resurrection untenable, he likewise rejected the idea that the resurrection was merely a subjective interpretation of the historical data.\(^{82}\) What, then, explains the continuity of Jesus's cause after his death, given that he connected it so closely with his person? What is the basis of Christian faith in the resurrection? For Kasper, one can only locate the basis of the faith of the disciples, and indeed of Christian faith as such, in “the Fidelity-Truth of God impressing itself on human beings.”\(^{83}\) This somewhat cryptic assertion broaches the question of the connection between truth

\(^{80}\) On Jesus's death as heightening the question about the Reign, see JC 143-44.

\(^{81}\) On the historical background to the disciples' faith in the resurrection, see JC 145-53.

\(^{82}\) See JC 153-59.

\(^{83}\) JC 167.
and divine faithfulness, which will be addressed in the next chapter.\textsuperscript{84} Within \textit{Jesus der Christus}, however, Kasper offered a few noteworthy points in explanation of his meaning.\textsuperscript{85} Kasper had apparently adopted the substance of Karl Barth's claim that only God's faithfulness to creation can ultimately account for any continuity between death and life.\textsuperscript{86} For Kasper, this meant that in the appearances of Christ to the disciples, something inconceivably new had taken place in history, unparalleled by any other event: the eschatological glory of God manifested itself in time. This is not to say, however, that the disciples were purely passive recipients of these theophanies, paralyzed as it were by the glory of God radiating from the countenance of Christ. In order to emphasize the disciples' free involvement with the risen Christ in these theophanies, Kasper described each of these encounters with Christ as a “believing seeing” and as an experience in faith.\textsuperscript{87} He could therefore distinguish between a subjective dimension of these appearances—the emergence of the disciples' faith in the resurrection—and the, so to speak, objective (though not concretely tangible) basis thereof—the Risen Christ making himself known to the disciples in the Spirit.\textsuperscript{88} In addition, the disciples' free assent to faith in Christ gained a certain plausibility in view of the hope common to all human beings for an answer to the question of the meaning of reality, which for the disciples took the form of an eschatological

\textsuperscript{84} Below, pp. 309ff.

\textsuperscript{85} On the theological basis of faith, see JC 162-67, esp. 166-67.


\textsuperscript{87} JC 166. On faith as fulfillment of human freedom, see ibid., 252-54.

\textsuperscript{88} Kasper eschewed the term “objective” in this context in order to avoid suggesting that the resurrection was a concretely tangible event. Here the term is used to emphasize that the faith of the disciples has its basis in reality and not just in their minds. See JC 166.
hope for a general resurrection of the dead. Against Barth, Kasper argued precisely on the basis of God's fidelity to creation that anthropological factors provided the apostles, no less than the Christians who followed them, a grammar without which the meaning of the resurrection could not be spelled out.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on this question of the basis of resurrection faith, both because of its importance to the argument of Jesus der Christus and its connection to the main theme of the present study. Kasper argued that something absolutely new, without parallel in the whole of history, had taken place in the story of Jesus. He found this novelty concentrated especially in Jesus's claim that the coming Reign of God had mysteriously entered history in his person and ministry. Since the historical record alone cannot verify this point, however, Kasper turned to the resurrection kerygma in search of some new content that could definitively clarify the newness of Jesus's life. His emphasis on the singularity of Jesus, and of his resurrection in particular, bears the influence not only of Schelling's search for the event that mediates between the Absolute and finite spirit but also of the Christological constriction of Barth's theology.

From such a perspective, any assertion of a "correlation" or "analogy" between the resurrection and other events within the history of religions must be regarded as a reductivist distortion of Christian faith.

The point of Kasper's insistence on the novelty of the resurrection was to maintain its origin in the sovereign freedom of God, whom Jesus claimed was actively present in his

\[89\] See JC 168-69.

\[90\] See JC 161.

\[91\] On Christological constriction in Barth's theology, see von Balthasar, Theology of Karl Barth (see p. 16n35, above), 241-43.

\[92\] In this context Kasper criticized a "law of analogy" that he found operative in historical-critical thinking, a law that elevated the universal over the particular. See JC 40; compare 172.
ministry. In so doing, Kasper intended (among other things) to safeguard the dialogical structure of salvation history on which his (not yet fully articulated) theory of analogy and the basic pattern of his theological thinking depended. Yet because he apparently excluded every kind of “analogy” between the resurrection and other historical events, one may ask whether he also managed to preserve the role of the human partner in the dialogue of salvation history. If one is not allowed to assert any correspondence between the resurrection and intra-historical reality, can one legitimately invoke anthropological considerations in interpreting the resurrection?\footnote{John P. Galvin raised a similar question when he asked whether Kasper's resurrection theology, which Galvin regarded as an attempt to mediate between Rahner and Pannenberg, was in fact tenable. See Galvin, “Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics” (see p. 17n36, above), 143-44.}

The question here is whether the rhetoric of newness in \textit{Jesus der Christus} was consistent with Kasper's own presuppositions, or whether it in fact represented a lapse into an idealist form of thought.\footnote{I am indebted to William P. Loewe for posing the question of lingering idealist influence on Kasper's thought.} 'Idealist' in this context describes any form of thinking that collapses the plurality that is an irreducible feature of history and dialogue into a single principle from which all truth and all reality may be systematically deduced.\footnote{To be sure, the 'single principle' with which Kasper has most often associated idealism is the transcendental subject. See Kasper, “Anthropologische Aspekte der Busse,” ThQ 163 (1983): 98n14.} The early Schelling's attempt to derive a comprehensive system from the “identity of identity and identity” represents a classic example.\footnote{On Schelling's idealist system and its collapse, see above, pp. 81-98.} Kasper also found a “theological idealism” operative both in biblical fundamentalism and in a “magisterial mysticism” that would seek to ground all truth claims in the infallibility of the Pope.\footnote{Kasper, “Schrift und Tradition” (see p. 20n46, above), 212-13; Kasper, “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” 162-63. Compare Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” in GG 22.} The same logical structure can (in Hans Urs von Balthasar's judgment, with which
Kasper agreed) be discerned in the radical Christocentrism of the theology of Barth.\textsuperscript{98} Did Kasper in his insistence on the singularity of the resurrection make essentially the same mistake as Barth, thus stumbling into a way of thinking he himself has often criticized as less adequate to the theological task than historical, dialogical thought?

The idealist leanings of Kasper's rhetoric in \textit{Jesus der Christus} may be attributed to the fact that he had not yet clearly articulated his own doctrine of analogy by the time he composed this book. In contrast to this rhetoric, the basic tendency within \textit{Jesus der Christus}, which was already in evidence in \textit{Das Absolute in der Geschichte},\textsuperscript{99} seems to point in the direction of the historical analogy of freedom formulated in \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}.\textsuperscript{100} Following Schelling's lead, Kasper looked to God's self-revelation in Jesus for a new and undeducible event capable of grounding the element of newness characteristic of liberated human freedom. This very manner of posing the question already presupposed some proportion between the newness of human freedom and that of God's free act of salvation.\textsuperscript{101} Accordingly, Kasper (in his critique of Rahner) described the relationship between anthropology and Christology as a similarity tempered by a still greater dissimilarity “in the sense of the classical doctrine of analogy.”\textsuperscript{102} That Kasper took seriously the element of similarity mentioned here (which was the point of Rahner's description of Christology as self-transcendent anthropology) appeared, as has been seen above, in his


\textsuperscript{99} See above, pp. 92-98.

\textsuperscript{100} On analogy in \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}, see above, pp. 112-18.

\textsuperscript{101} It may be recalled that Kasper considered “newness” to be characteristic of freedom as such, and not only divine freedom. See JC 70.

\textsuperscript{102} JC 61. Kasper's judgment on the relationship between transcendentality and history in Rahner's thought, and by extension on that between anthropology and Christology, developed significantly in the decade and a half that followed the publication of \textit{Jesus der Christus}. See pp. 399-408, below.
willingness to assert the fully human and free character of resurrection faith in spite of his contrasting claims about the unparalleled newness of the resurrection. Hence he spoke of an analogy between the faith of all Christians and the first disciples’ faith in the resurrection; he similarly discerned an analogy even between the faith of Christians and Jesus's own faith in the Father. Moreover, Kasper justified incorporating a human element into faith in the resurrection, something Barth would not allow, on the grounds of the very same reality with which Barth accounted for the continuity between the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ proclaimed by the apostles, namely, God's faithfulness to creation. “God in his fidelity takes up the hopes that he himself implanted in his creatures.” Even as regards the resurrection, then, there is similarity, if also a still greater dissimilarity, between divine and human freedom; there is an analogy of freedom within the analogy of faith; there is a theology from below that provides the concepts needed to understand the apostolic theology from above.

This raises the issue of the interpretation of the content of Easter faith: how has the resurrection of Jesus addressed the questions raised by Jesus's history and the question raised by history as such? The above discussion of the basis of resurrection-faith points to Kasper's first response to this question: as the revelation of divine glory, the resurrection has answered the question about God. The hoped-for new aeon has broken into history in the resurrection of Jesus.

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103 See JC 130, 167.
104 JC 161.
105 This phrase alludes to a formula coined by Gottlieb Söhngen and adopted by Hans Urs von Balthasar, which expressed their synthesis between the Catholic tradition of analogy and what Barth called the “analogy of faith.” See Söhngen, “Analogia entis in Analogia fidei,” in Antwort (Festschrift for Karl Barth), ed. Ernst Wolf (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), 266-71; von Balthasar, Theology of Karl Barth, 381-85; Palakeel, Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse (see p. 10n13, above), 134-36, 144-45, 149-51. On Kasper's reception of this synthesis, see above, pp. 115-16.
106 On Kasper's interpretation of the resurrection, see JC 168-88. The order of Kasper's three points has been altered here in order more clearly to reflect parallels with the three chapters of the third major division of Jesus der Christus, “Das Geheimnis Jesu Christi.”
It has thus confirmed definitively what was already “the most fundamental of all confessions of faith,” namely, “faith in the creative potency and in the faithfulness of God.”\textsuperscript{107} The resurrection has revealed in an unsurpassable way who God is:

the one whose power embraces life and death, being and nonbeing, who is creative love and fidelity, the power of the new life, on whom one can therefore rely unconditionally, even when all human potentialities have been shattered. The resurrection of Jesus is the revelation and realization of the Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus. In raising Jesus from the dead God has proven his faithfulness in love and has definitively identified himself with Jesus and his cause.\textsuperscript{108}

Since this cause, the Reign of God's mercy and love, was nothing other than the dawn of peace and justice for the world, the resurrection has also answered the question about human existence. By raising Jesus, God has brought about the redemption of the world: the liberation of women and men from sin, from death, and from the law, which has freed them for love. As the realization in Jesus's person of the universal salvation that had always been his 'cause,' the resurrection is “definitive proof” of what the history of salvation had always hinted at, “God's faithfulness, justice, and love.”\textsuperscript{109} At the same time, by validating the unity that Jesus maintained unto death between this cause and his person, it has demonstrated God's faithfulness to the man Jesus. Jesus embodied the love and mercy for human beings of the one he called Father. By raising Jesus, God has exalted his being-for-others so that Jesus is, for all times and places, the concrete form of existence of the new aeon, the living parable of divine fidelity, the Reign in person. The unbreakable faithfulness of God to creation and covenant has established the continuity and identity between the crucified Jesus and his abiding pneumatic presence in the world, both within the new communion he gathers to himself—his mystical Body, the Church—

\textsuperscript{107} JC 169.
\textsuperscript{108} JC 169.
\textsuperscript{109} JC 171.
and beyond, without restrictions in time and space.\textsuperscript{110} Thus, thirdly, the resurrection has answered the question about Jesus himself. Jesus is the Christ: his person is the salvation of the world.

3. The trinitarian and Christological explication of God's faithfulness in Jesus Christ

In the third section of \textit{Jesus der Christus}, Kasper embarked on an ambitious project. Having argued that the definitive truth about God and about all creation was revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, he then attempted to tease out the implications of this view by developing a Christic soteriology and vision of all reality. This was a complex task, involving a rereading of the whole dogmatic tradition in light of Kasper’s two-stage Christology and a careful development of the metaphysical and soteriological content of the same Christology. Articulating this content within the grammar provided by his analogy of freedom, Kasper succeeded in drawing up the main lines of a personalistic ontology centered on the person of Christ. The key point for the purposes of this study is that Kasper’s Christic interpretation of reality enabled him to connect the theology of the Trinity with his fundamental vision of God as faithful, to develop an anthropology in which the faithfulness of God meant the salvation of human beings, and to disclose the soteriological content of the Christological doctrine of the council of Chalcedon, which for Kasper meant that Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, personally embodies God's faithfulness and love for the world.

In his reflections on Jesus as Son of God, Kasper expanded on the theological “revolution” latent in God's self-revelation in the death and resurrection of Christ.\textsuperscript{111} The identification of the Crucified with the Risen that took place in the resurrection meant that God

\textsuperscript{110} See JC 172.

\textsuperscript{111} See JC 198. On the Son Christologies presented in the Bible, see ibid., 191-203; on the pre-Nicene period and the Council of Nicea, see ibid., 203-11.
was present and active in the lowliness of Jesus's human history, particularly in his obedience unto death. This implied an unprecedented vision of God for which neither the Jews nor the Gentiles were entirely prepared. Admittedly, for Kasper, the biblical experience of God as the living God of history basically tended toward the Christian vision. While the Old Testament took it for granted that the God of Israel was eternal, it did not understood this eternity in Greek essentialist fashion as “immobility, unchangeability and timelessness” but rather as “mastery of time, which demonstrates its identity [over time] not through an abstract self-identity considered apart from all relationships but through concrete, historical fidelity.”

The apostolic kerygma, however, focused this vision with scandalous concreteness on the person of Jesus as the unsurpassed fulfillment of God’s promise to be present with the covenant people on their sojourn through history. The Arian controversy forced the Church at the Council of Nicea (325) to express this Easter faith in the language of Greek philosophy in order to confute Arius’s static, impassible God-concept in unambiguous terms: the Son is “true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father,” that is, the Son stands on the same level of existence as the Father. The councils of Nicea and Constantinople I (381) managed not only to safeguard God's freedom to act in salvation history but also to develop the fundamental concepts for a completely new vision of God and the created world, a 'personal' interpretation of reality. In the process, however, they unwittingly ratified a paradigm shift in theology that largely took ontological categories like the divine attribute of apatheia and not the biblical witness as the starting point of reflection on God and Jesus. The councils did not carry the “revolution” to its completion.

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112 JC 207.
113 See JC 208.
114 JC 209.
Kasper’s criticism of the metaphysical tradition had nothing to do with a rejection of the divinity of Christ, but with its interpretation in terms that expressed its salvific as well as ontological content. Judging the theologies of Martin Luther and Piet Schoonenberg to be admirable, if conceptually inadequate, attempts to point Christological reflection back to the soteriological concerns of the biblical account, Kasper found a significant advance over essentialist metaphysical Christology only in the German Idealists. Within the context of the modern turn to the subject, Hegel found in the cross the exterior presentation of the immanent history of absolute Spirit, that is, the revelation of God as Subject, not in a self-enclosed sense, but in the sense of One who realizes Oneself precisely in giving Oneself away to an Other. While Kasper criticized Hegel in the spirit of Schelling for transforming the cross into a necessary law of history, he nevertheless thought that he could modify Hegel's insight in terms of the analogy of freedom by conceiving of the Gottsein of God “as freedom in love, which comes to itself to the extent that it gives itself away.”

But God can prove himself to be that self-communicating love in the history of Jesus Christ only if he is this love in himself: if, that is, he is in himself the identity and difference between free appeal open to free response and free response open to free acceptance in love.

Kasper thus presented the mystery of the immanent Trinity not as an abstract, esoteric doctrine but as the transcendental condition for the possibility of God’s radical faithfulness to creation, manifested unsurpassably in the self-communication of God to human beings in Jesus Christ. For

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115 On the question of dehellenization in Christology, see JC 211-13.

116 On Jesus's divine Sonship in the theological tradition after Nicea, see JC 213-15; on Hegel's interpretation of the cross as the epiphany of Jesus's Sonship, see ibid., 215-18.

117 JC 218. For Kasper's reading of Jesus's divine Sonship, see ibid., 218-21.

118 Here the English translation is quoted: Kasper, Jesus the Christ, trans. V. Green (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1976), 183. The German of the final clause is difficult to render: “wenn er also in sich selbst die Identität und die Differenz zwischen freiem und freilassendem Anruf und freier und freilassender Antwort in der Liebe ist” [emphasis Kasper's]. JC 218.
Kasper, the doctrine of the Trinity means that free, self-surrendering Love constitutes within the Godhead the difference between the Father and the Son even as it reconciles this difference from eternity. Within this divine act of love can be found the presupposition and model for reconciling every earthly form of alienation and division, even death on a cross. Moreover, the surplus of freedom in the love between the Father and the Son, which Kasper identified as the Holy Spirit later in the book, means that God can remain God while extending this love to what is other than God, liberating new daughters and sons in time and equipping them in turn for self-giving love.\(^{119}\) “So God's eternity is not rigid, abstract, and relationship-free self-identity, it is rather God's identity in becoming different; God's eternity, then, proves itself through his fidelity in history.”\(^{120}\) God’s faithfulness to the world finds its eternal foundation in the Trinity, in the Father’s faithful love for the Son and the Son's faithful response to the Father in love.

In the light of the personal and interpersonal (triune) reality of God, love proves to be the meaning of all reality.\(^{121}\) This does not mean that love has become a logical or metaphysical necessity, which would negate the freedom of human beings not to love, but that the Son's personal form of existence has revealed that being-wholly-from-the-Father is also the perfection and realization of human freedom and the quintessence of the salvation of the world. In other words, God's gracious self-communication in Jesus Christ has manifested the faithfulness of God to creation not by overriding the immanent structures of historical human existence, but by bringing about the surpassing fulfillment of creation precisely in and through these structures. In this connection, Kasper invoked the Scholastic axiom: “Gratia non destruit naturam, sed supponit

\(^{119}\) For a pneumatological explication of this surplus of freedom in divine love, see JC 296-97, as well as the discussion of this passage on pp. 209-10, below.

\(^{120}\) JC 220.

\(^{121}\) On the soteriological meaning of Christ's divine Sonship, see JC 221-30.
et perficit naturam.” This dynamism of presupposing and bringing to fulfillment was apparent in Jesus's whole ministry on behalf of God's Reign. It was illustrated in a distinctive way by Jesus's parables, which took up images from Palestinian agrarian life as images for the hidden presence of the Reign of God. Jesus's miracles likewise showed that the salvation God promises does not bypass the body but respects the incarnate character of human existence and brings it to wholeness. At the same time, these miracles, like Jesus's ministry as a whole, did not compel faith but respected the freedom of people to reject him. The mystery of God's “fidelity as creator and author of the covenant” has been disclosed above all inasmuch as the Father has allowed Jesus's faith, his free, human act of obedience unto death, to be the means by which the Father brought about the salvation of the world. In Jesus, God has revealed that faith, as total devotion to God and total availability for others, means not the subjugation of human freedom but its liberation from the anxiety to establish the conditions for its fulfillment, from slavery to intramundane values, and from the compulsion to dominate others.

To help him demonstrate that the salvation accomplished in Jesus's being-for-others was no violation of the relative autonomy proper to the human creature but rather the supreme expression of God's faithfulness to creation, Kasper developed in the chapter titled “Jesus Christ, Son of Man” a theological anthropology in terms of concrete, personal freedom. This

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122 JC 227.
123 See JC 88.
124 See JC 111, 112-14.
125 See JC 112, 115-16.
126 JC 270-71; see also 246-47.
127 For Kasper's understanding of Christian freedom, see JC 252-54.
anthropology may be summarized in five points.\textsuperscript{128} Kasper's anthropology may be designated, firstly, as incarnational, since he presented the body not as an alien dimension superadded to the soul but as essential to human being-in-relation to the world and to other human beings and thus intrinsic to personal existence. It is, secondly, social or solidary inasmuch as one's own existence is always already qualified by one's relationships with others, or as Schelling put it: the conditions for one's freedom are only established by one's encounter with another free person. Thirdly, it is historical, since Kasper regarded the bodily and social structures of human existence as potentialities that could in the concrete either promote or preclude an integrated, meaningful life, depending on the concrete choices of actual persons. According to Kasper's reading of the doctrine of original sin, however, human freedom has in fact perverted these basic structures into a curse. Thus, fourthly, Kasper's is an anthropology of the Fall: a shared situation of disaster has become the decisive precondition of all human activity, such that selfishness and violence now present themselves as the only way to master the cycle of selfishness and violence and so to attain one's own well-being. Fifthly, however, this anthropology is open to redemption inasmuch as the structures of human solidarity make it possible that one human being should be a representative of all others, that his or her free activity could modify the situation of everyone else.\textsuperscript{129} If it were possible, therefore, for Someone not subject to the fallen condition of human history to enter into this history and in so doing to accomplish something radically new in time, this would constitute nothing less than a new beginning, a fundamental transformation of the human situation.

\textsuperscript{128} For the main lines of Kasper's theological anthropology, see JC 237-45.

\textsuperscript{129} Kasper's notion of representation specifies in light of Christ the openness of the structures of human solidarity to salvation. See JC 263-69.
This anthropology represented Kasper's translation of what Anselm called the “order of justice” in his much misunderstood theory of satisfaction.130 “By binding himself to the order of justice, God preserves the honor due to man, preserves man’s freedom, and remains faithful to his creation. God's self-binding to the order of justice thus expresses God's faithfulness as creator.”131 In other words, through Jesus’s being-for-others, God has entered into the structures of solidarity that are intrinsic to historical human existence and transformed them from within into the structures through which God is now bringing about the renewal of the human condition, liberation, reconciliation, and peace.132 Schelling's phenomenology of freedom is key to this vision: my freedom is awakened, nourished, and supported only by my encounter with another freedom. Because Jesus, in his obedience to the Father, embodies not the fallen freedom of the children of Adam but authentic, liberated human freedom—something qualitatively new in history—an encounter with Jesus is the condition of the possibility of my liberation from sin and self.133 Jesus is therefore the beginning of a new humanity, the new Adam, the unique representative of all human beings before God, the savior of the world: he has liberated human beings from bondage to sin and freed them for love of others. The renewed solidarity established by the death and resurrection of Jesus, his continued redemptive presence in history, has taken concrete shape in the establishment of the Church, which is the abiding sign of this definitive


131 JC 262.

132 On Jesus as representative of the new humanity, see JC 254-69, esp. 263-69.

133 Again, however, Kasper qualified the newness of Jesus's freedom in view of analogous acts of loving self-transcendence inspired by the Spirit in persons of good will throughout time and space. His point was that Jesus, as the one anointed by the Spirit, is the mediator and the criterion of authentic human freedom. See JC 320-22.
reconciliation and restored communion between human beings and God.\textsuperscript{134} This same solidarity, however, since it is “grounded in God's faithfulness as creator and author of the covenant,” necessarily requires Christians to be “faithful to the earth,” that is, to engage in historical praxis in service of the Reign rather than abandoning the world.\textsuperscript{135}

For Kasper, therefore, the person of Jesus as the manifestation of God's eschatological faithfulness in history embodied the salvation of humankind. Against this soteriological background, however, how is one to understand the doctrine of the hypostatic union, which has since become the starting point for over 1500 years of theological reflection on the person of Jesus? Is a Christology of reciprocity compatible with a traditional two-nature Christology? In the climactic final chapter of \textit{Jesus der Christus}, Kasper ventured his own account of the unity of Christ's two natures against the background of the soteriological-speculative question of how a mediation between God and human beings is even conceivable. He developed this account in two parts: first, he argued that an ontological union between divinity and humanity in Jesus would in no way cancel out, but would posit and enable Jesus's human freedom, provided that it appropriately construed the personhood of Jesus and accounted for the role of the Spirit in this union;\textsuperscript{136} second, he presented this same Jesus as salvation in person, the hermeneutical key to the mediation between God and human beings that takes place in salvation history.\textsuperscript{137} The resulting Christology in Trinitarian perspective represented a speculative unpacking of what

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{134} On the Church as sign of Jesus's abiding presence in the structures of human solidarity, see JC 186-88; see also 179.

\textsuperscript{135} “Christliche Hoffnung ist vielmehr begründet in der Schöpfer- und Bundestreue Gottes; sie ist daher der Erde treu.” JC 183. Kasper was alluding to a line from Nietzsche, which he later situated in its broader context in DG 62. See Oscar Levy, ed., \textit{The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche}, vol. 11, \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra}, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Gordon Press, 1974), 7 (Zarathustra's Prologue, no. 3).

\textsuperscript{136} See JC 270-300.

\textsuperscript{137} See JC 301-22.
\end{footnotes}
Kasper, like Barth, regarded as a key element of faith in the resurrection, namely, that the identification of the Crucified with the Risen rests “solely on God's creative fidelity.”

The assertion that Jesus is the one mediator between God and human beings is basic to the Church's confession of faith in Christ. Kasper discerned a historical basis for this assertion in the story of Jesus, who taught and behaved “like someone who stands in place of God.” The question facing Christian faith was how this unity between God and man could be adequately expressed using the metaphysical categories available to Christians. While two Christological patterns found in the New Testament, *pneuma-sarx* (spirit-flesh) and *logos-sarx* (word-flesh), allowed one to predicate both human and divine attributes of the one subject, Jesus, neither pattern directly addressed the issue of Jesus's inner constitution. When this metaphysical question was raised, it became necessary to point out that Jesus's unreserved obedience to the Father presupposed the Father's gracious communication of the divine essence to Jesus—that is, Jesus's unity with the *Logos*, the second Person of the Trinity. Yet although Logos Christology proved better able than the *pneuma-sarx* pattern to safeguard this unity, the tradition's subsequent struggle to understand the nature of this unity has disclosed the dangers latent in this paradigm. Kasper unfolded this tradition-history as an apparently intractable dialectic between the assertion that the *Logos* plays a profound and fundamental role in the divine-human union in Jesus, to which the human element is in no way comparable or parallel, and the defense of the humanly

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138 JC 271; see also 161, 172.

139 JC 270.

140 On the traditional explication of Jesus's mediatorship, see JC 270-83.

141 See Rom. 1:3-4, which describes Jesus as “descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead,” and 1 Tim. 3:16, which confesses that Jesus “was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

142 See John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”
free participation of the man Jesus in this same union. In attempting to deduce the ontological constitution of Jesus from an analysis of the two-natures-one-person formula, speculative Christology after the Council of Chalcedon (451) was attempting the impossible: to mediate between divinity and humanity from within the horizon of a Greek metaphysics of essence rather than the eschatological perspective of the Bible, where Jesus's relationship with the Father stands at the center of salvation history. To be sure, Kasper thought that biblical eschatology had planted a seed in metaphysical discourse in the form of the distinction between nature and person that emerged out of the early ecumenical councils. This seed, however, had not yet matured into a metaphysics capable of illuminating the mystery of the one Mediator between God and humanity.

This suggested to Kasper that an adequate answer to the question of the unity between God and man in Jesus ought to go beyond the framework established by the Council of Chalcedon and to reflect more deeply on Jesus's personal existence within the horizon of an ontology of freedom and person. Kasper asked: can one consistently affirm the full humanity of Jesus without also affirming that he is a human person? But how can one say that Jesus is a human person without contradicting the authoritative Christological tradition of the Church?

Having reviewed other twentieth-century efforts to interpret the doctrine of Chalcedon, Kasper began his own account of the person of Jesus with a phenomenology and ontology of personal existence. Recapitulating his anthropology, Kasper described personal existence as essentially mediation, a mode of existence that unites uniqueness (my experience of being a unique and irreplaceable I) and universality (my openness to all reality). In a person's relationships with self,

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143 See JC 287-88, 290.

144 For Kasper's elaboration of a Christology from below grounded in the concept of person, see JC 284-93.
the world, other persons, and finally with God, the person mediates between the concrete here-
and-now and the whole of being. In the finite person, however, this mediation is never an
accomplished fact, but a task marked by a constant state of tension between individual and
society, person and person, human being and God, a tension that leaves the person in a state of
unrest. The significance of this tension is uncertain: will it eventually pull one to pieces, or can
one by enduring it and the suffering it entails finally accomplish the sought-after mediation? A
particular human person might just as easily move one to despair over the human condition as
she or he could strengthen one's hope that human beings can find redemption. Considered in the
abstract, personal existence raises the question of a mediation between God and human beings,
but it does not provide the answer.

Kasper's reflection on personal existence yielded several results indispensable to his
interpretation of the doctrine of Chalcedon. It indicated, first, that concrete, personal being-in-
relation was the place to look for a possible mediation between God and humanity in history.
This legitimated Kasper's turn to history, particularly to the history of Jesus, in search of the
more-than-historical reality that tradition has called the hypostatic union. Because this account of
personal existence included metaphysical reflection, however, it provided, second, an ontological
grammar with which Kasper could describe the metaphysics of what took place in this history.
Third, it expressed conditions that an alleged mediator would have to fulfill in order that the
mediation he or she (or they?) accomplished could be understood as the preservation and
perfection, rather than the destruction, of human personhood. This is not to say that one could
decide a priori whether and how the sought-after mediation might have taken place. Kasper in

145 On the necessity and the limitations of a philosophical Christology “from below,” see JC 292-93.

146 “If, however, we take seriously the irreversibility of the modern perspective, we cannot formulate the
essence of the person from a universal ontology, but we must on the contrary formulate our ontology on the basis of
the reality of the person, that is, we must conceive ontology personalistically and the person ontologically.” JC 287.
fact denied that it was possible to deduce purely “from below” that this mediation had taken place in a single divine-human mediator.\footnote{JC 293; see also 60-61.} For Kasper, one is left to seek in history some concrete sign indicating 'that' God has carried out this mediation between God and human beings as well as 'how' this has been accomplished.

Fourth and finally, by conceiving of human personhood in terms of mediation, Kasper established the terms that enabled him to affirm that Jesus is not only the second Person of the Trinity but also, in some sense, a human person.\footnote{Kasper did not think it permissible to call Jesus a human person where this meant a denial of his identity as the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. In some contexts he has implied that affirming that Jesus is a human person meant denying that he is the eternal Son. See JC 289; “Christologie von unten,” 146; “Für eine Christologie in geschichtlicher Perspektive: Replik auf die Anmerkungen von Hans Küng,” in Grundfragen der Christologie heute, 182.} This leads to Kasper's interpretation of the hypostatic union.\footnote{For Kasper's interpretation of the hypostatic union, see JC 293-96.} He took as his starting point Jesus's understanding of his own personal existence wholly “from above,” as obedience to the Father. This obedience, however, took the form of unrestricted being-for-others. In his obedience, Jesus is totally distinct from the Father; in his being-for-others, however, Jesus totally identifies himself with the Father's self-outpouring love for humanity. Kasper interpreted this unity-in-distinction between Jesus and the Father ontologically: “Since he [Jesus] is nothing besides, apart from, or before this obedience, he is also totally this self-communication of God.”\footnote{JC 294; see also 274.} Already in his discussion of the divinity of Jesus Kasper had affirmed, in contradistinction from Rahner and Barth, that even in the eternal, loving communion between the Father and Son, the Son could rightly be called person, albeit in an analogous, non-finite sense of the term, such as that proffered by Hegel.\footnote{See JC 219.} Kasper identified Jesus's person-in-act, his personal obedience, with the Person of this eternal Son, who in the
history of Jesus has been revealed as God's self-communication, the divine Word or *Logos*. There is for Kasper only one 'who' in Jesus, the 'who' of the Word or Son of God.

Kasper's reading of Chalcedon in light of Jesus's obedience preserved what he regarded as the main concern of Alexandrian Christology, the preeminence (hegemony) of the *Logos* within the hypostatic union. Kasper understood this hegemony in such a way that it did not exclude but included human personhood (rightly understood) in Jesus. In other words, Jesus lived the being-in-tension and being-in-relation that are constitutive of the human experience of personhood. Kasper formulated this idea in several different ways. In a first instance, he wrote, “Precisely insofar as Jesus is none other than the Logos, he is also, in and through the Logos, a human person.” Here Kasper came as close as he was willing to come to Schoonenberg’s formula—“Jesus is a human person”—but with the important qualification that this human personhood arises “in and through” the person of the Logos. Kasper paraphrased this first formulation in a second: “The person of the Logos is the human person.” One can recognize in this second formula a restatement of the qualification that appeared in the first if one reads the copula as a Schellingian non-invertible “is,” in which case “the person of the Logos” relates to “the human person” as subject to predicate. A third formula, “The humanity of Jesus lacks nothing since it is human person through the person of the Logos,” highlighted the asymmetrical relationship between Jesus's divine and human personhood through its omission of

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152 On the Logos as the ontological ground of the divine-human unity in Jesus, see JC 274, 276-77, 281-82.

153 “Gerade indem Jesus kein anderer als der Logos ist, ist er im Logos und durch ihn auch eine menschliche Person.” JC 294.


155 “Umgekehrt formuliert: die Person des Logos ist die menschliche Person.” JC 294.

156 See DA 76. For a discussion of the role of this principle in Schelling's understanding of analogy, see above, pp. 86-88.
an otherwise expected article (“human person” rather than “a human person”). Without denying that Jesus is personally identical to the Logos, Kasper was groping for a way to do justice to the Antiochene concern for the full humanity of Jesus in its salvific significance. His solution was to affirm that, precisely because of the hypostatic union, Jesus experienced something analogous to what human beings experience as personhood, and that this experience expressed an ontological reality: Jesus is (a) human person.

Kasper's unusual formulations, which posit a distinction (not a division) between the hypostasis or person of the Logos and Jesus's human personhood, could sound almost Nestorian if the term 'person' were understood in a univocal way. He had no intention, however, of affirming two identities, two 'whos' in Jesus. Rather, Kasper wanted to communicate the reality of the hypostatic union anew in light of contemporary experience of what it means to be a human person. His point was that the personhood that human beings experience in the present day is analogous to the personhood of the eternal Son and that this analogous relationship was realized in an incomparable way in the hypostatic union. This means, on the one hand, that in the incarnation, the person of the Son or Logos becomes present in history as person in a qualitatively new way, that is, he becomes a person in the human sense. On the other hand, the participation of Jesus's humanity in the personhood of the eternal Son (the hypostatic union) is the unsurpassable fulfillment of what it means to be a human person. In Jesus, a Rahnerian axiom is verified: one's autonomy as human being grows in direct proportion to one's union with

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157 “Der Menschheit Jesu fehlt nichts, weil sie durch die Person des Logos menschliche Person ist.” JC 294.

158 This impression is heightened when one notes Kasper's sympathy for Origen's idea of a unity in love between Jesus and the Logos, as well as for the Homo-assumptus theory and Piet Schoonenberg's historical approach to an account of the personhood of Jesus. See JC 276, 282-83, 289.

God. More specifically, because the person of the Son is communion in love with the Father, the hypostatic union posits Jesus's capacity as human to enter into a communion of love, which capacity, in Kasper's terms, is his human personality.\textsuperscript{160} It follows that Jesus possesses a relatively independent human subjectivity, with a human mind and will. Not only does Jesus possess the faculties proper to human persons, however, but he actualizes them to the highest possible degree in his loving act of obedience. The indeterminacy of personal existence received in Jesus its definitive determination: in him the mediation between God and humanity has taken place.

In explaining the hypostatic union using the analogy of personal love, Kasper has not explained away the mystery of the incarnation but underlined the unfathomable depths thereof.\textsuperscript{161} What sort of love is this, that in uniting the Father and the Son so liberates the Son that it sets him free as a human person, to live out his divine personhood in a new and fully human way? One can hear the echoes of Barth's objection: no merely human love could be the principle that unites the eternal Son to the humanity of Jesus; God alone can bring about this union. Kasper thus thought it necessary to move beyond the metaphysical problematic back into the properly theological perspective.\textsuperscript{162} For Kasper, Jesus has revealed God not only by rendering present in history what God has been from eternity—the incomprehensible communion of love between Father and Son—but also by realizing this in history in an undeducibly new way. An inexhaustible Freedom for love, overflowing from the love between Father and Son, also belongs

\textsuperscript{160} Kasper uses different linguistic constructs to refer to Jesus's personal being. On the one hand, he calls Jesus menschliche Person or eine menschliche Person, (a) human person; on the other hand, he speaks of die menschliche Personalität, the human personality of Jesus. In all of these cases, however, Kasper refers to the person of the Logos as the ground of Jesus's human person or personality. See JC 294-95.

\textsuperscript{161} See JC 296.

\textsuperscript{162} For Kasper's outline of a pneumatologically-oriented Christology, see JC 296-300.
to the eternal nature of God; this is what tradition has called the Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit as the personal reality of God's freedom in love is the condition of the possibility within the Godhead of extending the innermost mystery of divine love to what is outside God. Thus the Spirit not only makes possible God's loving act of creation, but also enables a new self-communication of God to creation, the economy of salvation. The Spirit is finally the condition of the possibility of the Incarnation. In Kasper's words:

The Spirit as the bond-become-person of freedom in love between Father and Son is the medium in which the Father sends the Son in freedom and out of pure grace and in which he finds in Jesus the human partner in whom and through whom the Son obediently responds to the mission of the Father in a historical way.\footnote{JC 299-300. This passage, too, has a Nestorian ring, although it could perhaps admit an orthodox interpretation from the perspective of Kasper's analogy of person.}

The hypostatic union does not circumvent the experience of personhood that all human beings share; it rather takes place in and through Jesus's being-for-others in the freedom of the Spirit.\footnote{JC 298. See also Randy L. Stice, “Jesus the Christ: The Christology of Walter Kasper,” \textit{Heythrop Journal} 69 (2008): 247, 249; Brian O. McDermott, “Roman Catholic Christology: Two Recurring Themes,” \textit{Theological Studies} 41 (1980): 343.} The Incarnation is therefore no necessary law of history but an act of divine freedom which empowers, affirms and surpassingly fulfills Jesus's freedom as human person. As a work of the Spirit, the hypostatic union preserves the integrity of creation while bringing it to fulfillment; it is the expression of God's faithfulness to creation than which no greater can be conceived.

In complementing his Logos Christology with this Spirit Christology, Kasper has presented the unity of God and man in Jesus as the definitive reconciliation between a number of perplexing tensions.\footnote{On the mediating work of Jesus the Christ, see JC 301-22.} On the level of systematic theology, Jesus's pneumatic being-for-others unites soteriology and ontology. The world-transforming work of the Spirit, bringing about the Reign of the freedom of the children of God on earth, has reached its goal in Jesus, the new
Adam, the prototype as it were of the successful mediation between God and creation. For Kasper, this pneumatological interpretation of the hypostatic union clarified its status as no mere ontological speculation but a recapitulation of the Christian view of salvation in terms of its central point: “salvation is partaking of the life of God in the Holy Spirit through the mediation of Jesus Christ.” Thus understood, the ancient confession, “Jesus is the Christ”—the Spirit-anointed Messiah—summarizes the whole Gospel. Not only does it provide a foundation for the later systematization of the various images and fragmentary “benefits” of salvation in the traditional doctrine of the three “offices” of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and Shepherd-King—but it also shows how Jesus can be both the unsurpassable high point of the history of human beings transcending themselves out of love for others, thus king over all the nations, and the head in a special way of the official sacrament of his Reign, the community of disciples who publicly testify to his universal kingship, the Church. In this way, Jesus the Christ overcomes the rift between the unique identity and universal relevance of Christianity. Finally, just as the hypostatic union meant a new, temporal realization of the eternal love between the Father and the Son in the freedom of the Spirit, so in an analogous way, the salvation that Christ mediates is no closed ideological panacea for the unpredictable problems of the future but the ever-new manifestation of Jesus's being-for-others in the Spirit as liberation from the forces that enslave human beings today, anticipating in the present moment God's ever-greater tomorrow. Thus, for Kasper, the pneumatic unity between the Crucified and the Risen also reconciles commitment to the past with freedom for the future. It is in the Spirit of prophecy that Jesus is the Truth for the world:

166 JC 301.
his words of hope for the present day have not the definitiveness of an impersonal, inflexible law, but the life-affirming and empowering definitiveness of divine fidelity.\textsuperscript{167}

\textit{C. Conclusion}

The argument of \textit{Jesus der Christus} revolves around the ancient confession of faith that for Kasper expressed the center of the Easter kerygma: Jesus is the Christ. Following Barth, Kasper found the theological basis for this reciprocal unity between the Crucified and the Risen in God's own creative fidelity. However, while Kasper followed Barth in assigning central importance to the disclosure of the faithfulness of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, he interpreted this same faithfulness in order to give more serious consideration than Barth did to the freedom of the human partner in the dialogue of salvation history. This became evident in Kasper's efforts to trace the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas of the early Church back to the revelation of divine faithfulness in Jesus. That Jesus lives on in God's glory on account of God's faithfulness meant for Kasper first of all that Jesus's continuity from death to life has its grounds in the hegemony of the second Person of the Trinity, such that the personal obedience of Jesus is none other than the person of the \textit{Logos}, the eternal Son of God.\textsuperscript{168} Precisely because God is faithful to creation, however, this union posits the freedom of the creature, which meant for Kasper that the obedience of Jesus remains humanly free, that the incarnate Word is a human person.\textsuperscript{169} The Holy Spirit as God's freedom in love mediates between the eternal mystery of God's love and its unsurpassable historical realization in Jesus's free obedience to the Father. The new element disclosed in the resurrection is to be located above all in the outpouring through the

\textsuperscript{167} See JC 311-12.

\textsuperscript{168} See JC 281-82.

\textsuperscript{169} See JC 294-95.
risen Christ of this same Spirit. It is as the Christ anointed by the Spirit that Jesus has become the firstborn of a new creation, the prototype of an economy of salvation that does justice to human freedom and so manifests the faithfulness of God to the whole of creation.

Yet although Kasper made it clear that he intended a different interpretation of the revelation of God's faithfulness in Jesus Christ than Barth, the present study has disclosed elements of his argument that run counter to this intention. In particular, Kasper presented the story of Jesus and especially his resurrection as radically new events that contrast sharply with the rest of history. His main concern in doing so was soteriological: he wanted to find in Jesus an answer to the riddle of human existence, caught in the tension between freedom and necessity. This emphasis on novelty in the story of Jesus also helped Kasper connect Jesus's person to the Holy Spirit, in whom Kasper found the theological condition for the possibility of an undeducibly new, gracious self-communication of God in salvation history, and so bolstered his case for a Spirit-oriented Christology. At times, however, Kasper pushed this rhetoric to the point of suggesting that no analogy or comparison could be drawn between the unique divine-human mediation that has taken place in Jesus's obedience and the divinely liberated freedom of other human beings. This introduced an ambiguity into Kasper's account that undermined his presentation of Jesus as representative of humankind and thus as mediator of salvation by suggesting a complete discontinuity between Jesus and the rest of humanity.

Though the presence of this idealist streak weakens the synthesis proposed in Jesus der Christus, it does not cancel out the positive achievement of the book. Kasper has indicated, even if not entirely consistently, a vision of God's faithfulness to the world in Jesus Christ that responded to the dilemma facing the Church of his day, the dilemma of identity and relevance.

170 So McDermott: “The most significant way in which Kasper uncovers the 'more' in the Resurrection is by developing the outline of a Spirit Christology.” McDermott, “Roman Catholic Christology,” 341.
The Church who takes Jesus the Christ as its criterion and standard does not need to choose between clinging to what is uniquely its own and addressing the problems of its time. Rather, it can recognize in its founder the culmination of the work that the Spirit accomplishes throughout the world in all human histories and cultures. There is in particular an analogy—similarity as well as difference—between the liberation achieved in Jesus and modern consciousness of freedom, which has in turn given rise to various movements of liberation throughout the world. Jesus the Christ is the foundation for a Church whose identity is open to the world, whose dogmatic commitments liberate it for dialogue. Indeed, the Church has something to learn from the world, in which it beholds the ever-new initiatives of the Spirit; at the same time, it has something to teach the world, namely, that all these initiatives in their irreducible newness tend toward the fullness of truth uniquely revealed in the history and destiny of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the one mediator between God and humanity. Through such dialogue, the Church that hopes in God's creative faithfulness lives out its fidelity to the earth.\footnote{See JC 183.}

The same vision of the faithfulness of God revealed in the resurrection also points toward a reconciliation between a Christology grounded in the sometimes scandalous particularities of history and one that seeks to illuminate the mysteries of all reality in the light of divine revelation. In this connection, Thomas Petriano remarked that in \textit{Jesus der Christus}, Kasper was grafting modern research on the historical Jesus to a systematic Christology.\footnote{Thomas Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology? An Analysis of the Tension Between the Two in the Theology of Walter Kasper” (PhD diss., Fordham University, 1998), 138.} To be sure, Kasper's incorporation of historical Jesus research into his Christology was a significant achievement within the history of Catholic systematics. It would do at least as much justice to the structure of Kasper's thought, however, to say that Kasper grafted a systematic reflection on
the dogmatic tradition to a narrative Christology, that is, to his Christology of reciprocity, in which he united a reading of the historical Jesus to a fundamental reflection on the kerygma of the apostles. Kasper's two-stage Christology has incorporated a two-nature Christology, and with this the mainstream of the Christological tradition, while also reinterpreting the latter in view of the former. The tradition thus remains bound to its “Beginning in Fullness.”

Petriano's remark, however, draws attention to the fact that the converse was also true for Kasper: the story of Jesus does not rest in itself but tends in the direction of a tradition that reflects on its universal significance. By every honest and thorough historical account, Jesus's teaching and ministry bore a distinctly eschatological character. The universal claim contained within this eschatological element cries out for some “ontological” interpretation; it precludes any Christology that would purport to be purely “functional.” Kasper insisted that the Christological dogmas of the Church represented a permanently binding interpretation of the story of Jesus, even though their meaning has to be understood in light of the story and integrated into the theological tradition as a whole. A reciprocity therefore exists between historical inquiry into Jesus and the metaphysically-oriented Christological tradition. Theological method in general, and Christological method in particular, must be both historical and speculative.

\[173\] For the Catholic Tübingen School, the ecclesial commitment of theology did not exclude but included an obligation to return to the sources. See Kasper, “Verständnis der Theologie damals und heute,” in GG 21-27, as well as p. 61, above.
II. The Faithfulness of God in Der Gott Jesu Christi

A. From Jesus der Christus to Der Gott Jesu Christi

In his foreword to the first edition of Jesus der Christus, Kasper described the book as primarily a stimulus to further Christological reflection. Its concise, rapid style yielded a readable sketch of Kasper's viewpoint, but left many questions of detail unanswered. Admittedly, in the exegetical section, a subject that falls outside of Kasper's expertise, a summary presentation was practically unavoidable. Even in the systematic portion, however, there were notable gaps. He disposed of the knowledge and free will of Jesus—topics that in other presentations of Christology command a significant amount of attention—in only one paragraph each. Spirit Christology, which some interpreters regard as his principal contribution, received only a few pages of sustained discussion. In a similar way, Jesus der Christus did not really develop “a Christologically determined historical and personal ontology” so much as an outline of such an ontology. This outline was enough to allow Kasper to introduce his interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, but not to provide anything like a full account. Finally, Kasper introduced the vast question of the mediation between God and human beings—theologically speaking, the question of salvation—while only nodding to its connection with the valuation of liberation theology, the possibility of salvation outside the Church, and other timely questions. The book left many tasks unfinished, leaving the door open to a future treatment of these topics.

Kasper's writings in the years immediately following the publication of Jesus der Christus suggested that he himself sensed the need for a further synthesis. In 1975 Kasper published, as a chapter of an anthology of essays dedicated to fundamental questions facing

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174 JC 9.
175 JC 22.
contemporary Christology, a critical assessment of recent formulations of a Christology “from below.” According to Kasper, this new paradigm in Christology emerged out of a cultural situation quite different from that of the classical Christologies “from above”: whereas at one time God had been treated as more or less self-explanatory, while the finitude and sinfulness of human existence presented a fundamental problem to be solved with reference to God, in the present time the human subject is the self-explanatory reality in terms of which all discourse about God, which has since become problematic, must be explained. Attempts to address the central problem of Christology, the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ, from within these new parameters have understandably encountered difficulties owing to the pioneering character of their task and methods. By Kasper’s analysis, the approaches of Karl Rahner and Hans Küng resulted (albeit in different ways) in ambiguities over the decisive question, whether Jesus is indeed the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, or merely a man in whom God is powerfully present. These in turn led to ambiguities about the very mystery of God. In order to point the way forward, Kasper offered a three-thesis summary of the position he took in *Jesus der Christus*, emphasizing, however, the importance of a personalist ontology for drawing out the Trinitarian content of the biblical and historical relationship between Jesus and the Father.

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176 Kasper, “Christologie von unten” (see p. 182n58, above), 141-70.

177 Kasper, “Christologie von unten,” 143.


180 The three theses read: “1. The starting point and boundary-line for Christology is the confession of the church community: ‘Jesus is the Christ.’ . . . 2 . . . The ecclesial confession . . . has its pregiven content and its norm in Jesus the Christ. The content of Christology is thus the earthly Jesus as well as the exalted Christ of faith. . . . 3. Therefore the central Christological problem is, now as ever, the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ, or more concretely: Who is Jesus Christ? . . . The error common [to most Christologies 'from above' and 'from below'] is that they pose the question abstractly, inasmuch as they ask about the unity between divinity and humanity . . . By contrast, Scripture . . . speaks . . . of the personal union of Jesus with 'his Father.' . . . Personal and relational categories are thus to be interpreted as expressions of essence, and communion of essence as personal and relational activity.” Kasper, “Christologie von unten,” 166-67. For Kasper's explanation of his third thesis, see ibid., 167-70.
This approach “from below” allows one to locate within history foundations for speaking of one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and thus to recover an enduring insight of classical Christology “from above,” namely, that essential presuppositions for a mediation between God and human beings can only be found in the triune God.\textsuperscript{181} So the situation of contemporary Christology motivated Kasper to elaborate on the reflections on the Trinity he sketched in \textit{Jesus der Christus}.\textsuperscript{182}

Kasper's insistence in this essay on the “from above” or Trinitarian dimension of a rightly understood Christology “from below” raises the question of whether his own Christology book could, apart from this clarification, be misinterpreted as promoting a Christology exclusively “from below.” Noteworthy in this context is the reading of \textit{Jesus der Christus} presented in Thomas Petriano's doctoral dissertation on Kasper's pneumatically-oriented Christology. Petriano sought in Kasper's Christology text foundations for a Catholic Spirit Christology capable of complementing a rightly understood Logos Christology.\textsuperscript{183} He intended in this fashion to avoid the tendencies of certain revisionist Christologies either to dispose completely of the more traditional Logos-model for Christology or else to subsume this model into a pneumatocentric perspective, since in his judgment, both of these tendencies terminate in either an agnosticism about the triunity of God or a full-blown modalism.\textsuperscript{184} At the same time, he hoped to avoid as rigid a commitment to the received tradition of Logos Christology as some more traditional exponents of Spirit Christology have adopted, since this option only serves in his opinion to

\textsuperscript{181} See Kasper, “Christologie von unten,” 168; compare 142-43.

\textsuperscript{182} For a more explicit call for theology to rediscover its roots in the mystery of God and so to become once again the “science of God” and a “theological theology,” see Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” esp. 196-200.

\textsuperscript{183} See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” chapter one.

\textsuperscript{184} See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” 51-52, 61, 63.
reinforce existing confusion over the doctrine of the Trinity as well as the cryptomonophisitism that so hampers appreciation of Jesus's full humanity in the present. Working from this perspective, Petriano displayed exceptional sensitivity in disclosing pneumatological elements throughout Kasper's presentation in *Jesus der Christus* and made a convincing case that Kasper had shifted away from this pneumatically-oriented Christology by the time he published *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. At the same time, he capitalized on the underdeveloped state of the Trinitarian theology latent in *Jesus der Christus*, finding here an opening for his own “theology from above,” namely, a binitarian theology along the lines of J. P. Mackey's *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, in which “Word” and “Spirit” identify the self-same surplus of freedom in the Father's love for the Son, that is, for the man Jesus. Petriano was therefore disappointed to find in *Der Gott Jesu Christi* clear affirmations of the “literal” eternal preexistence of a Son or Logos personally distinct from the Spirit, and he identified these as symptoms of Kasper's departure from his earlier and more promising pneumatic orientation.

While there are good reasons to criticize Petriano's interpretation of Kasper, it may in fact contain a grain of truth. Kasper's Spirit Christology, whose fundamental thesis was that the Holy Spirit mediates between the Logos and the man Jesus in the hypostatic union, apparently asserted that the Logos is incapable of entering into creation except by the mediation of the Spirit. This suggestion, as well as Kasper's apparent rejection of other solutions to the mediation problem

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185 Petriano cites Philip Rosato as an example. See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” 35. On the dangers of an unchecked Logos Christology, see ibid., chapter five.

186 See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” chapters three and four.


188 That this is what Petriano intended when he spoke of a complementarity between Logos and Spirit Christologies, or of “the related missions of the Spirit and Christ . . . as two aspects of God's self-communication” (283), is suggested by his preferred reading of the Old Testament data on the relationship between the Logos and the Spirit. See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” 9-11, 52-53, 179n109.
through a Christology of kenosis, seemed to relativize the salvific significance of the Logos.\textsuperscript{189} Taken together, they effectively render the eternal Son a static, impassible, absolutely transcendent principle, incapable of any meaningful interaction with the created world. The resulting divide between the Son and creation places the burden of divine involvement with human beings and the vicissitudes of human history solely on the Spirit. Since this divide also stands between the Son and the human being Jesus, it resonates with a few Nestorian-sounding remarks that were pointed out in the above analysis of \textit{Jesus der Christus}. In short, a number of factors indicated the need for a sequel to \textit{Jesus der Christus}, a need that Kasper himself perceived.

\textit{B. The Narrative of Der Gott Jesu Christi}

From the outset of this inquiry, it must be acknowledged that in \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}, the language of faithfulness has nowhere near the same prominence that it had in \textit{Jesus der Christus}.\textsuperscript{190} As was argued above, the theology of the resurrection and much of the systematic reflection articulated in \textit{Jesus der Christus} involved an extended unpacking of Barth's dictum that the only possible grounds for any continuity of the creature from death to new life is the faithfulness of God to creation and covenant. By contrast, Kasper was addressing a different set of dialogue-partners in \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}, most of whom were not as interested as Barth in the resurrection of the dead. Kasper articulated his theology of the Trinity against the background of the question of how responsible God-talk was possible at all in light of the objections raised by modern atheism in the name of human autonomy. In this context, it made sense to give priority to the defense of the metaphysical dimension of language and thought presupposed by

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\textsuperscript{189} On Kasper's rejection of 17th- and 19th-century Protestant kenosis Christologies as well as his critique of Barth's solution, see JC 42-43.
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\textsuperscript{190} Direct predications of \textit{Treue} to God may be found in DG 188, 242. Kasper similarly spoke of God's \textit{Verlässlichkeit}: see ibid., 15, 135, 292.
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the traditional doctrine of God rather than the critique of metaphysical categories in light of the salvation-historical perspective of the Bible. This choice resulted in a significant difference in emphasis between *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi*.

This shift in emphasis did not mean, however, that Kasper was abandoning the task he had begun in *Jesus der Christus*, namely, to retrieve the metaphysical content of traditional theology from within the horizon of history and freedom. On the contrary, *Der Gott Jesu Christi* took up and refined the historical analogy of freedom that was indispensable to the description of God as faithful developed by Kasper in *Jesus der Christus*. Indeed, Kasper thought that the only way to address the modern objection to faith on behalf of human autonomy was to reformulate the doctrine of God according to the analogy of freedom. Given this and the connection drawn by chapter three between Kasper's analogy of freedom and his use of the language of faithfulness, it should be no surprise that Kasper established a connection between the main thesis he advanced in *Der Gott Jesu Christi*—that the only answer to modern atheism was the doctrine of the Trinity—191—and the faithfulness of God. From the perspective opened up by Kasper's analogy of freedom, the monotheistic faith of the Bible meant that the God of Israel was the sovereign Lord of history, the one source of creation, who gives meaning and purpose to all reality and thus also enables and supports human freedom. It is because God had proven to be faithful in the history of Israel that the Jews also experienced the world as a realm of freedom. Thus, one way Kasper expressed the humanistic content of monotheism was by speaking of the faithfulness of God. The significance of this fact becomes clear when one observes that Kasper presented the doctrine of the Trinity as the concrete Christian exposition of monotheistic faith.

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191 See DG 9, 381, 382.
One could therefore argue that for Kasper the doctrine of the Trinity is the answer to modern atheism precisely as the exposition of the claim that God is faithful to creation.

1. Reconstructing the question about the faithful God

Whereas Moltmann's identity-relevance dilemma helped set Kasper's agenda in *Jesus der Christus*, in *Der Gott Jesu Christi* one finds in its place the question of God.\(^{192}\) By this Kasper did not mean the question, “Does God exist?”—which, considered abstractly, may be answered “no” as easily as “yes”—but the question underlying this one: “What does 'God' mean?” In other words: how is belief in God a meaningful option for human beings? The salient point for the present inquiry is that even within the first few pages of his book, Kasper connected this question of God with the theme of divine faithfulness. On the one hand, Kasper observed that all the Christian traditions have recognized in their own ways the transcendental character of the question of God, which is not simply one question among others but the question that underlies all other questions, the basic question of metaphysics, the question about the unity of the whole of reality. On the other hand, these traditions have expressed the fundamental character of this question in different ways, generating different definitions or preapprehensions of God. Noting Aquinas's and Anselm's philosophical definitions of God, Kasper contrasted these with the existential notion of God provided by Luther, in which God became, in Kasper's words,

the one who turns hardships around, who bears and supports the human being in the distresses of his or her existence, the one on whom one can rely unconditionally, on whom one can build one's existence.\(^{193}\)

By attempting in different ways to link such a description of God in terms of total reliability or trustworthiness (here *Verlass* rather than *Treue*) with the older definitions of God as

\(^{192}\) On the forms in which the theological tradition has posed the question of God, see DG 13-17.

\(^{193}\) “Aus dem notwendigen Sein … ist bei Luther der Not-wendende geworden, der den Menschen in seiner Existenznot trägt und hält, derjenige, auf den unbedingter Verlass ist, auf den man seine Existenz bauen kann.” DG 15.
the ultimate Ground of all reality, modern theology has affirmed a basic continuity between these two patterns. In particular, theological approaches that begin from the human being's unlimited openness to reality have shown that the question of God is also the question of the meaning of human existence. For Kasper, however, not only the classical definitions of God but even these recent efforts have been challenged in the modern context. The breakdown of the unity in faith that had formed the social glue of Christian Europe until the Reformation contributed in no small part to the phenomenon of secularization, in which autonomous reason increasingly supplants faith in God as the unifying factor in society while faith and institutional religion are relegated to the sphere of the private and irrational. The rejection of God is more and more seen as a precondition of a free social order and an integrated personal existence. Because the question of God has always been linked to the question of the meaning of all reality, however, the “death of God” that followed from the modern marginalization and rejection of faith today threatens to become the loss of the dimension of meaning, the death of humankind. The specter of nihilism looming over a secularized world has bestowed a new urgency on the question of God.

For Kasper, the most pressing question facing faith in God since the rise of mass atheism was not whether this faith could be reconciled with the methods and findings of the natural sciences, but whether it could do justice to human freedom. Kasper found the roots of modern atheism in the “turn to the subject,” or more precisely, in contemporary anthropologies of radical human autonomy. If emancipation from every form of exterior authority, religious as well as

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194 See DG 15.

195 On the cultural situation characterized by the “death of God” that Kasper set out to address, see DG 18-24.

196 On human autonomy as the root concern of modern atheism, see DG 41-67. On the relationship between atheism and the modern natural sciences, see ibid., 34-41.

197 On the theological and philosophical roots of the modern concept of autonomy, see DG 30-33, 41-43.
political, is understood to be necessary for human freedom and integrity, then the idea of an ultimate divine authority (theonomy) almost necessarily appears tyrannical and worthy of rejection out of humanistic concern. In this situation, thinkers like Descartes, Kant, Schelling, and Hegel attempted to conceive of God in such a way that God undergirded and made possible human autonomy. The critiques of Feuerbach, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, however, revealed the ambiguity latent in all these proposals: a God conceived as the necessary ground of human freedom might very well be a human projection, a psychological attempt at wish-fulfillment, a superstructure designed to bolster the political status quo—in other words, an alienation of humanity from itself and thus a betrayal of the world. This is why for Nietzsche, only der Übermensch, who has rejected hope in a transcendent God, could remain “faithful to the earth.”198 In place of religious hope for a resolution to the alienations of human existence, however, Nietzsche could only offer a thoroughly nihilistic philosophy. Thus Kasper, who regarded Nietzsche's nihilism as the ultimate consequence of post-Enlightenment atheism, questioned whether the atheist critique had itself remained faithful to human beings.199 The atheists' point, however, has lost none of its force: how can one do justice to the human person and the world?

The modern philosophy of subjectivity has altered the presuppositions upon which theology operates.200 Consequently, in Kasper's estimation, virtually all contemporary approaches to the God-question have fallen into ambiguities as regards the relationship between faith and the free subject; this includes both Catholic proposals grounded in one or another kind

198 “Der Übermensch . . . ist also kein jenseitiger Mensch, er bleibt vielmehr der Erde treu und glaubt nicht an überirdische Hoffnungen.” DG 62.

199 See DG 64-65.

200 On the situation facing modern theology, see DG 68-91.
of natural theology and Protestant dialectical theologies. Kasper's prescription for this critical situation was a remodeled natural theology that would clarify the relationship between theology and subjectivity by reformulating the traditional praemula fidei, up to and including the category of being, in order to render explicit their relationship to the human subject. This new theological starting-point, grounded in an analogy of freedom more meticulously formulated than that found in Jesus der Christus, afforded Kasper the ability to speak meaningfully of divine revelation within an anthropological horizon. If one conceived of analogy as an interpretation of the exercise of freedom—a disclosure of the infinite horizon that makes finite acts of freedom possible—then, far from being nonsense, analogous speech about God could be understood as the condition of the possibility for speaking of the world as the place of freedom, of the future as something more than an extrapolation or repetition of the past and present, of history as meaningful and as moving toward a goal. Analogy would then shed light on human experience, language, and knowledge as the possible location of an answer to the question of the whole of reality; discovering such an answer would in turn foster hope that the exercise of freedom today will not turn out in the end to have been in vain. In particular, experiences such as the “love and faithfulness of one's fellow human being, where we are unconditionally accepted and affirmed” could be understood as transcendental experiences or disclosure situations that revealed something meaningful about the mystery of God. Kasper's analogy of freedom would thus

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201 This reflects the critical tendency both William Loewe and Aidan Nichols found in Kasper's theological option. See Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper” (see p. 7n3, above); Nichols, “Kasper and his Theological Programme” (see p. 7n3, above). For discussion, see pp. 80-81 and 92-98, above.

202 See DG 90-91, 92-106. On Kasper's formulation of a natural theology in DG, see pp. 112-18, above.

203 On the articulation of Kasper's analogy of freedom, see DG 116-31, especially 129-31.

204 DG 114.
allow one to speak of God as a meaningful answer to the question posed by human freedom, as faithful to human beings and to the world.

If, however, analogy is an interpretation of free human activity, then it cannot prevent free persons from positing different interpretations of human freedom. Thus, the advantages of Kasper's analogy of freedom come at the cost of the certainty once claimed by natural theology, which must henceforth surrender its ambition to demonstrate that God is a “necessity posited by thought.” Even if such a demonstration were possible, it would undermine the free and fully human character of the act of faith. The consequences of this view emerged pointedly in Kasper's treatment of the traditional “proofs” of God's existence. On the one hand, the surprising, gratuitous, even astonishing fact that anything at all exists has recently come into relief in no small part because modern nihilism has called into question every vestige of order, beauty, and meaning in the universe from which the existence of God has classically been deduced. Because being is not necessary, because “non-being” could just as easily “be,” one can appreciate the Verlässlichkeit (dependability) and Gediegenheit (solidity) of reality disclosed by ordinary experience as well as by the regularity of scientific descriptions of the universe. On the other hand, how can one conceptualize the ground of this orderliness and reliability, this element of necessity in the contingency of given reality? Here pure reason has reached its limits. Before the mystery of the contingency of the cosmos, one can either abandon all hope for meaning and coherence in reality, or one can entrust oneself to this mystery, surrendering in the process the impulse to comprehend all reality as the product of necessary laws, but receiving in return the

205 DG 130.

206 On the traditional proofs of the existence of God, see DG 131-50.

207 DG 134-35.
key to understanding the world as an orderly, intelligible whole. Kasper has likewise presented the anthropological and philosophico-historical arguments as invitations to faith in the living God of history, who promises to be a sure foundation for one's own existence as well as one's hope for a just and meaningful future. A natural theology that highlights God's freedom in faithfulness cannot compel belief in God, but it can show that faith is a reasonable choice. Only by trusting in the trustworthy Ground of reality can one apprehend the dependability of reality; through the act of faith, one opens oneself to experience the faithfulness of the Creator.

The logic of the analogy of freedom, then, leads one to seek an answer to the question of the meaning of all reality not from pure reason but from Meaning itself making itself known, or in theological terms, from the self-revelation of God. According to Kasper, it is only in the encounter with God that the meaning of one's own existence, of history, of all reality becomes clear. In revelation, God does not simply disclose information; God rather communicates himself, the personal mystery of God, “in, with, and under” categorical experiences of different kinds. General and special salvation history comprise a variety of such experiences; the Christian, however, recognizes in the history and destiny of Jesus Christ the eschatological self-revelation of God, in whose self-giving, self-emptying love the personal content of revelation has taken its definitive historical form. In faith the Christian responds to God's self-communication in a comprehensive personal way that embraces both complete trust and belief in certain truths. Faith can indeed be rendered more intelligible and plausible by argumentation; for Kasper, however, the final justification for faith can only come from the authority of the God who

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208 See DG 135-36.
209 See DG 138-39, 141-43.
210 On revealed knowledge of God, see DG 151-67.
reveals, that is, from God himself. With this statement, Kasper was not embracing an extrinsicist understanding of revelation. He rather understood God's authority to reveal in terms of his dialogical thought-form, arguing that what ultimately justifies my complete reliance on another person can only be that person's concrete, historical faithfulness. So God's faithfulness is both the content of revelation and faith and that which constitutes the authority to reveal this content. Kasper's comment about the authority of the revealing God comes close to another assertion that was the subject of extended discussion in the analysis of Jesus der Christus offered earlier in this chapter, namely, that the only possible justification for the disciples' faith in the resurrection was the faithfulness of God revealed in the person of the risen Christ. There is an important difference, however, between these two passages. By clarifying in Der Gott Jesu Christi that the truth of God, the authority or self-evidence of God's love, is the final or ultimate (letzte) ground of faith, Kasper admitted the possibility of other, relative justifications for the same. He thus blunted the exclusive, polemical edge (nur, “only”) of his earlier claim. In doing so, Kasper clarified his analogy of freedom, affirming its scope for the human as well as the divine dialogue-partner.

One further point may be added here. The claim that only God can finally vouch for God was already in Jesus der Christus pregnant with Trinitarian content. Kasper made this content quite explicit in Der Gott Jesu Christi. Yet even when God is known to the Christian as Father,

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211 See DG 158-59; compare 99, 143, 276.

212 In this context, Kasper invoked the analogy of freedom rather than that of faithfulness: “Erst recht kann Freiheit nie beweisen, sondern nur wieder in Freiheit erkannt und anerkannt werden.” DG 158.

213 See JC 167; compare 161, 172. For discussion, see pp. 188-93, above.

214 Kasper thus opened the door to considering the evidentiary function of the subjectivity of the authentic believer illumined by the light of faith. See below, pp. 417-29.
Son, and Holy Spirit, this does not cancel out the abiding mystery of God. The doctrine of the Trinity articulates precisely this mystery as God's sovereign freedom in faithful, self-giving love.

2. The Christian experience of God as faithful

Using his analogy of faithfulness, Kasper referred the question of human freedom—the modern form of the perennial metaphysical question about the unity of all reality—to the experience of God's self-revelation in history. He therefore turned in the second, central section of Der Gott Jesu Christi to the task of interpreting the distinctively Christian experience of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This account set the stage for Kasper's systematic exposition of the Trinitarian mystery of God in the third section of the book, where he argued that the doctrine of the Trinity was not a betrayal of monotheistic faith but its concrete Christian form. It will be shown later that divine faithfulness was essential to the understanding of monotheism Kasper developed in Der Gott Jesu Christi. If this is the case, then one would expect Kasper to present the threefold Christian experience of God as a threefold experience of the faithfulness of God. In what follows, it will be argued that in Kasper's account of revelation, God proves to be faithful as the one Source of the created world and its fulfillment, as the Mediator of this fulfillment in whom the question of suffering receives its definitive response, and as the pure Gift of salvation to creation, who liberates human beings and transforms the world into the realm of freedom.

When Christians experience God as the one source of the orders of creation and salvation, of binding authority and liberation from bondage, of the established past and the hoped-for future, they experience the Fatherhood of God. According to Kasper, the various critiques leveled in the present not only against naming God “Father” but against every form of authority in the name of human freedom have been accompanied by the loss of a sense of order and harmony within the cosmos, which has in turn threatened the basic presuppositions that
enable human freedom in the concrete.\textsuperscript{215} In view of these developments, Kasper's task of retrieving the Christian message about God the Father had to address the Father's relationship not only to order and authority in creation but also to the relative autonomy and freedom of creatures.\textsuperscript{216} While fatherhood was a primordial religious symbol for the divine source of the cosmic laws and structures that made life possible, its use in the general history of religions tended to downplay the difference between “begetter” and “begotten”; it did not include the notion of divine freedom and transcendence. By contrast, the Old Testament idea of divine fatherhood took as its starting point God's free election of Israel. It thus attached the idea of a divine fatherhood over creation, which Israel shared with other traditions, to the prophetic promise that God would be father to Israel in a special way, by manifesting within their history his justice and mercy, his concern for the poor and forsaken.\textsuperscript{217} This eschatological hope in God as father received its undeducible fulfillment according to Kasper in the ministry of Jesus, whose message of God's coming Reign of mercy and love took historical and personal shape in Jesus's loving concern for the sinner and outcast. God has thus been revealed as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in a singular way and, in and through that unique fatherhood, also the Father of all women and men who acknowledge God's Reign in faith.

The question for Kasper was how to maintain the unity-in-distinction between the ontological and soteriological content of the message of God the Father within a contemporary speculative theology.\textsuperscript{218} Two dangers have emerged in the history of the question: one could

\textsuperscript{215} On the contemporary critique of naming God “Father,” see DG 171-75.

\textsuperscript{216} On divine fatherhood in the history of religions and the testimony of the Bible, see DG 175-83.

\textsuperscript{217} See DG 178.

\textsuperscript{218} On the treatment of divine fatherhood within the dialectics of the theological tradition, see DG 184-93. For Kasper's synthesis within the horizon of modern philosophy of freedom, see ibid., 193-98.
downplay the distinctive content of revelation by identifying the eternal Fatherhood of God with God's establishment of the order of creation (the tendency of the early Apologists), or one could so stress the distinction between the two that one could no longer express the significance of God's eternal Fatherhood for creatures (the tendency of medieval Scholasticism). This latter tendency was at work in the establishment of “I am who am” as the standard translation within the tradition for the name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:14).\(^\text{219}\) This reading gave clear expression to God's universal fatherhood as Creator at the cost of obscuring (though not denying) God's elective love in the history of salvation. By contrast, when one translates Exodus 3:14 with Kasper as, “I am there who I am there,” one finds in it a solemn expression both of God's promise to be actively present with human beings as their loving Father and of God's freedom in this self-giving love.\(^\text{220}\) “His being-there is absolutely certain and yet remains beyond our disposal; in promising and fulfilling his promises, God is unconditionally faithful and yet ever new.”\(^\text{221}\)

Aquinas's critical appropriation of the theological tradition represented for Kasper an ingenious retrieval of this biblical perspective within a metaphysical framework and a model for his own reflections on the person of God the Father.\(^\text{222}\) By defining God as \textit{ipsum esse subsistens}, subsistent being, Aquinas established God's uniqueness and transcendence above all reality (since, unlike creatures, God does not 'have' being but 'is' being) while also maintaining God's immanence or intimate relatedness to all creation (since all being participates in God's subsistent

\(^{219}\) On Exod. 3:14, see above, p. 125n5. For other references in Kasper’s work, see pp. 77 and 141, above.

\(^{220}\) See DG 188.

\(^{221}\) “Sein Da-Sein ist absolut gewiss und bleibt doch unverfügbar; Gott ist in seiner Verheissung unbedingt treu und doch je neu.” DG 188.

\(^{222}\) For a more detailed exposition of Aquinas's theology of God, see Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes” (see p. 109n177, above), 176-90, as well as the discussion on pp. 109-12, above.
being). Now if it belongs to personal existence to be a unique realization of being,\textsuperscript{223} then God is Person in an utterly singular way, since as the unparalleled subsistence of universal being, God is both incomparably universal and totally unique. At the same time, this conception of divine personhood clarifies the grounds for speaking as the Bible does of God's freedom in love and historical faithfulness, since God as \textit{ipsum esse subsistens} is pure actuality, not motionless or lifeless but living and active in a superlative degree. Kasper used this analogy of person to recover the ontological content of the Scholastic treatise “De Deo uno” within a trinitarian framework. From this perspective, the subsistence of being in God means that both the origin and the goal of all reality is the Father's free act of love. Being, then, reaches its end or \textit{telos} in self-surrendering love: love is the meaning of all reality.

If God as Father is absolute Person, then the idea of a loving, faithful God is at least intelligible. Kasper, however, thought that concrete experience of the world, marked everywhere by the presence of evil and suffering, provided a considerable objection to the biblical conviction that God is faithful.\textsuperscript{224} Can God be the sovereignly free and loving source of all being while allowing evil to exist in this creation? Evil calls into question the meaning of the whole of reality. It represents a challenge not only to the idea of a faithful God but also to the hope on which the exercise of freedom depends. Not only does the human being suffer out of powerlessness to realize his or her unconditional dignity in view of the structures of evil that condition his or her existence, but these structures so resist human efforts to bring about a truly just world that the only way to overthrow them is with another act of injustice. Amidst the objections against faith in God raised by the existence of evil, the question of how to do justice to human freedom recurs

\textsuperscript{223} On Kasper’s notion of person, see above, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{224} On the problem of evil as horizon for the experience of Jesus Christ as Son of God and mediator of salvation, see DG 199-205.
in an acute form. This question in turn points to the question of God as Savior of the world, since liberation from bondage to evil—salvation—can only be conceived as originating from outside the intramundane cycles of violence and injustice. In brief, the question of God's fatherhood, which Kasper united to that of God's faithfulness, can only be answered eschatologically; it flows into the question about Jesus Christ, the Son of God and unique mediator of salvation.

In his chapter on Christology in *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Kasper wished to show that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ could do justice to human suffering, that God's love embraced the creature even in its most hopeless circumstances. He was therefore concerned not with the question of the mediation between God and human beings as such, which was his chief speculative interest in *Jesus der Christus*, but with a question presented in *Jesus der Christus* as preliminary to this one, that of the presuppositions of this mediation on the part of God, namely, the relationship between God and Jesus. Consequently, his review of the tradition focused mainly on the divinity of Jesus. Kasper's examination of the Old Testament implied that the work of salvation always involved human representatives, yet in each case transcended the capacities of the persons so commissioned. Abbreviating his story of Jesus, Kasper focused on Jesus's “implicit Christology”: Jesus's claim that the Lordship of God was effectively at work in his preaching and activity presupposed a profound and indeed unprecedented relationship between God and a human being (Jesus). This relationship, and Jesus's entire ministry on behalf of the Reign, reached their crescendo in his death on the cross, since the crucifixion meant God's entry into the depths of human weakness, suffering, and God-abandonment. Glossing over the question of Jesus's resurrection, Kasper presented the Son Christologies of the New Testament

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225 DG 206. *Jesus der Christus* covered this topic in the first chapter of part three, titled “Jesus Christus – Gottessohn.”

226 On Jesus's divine Sonship in the witness of scripture and tradition, see DG 205-29.
not as metaphysical flights of fancy but reflections on the eschatological-definitive revelation of God that had taken place in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They expressed the saving significance of what happened in Jesus: God's eternal Son entered into history that human beings might gain the freedom of the children of God. Rejecting the tendencies of some early Christian groups to undermine Jesus's full humanity, Kasper spent more effort in this context confuting challenges to Jesus's divinity. His clear intention was to establish the salvific reality of the Incarnation.

How, then, can the divinity of Jesus be understood as salvific for those who suffer? Kasper paid his respects to the hefty tradition of Logos Christology, noting how Augustine freed this idea from the subordinationism latent in the Stoic concept of the Logos as a world-immanent principle by giving it a new basis in his analogy between the Trinity and the structure of the human psyche, while Aquinas showed how this analogy could be used to ground both the full divinity of the Logos and God's involvement in creation through the Logos. Kasper wondered, however, whether this starting-point could do full justice to the story of Jesus disclosed in the Bible. Has not the question, “How can the Logos undergo change, much less suffer and die?” haunted Logos Christology from the beginning? For this reason, Kasper opted for what he called a *kenosis*-Christology. While many of the Church Fathers struggled to reconcile Jesus's suffering with divine *apatheia*, a few suggested that suffering could be seen as an act of divine freedom and power, even a perfection; for his part, Origen recognized in God's love a divine capacity to suffer out of love for the beloved. Kasper learned from Origen, Augustine, and Richard of St. Victor (as well as Hegel) that one need not interpret God's utter surrender of self to

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227 For Kasper's evaluation of traditional Logos Christology, see DG 230-35.

the “opposite” of God—the abyss of God-abandonment, suffering, and death—as an act of self-dedivinization. “On the contrary, the love of God revealed on the cross expresses God's unconditional fidelity to his promise.”

This divine self-renunciation is for Kasper the eschatological manifestation of the divinity of God, God's faithfulness to himself. For God, total self-possession consists in total self-dispossession, omnipotence in setting the other free to respond to the divine gift of self. God, however, can only manifest Godself as self-emptying love (*kenosis*) in history if God is this love from eternity. Kasper argued that this new starting point for trinitarian theology could incorporate the valid insights of Logos Christology, since love involves knowledge of the beloved. More importantly, it can address the problem of theodicy—God’s faithfulness to the world—by showing that God in the superabundance of divine love has scope also for human suffering. God's love does not thereby cancel out the reality of suffering, but it does take away the fateful dimension of suffering and transforms it into hope, so that whenever one accepts in love the suffering that is part and parcel of the fallen condition of humanity, that suffering bears the promise of new life.

Because Jesus's death on the cross has revealed that no situation lies beyond the reach of divine love, the glorification of God that will take place in the eschatological manifestation of God's peace, justice, mercy and love within creation has already broken into time in Jesus Christ. He is therefore the unsurpassable historical sign of God's faithfulness. On the other hand, the

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eschatological revelation of the love of God on the cross makes itself known only to the extent that it becomes a life-giving and sanctifying force within the whole of history. This is to say that for Kasper, the faithfulness of God definitively revealed in Jesus Christ comes to fruition in the work of the Holy Spirit.

One might well object to this thesis on the grounds that Kasper did not directly refer to the faithfulness of God in his account of the Holy Spirit. It can be shown, however, that the content of Kasper’s notion of divine fidelity is implicit in this account. In the first place, for Kasper, it is ultimately through the Spirit that God does justice to the world, which is to say that the Spirit demonstrates God’s overbidding faithfulness to creation. According to Kasper, the contemporary world experiences itself in a paradoxical way: although men and women in the present tend to look upon the world as a “spiritless” reality devoid of any numinous dimension, they nevertheless experience the same world as a hostile environment, characterized by anonymous forces and structures that have proven inimical to life and freedom, which have not only resisted attempts to humanize and domesticate them but have transformed these very efforts into new forms of oppression. One may therefore ask how authentic human life and freedom are possible under such conditions. Dare we hope for a transformation of this fundamental situation, for the advent of a humane world? This is the question to which Kasper addressed his theology of the Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life. It is significant that Kasper described the Holy Spirit not only as the condition of the possibility of God’s originating act of creation but as the dynamic, animating presence in whom created reality is again and again drawn beyond itself.

232 DG 245.

233 On the conditions modifying contemporary experience of the Spirit, see DG 246-48.
in ever new acts of self-transcendence.\textsuperscript{234} As in the order of creation, so also in the order of salvation is the Spirit for Kasper a source of newness and life, inviting women and men into friendship with God, revealing to them that they are radically accepted by God, liberating them for self-surrendering love. Bestowing life on creation and fostering the conditions it needs to flourish, the Spirit renews the face of the earth, thereby demonstrating the faithfulness of God to human beings and the whole created world.

In the second place, the tension between past and future, between faithfulness and newness emblematic of Kasper’s notion of divine fidelity was also an essential feature of Kasper’s description of the activity of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, the religions of the ancient world understood “spirit” as a creative, dynamic presence that gives life and brings about all that is surprising and new in the cosmos.\textsuperscript{235} On the other hand, the Bible added a critical corrective to this view, identifying this source of life and newness not as a world-immanent or material principle but as the free, transcendent Spirit of YHWH.\textsuperscript{236} This meant that the freedom and newness of the Spirit’s work was evident most of all in the history of salvation: the Spirit inspired the prophets, raised up judges, came to rest on David, and according to a prophetic promise, would in the end times transform the hearts of human beings and revitalize the whole of creation. The testimony of the Gospels regarding the involvement of the Spirit in the life, ministry, death, and especially the resurrection of Jesus indicated in different ways that the Spirit was bringing about in Jesus the long-awaited eschatological fulfillment. Thus, the New Testament understood the free operation of the Spirit to be permanently linked to the person of

\textsuperscript{234} On the Spirit as condition of God’s self-communication in the order of creation as well as in the order of grace, see DG 279-81.

\textsuperscript{235} See DG 248-49.

\textsuperscript{236} On the freedom of the Spirit according to the testimony of the Bible, see DG 249-56.
Jesus. Yet it did not thereby dissolve the tension between the regularity of the Spirit’s action and its undeducible newness. Different biblical traditions emphasized one or the other pole: the book of Acts vividly portrayed the freedom of the Spirit to intervene in extraordinary ways during the early days of the Church, while Paul emphasized the Spirit’s operation in ordinary Christian life, bestowing on the baptized the freedom of the children of God. Kasper understood the same tension to be at play in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the Church as its inner life-principle. Among other places, this emerged where he described the Spirit’s role in maintaining the Church in the truth. “The Spirit preserves the Church in its fidelity to tradition precisely to the extent that he prophetically leads it into all truth and proclaims to it what is to come.”

This raises once again the issue of theological truth, which will be addressed in greater depth in the next chapter. In the present context, it will suffice to observe that even as the Spirit reveals the truth of faith and leads the faithful into an ever-deeper understanding of the same, for Kasper, this truth loses nothing of its mystery for having been revealed. In other words, and in the third place, the Spirit’s role in revelation reflects the simultaneous nearness and hiddenness characteristic of Kasper’s notion of divine faithfulness. Kasper thus made his own the concern of the pneumatological tradition of the churches of the East to preserve the mystery of the Holy Spirit. He argued that the theology of the Spirit could in no way be deduced from a logical analysis of the relevant biblical and traditional images, of which Kasper considered the image of the Spirit as gift, or gift of love, to be the most important. Rather, that which for Kasper enables believers to apprehend the divine mystery in faith as well as to come to a more profound

237 “Der Geist bewahrt die Kirche eben dadurch in der Treue zur Tradition, dass er sie prophetisch in alle Wahrheit einführt und ihr das Kommende kundtut.” DG 281-82.

238 Below, pp. 309ff.

239 On the Holy Spirit as the condition interior to the human subject that makes possible the revelation of the divine mystery to human beings, see DG 273-77.
understanding thereof cannot be anything or anyone less than God. This principle was at work in *Jesus der Christus*, and it will appear again in the next chapter of the present study: only God can vouch for God; only the self-evidence of God’s faithfulness in love can finally suffice as a basis for faith. In *Der Gott Jesu Christi* Kasper interpreted this to mean that in the gift of faith, the believer experiences the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of wisdom and understanding” (Isa. 11:2), the divinely-bestowed subjective condition of revelation. The Spirit, however, can only reveal God's freedom to bestow the divine love upon what is not God if the Spirit is in himself the 'givability' of God's love, the Giver as well as the Gift, Self-Gift in person. In other words: precisely as the personal realization and completion of the eternal act of love between Father and Son, the Holy Spirit is also the abundance and the givability of this love from eternity. Kasper thus maintained both God's intimate nearness to creation in the Spirit and the permanence of the divine mystery in this self-bestowal. On the one hand, Kasper considered the Holy Spirit to be the condition of the possibility of God’s loving self-gift in the order both of creation and of grace, as discussed earlier. On the other hand, the Spirit does not cancel the divine mystery by revealing God to be self-giving love; rather, as unfathomable Love, the Spirit remains sovereignly free and beyond comprehension. The saving gift of the Spirit thus transcends the visible boundaries of the Church, bringing about the renewal of the world even as the Spirit remains the unique and permanent life-principle of the Church.

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240 On the question of a basis for the truth of faith, see below, pp. 417-29.

241 See DG 99, 143, 158-59, 276.


243 See DG 281-82.
3. The Trinity as concrete monotheism

In the revelation of God as the Source of all reality, the Mediator of salvation, and the saving Gift of divine love, the believer apprehends the faithfulness of God. Christianity thus finds its grounds in the believing community's threefold experience of God in salvation history. Can one speak, however, of anything more than experience in this context? Was the further step taken by the dogmatic tradition, namely, the authoritative interpretation of this experience in the doctrine of the Trinity, a transgression of the divine mystery, speculation into matters that in any case bear no practical relevance for believers? Kasper did not think so. On the contrary, he maintained that it was only in the doctrine of the Trinity that the question of the unity and meaning of all reality received its definitive answer. That is, only by acknowledging the glory of the one true God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit can one ultimately do justice to the human person and the world. Faithfulness to the world becomes a human possibility in the Spirit, who draws one into the faithful, self-surrendering love between the Father and the Son and so equips one for selfless service to others. Kasper thus viewed the trinitarian confession as “the” short formula of Christian faith, which expresses what stands at its center—the Christian understanding of God—and thereby recapitulates the Church's entire vision of reality and its believing praxis.\[244\]

Underlining this point, Kasper described the confession of the Trinity somewhat paradoxically as the concrete way in which Christianity maintains continuity with the faith of Israel, that is, as concrete monotheism.\[245\] What did he mean by this? For Kasper, the term 'monotheism' designated the Judeo-Christian-Islamic answer to the question about the unity,

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\[244\] DG 300; see also 285-86, 306-7, 371, 380. Kasper had in fact advanced this claim in JC 203, although he did not there develop it at any length.

\[245\] On the content of monotheistic faith, see DG 291-95.
coherence, stability, and meaningfulness of the whole of reality.\textsuperscript{246} Kasper considered this question not the exclusive interest of the monotheistic religions but a primordial concern touching all human beings; as evidence of this, he cited the treatment of the question of the one and the many within the Western tradition.\textsuperscript{247} Neither Greek philosophy nor the Bible was interested first of all in idle speculation but in the order and dependability of reality that made day-to-day existence possible. What for Kasper distinguished biblical monotheism was its origin in Israel's experience of God as utterly trustworthy and faithful.

In the confession of one God we are ultimately dealing with the fundamental decision between belief and unbelief, with the question of where alone and in all situations unconditional reliability is to be found. The point is conversion from non-existent idols to the one true God. . . . God is the only God; on him alone can one build with absolute confidence.\textsuperscript{248}

This practical monotheism came to liturgical expression in the prohibition on rendering worship to any god other than YHWH (monolatry). Further implications of Israel's monotheistic experience, however, came to light in the historical development of its tradition. As the One who is absolutely trustworthy and reliable, God is unique, unlike every finite reality; likewise, as the only truly stable Ground to be found among the nations, God is universal, the one Lord over all history. The prophets thus declared not only the illicitness of idol worship but the utter unreality of other gods. Holding fast to Israel's monotheistic convictions, Christian theology concluded that the one God could only be pure Spirit, totally transcending the conditions of intramundane

\textsuperscript{246} DG 382; compare 293.

\textsuperscript{247} On the problem of the one and the many, see DG 285-91.

\textsuperscript{248} “Im Bekenntnis zum einen Gott geht es letztlich um die Grundentscheidung zwischen Glaube und Unglaube, um die Frage, wo allein und in allen Situationen unbedingter Verlass ist. Es geht um die Bekehrung von dem nichtigen Gotzen zu dem einen wahren Gott. . . . Gott ist der einzige Gott; allein auf ihn kann man absolut bauen und trauen.” DG 292.
reality. Monotheism, then, meant for Kasper the uniqueness, universality, and transcendence of the one and faithful God.

This distinction between monotheism and the views of pagan antiquity was of decisive importance to Kasper's account. Although Greek philosophy and religion has in many instances betrayed its awareness of a manifold (threefold) dimension of the whole, its solution to the question of the whole has much more emphasized the aspect of oneness—the monarchy of God—as Aristotle, the Stoics, and the neo-Platonists attest. The basic difference between God and the created world that is part and parcel of monotheism, however, meant that monotheistic faith had to rethink the pagan solution to the problem of unity. If God's very self does not include fullness and completion of being as well as its unity and ultimate ground, multiplicity as well as oneness, then does not God's self-fulfillment ultimately depend on the creation of an other than God? But would this not mean surrendering the monotheistic conviction that God really transcends creation? Already within the Jewish tradition, this issue came to the fore in the Old Testament through its various attempts to conceive of the sovereignly free and transcendent God's living and active presence in history through the mythological figure of the “angel of the Lord,” the personifications of the Word and the Spirit of God, and speculation about Wisdom as a hypostatic reality relatively independent from God. For Christianity, however, it was above all God's definitive act of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit that unsurpassably disclosed the God of Israel as the living God. Kasper explained the doctrine of the Trinity as

249 See DG 287-90.

250 See DG 294-95.

251 On the treatment within the Old Testament of the problem of God's living involvement in history, see DG 295-97.

252 On the Trinitarian structure of God's self-revelation, see DG 297-303.
the specifically Christian confession of the one, unique, universal, transcendent God: as the Living One who saves—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God is the one, trustworthy Ground of all being, the faithful God. This confession of God in turn determines the basic structure of Christian life, prayer, and worship. Nothing could be more fundamental to Christian faith. For Kasper, the monotheistic foundation of the Church stands or falls with the confession of the Trinity.

Therefore, in spite of the apparent irrelevance of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity to modern Christians, Kasper argued that much was at stake in the proclamation of this basic truth of faith. The burden of the theological tradition was to shed some light on how the transcendent God could be both one (ground of the order and intelligibility of reality) and three (fullness of life), since God could not otherwise be thought as the faithful God. In opposing the Gnostic idea of emanation, which threatened the idea of divine transcendence, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen attached their expositions of the triune mystery of God closely to God’s activity in the history of salvation. This perspective made it easy to unite divine oneness or simplicity to God's abundance of life by way of the *monarchia* of the Father, who sends the Son and the Spirit into history for the salvation of the world; nevertheless, because Tertullian and Origen did not clearly distinguish between the economy of salvation and its grounds in God's eternity, they could not maintain as convincingly the transcendence of the Son and the Spirit. When Arius developed this latent subordinationism into a complete theology of God, the councils of Nicea and Constantinople I were forced to clarify the doctrine of God in ontological categories. This conceptual advance unfortunately led to a de-eschatologization of the doctrine of God, to its

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253 On confession of the Trinity as rule of faith, see DG 303-7.

254 On the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, see DG 307-21.
removal from the context of salvation history. Kasper explained the present situation in both East and West as a complete disjunction between the believer's understanding of God in himself and the Christian experience of salvation: the practical oblivion of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. He thus viewed the restoration of this connection as prerequisite to demonstrating the relevance of the immanent Trinity for today and thus as an indispensable task for a contemporary Trinitarian theology.

Kasper grounded his own recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity in an unambiguous assertion that the Trinity is a mystery of faith and so can never be made transparent to the human intellect. He thus expressly distanced himself from the reflections of Hegel, Schelling and other Enlightenment philosophers on the Trinity, since in spite of whatever value theology can glean from them, it cannot adopt their methods—to deduce the Trinity from reflection on nature, freedom, and history. Nevertheless, Kasper thought it possible to develop images of the Trinity because of the analogous correspondence between the mystery of the human person in his or her freedom and the mystery of God's will to save in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Kasper found value in the various parables and images proposed by the tradition as demonstrations that the mystery of divine Triunity sheds light on the mystery of human existence and the whole of reality. He agreed with Barth, however, that the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ attested in scripture provided theology with its most important “image.” Kasper therefore adopted a version of Rahner's Grundaxiom: one should interpret the immanent Trinity in the light of the economic Trinity. This enabled him to retrieve the theological concepts employed by Aquinas and other

255 On mystery as starting-point of reflection on the Trinity, see DG 322-37.

256 On Kasper’s renewal of the doctrine of analogy on the basis of human freedom, see above, pp. 115-16 and 225.

classic interpreters of the Trinity (processions, relations, persons, personal properties, *perichoresis*) beginning with the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit (understood as an interpretation of God's self-communication) and proceeding in the order of knowledge.\(^{258}\) In this process he aligned himself with Bernard Lonergan, who found in Aquinas's trinitarian theology a threefold subsistence of the one divine consciousness, and thus 'three persons' who are nevertheless intimately linked to one another in a way that for Kasper resembled the phenomenology of person proposed by personalist philosophy (as well as the German idealists). Unlike Barth and Rahner, who presupposed an individualistic idea of personhood, Kasper felt justified by modern philosophy as well as the theological and dogmatic tradition in speaking of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as 'persons,' although only analogously and not univocally.

This analogy of person provided the ontological groundwork for asserting a unity-in-difference between the immanent reality of the Trinity and God's self-disclosure in the economy of salvation, which in turn facilitated Kasper's retrieval of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity as the Christian's monotheistic confession of faith.\(^{259}\) Proceeding in this fashion, he reformulated the ancient notion of the *monarchia* of God the Father, which has retained an important place especially in the Eastern theological tradition in spite of subordinationist and modalist misunderstandings of this notion that appeared in the early Church. When one conceives of God the Father as “absolute person,” that is, as sovereign freedom in love who generates the Son and the Spirit and unites them to himself in an eternal act of love, who as the source of the Trinity is also the groundless ground of all reality, two points become clear: first, all reality has a single

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\(^{258}\) On basic concepts in Trinitarian theology, see DG 337-54.

\(^{259}\) For Kasper's retrieval of divine unity within the framework of the Trinitarian confession, see DG 354-65.
source; second, this Source is sovereignly free to create and to save, not out of metaphysical necessity but out of superabundant love. The monarchy of the Father is not domination over creation but liberating grace because it is from eternity a monarchy of love that reaches its fulfillment in the Son and the Spirit. Kasper's renewed doctrine of divine monarchy thus confirmed the unity and coherence of reality while affirming that the transcendent Source of all creation is also the Fullness of Life as incomprehensible divine Love. This basis enabled him to describe the confession of God's faithful love in the Son and the Spirit as concrete monotheism.

Kasper's notion of monotheism established what he regarded as adequate theological foundations for a deeper understanding of the 'threeness' or triunity of God. Renewing an assertion he made in *Jesus der Christus*, he argued that the doctrine of the Trinity, grounded in the notion of divine monarchy, was an unfolding of the statement, “God is love”: the Father freely generates the Son in an eternal act of self-outpouring love; the Son accepts the Father's self-giving love in the free act of giving himself away out of love; this mutual love reaches its completion in the Holy Spirit as pure gift, perfect fulfillment, free graciousness, the superabundant ecstasy of love. Kasper made his own the Trinitarian theology of Richard of St. Victor: as love purely given, love both wholly received and wholly given away, and love purely received, God is perfect love. In doing so, however, Kasper insisted that he was not deducing Trinitarian doctrine in Hegelian fashion from a concept of love attained by natural reason alone. He rather intended that love should function analogously, receiving its content from the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Understood in this fashion, the mystery

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260 On the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity, see DG 369–76.

261 JC 218.

262 DG 374–76; see also 266–67.
of the Trinity reveals what real love is, and, in so doing, it places human love, and indeed all of human existence, in a new perspective.

Kasper proceeded to illuminate the structure and logic of Christianity as well as the various perplexing dimensions of human existence in the light of Trinitarian love. The mystery of human existence emerges with clarity for Kasper in view of the unity in love among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity shows that the most fundamental reality is not self-sufficient substance but relation: love is the meaning of all reality. It presents as the highest form of unity among persons not the tyrannical unity established by domination but the unity of communion established by self-giving love, a unity that preserves individual identity while bringing it to fulfillment through the person's act of self-donation. Such a vision has implications for politics as well as for ecclesiology. It lays foundations for a spirituality that is at once contemplative (centered on God's perfect act of self-surrender in Jesus Christ), active (directed toward the world in self-giving love), and communal. It addresses the humanist objection to faith by showing that the loving freedom of God does not pose a threat to human freedom but promises its authentic fulfillment, since in communion with the eternal love of God, one finds the stability and orientation amid the vicissitudes of history that empowers one to love freely and with abandon. In this way Kasper's doctrine of the Trinity verified the Johannine understanding of salvation as knowledge of the mystery of God, knowledge, that is, of the Love that transcends every conceivable form of love. By acknowledging the glory of God who is Love, one humanizes humankind and thus practices true fidelity to the earth.

263 On the doctrine of the Trinity as key to the Christian vision of reality, see DG 376-81.
264 See DG 354.
265 See DG 383.
C. Conclusion

Thomas Petriano has pointed out that Jesus der Christus and Der Gott Jesu Christi differ significantly from one another in their methodology. In connection with the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, however, the foregoing discussion suggests that this difference largely amounted to a change in perspective on the center of the faith rather than a fundamental shift in Kasper's understanding of the same center. This perspectival difference appears in the different guiding questions that structured the overarching narratives of the two texts: while Jesus der Christus was concerned to reconcile Christian identity with the relevance or significance of the faith, Der Gott Jesu Christi pleaded with theology to rediscover the grounds of its own possibility in the groundless Ground of all reality, the God of Jesus Christ. To these questions Kasper responded in each book with a credal statement that summarized the basic pattern of his argument: in Jesus der Christus, Kasper found in the ancient Christological confession “Jesus is the Christ” the kernel of his solution to the identity-relevance dilemma, whereas in Der Gott Jesu Christi, the threefold pattern of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which was a modification of an old baptismal confession, provided the hermeneutical key to a Christian vision of the human person and of all reality. The difference between these two books, analogous to that between the two creeds, was not their content but the mode in which this content was understood and expressed. Already in 1972, Kasper argued that the Church's confession of the immanent Trinity was identical in content to his own soteriologically-oriented short formula of faith, namely, that in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit God is salvation

266 See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” 198-206.

267 On the difference between the content of faith and its mode, see below, pp. 323-24.
for all human beings. For Kasper, the trinitarian confession simply made explicit the metaphysical content of the soteriological statement, clarifying its foundations in the Godness of God, God's eternal essence. By attending to the transcendental conditions of the possibility of Christology from the side of God, Kasper’s “theological theology” was highlighting the metaphysical content that was already present in, though not the central focus of, Jesus der Christus.

It may be added, however, that although the metaphysical content in Der Gott Jesu Christi also came to expression in Jesus der Christus, it was not presented with the same degree of clarity in both books. In particular, with the aid of his reformulation of the analogy of being in the form of the analogy of freedom, Kasper articulated in Der Gott Jesu Christi the dialogical (divine and human) structure of the center of the faith more convincingly than he had in his previous work. On the one hand, Der Gott Jesu Christi unambiguously affirmed the divine mystery, the Godhood of God, in response to the threat of modern atheism. For Kasper, human freedom in its self-transcendence points beyond itself toward the mystery of God, not however by positing the God of Jesus Christ as a necessary inference from freedom, but by opening the human person up to a possible revelation of the divine mystery in history, the theology “from above” that could bring to fulfillment her or his theology “from below.”

By affirming that God is sovereignly free to reveal the divine mystery, a mystery that does not subsequently become speculatively transparent but abides even in the event of revelation, Kasper maintained the transcendence of God above all systems of necessity and above human comprehension. At the

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268 For a comparison of soteriological and ontological statements of the faith, see EG7 100. Compare the soteriological statement of faith formulated there to a similar formula in JC 301, whose content Kasper tied closely to the confession, “Jesus is the Christ” (see p. 211, above). See also below, pp. 301-3.

269 According to Cyril J. O'Regan, Kasper's turn to scripture to determine the indeterminate content of his transcendental reflection represented a faithful development of the lines set down in Rahner's proposal for a new paradigm in Trinitarian theology. See O'Regan, “The God of Jesus Christ in Continuity and Discontinuity,” 118-19.
same time, Kasper's insistence on God's hiddenness meant not that the divine mystery is “dark” and unintelligible but that God is radically personal, incomprehensibly free to love with abandon. It is because the inmost mystery of God is love, apart from any exterior demand or compulsion, that human beings have nothing to fear from God's freedom and can rely on God unconditionally.

This leads to a second point: Kasper's analogy of freedom also helped him to give the mystery of human freedom its due. Indeed, Kasper's extended discussions of the mystery of God in *Der Gott Jesu Christi* were in each case complemented by a discussion (in connection with Rahner) of the reference to this mystery contained in the mystery of the human being.\(^{270}\) To this extent, Kasper's “analogy of freedom” may be understood as complementary to Rahner's “analogy of man.”\(^{271}\) Furthermore, the absence in *Der Gott Jesu Christi* of any references to the analogy-less character of the historical Jesus and of his resurrection is striking when compared to *Jesus der Christus*. Where he once spoke of Jesus as a figure of unparalleled originality, Kasper was satisfied to point out only three novelties in Jesus's earthly life: his proclamation of the Reign of God as a reign of grace, forgiveness, mercy, and love; the close link he drew between the Reign and his own person; an understanding of his death as an act of self-surrender on behalf of the Reign.\(^{272}\) Moreover, Kasper pointed out partial historical precedents for all but the second of these. This sober consideration of Jesus in continuity as well as discontinuity with his Jewish background corresponds to a clearer acknowledgment of the dignity of the human partner in the dialogue of salvation history envisaged by the analogy of freedom. The Kasper of *Der Gott Jesu Christi* deliberately widened the gap between himself and the idealistic tendencies of Schelling and Barth.

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\(^{270}\) See DG 164-65; 328-30.

\(^{271}\) See Palakeel, *Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse* (see p. 10n13, above), 298.

\(^{272}\) See DG 211-16.
How has this development affected Kasper's regard for the notion of divine faithfulness? On the one hand, in distancing himself from Barth, Kasper has also to a certain extent reined in his application of the language of faithfulness to God. In the analysis earlier in this chapter of *Jesus der Christus* and the notion of divine fidelity presented therein, it was observed that in many instances Kasper's references to divine fidelity were developments of Barth's thesis that only God's own faithfulness could account for the continuity between the crucified and the risen Christ. By remaining in the tradition of Barth, however, Kasper was not quite able to do justice to the fully human, reasonable character of Christian faith, in spite of his manifest intention to affirm the human element. It may therefore be suggested that the relative absence of references to *Gottes Treue* in *Der Gott Jesu Christi* has less to do with the fact that the book contains very little discussion of the resurrection than with the association between this notion and the theology of Barth. Out of fidelity to his historical and dialogical thought-form, Kasper began to utilize this language with greater reserve. On the other hand, he has nevertheless included a number of references to the faithfulness of God in this book, using the word *Treue* and its cognates as well as closely related words like *Verlässlichkeit*. He could do this because he regarded divine faithfulness as an essential element of monotheistic faith. Christian faith is for Kasper correctly designated as monotheistic because it specifies the faithfulness of the one God as the faithfulness and love of the One Jesus called Father, the personal Source of the Godhead.

At this point, however, a question arises. Is it not the case that the loving faithfulness God has demonstrated time and again in the history of salvation has repeatedly met with frustration and failure on account of the infidelities of his creatures? Would it not then be more accurate to say that by his faithfulness God has subjected himself to this frustration, that the faithfulness and

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273 For discussion, see pp. 188-93, above.
love of God for the world really means God's de-divinization? This question indicates why Kasper located the historical revelation of God's faithfulness above all in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus's loving self-surrender unto death was for Kasper the perfect incarnate response to God's total gift of self; thus the Father in turn accepted and affirmed Jesus's being-for-others in the resurrection. Kasper did not regard this loving union between the Father and the Son as a divine coming-to-be in time but as a revelation of who God from eternity is, of the Godhood of God. From eternity, the Father and the Son are free in the superabundance of their love—in the Spirit—to invite what is not God into the perfect communion of their love. God's loving faithfulness in the economy of salvation has thus proven in Christ to be the manifestation in history of God's eternal faithfulness to himself, the mystery of divine love. For this reason, Kasper could say that faith in the Trinity is concrete monotheism.

In *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, then, Kasper shored up the theological presuppositions for an answer to the question of mediation that had been a central concern of *Jesus der Christus*. It is above all where God is acknowledged as triune Love that love can be apprehended as the mediation between freedom and necessity, particularly between divine omnipotence and human suffering; as such, love discloses the meaning of all reality. Consequently, it is faith in the Trinity that can best do justice to human freedom and in this way remain faithful to the world. However, because *Der Gott Jesu Christi* focused so intently on the issue of presuppositions, it could not give the question of how the God who is Love concretely liberates persons for love in the here and now the attention it deserved. This task was left for another book.
III. The Faithfulness of God in *Katholische Kirche*

A. From *Der Gott Jesu Christi* to *Katholische Kirche*

Nearly thirty years elapsed between the publication of *Der Gott Jesu Christi* and that of Kasper's systematic ecclesiology, *Katholische Kirche: Wesen – Wirklichkeit – Sendung*. He penned this new book under historical conditions quite distinct from those under which he produced *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the rapidly-expanding availability and sophistication of computer technology and electronic media, the phenomenon of globalization, the appearance of international terrorist networks, the economic crisis of 2008, and the worldwide effects of climate change represent some of the epoch-making developments that have taken place on the world scene between 1982 and 2011. The same three decades also saw significant changes in the state of the world church. They encompassed nearly the entirety of the pontificates of Saint John Paul II (1978-2005) and his successor, Benedict XVI (2005-2013), who as Joseph Ratzinger had served as Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1981 until his election to the papacy. John Paul in particular has made a formidable impact on the Church's way of being in the modern world, and history has yet to say the last word on his legacy. To implement the teachings of the Second Vatican Council within the Church of his time was among the priorities of his papacy, as one could infer from the fact that he called an extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 to celebrate this Council and discuss its correct interpretation.\(^{274}\) However, in spite of his efforts to put Vatican II into practice, for example, within the realm of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, his policies also

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included measures that reined in some of the decentralization of authority within the Church that had come about as a result of the Council. One should finally mention that it was during the last years of John Paul's papacy and the whole of Benedict's that the disaster of widespread clerical sex abuse in North America, Europe, and elsewhere came to public attention, a moral eclipse within the Church whose repercussions can scarcely be overestimated.

As the state of the Church continued to develop between 1982 and 2011, Kasper's relationship to the Church also underwent noteworthy changes. As priest, professor of theology, and ecumenist, Kasper had already begun to exercise leadership within the Church in Germany and the world, having served not only as the primary author of the adult catechism published by the German Bishops' Conference but also as secretary for the 1985 Extraordinary Synod. His focus shifted decisively, however, when he was named bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart in 1989. During his ten-year episcopate, Kasper responded energetically to the pope's call for a new evangelization while striving to put into practice the ecclesiology of communio that had been the unifying theme of the Second Vatican Council as well as an important topic within his own research. In addition to the challenges facing his own vast diocese, Kasper also experienced firsthand the hopes and the anguish of the world church in his travels to Africa, Asia and Latin America, which he undertook both in his capacity as bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart (a diocese involved in a number of missionary activities) and as the chair of the World Church

275 On the development of Kasper's career and ministry in the Church, see WH; KK 19-67. For a concise account covering the period up to the year 2000, see New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement, Jubilee Volume, s.v. “Kasper, Walter.”

276 German Bishops' Conference, Katholischer Erwachsenen-Katechismus, vol. 1 (see p. 2n8, above).


Commission of the German Bishops' Conference. Kasper's tenure also included ecumenical duties: between 1995 and 2001, he served for a second time as co-president over the international dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, now called the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity. Yet another phase of Kasper's career began in 1999 when he was appointed as secretary, and in 2001 as president, of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This new position again involved a shift in focus, since as head of the Pontifical Council, Cardinal Kasper was also responsible for the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and thus for the promotion of Jewish-Christian dialogue, an area in which he had been almost entirely uninvolved during his earlier careers.279

So Kasper wrote *Katholische Kirche* under very different circumstances than either of the two texts discussed earlier in this chapter. Whereas *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi* both emerged out of courses Kasper taught at the universities of Münster and Tübingen, the process that led up to the publication of *Katholische Kirche* was far removed from any university context. It was motivated not only by Kasper's academic work as a teacher and author, but also by new experiences of pastoral work, ecclesiastical leadership, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. It is therefore necessary to ask how Kasper's understanding of the center of Christian faith and its relationship to God's faithfulness was affected by these shifts in his perspective on the Church. For an answer to this question, the present study now turns to *Katholische Kirche*.

**B. The Narrative of Katholische Kirche**

The problem of discerning the function of divine fidelity in *Katholische Kirche* is somewhat different than in the cases of *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. On the one hand, *Katholische Kirche* presents certain features that distinguish it from both of Kasper's

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279 See WH 280.
previous systematic theologies. In the first place, Kasper was dealing in *Katholische Kirche* with a subject that for him stood on a different level than those with which he was dealing in the other two texts: the theology of the Church is not for Kasper a topic that can be considered apart from the doctrine of God, Christology, and pneumatology, but only within the horizon formed by these topics. This was accompanied by a second difference, as will be discussed below: unlike both *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, in which a historical analogy of freedom provided the basic perspective from which Kasper interpreted the data of history and the tradition, in *Katholische Kirche*, a new analogy of *communio* or communication played this hermeneutical role. As the above analysis of the previous texts has shown, however, the analogy of freedom provided important presuppositions that made talk of God as faithful intelligible. It is not immediately clear, then, how the analogy of *communio* to which Kasper attached himself in *Katholische Kirche* could allow him to continue speaking of God in these terms.

On the other hand, Kasper frequently invoked the theme of divine faithfulness within this text. Whereas references to the faithfulness of God in *Jesus der Christus* were largely localized around his account of the resurrection, and whereas the same were in *Der Gott Jesu Christi* more often hinted at than spelled out, Kasper has peppered *Katholische Kirche* with the language of faithfulness. This is particularly apparent in chapter three, where Kasper treated the essence of the Church. When one combines these facts with the observation that Kasper has in *Katholische Kirche* maintained a tendency present in his ecclesiological reflections from the beginning of his career, namely, to speak of the Church in sacramental terms, then one arrives at

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280 See KK 109-11.

281 See KK 132, 140, 182, 183, 186, 197, 200, 221, 249, 340, 374, 421, 439.
the following thesis: in *Katholische Kirche*, Kasper has presented the Church as the historical and communal sacrament of divine faithfulness.\footnote{On Kasper’s understanding of the Church as sacrament, see below, pp. 444-54.}

It must be admitted, however, that Kasper has presented the Church as a multifaceted reality, indeed as a mystery not reducible to any single formula.\footnote{On the Church as mystery, see KK 102-31.} He therefore used not just one but several images to elaborate his theology of the Church. One could argue, for example, that *Katholische Kirche* described the Church as the sacrament of *communio* between God and human beings. It will be necessary in what follows, therefore, to relate these other descriptions to that of the Church as sacrament of the faithfulness of God.

1. The experience of God’s faithfulness in the Church

Jesus Christ speaks and acts here and now in the sacraments.\footnote{On the theology of the sacraments, see Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament”; Kasper, “Kirche als universales Sakrament des Heils” (see p. 138n56, above); see also p. 146, above.} For Kasper, however, this mysterious sacramental presence of Christ can only be experienced in faith. Hence in order adequately to introduce the sacramental ecclesiology he developed in *Katholische Kirche: Wesen – Wirklichkeit – Sendung*, Kasper decided to narrate the story of his own faith-experience of the Church.\footnote{On Kasper’s life in and with the Church, see KK 19-67.} This already signaled an important difference between *Katholische Kirche* and Kasper’s previous systematic theologies. For although *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi* were not simply bloodless commentaries on Church doctrine but reasoned accounts of a personally appropriated faith in Jesus Christ and in the triune God, the principles of his theology made it clear that this very faith could never be detached from but is always mediated through personal involvement in the life of the Church, its living tradition. As the self-reflection of the
ecclesial subject of faith, Kasper's theology of the Church necessarily involved the inquiring subject in a more explicit way than his other major theological inquiries.

In the midst of the rapidly-changing intellectual and cultural situation in Germany, Europe, and the world during the twentieth century, Kasper experienced the Church as a living and vibrant reality, rooted permanently in the history of Jesus Christ yet constantly renewed and vitalized by the Holy Spirit. Growing up in Germany during the Nazi era and the second World War, he recalled not an age of darkness and unfreedom but the lively faith and prayer life of his family, the courage of Christians (particularly his own bishop) in opposing the Nazi regime, and a passion for the Church that became evident in the liturgical movement and other ecclesiastical movements of renewal. These early experiences dovetailed with the vision of the Church's living tradition that Kasper acquired through his studies at Tübingen, according to which God did not cease to speak with the last book of the Bible or with the closing words of the Council of Trent, but continues even in the present age to guide the Church. For this reason, modernity cannot simply be dismissed as intellectual and cultural decline in comparison, say, to the high middle ages; on the contrary, since it also bears the fingerprints of the Holy Spirit, one must examine the modern era with care, placing its experiences and questions into a critical and creative dialogue with the great lights of the tradition. According to Kasper, such a process of discernment took place at the Second Vatican Council and continues to take place in the present day, in the best teachers of the theological tradition as well as in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, although not without opposition from both the 'conservative' and 'progressive' sides. In spite of all politics and scandals, Kasper's experiences as an academic, bishop, and cardinal have

286 See KK 22-24.

287 On Kasper's studies at the University of Tübingen, see KK 24-31.
convinced him that God has remained faithful to this “black but beautiful” Church (Song of Sol. 1:5), continuing in the Spirit to accompany the believing community in its work of dialogue and discernment. He has thus found much reason to hope for a renewal of the Church in the midst of the declining membership and structural obsolescence facing the Church in Europe today. The Good News of the Reign of God has for Kasper lost none of its timeliness, but rather contains the potential to transform the Church of Europe into a “qualitative and creative minority,” a life-giving leaven in the dough of the world.

Kasper is convinced that commitment to the Catholic Church as the one Church whom Christ promised to accompany even to the end of the age does not conflict with but indeed includes recognition of the legitimate interests of other churches and ecclesial communions. Unlike in Der Gott Jesu Christi, where atheists were Kasper's principal interlocutors, Kasper formulated the guiding questions of Katholische Kirche in light of decades of involvement in ecumenical dialogue over the nature, reality, and mission of the Church. In spite of the considerable degree of convergence achieved by the ecumenical movement over formerly controverted questions, such as the necessity of certain institutional elements for carrying out the Church's mission, Christian communions have continued to disagree over certain fundamental questions, namely, where the true Church can be found in the concrete, and how one such claim to be the true Church relates to the truth claims of other ecclesial communions. One cannot responsibly do ecclesiology without venturing an answer to these two questions, an answer that would express one's basic option for a concrete confession of faith in and with a specific church.

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288 See KK 21-22, 468-69.

289 On the situation facing the Church in the present and the task of renewal, see KK 59-67.

290 KK 64-65.

291 On the ecumenical horizon in which Kasper posed the question of the Church, see KK 71-76.
Confessionalism in this sense does not mean that ecclesiology is for Kasper an ideological superstructure that uncritically props up the concrete form of one's own church; as faith seeking understanding, ecclesiology involves a careful discernment of the presuppositions and concrete preconditions that make one's own faith possible in light of the faith of the Church attested in scripture and tradition. And while both scripture and dogmatic tradition involve definitive attestations to the truth, both also arise out of the historical experience of the Church and so leave room in principle for new experiences and situations in the future to shed still further light on the truths they attest. This means that the contemporary experience of ecumenical dialogue also bears relevance for a Catholic ecclesiology. Kasper's ecclesiology may thus be described as 'ecumenical' inasmuch as it draws from and is intended as a contribution to ecumenical dialogue.

By affirming the confessional and ecumenical character of his ecclesiology, Kasper did not mean to imply that the question of the Church was irrelevant to non-Christians. He rather sought to indicate the intelligibility and universal significance of faith in the Church by way of a transcendental reflection on the phenomenon of dialogue or communication. Kasper observed that there is no such thing as communication in the abstract; rather, a dialogue between persons always takes place within the medium of a specific cultural, linguistic, social context which alone makes such communication possible. Experience, however, shows that culture and language do not only facilitate but, unfortunately, also create barriers to dialogue, obstruct understanding and distort relationships. The reality of miscommunication calls into question the very possibility of an authentic dialogue and can ultimately lead to resignation in the face of the challenges inherent in communication. This is why Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel and others

\[292\] On the methodological presuppositions of ecclesiology, see KK 76-94.

\[293\] On hope for an undistorted communicative situation as anthropological reference-point (analogy) for ecclesiology, see KK 94-101.
have concluded that every act of communication depends upon a preapprehension in hope of a communicative situation free of those elements and structures that alienate and dehumanize. If, however, such an absolute communio is not simply wishful thinking, where might one find some sign of its existence in history? Kasper found in this transcendental hope for free communication an analogue to the communion with God that is the object of Christian hope (‘analogy of communication’) and a starting point for reflection on the Catholic Church as the sacrament of this communion in history. It is not a proof that the Catholic Church is the one true Church but an invitation to consider the faith of the Church as perhaps the best foundation for one's hope for authentic communication among human beings and for relationships free of alienation.

It is worth mentioning here that Kasper was not abandoning his earlier theological commitments by selecting communio or communication rather than freedom as the fundamental analogy for his ecclesiology. His work on Schelling had already made clear that the social and linguistic orientation of the human person was essential to the concrete deployment of human freedom. Conversely, communication presupposes the freedom of those who communicate. To be sure, this newfound emphasis on communion as conditioned by freedom represented a shift in comparison to his Christology and theology of God. On the one hand, this shift correlated with a watershed development in his understanding of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council that took hold in his thinking after the extraordinary synod of bishops in 1985. On the other hand, the choice of communication as analogy for the Church also reprised the

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294 On the conditions that for Schelling make freedom possible in the concrete, see above, pp. 65-66.

295 See KK 97.

296 This shift was reflected in a talk Kasper delivered at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota in 2009. See Kasper, “Freedom and Communion as Basic Concepts of Theology” (see p. 140n66, above).

297 See KK 44-48, esp. 45.
basic concerns of the account of theological truth he published in the closing year of the Council in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. Both of these factors, however, converge on the idea that *communio*, like freedom, expresses a fundamental structure of human existence and thus a primordial human concern. To confess God's faithfulness to creation would therefore mean asserting that God's work of salvation does justice to human *communio*, preserving its integrity while bringing it to its undeducible fulfillment. It is in this sense, however, that Kasper understood the Church as the communal sign of the faithfulness of God for the whole world.

2. The *communio* of the Church as sacrament of God's faithfulness to the world

Kasper described the Church as a self-transcendent reality: its essence is ek-sistence, its beauty is its transparency, its luminescence is entirely a reflection of the one Light of the World. In this sense he understood the Church ultimately as a mystery and a sacrament, whose being consists in rendering the eschatological Reign of God present in history. The Church is for Kasper the sacrament of God's faithfulness to the world precisely as the community that sets before the eyes of the world the definitive salvation accomplished by God in Jesus Christ and its continued unfolding in the world through the Holy Spirit; it has no real meaning apart from this salvation-historical context. The many facets of the mystery of the Church—as People of God, Body and Bride of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, and as reflected in Mary as Type of the Church—come to unity in its reality as sacrament of divine fidelity. Against this background the essential marks of the Church appear not only as inalienable qualities of the Church's being but equally as a perpetual task for the Church, requiring a renewal of its commitment to the Gospel and reform of its structures to meet the needs of its missionary work. It is only by constantly

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298 See below, pp. 333-64.

striving for greater transparency to the faithfulness of God that the Church becomes for the world what it already is in mystery.

In the spirit of the Tübingen tradition, Kasper grounded his ecclesiology on the premise that the *communio* of the Church is a mystery of faith. Summarizing the notion of mystery he developed in *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Kasper explained that the created world, the human person, and the process of human history present an irreducible contingency that raises the question of a ground of unity and meaning underlying all reality, the question of God. To speak of the Church as 'mystery' is to pose the question of the Church within the horizon of the question of God, or more specifically, the question of the salvation of humankind in God. It was God's self-communication in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit that provided for Kasper the Christian answer to the God-question; it is thus in the context of the revelation of God in the cross and resurrection of Jesus that the meaning of the Church is to be decided. According to Kasper, the *communio* of the Church ultimately consists in its participation in the eternal *communio* of the Trinity. He therefore described the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, whose reality as sign and instrument of salvation consists in its pointing away from itself to the reality it signifies, namely, partaking of the divine life through faith, hope, and love. It may be likened to a work of art, the icon of the Trinity, whose essence is to be transparent to divine love.

As Kasper maintained in *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, however, reflection on the triune God should not be divorced from reflection on the eschatological self-revelation of God that takes place in salvation history. From the biblical viewpoint, hope for a just and peaceful communion among human beings has its roots in the message of the one God, who is the one

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300 On the Church as mystery, see KK 102-31.

301 On the biblical message about the eschatological Reign of God, see KK 131-35.
source of the whole human family and therefore of the interpersonal and linguistic structure of
human existence. As the first chapters of Genesis indicated, however—particularly the story of
the tower of Babel—sin fractured and distorted this communicative unity of humanity. Yet God,
out of faithfulness to creation, did not abandon humanity to its fate.\(^{302}\) God's dealings with Israel
represented a new beginning in history through which God promised a restoration of communion
among human beings. This hope came to new expression in the prophetic announcements of a
coming aeon in which God would establish a universal kingship among the nations through a
human mediator (the Messiah). Recapitulating his accounts in *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Kasper found in Jesus's proclamation of God's coming Reign a renewal of this
prophetic tradition. The novelty of Jesus's message was his claim that the promised restoration of
*communio* was already being fulfilled in his own ministry: in his table fellowship with the
outcast, his parables, his marvelous deeds. Jesus presented himself as the Reign in person,
through whom God offered a new communion to those who would entrust themselves entirely to
God's promised future and in so doing make themselves available for love of neighbor.

Historical Jesus research, however, has raised the question: does the Church represent a
collapse of the tension between the eschatological Reign and the present, and therefore a break
from the message of Jesus?\(^{303}\) The key to Kasper's answer was his Christological eschatology.\(^{304}\)
In the resurrection, according to Kasper, God declared his faithfulness to Jesus and to the
message of the Reign that he embodied in his obedience unto death on the cross.\(^{305}\) This means
that on the cross God's faithfulness to creation has been realized in an unsurpassable way:

\(^{302}\) “Doch Gott hat in seiner Treue den Menschen nicht fallen lassen.” KK 132.

\(^{303}\) On the challenge to ecclesiology posed by the Old Quest for the historical Jesus, see KK 135-37.

\(^{304}\) On the Christological and eschatological foundations of ecclesiology, see KK 137-41.

\(^{305}\) “Durch die Auferweckung hat Gott sine Treue zu Jesus und seiner Botschaft erwiesen.” KK 140.
salvation history has reached its goal in the crucified and risen Christ, which henceforth presents
the standard and center for the ongoing divine work of recreating the world. Consequently, the
community of disciples that Jesus had gathered during his lifetime, whose defining mark was
communion with Jesus and whose life after Easter centered around the sacramental celebration
of his death and resurrection and anticipation of his future return, became the abiding historical
sign of God's eschatological faithfulness following Christ's exaltation. Jesus's selection of the
Twelve, which symbolized the eschatological gathering of the people of Israel, and his sending
the same disciples to the whole world after Easter, which pointed to the assembly of all the
nations, confirmed that this community belonged to the whole dynamism of the coming Reign of
God, which reached its high point on the cross.

The mission of the Twelve also anticipated the structures of authority that developed in
this community.\textsuperscript{306} The roots of the biblical appropriation of the Koine Greek concept of
\textit{ekklesia}—an assembly with official leaders—to describe the Church can thus be traced through
the Twelve back to Jesus himself. The institutional development of the Church in no way
represented a betrayal of Jesus's eschatological message. That the Church is not an “event” in an
ephemeral sense, as Christians in the Reformation traditions have claimed, corresponds to the
once-for-all-time character of its origin: as the enduring, communal response of faith to the
crucified and risen Christ, the Church is both event and institution; it is institution as event and
event as institution.\textsuperscript{307} Because God's self-communication exists in history only insofar as it is
heard and accepted, the perdurance of the believing community is the indispensable correlate of

\textsuperscript{306} On the institutional and charismatic structure of the Church as sacrament of the Reign of God, see KK
137-41.

\textsuperscript{307} See KK 146. This seems to represent a scaling back of occasionalist tendencies present in Kasper’s
earlier theology. See below, pp. 340-46, 419, and 446.
the faithful and abiding presence of God among human beings in his Word. Yet although Christ speaks and acts in the world through the Church, breathing his Spirit onto it and bringing about the new humanity within it, the Church is not identical to the exalted Christ; it is not the Reign. Kasper therefore described the Church as an intermediate reality, characterized by eschatological tension. Though the life of the Church anticipates the coming Reign, it also bears within itself the unfulfilled condition of the world. Insofar as it acknowledges this, the Church is freed from hubris and can recognize signs of God's promised fulfillment outside of itself, encouraging all authentic commitment to justice and peace. In its existence for God and for others, however, the Church also presents a prophetic criticism against every form of self-sufficiency that expects everything from human efforts alone. As sacrament of the Reign of God's love, it reminds the world that love alone endures.

Because the mystery of salvation cannot be reduced to a single image, Kasper rounded off his account of the place of the Church in salvation history by taking up a number of other traditional perspectives. Just as the Bible spoke of Christ, who on the cross revealed that love was the meaning of all reality, with the titles of eternal Word, divine Wisdom, and Light of the world, so the Church Fathers developed the idea of the Church as the pre-existent house of Wisdom (see Prov. 9:1-6), which confronts the lies and shadows of the world with the revelation of God's Wisdom on the cross, while also recognizing the “seeds of the word” present in other religions and cultures, purifying them and demonstrating that they find their fulfillment in the light of Christ. The Church is at the same time the temple and house of God, a place of repose and reorientation in the midst of the anxieties of the world, a house of prayer for all peoples, a

308 See KK 166.
309 On other traditional images for and perspectives on the Church, see KK 156-79.
310 On the doctrine of logoi spermatikoi, see KK 158.
home where none is a stranger, which prefigures the definitive peace of the coming Reign. But the Church is this bearer of wisdom and a foretaste of this eternal home precisely as the community constituted by word and sacrament. And so the Church is the “creature of the Word,” the congregation of the faithful brought into being by the Word of God, whose essence is to listen to the Word and, in receiving it, to proclaim it to the world. Moreover, since the Word of God is not an empty word but one that comes to fruition in reality, that finds its verification in deeds, that indeed becomes flesh, the Church is also communio sanctorum, that is, the communion or participation of the faithful in the goods of heaven (the divine life) through hearing the Gospel and partaking of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Yet although the Church offers a real foretaste of salvation in word and sacrament, the history of salvation remains broader than the walls of the Church. Thus, from its beginnings, the tradition has recognized “seeds of the Word,” “preparations for the Gospel,” and the activity of the Holy Spirit outside as well as within the Church. Vatican II for its part integrated these ideas into a universal salvation-historical horizon. The Council did not thereby teach that all are saved, but that, through Christ and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, all have the possibility of being saved. Missionary work retains its soteriological significance, since it brings what is good and true in the religions and cultures of the world into the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and so purifies these things from error that their authentic beauty may shine forth.

If the Church can only be rightly understood as something that points beyond itself toward the eschatological glorification of God at the consummation of the world, then what can

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311 See KK 165-67.
312 See KK 176-78.
one say about the Church’s own proper reality, its essence? In locating the mystery of the Church within the horizon of the divine economy of salvation, Kasper presented the communion of the Church as essentially an image or icon of the communion between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The relevance of Kasper’s Trinitarian perspective for the present study emerges when one observes the role of divine fidelity in his presentation of what he considered the principal traditional expressions of the essence of the Church. In analyzing the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, Kasper identified the People of God, the Body of Christ and Bride of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit as the most important of the biblical and traditional images or symbols for the Church enumerated by the first chapters of *Lumen gentium*. For Kasper, each of these images expresses particular facets of the unbreakable faithfulness and love of God for the Church. In addition, Mary, whom *Lumen gentium* called Type of the Church, was for Kasper the concrete, personal embodiment of the Church’s essence both as icon of the triune God and symbol of God’s faithful love for the created world. Kasper’s account of the essence of the Church confirms a conclusion reached earlier in this chapter, namely, that in the revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God has definitively disclosed Godself as the faithful God.

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313 See KK 123.
314 See KK 180.
316 See KK 215-16, 221.
317 See above, pp. 240-47.
The appellation “People of God,” applied to the Church particularly by the first letter of Peter (2:9-10),\footnote{318} incorporates the Church into the history of the people of Israel, the people of the promise made to Abraham and of the covenant struck on Mount Sinai.\footnote{319} As the laos tou Theou, the community constituted as a people by its covenant relationship with the God whose name means “I will be with you on your way,” Israel—and by extension the Church—owes its continued existence to God's unbreakable faithfulness and mercy.\footnote{320} The dramatic biblical account of the covenant people's wavering fidelity to its role within the divine plan of salvation repeatedly reinforced this divine promise. “The relationship between God and his people again and again passes through difficult crises and deep fractures; yet the fidelity of God is unbreakable.”\footnote{321} God's permanent promise to bless and accompany Israel on their historical mission to the world corresponds in the first letter of Peter (2:4-10) to the participation of the whole Church, and not just the ordained hierarchy, in the priestly, prophetic, and royal offices of Christ. Luther's emphasis on this “royal priesthood” proper to all the baptized (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) indicated to Kasper the ecumenical significance of the “People of God” image, a subject on which Kasper expanded in his treatment of structures of communion in the Church.\footnote{322} In the present context, however, Kasper pointed out that the Church’s priestly principle of existence lies not in any intrinsic quality but in its “eccentricity,” its constant pointing away from itself in order to refer with its whole being to the glory, the promises, and the salvific work of God. 

\footnote{318} “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.”

\footnote{319} On the Church as People of God, see KK 180-90.

\footnote{320} See KK 182. On the meaning of the name of God, see above, pp. 230-31.

\footnote{321} “Aufgrund der Untreue des Volkes geht die Beziehung zwischen Gott und seinem Volk immer wieder durch schwere Krisen und tiefe Brüche hindurch; Gottes Treue aber ist unverbrüchlich.” KK 182; see also 183.

\footnote{322} KK 184; see also 285-94.
doxological structure of the Church does not substitute for the individual's relationship to God, but it does provide the communal context and support that is indispensable for this relationship.

Kasper understood this same symbol as a crucial factor in Christian-Jewish relations.\footnote{On the significance of the symbol “people of God” for the Church's relationship to all the nations and in particular to Judaism, see KK 185-87.} According to his reading, the Bible did not envisage the Church as the “new” people of God but as grafted through Christ onto the rootstock of the one covenant-people. The Church was thus graciously incorporated into the history of this covenant-relationship, in which the mercy of God toward Israel always trumped God's wrath in the end. This “in the end,” however, pointed in the later prophets to a still greater realization of God's faithfulness, to a future in which God would “dwell in your midst” in a definitive way (see Zech. 2:10-11).\footnote{See KK 183.} The Church finds in Jesus Christ and its communion with him the superabundant fulfillment of divine fidelity, the “Yes” to all God's promises to Israel (see 2 Cor. 1:20). This meant for Kasper that the New Testament affirmed God's unbreakable faithfulness to the one people of God, Israel, and to the original covenant.\footnote{Kasper connected his rejection of the so-called substitution theory to his understanding of God’s fidelity to Israel. “Darum wird die Kirche im Neuen Testament nie als das neue Volk Gottes bezeichnet. Vielmehr hält das Neue Testament daran fest, dass Gottes Treue für Israel unverbrüchlich ist.” KK 186. Kasper traced the phrase “new People of God” to the second-century Epistle of Barnabas. See also pp. 473-75, below.} At the same time, Kasper maintained that even for Jews, this faithfulness is ultimately mediated through the death and resurrection of Christ.

This leads to Kasper's next point. The principle by which the Church is included in God's promises to Israel is its union with Christ as his Body and Bride. For Kasper, the image of the Church as the body of Christ expresses the profound and mysterious unity of the Church with and in the risen Christ.\footnote{On the Church as Body of Christ, see KK 190-96.} It has its roots in the Hebraic idea of the corporate person: Paul
presented Christ as the “great I” who unites the individual Christian “I”s into a single people. This incorporation takes place sacramentally through baptism into Christ’s death and especially through communion in the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. On this basis Augustine developed a mystical vision of the unity of the “whole Christ, head and members,” in which the sufferings of the Church become the sufferings of Christ himself. Two events led to the obscuring of this sacramental vision: the eleventh-century Eucharistic controversy, in which the term “mystical body of Christ,” judged too ambiguous to express Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, was applied instead to the Church; and the Reformation, in which the Reformers used the idea of Christ's mystical body in an anti-institutional fashion to refer to an immediate union between Christ and the individual believer, which led Catholic theologians to avoid the term. It made a comeback in the theologies of Johann Adam Möhler and Karl Adam, and entered into the dogmatic tradition through Pope Pius XII's encyclical Mystici corporis. In this modern retrieval, however, the language of Christ's mystical body was sometimes connected with the idea that the incarnation of Christ was prolonged in the Church. Vatican II showed more reserve, affirming an “analogy” between the mystery of the Church and that of the Incarnation, but distinguishing more clearly between the Church and Christ by incorporating this analogy into a larger pneumatological and sacramental framework. This renewed vision became the basis for post-conciliar eucharistic ecclesioologies, in which Kasper saw great promise for Catholic-Orthodox dialogue and for elucidating the relationship between the local and the universal Church. He cautioned, however, that a clear distinction between Christ as the Head, that is, the “subject” of the body, and the Church as “predicate” is key to understanding this image correctly. This qualification allows one to affirm the real, already-effective presence of Christ in the sacramental structure of the Church without identifying Christ with its concrete form in the present. Although
the Body is already united with its Head, the baptized nevertheless continue to build it up into the full stature of Christ (see Eph. 4:12-13).

To reinforce this point, Kasper found it helpful to complement the symbol-image of the Body of Christ with another image already linked in the Bible to the body-image, namely, that of the Church as Bride of Christ.\(^{327}\) Like the symbol of the body, this spousal symbol affirms the unity between Christ and the Church; at the same time, it accents the reciprocal relationship of love between them as well as the history of this relationship, which presupposes an abiding distinction between the two. This distinction emerged quite sharply in the biblical and traditional 'history of the effect' of this image. When the Old Testament described Israel as the bride of YHWH, it frequently utilized this language to interpret the conduct of the covenant people as spousal infidelity. A dialectic emerged within the tradition between the symbols of the Church as Bride and as Prostitute; Luther was by no means the first to apply the image of the “whore of Babylon” to the Catholic Church, although he was the most influential. Not even the letter to the Ephesians intended to romanticize the Church by applying spousal imagery to it, as Kasper reminded his readers; it rather spoke of the spots and wrinkles of the Church prior to its eschatological purification. Kasper presented as the fundamental content of this symbol the unbreakable fidelity of Christ to the Church, his inexhaustible mercy in the face of the Church's sinfulness.\(^{328}\) The Church can say with the sinful woman of the Gospel: “Though so many may accuse me of gloating, Christ has not given up on me and will never definitively abandon me.”\(^{329}\) This meant for Kasper that each Christian must also love the Church, since Christ himself loves

\(^{327}\) On the Church as Bride of Christ, see KK 196-201.

\(^{328}\) See KK 200-1.

\(^{329}\) “Die Kirche darf aber wie die Sünderin im Evangelium wissen: Mögen noch so viele mich hämisch anklagen, Christus hat mich nicht aufgegeben und er wird mich niemals endgültig fallen lassen.” KK 201.
it so unshakably. The spousal image also reminds the Church of its “honeymoon love” for Christ and exhorts it to seek and pray for a more radical conversion and a renewal of its original fervor. It thus places the eschatological reservation on a too-enthusiastic interpretation of the Body of Christ image: the glorification of the Church at the wedding feast of the Reign is still to come.

This Christological dimension, however, depends for Kasper on the creative and vivifying presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, just as the Church's theological nature depends on its incorporation into Christ. This is why Kasper ultimately described the Church as a pneumatic reality, the Temple of the Holy Spirit.330 It is the Spirit, according to Kasper, who will finally reconcile and who indeed reconciles even now the eschatological tension between the Church and Christ, a tension that corresponds with the unfulfilled condition of the present aeon. The same Spirit that renews the face of the earth is also (in the words of Augustine) the soul of the Church, who prophetically leads the believing community into all truth. Since Jesus is the fullness of time, however, Kasper described this prophetic guidance of the Church into the future with the evangelist John as the Spirit's preservation of the identity of the Church by maintaining the Church's faithfulness to its origin in Christ.331 In explaining this Spirit-directed union of the Church with Christ, Kasper did not intend to assert any identification of Christ with the Church, as was discussed above. A crucial factor in his efforts to differentiate his ecclesiology from such Christomonism was his clear assertion of the sovereign freedom of the Spirit. Commenting on the sacramental ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, Kasper described the structure of the Church as epicletic: its authority (Vollmacht) does not permit it to issue commands to the Spirit, but rather mandates that it pray and listen for the Spirit's coming. What Kasper considered

330 On the fundamental pneumatological character of the Church, see KK 201-5.

331 See KK 202.
most characteristic of the Church was not its exterior laws and structures but the interior law written on the hearts of the faithful, the grace of the Holy Spirit, which Aquinas called a *lex libertatis* (law of freedom).\(^{332}\) God thus remains faithful to the Church above all in the sovereign, creative freedom of the Spirit, who in times of ecclesiastical crisis opens up barred doors, bestowing charismatic gifts on the faithful for the renewal of the Church, thus forging new paths for the Church into the future.

It is not in spite of the Church's charismatic nature but precisely because of it that Kasper argued for the abiding significance of stable ministerial offices in the Church.\(^{333}\) As signs of the inbreaking Reign of God, charisms belong permanently and essentially to the Church as the sacrament of the Reign, the historical, communal sign of God's faithfulness. For Kasper, however, the model for Christian charisms was not the extraordinary or miraculous gift (the deeds mentioned in Mark 16, for example) so much as the grace bestowed on each Christian for the carrying out of the Church's mission in a particular time and place. For Paul, the criterion for judging charisms was not their spectacular character but their coordination with the charisms of other Christians in building up the Church. A Church that is “built up,” however, has a certain structure. The special importance of stable charisms of leadership for promoting harmony among the other charisms in the Church became clear even within Paul's lifetime. Kasper summarized his vision of a dialogical reciprocity between this stable, institutional element and the full range of ecclesial charisms in his description of the Church as the “sacrament of the Spirit”: while it indeed possesses an exterior form, an institutional structure (*sacramentum tantum*), the sole purpose of this structure is to provide the guidelines by which the Spirit-anointed servants of

\(^{332}\) On the grace of the Holy Spirit as essence of the New Law, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1-2.106.1; on the New Law as a law of freedom, see ibid., 1-2.108.1.

\(^{333}\) On the charismatic structure of the Church and its ministries, see KK 205-11.
unity in the Church (*res et sacramentum*) help all other Christians to live harmoniously in the life of the Spirit (*res sacramenti*). While there will always be some degree of tension between the institutional and charismatic elements of the Church, institution as such need not lead to a totalitarian rule but can instead foster a flexible system, something like a living organism, open to the ever-new promptings of the Spirit. Kasper presented the unity among the persons of the Trinity as the archetype for relations among the different charisms in the Church: one brings one's own identity and one's own gifts to fruition insofar as one does not hold jealously to them but empties oneself out totally before the other, setting the other free to live out his or her charism and realizing one's own at the same time.

By constantly bestowing new spiritual gifts on the Church and by establishing permanent ministries to maintain unity and freedom within the charismatic *communio*, God demonstrates his faithfulness to the Church. Within the broader mission of the Spirit, however, these gifts given to the Church become signs of God's fidelity to the whole of creation. Thus, according to Kasper, it is as Temple and Sacrament of the Spirit that the Church realizes its universal significance in the history of salvation. On the one hand, Kasper made it clear that the Holy Spirit is not only the soul of the Church but the Lord and Giver of Life, who is bringing about the renewal of creation beyond the walls of the Catholic Church, in the religions and cultures of the world as well as in other churches and ecclesial communions, as Vatican II and John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* taught. Salvation is thus possible for women and men everywhere through the hidden working of the Spirit in the world. On the other hand, as the communion of disciples gathered around the One on whom the Spirit rested, the Church, more than any other community,

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334 See KK 210.

335 On the place of the Church in the universal work of the Spirit, see KK 212-15.
has been empowered to recognize and proclaim these initiatives of the Spirit for what they are—the inbreaking of the Reign of freedom, justice, and peace into the world—and to distinguish them from the workings of the spirit of the present age. The Spirit thus directs the Church beyond itself into ecumenical and intercultural dialogue, which for Kasper is no free-for-all but a spiritual process of discernment that proclaims both promise and judgment, measuring everything against the standard of self-surrendering love revealed in Jesus Christ.

In its missionary proclamation, the Church declares that the Spirit's universal work of salvation is no abstract ideal but has already come to fruition in Mary and the saints. Since Mary personally embodies the eschatological fulfillment that is already underway in the world and is even prefigured, though not yet definitively realized, in the *communio* of the Church, Kasper joined the Church Fathers and *Lumen gentium* in designating Mary as the Type of the Church.336 Kasper found in Mary the concrete realization of the essence of the Church as icon of the Trinity. She, like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, mirrors the fundamental status of Israel before God in her lowliness, poverty, and humility and so represents the people of God in its purest state. As *Theotokos* or Mother of God, Mary plays an indispensable role in salvation history, not apart from her Son but rather in perfect union with him in his saving ministry. By living out her own charism in perfect humility and openness to God's will, she personifies the whole Church; in view of Mary the function of the hierarchy is relativized. Her “Yes” to God bore universal significance, as the Fathers of the Church affirmed by designating Mary as the new Eve, the “undoer of the knots” of Eve's disobedience.337 Kasper clarified the meaning of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception within this salvation-historical perspective: if Mary was completely

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336 On Mary as Type of the Church, see KK 215-22.

337 See KK 220-21.
preserved from the stain of original sin, then the sin of Adam did not fundamentally frustrate the eternal plan of God for the salvation of the world.\textsuperscript{338} So Mary, as the Immaculate Conception, is the “image and sign of God's unbreakable faithfulness to the world and to humanity.”\textsuperscript{339} Mary is concretely the sign of divine fidelity that the Church is in mystery. Kasper therefore concluded that the task of renewing the Church must go hand in hand with a renewal of Marian piety.

The concrete reality of the Church as sacrament of divine fidelity stands in the tension between its mysterious anticipation of communion with the triune God already now in its life of witness, worship, and service and its not yet complete realization of its own lofty essence on account of its finitude and sinfulness. The Church is indeed sign and instrument of God's faithfulness to the world, but it is not yet fully transparent to this faithfulness for all times and before every nation. Expanding his reflections on this already-not-yet reality of the mystery of the Church, Kasper interpreted each of the classical \textit{notae ecclesiae} or essential marks of the Church (unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity) as both permanent gifts to the Church as well as perpetual tasks. The unity God intends for all humanity is no mere abstract ideal but something mysteriously present in the here and now, ineradically prefigured in the spiritual and sacramental unity of the people of God; this unity has nevertheless been wounded by the sins of Christians, which have given rise to the now-historic ecclesiastical divisions for which the Church today seeks healing through its participation in the ecumenical movement.\textsuperscript{340} Likewise, while the Church will never lose its catholicity in the sense of its possession of the fullness of the means of salvation—including the ministry of the word and the sacraments as well as the Church's ancient

\textsuperscript{338} See KK 221.

\textsuperscript{339} “So ist Maria Bild und Zeichen der unverbrüchlichen Treue Gottes zur Welt und zur Menschheit.” KK 221.

\textsuperscript{340} On the unity of the Church, see KK 225-38.
episcopal structure and the headship of the Pope—it is called to administer these gifts throughout the world until the end of time, and to do so in a way that corresponds to the salvation of human beings rather than one that emphasizes its own confessional identity.\textsuperscript{341} The Church's apostolicity, for its part, comprises not only the formal preservation of a historical line of succession but also the response of the whole Church to the summons of the Gospel message, which each generation must renew in part by reconsidering the concrete structures of the Church against the norm of the apostolic and evangelical form of life.\textsuperscript{342}

This tension between 'already' and 'not yet' in the Church's re-presentation of divine fidelity became particularly apparent in Kasper's discussion of the mark of the Church that he regarded as the oldest and most primordial, namely, its holiness.\textsuperscript{343} In the eschatological self-communication of divine holiness into the world, God has set the Church apart from the world to be the chosen people of God, to participate in God's own holiness, that is, God's otherness and transcendence. Significantly, the book of Hosea interpreted precisely this divine otherness as God's mercy and love, divine attributes that Kasper has frequently connected with faithfulness.\textsuperscript{344}

For Kasper, this holiness does not simply happen, as it were, when the Church proclaims the Gospel and administers the sacraments, only to evaporate thereafter. Rather, since the execution of its universal mission as Sacrament of the Spirit requires stable institutional structures, even these outward forms are penetrated by divine holiness. Even now, therefore, the people of God has been made holy by the eschatological indwelling of God in the Church. Because of the definitive manifestation of God's faithfulness to the world in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit

\textsuperscript{341} On the catholicity of the Church, see KK 254-65.

\textsuperscript{342} On the apostolicity of the Church, see KK 265-84.

\textsuperscript{343} On holiness as divine gift bestowed upon the Church, see KK 238-43.

\textsuperscript{344} See KK 239. On the link between divine faithfulness and mercy, see pp. 132-40, above.
from which the Catholic Church has its origin, this Church is indefectible: it cannot finally be destroyed by sin, death, or violence either in its fundamental structures or in the prosecution of its mission, the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.\textsuperscript{345}

This does not mean that the Church has remained interiorly untouched either by the sins of individual Christians or even by the appearance of sinful social structures within its institutional forms.\textsuperscript{346} The historical Church continues to show many a spot and wrinkle in need of cleansing. The conflict between the essential sinlessness of Christ and the existence of sin within his ecclesiastical members has confronted the Church with a perplexing challenge from its very beginnings. According to Kasper, the Church's historical struggles with sin have underscored the mystery of the holiness of the Church as its participation in the mercy and faithful love of God. Reflecting on the biblical understanding of God's holiness as faithfulness and mercy, the early Church concluded that even those who, as it were, renounce their Church membership through grave sin continue to be united to the body of Christ and its gracious influence, even when they remain dead members of this body through refusal to repent.\textsuperscript{347} That is, the indelible character of baptism reveals the faithfulness of God even to the Christian who is unfaithful to his or her baptismal calling.\textsuperscript{348} In light of its unwavering hope in God's mercy and faithfulness, the Church gradually developed penitential rites that would permit some degree of tolerance even for members of the Church guilty of grave sin, giving them the opportunity to answer again God's perpetual call to holiness, to repent from sin and thus to experience anew the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{345} See KK 242-43.
  \item \textsuperscript{346} On personal and structural sin within the Church, see KK 247-54.
  \item \textsuperscript{347} “Wer sich durch schwere Sünde davon losgesagt hat, fällt aufgrund der Treue Gottes nicht aus der ihn in seinem Gewissen zur Umkehr mahnenden Wirksamkeit des Geistes Gottes heraus, aber es ist, solange er die Stimme des Geistes in seinem Gewissen unterdrückt und ihr nicht folgt, sozusagen ein totes Glied in der Kirche und als solches eine Wunde am Leib der Kirche.” KK 249.
  \item \textsuperscript{348} See KK 249.
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inscrutable depths of God's life-giving mercy. Reflecting on such developments, Kasper concluded that the holiness of the Church includes its constant self-purification (*ecclesia semper purificanda*): through penance, through the prayers and suffering of the saints on behalf of those dead to sin within the Church, and through the renewal of ecclesiastical structures by way of a continuous reflection on the tradition and in light of the new initiatives of the Spirit in Church and world today.

The ecumenical significance of this real and irrevocable, yet imperfect, participation of the Church in the reality of God's faithfulness emerged when Kasper treated the other essential marks of the Church. On the one hand, the permanent subsistence of the unity, catholicity, and apostolicity of the one Church of Christ within the Catholic Church corresponds to the Church’s holiness and indefectibility and so cannot be wiped out even by the sins of Christians, since this would give the lie to God's definitive pledge of faithfulness in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, sin—here meaning the failures of charity and humility on all sides that led to the present rifts in communion between Christians—can and in fact has obstructed the full realization in history of the essence of the Church, namely, communion among all Christians (unity) on the foundation of the personal witness of the apostles (apostolicity), which anticipates in word and sacrament the establishment of God's Reign of freedom throughout the earth (catholicity). Yet God remains faithful even in the present state of division. For just as baptism remains a permanent channel of grace even for the Christian who willfully separates himself from the Church through grave sin, so in an analogous way, all the communions emerging from these ecclesial divisions retain, albeit

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349 On the universal call to holiness, see KK 244-46.


351 See KK 230-32, 256-58, 278.
in different measures or degrees, essential elements of the one Church. These elements, which belong to the full catholicity of the Church and so possess an innate tendency to Church unity, include such means of salvation as the proclamation of the Bible and the administration of baptism. Kasper likewise discerned elements of the apostolicity of the Church preserved to one degree or another in many non-Catholic communions, elements not only of the content (the right proclamation of the Gospel) but even of the outward signs of apostolicity (historical succession through laying on of hands). In short, without prejudice to the essential subsistence of the one Church in the Catholic Church, there is authentic pneumatic and ecclesial reality outside the walls of the Catholic Church that belongs to the full manifestation of the mystery of the Church in history. So Catholics need not see in the ecumenical movement a watering-down of Catholicism but can recognize in it a divine initiative, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit leading the Church and all Christians into the full stature of their head.

3. The re-presentation of divine faithfulness in the structure and activity of the Church

It is because Kasper understood the Church in sacramental terms that he could distinguish between the essence or mystery of the Church, which consists in its transparency to the mystery of the triune God, and the concrete realization of the Church's essence and mission in history. The Church reflects the faithfulness of God by means of certain concrete structures and practices: liturgical rites, hierarchic offices, religious orders, lay and clerical associations, social norms, lobbying groups, charitable organizations, hospitals, schools, newspapers. The structures of the Church are not infinitely malleable; because they arise out of the essence of the Church, which is in turn grounded in the fidelity of God, they include a basic, unchanging framework that

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352 On elements of the Church, see KK 235.

353 On elements of authentic ecclesial ministry in Protestant churches, see KK 346-50.

reflects the Church's continuity with its apostolic origins. In particular, Kasper traced to the very beginnings of the Church a distinction between the eschatological mission entrusted to the whole Church and a special commission of some Christians to promote the unity and freedom of the whole Church and thus to facilitate the execution of their common mission. Practically speaking, however, this basic framework can only serve the Church in its work of salvation when it is configured to accommodate a full complement of means to serve this end within concrete places and times, means that do not themselves belong inseparably to the essence of the Church. Thus, precisely because it has its grounds in divine fidelity, the essential form of the Church is flexible enough to adapt to the exigencies of its salvific mission to all nations. In other words, because the Church belongs for Kasper to the spiritual process by which God is bringing about the eschatological renewal of the earth, its structure includes an openness to the new and surprising activity of the Holy Spirit in history and thus to dialogue with other peoples and communities.

It was in his reflections on the nature and mission of the Church as the People of God that Kasper found what he regarded as the foundations of its basic structure.\textsuperscript{355} As “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people” (1 Pet. 2:9), the whole Church is ordained toward the sanctification of the world. Kasper found it significant that in its descriptions of Israel and the Church as “people,” the Greek Bible (Septuagint and New Testament) did not use the political and sociological term \textit{demos} but the salvation-historical term \textit{laos}.\textsuperscript{356} He concluded that one could not use the appellation “People of God” to justify a thoroughly democratized account of ecclesiastical ministry. Luther's doctrine of the universal priesthood of the baptized, which for him meant the authority of all the faithful to interpret Scripture, represented for Kasper one such

\textsuperscript{355} On the dignity and mission of the whole People of God as the basis for the concrete structure of the Church, see KK 285-94.

\textsuperscript{356} See KK 181.
flattening of claims to authority within the Church. Admittedly, Luther later changed his position, insisting that the ordination of preachers and bishops had its origin in Christ himself. Even in Luther’s earlier position, however, Kasper could find a kernel of truth, namely, that the whole people, and not just the sacramental or ministerial priesthood, is the primary referent of the divine promises as well as the divine commission to the Church: all the baptized exercise priesthood in this sense. Consequently, special claims to authority within the Church may not be isolated from but must be integrated into this larger framework: the hierarchy is not the sole means by which the Church's priestly mission is fulfilled but a service and ministry to all the faithful who carry out this mission. This is why both the Fathers of the Church (under the rubric of the Church's holiness) and Thomas Aquinas (within his reflections on the character infused into the faithful by baptism) could formulate doctrines of the priesthood of all Christians that presented this priestly Church as articulated into distinct charisms. Similarly, Vatican II, with reference to 1 Peter 2:4-10, affirmed the holiness of the whole Church and the co-responsibility of all its members without thereby sweeping away the distinctive role of ordained ministers.

Kasper's vision of the People of God absolutely excluded an understanding of the laity as less holy in principle than clergy and religious. Nor did it permit one to understand the Church in terms of a strict division between the private and public spheres, whereby the laity are conceived to be entirely oriented to the Church's mission ad extra, while priests are exclusively ordered to the Church's ad intra functions. Kasper considered the lay vocation to be relatively more focused than that of the ministerial priest on the sanctification of the world from within. This does not preclude but rather includes the rights as well as responsibilities of the layperson within the Church. In the spirit of the Council's reforms, Kasper called for the implementation of

357 On the ecclesial calling proper to laypersons, see KK 294-315.
a more communicative or participative style of interaction between laypersons and clergy. He did not, however, consider an installation of laypersons into properly clerical roles, as in the case of lay ecclesial ministry, to be the normative form of such an augmented relationship between clergy and laity. While Kasper regarded leadership roles in the world and to some extent in the Church as appropriate expressions of the specific charisms of laypersons, marriage, the domestic church, represented for Kasper the ordinary place of lay mission.

It is worth mentioning in this connection that the sacramental and quasi-sacramental signs of God's faithfulness to the Church within the differentiation of its charisms find their common root for Kasper in the image of the Church as Bride of Christ. It is above all the sacrament of marriage that for Kasper signifies and effects Christ's faithful love for his Church entering in a special way into the mutual love of spouses, forming their family as domestic church and giving them grace and strength for their mission as laypersons.358 While the sacrament of marriage emphasizes the efficacy of this love and faithfulness in the present as grace for family life, the renunciation of marriage within religious life signifies for Kasper the eschatological finality of the Church's response to Christ's love.359 The spousal bond of love between Christ and the Church finally provided the perspective from which Kasper interpreted the Church's ban on the ordination of women to the priesthood as well as the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Roman rite. For Kasper, the restriction of priestly ordination to men has less to do with a perceived need for the priest to reflect Christ's maleness than with the personal and sacramental re-presentation of Christ's faithful love for his Bride that takes place in the priest's total dedication to the service

358 On the sacrament of marriage, see KK 306-07.

359 On religious life as the radical living out of the eschatological dimension of the calling of every Christian, see KK 399-408. On the relationship between marriage and religious life, see p. 157, above.
of his community.\textsuperscript{360} The celibacy of the priest likewise underlines the completeness of his dedication to the Church.\textsuperscript{361} Kasper found this same Christlike devotion expressed in the prayer that accompanies the presentation of a newly ordained bishop with his ring: “Take this ring, the seal of fidelity, that you may keep God's holy bride, the Church, adorned by indestructible fidelity, safe from all harm.”\textsuperscript{362}

This raises the question about ecclesiastical ministers. Kasper did not construe the sacramentally ordained ministry as a privileged class of Christians but a body dedicated to the service of the whole people of God, to assist the Church in carrying out its priestly mission.\textsuperscript{363} He found the roots of this differentiation of roles within the Church in the historical ministry of Jesus, although he admitted that elements thereof, including the traditional threefold structure (bishop, priest, deacon), originated in a later stage of development.\textsuperscript{364} While Jesus preached the message of the Reign to the whole people of Israel, he called only some to a special participation in and radical dedication to his mission. He thus assembled a group of Twelve, whom he sent out in his authority to preach and heal among the people. This same group became the primary witnesses to his resurrection and the recipients of Christ's commission to baptize all nations. Jesus thus constituted the college of apostles through \textit{Sammlung und Sendung}, by gathering individuals to himself and then sending them into the world. The fact that mortal men received from Jesus Christ a universal commission and his promise to accompany them faithfully “to the

\begin{footnotes}
\item On the question of ordaining women to the priesthood, see KK 339-40. Kasper discusses the status of women in the Church in a broader way within his treatment of the vocations of laypersons. See ibid., 308-15.
\item On priestly celibacy, see KK 336-38.
\item “Nimm den Ring, das Siegel der Treue, damit du Gottes heilige Braut, die Kirche, geschmückt durch unwandelbare Treue, unverletzt behütest.” KK 340.
\item On sacramental ministry as service (\textit{diakonia}), see KK 315-16.
\item On the roots of the Church's sacramental ministry in the historical ministry of Jesus, see KK 316-17.
\end{footnotes}
end of the age” (Matt. 28:20) implied to Kasper that Jesus intended the “apostolic function” to continue even after the death of the apostles. He did not, however, specify in detail how this was to happen.

The episcopal structure emerged out of the fundamental pattern laid by Christ and the missionary experiences of the early Church. The New Testament authors attested to a differentiated process of development and discernment in which apostolic authority was exercised through a variety of charismatic offices (apostles, prophets, teachers, 'leaders,' and deacons, among others) and styles of organization within different communities. Many of these authors alluded to a rite of ordination (laying on of hands and prayer) through which such leaders were incorporated into the apostolic commission and the blessing of Christ. Their installation was not for Kasper an expression of the will of the community as much as an event in Christ and the Spirit, a sacrament, which gave them the authority over the community they needed to carry out their ministry. Kasper identified the establishment of the threefold episcopal structure throughout the universal Church in the third century as an important milestone in the aforementioned discernment process. He regarded the rapid spread of the episcopal pattern as an indication that the sacramental-episcopal pattern normatively expressed the essence of the Church. He did not, however, deny that there were variations and even aberrations in the later tradition. The medieval jurisdiction theory, which identified the distinguishing mark of the episcopacy over against the priesthood as the authority (jurisdictio) entrusted to the bishop by the pope, presented only the priesthood, not the episcopacy, as an incorporation into sacramental orders (ordo). The Reformers rightly critiqued abuses within the medieval Church's exercise of


366 On ecclesiastical ministry during the Middle Ages and the Reformation, see KK 325-30.
its authority, although their critique eventually took the form of an attack against the sacramental basis of authority in the Church. Only with the Second Vatican Council was the unity of sacramental orders in its threefold articulation restored.\textsuperscript{367} The Council taught first of all that ecclesiastical authority is at the service of \textit{Sendung} or mission: the bishop makes present in a personal way the authority given to the apostles by Christ in the service of the particular needs of his local church. It also signified that this authority is exercised collegially, since it is only in \textit{Sammlung}, in communion with one another and with the Pope, that the bishops exercise the fullness of apostolic authority over the universal Church.

This account of the episcopal structure of ordained ministry in the Church provided the framework from which Kasper interpreted the offices of priest and deacon.\textsuperscript{368} His fundamental principle was the tight link between ministry and relationship to Christ, between \textit{Sammlung} and \textit{Sendung}. In response to the “identity crisis” faced by priests after the Second Vatican Council, Kasper found the heart of priestly ministry in friendship with Christ to the point of radical identification with Christ's dedication to the Church. The definitiveness of Christ's promise to be with the Church until the end of the age corresponds to a consecration of the priest's entire person to the ministry of word and sacrament. For this reason, the sacrament of ordination permanently (“indelibly”) modifies the identity of the priest. Kasper likewise called the permanent deacon the official representative of Christ the Servant, who lives out his friendship with Christ through service in Church and world. Kasper argued that the concrete practice of these offices is not a static reality but can and should be renewed in light of the needs of the Church in a specific age. This is clear in the case of the permanent deaconate, which was restored

\textsuperscript{367} On the Second Vatican Council's teachings on ministry in the Church, see KK 325-30.

\textsuperscript{368} On the priesthood and permanent deaconate, see KK 332-43.
after a millennium of absence by the Second Vatican Council. In applying the same principle to the concrete form of the priesthood, Kasper nevertheless concluded that a revision of the Catholic Church's discipline of priestly celibacy would not solve the actual problem facing the priesthood today, namely, a loss of the center of priestly existence. This center is radical friendship with Christ, and celibacy continues to present an important outward sign of the priest's total dedication to Christ in his being for the Church.

Like the episcopacy, the development of the papacy illustrated for Kasper *schöpferische und innovative Kontinuität*, “creative and innovative continuity” in the history of the Church, the preservation of its self-identity by continually bringing its essence to bear upon the changing needs and situations of the missionary Church.\(^{369}\) The New Testament witnessed to the special role played by Peter in a variety of ways:\(^{370}\) in all the Gospels, Jesus gave Simon bar Jonah the name *Kephas*, “rock,” which translates to the Greek *Petros*; the same Gospels presented Peter occupying first place among Jesus's disciples and speaking for them on important occasions; First Corinthians and the Gospel of Luke preserved an ancient tradition that presented him as the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus; Acts placed him in a position of leadership within the early community, and Paul in Galatians admitted and honored this authority in spite of his differences with Peter. This background lends credence to the claim that the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18-19\(^{371}\) originated in an older, pre-Matthean tradition. The authority to render binding decisions here bestowed on Peter proved in the subsequent history of the Church to be a

\(^{369}\) KK 354.

\(^{370}\) On the biblical foundations of the papacy, see KK 351-54.

\(^{371}\) “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
solid foundation for its faith. Before the end of the first century, the church of Rome (the
traditional site of Peter's martyrdom and burial) gained a reputation as a bulwark of the faith of
the apostles and so became an important center of communication and communion in the
universal Church. The bishop of Rome repeatedly played an important role in the resolution of
doctrinal and disciplinary disputes, although Matthew 16:18-19 had not been used to justify this
role before the reign of Pope Stephanus (254-57). The first-millennium practice of papal primacy
demonstrated to Kasper that the Pope was not an absolute monarch over the Church but (in the
words of Augustine) the representative of the Church, the reference point for the unity and
collegiality of the bishops. At the same time, one need not deny the ecclesiological
significance of the experiences of the Catholic Church in the second millennium. A strong
papacy proved in the Middle Ages to be an important safeguard for the freedom of the Church
against the self-assertions of feudal lords and other political bids for power. One can likewise
recognize another important instance of “innovative continuity” in the response to the Western
Schism mounted by the Council of Constance, which for Kasper provided an important model
for protecting Church communion in the face of irregularities involving the papal office.

The teachings of the First Vatican Council, according to Kasper, expressed in juridical
terminology the gift that the papacy had proven to be for the communion of the Church in the
first two millennia of its history. Pastor aeternus intended to interpret the papacy in light of
the constant faith of the Church as a service to the unity of the faithful. Kasper opposed the idea

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372 KK 358. On the deployment of the office of Peter in the Church of the first millennium, see ibid., 354-59.

373 On Peter as representative of the Church, Kasper cites Augustine, Sermones 270.2; in Ioannis
evangeliun 50.12, 124.5.

374 On the development of the papacy during the second millennium, see KK 360-63.

375 On the First Vatican Council’s teachings on the papacy, see KK 363-68. See also Kasper, “Primat und
that by describing the Pope's primacy of jurisdiction as “ordinary, episcopal, and immediate,” the
dogmatic constitution had subjected the other bishops to the Pope as his functionaries. Citing the
German Bishops' reply to von Bismarck, Kasper argued that the Pope was invested “ordinarily”
(by virtue of his office) with “episcopal” (pastoral) authority to support and strengthen the work
of the local bishops. This authority neither absorbed, nor supplanted, nor simply ran parallel to
the authority proper to the other bishops, but empowered the Pope to intervene “immediately” in
extraordinary situations, such as when a bishop is hindered from carrying out his episcopal
responsibilities. Kasper thus held that _Pastor aeternus_ was trying to facilitate the relative
independence of the bishops in communion with the Pope. Unfortunately, the technical, juridical
language of Vatican I by and large left the impression that the council had declared the Pope an
absolute monarch over the Church. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council contextualized
the doctrine of papal primacy within the broader framework of its _communio_ ecclesiology.\(^{376}\) It
made clear that although the authority of the Pope does not derive from the bishops, it
nevertheless belongs to the Pope precisely by virtue of his solidarity with the other bishops as the
bishop of Rome, the head and representative of the episcopal college.

In a similar way, _Pastor aeternus_ avoided a notion of papal infallibility that would render
it a private possession of the Pope, instead incorporating this papal charism into the broader
context of the infallibility belonging to the whole Church.\(^{377}\) This topic raises once again the
question of theological truth that will be treated in chapter five. In _Katholische Kirche_, Kasper
made it clear that although the concept of infallibility was only coined in the later Middle Ages,
the content it designates was no medieval innovation, but a basic affirmation of faith

\(^{376}\) On the Second Vatican Council’s teachings on the papacy, see KK 368-71.

\(^{377}\) On papal infallibility and the infallibility of the whole Church, see KK 373-77.
grounded ultimately in the biblical understanding of the Fidelity-Truth (emeth) of God. It is a fundamental conviction of the Bible that God is faithful and that one can depend on him unconditionally. God can neither err nor lead into error . . . God stands beside his Church with this infallible faithfulness and makes it into the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Because of the promise of Christ and with the assistance of his Spirit, the Church will endure in the war with the powers of falsehood and death until the end of time (Matt. 16:18, 28:20). In spite of all persecutions and in spite of inner weaknesses, the Church will always exist until the end of time because of God's faithfulness.\textsuperscript{378}

For Kasper, then, infallibility expresses “the central truth of our salvation, that God has revealed to us the truth about our life once and for all in Jesus Christ, and that this Light of truth remains permanently victorious in the Church, never again to be extinguished.”\textsuperscript{379} The perdurance of the Church contained in this basic affirmation does not mean the mere survival of its institutional structures but its remaining constantly faithful to the truth of divine revelation in the concreteness of its proclamation in every age.\textsuperscript{380} Hence the official teaching of the Church participates in the infallible Fidelity-Truth of God, so that when the Pope speaks in his capacity as the official teacher of the Church (\textit{ex cathedra}), he enjoys the protection from error that belongs to the Church as a whole. Such infallible statements must of course be interpreted according to the ordinary principles of theological hermeneutics, which includes considering their historical context and their relationship to the hierarchy of truths. They are nevertheless guaranteed to be true apart from any subsequent process of reception, and so can never become false. Thus, with this gift of infallibility, the Catholic Church offers to other Christians and to humankind a sure foothold amidst the deceptions of the world in God's absolutely reliable Truth.

\textsuperscript{378} KK 374.

\textsuperscript{379} “Sie [die Lehre von der Unfehlbarkeit] ist Ausdruck der zentralen Wahrheit unseres Heils, dass Gott uns in Jesus Christus ein für alle Mal die Wahrheit unseres Lebens offenbart had und dass dieses Licht der Wahrheit bleibend siegreich in der Kirche gegenwärtig ist und nicht wieder verdunkelt werden kann.” KK 377.

\textsuperscript{380} KK 374; see also 243.
Kasper's point in clarifying the gifts offered to the Church in the papacy and the episcopacy was not to canonize the present practice of authority in the Church but to discern how ecclesiastical authority can better facilitate the mission of the whole Church within the world today.\(^{381}\) According to Kasper, however, it is not only the papacy and the episcopacy that need to be renewed today but also the structures of communion and communication that they have been commissioned to serve. He thus proposed some guidelines for understanding and implementing collegial relations among the bishops, a healthy relationship between local churches and the universal Church, and parish structures in light of contemporary challenges.\(^{382}\) To strengthen the spirit and structures of collegiality or synodality would not demand that limits be imposed on the power of the Pope but rather that he be empowered to function more effectively as a center of unity and a facilitator of freedom and communication within the Church. The pope cannot effectively exercise this service apart from a careful discernment of the proper balance between that which must be imposed on all local churches as indispensable for Church unity and that which can and should be left to the freedom and relative independence of each local church in union with its bishop. All this well-intentioned work of renewal would likewise be in vain if it did not address the dramatic diminution of the ranks of the faithful, which has destabilized the parish structure as it currently exists in much of Europe. To this end, Kasper suggested applying models from the Church's missionary experiences. Local churches could be concentrated into a relatively small number of hubs or spiritual centers, which could then support the development and growth of smaller satellite communities analogous to the “house churches” of Christian

\(^{381}\) On the dialogue initiated by Saint John Paul II over the exercise of papal primacy in the Church, see KK 378-82.

\(^{382}\) On collegiality or synodality and its concrete realization in the Church, see KK 382-87; on the relationship between universal church and local churches, see ibid., 387-92; on the parochial structure of the Church, see ibid., 392-99.
antiquity, the “base communities” of parts of Latin America and Africa, or the small spiritual communities and circles that have already become the locus of a renewed vitality of faith in the United States and Europe.

Kasper's historical vision of the concrete *communio*-reality of the Church has important consequences for ecumenical dialogue. On the one hand, it clearly expresses the uniqueness of the gifts offered by the Catholic Church to its dialogue partners, particularly the episcopacy and the papacy. Recent ecumenical convergence over the papacy in particular has shown that this question is no longer simply a non-starter either in dialogue with the Orthodox or with those communions stemming from the Reformation.\textsuperscript{383} According to Kasper, further progress on this question will depend on how effectively the papacy is deployed in the present time as a gift for strengthening and supporting the unity and freedom of all Christians. On the other hand, the history of development and reform in the Church's understanding and deployment of its ministerial offices has shown that the concrete forms of ministry presently in use in the Catholic Church are not the only possible way to exercise ecclesiastical authority. Kasper argued that elements of authentic ecclesiastical ministry can be recognized in the structures of authority in use within some of the communions stemming from the Reformation, which implies that these arrangements also have something to contribute to the full catholicity of the Church.\textsuperscript{384} Nor does the absence of the sacramental signs of apostolic succession in the historic Protestant communions (“horizontal” apostolicity) mean that their authority structures lack the substance of this succession, since succession is ultimately a reality brought about “vertically” in each age by

\textsuperscript{383} On ecumenical dialogue over the papacy, see KK 378-82.

\textsuperscript{384} See KK 346-50.
the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{385} The decisive question for the discernment of the churches is not whether the present structures of authority are identical to those of the past but whether these present forms represent an “innovative continuity” faithful to the essential nature of the Church as it emerged out of its “Beginning in Fullness”\textsuperscript{386} and was clarified in the course of their common tradition. Could these forms of ministry, too, belong to the surplus of promise given to the apostles by Christ?\textsuperscript{387} Kasper has thus shown that a Church whose structure is grounded in divine faithfulness is not only capable of offering its own concrete form of existence to other churches and communions but is also open to receiving their distinctive gifts.

This, however, raises the question of how Kasper related the Church's ecumenical openness to the end toward which all of its structures are finally oriented, namely, to be sign and instrument of the inbreaking Reign of God to all the nations.\textsuperscript{388} Kasper was in no way willing to abandon missionary activity as something immoral or passe in spite of both the charge of colonialism leveled nowadays against the missions of the past and the Church's present consciousness of the religious traditions of the world and their positive values. On the contrary, if the Church can only be understood properly in light of the mystery of the eschatological self-revelation of the triune God, then the very essence of the Church can only be a function of its mission, a consequence of its being taken into the service of God's own eschatological “mission” to bring about the Reign on earth. Kasper understood the mission of the Church to be the glorification of God through the preaching of the Good News to the whole world. Recalling Der Gott Jesu Christi, Kasper argued that the glory of the triune God really is good news for human

\textsuperscript{385} See KK 268-70, 347.

\textsuperscript{386} On the “Beginning in Fullness” of the Catholic tradition, see above, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{387} See KK 347-48.

\textsuperscript{388} On the mission of the Church, see KK 409-16.
beings, since it is the revelation of divine love as the meaning of all reality, the foundation for unity in reconciled diversity and freedom among human beings, who alone can establish peace, justice, and communion within the world. By the same token, the mission of the Church, like Jesus's mission before it, includes a call to conversion that negates all forms of tribalism and nationalism and all idols that pretend to offer human flourishing but in truth bring about slavery and division. In this way, the Church's proclamation discloses the Godhood of God as faithfulness to creation, which brings about the humanization of the world.

The Church is called to proclaim the liberating truth that God is a faithful God not only in word but in deed; in other words, it must preach God's faithful love for the world in a way that corresponds to this faithfulness. Missionary work must respectfully take into account the situation of its audience. It is in this sense communicative: its effectiveness depends not only on speaking but on listening. For this reason, Kasper presented dialogue as one of the most important means available today for carrying out the Church's mission.

Dialogue does not mean downplaying the uniqueness of the Church and its teaching on salvation but discerning the common ground as well as the differences between oneself as a Catholic and one's dialogue partner in order to convey more clearly and effectively the unique liberating reality of the Gospel. This new dialogical posture of the Catholic Church, as represented in the document Nostra aetate, has allowed the Church to recognize the significance of the heritage it has in common with Judaism and to affirm with Paul the irrevocability of God's promises and the perdurance of the original covenant based on God's faithfulness to his faithfulness to creation, which brings about the humanization of the world.

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389 On the relationship between dialogue and the Church's mission, see KK 416-17.

390 See KK 417.
people. In light of this common heritage, the Catholic’s call to mission not only charges her or him to bear witness to Jesus Christ before Jewish persons but also to witness in unison with them to the saving message of the faithful God before the world. Likewise, the eschatological and trinitarian horizons in which Vatican II elaborated its *communio*-ecclesiology enabled the Council to find a basis for ecumenical dialogue without surrendering the Catholic Church’s claim to be the unique community in which the one Church of Christ subsists in history. It did so by pointing to the elements of grace and truth present within other churches and ecclesial communions that place them in a real, though imperfect communion with the Catholic Church, elements that belong to the full expression of the Church’s catholicity and so motivate an exchange of gifts among the churches. Catholics can therefore recognize in the ecumenical movement a divine initiative and trust in the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit, who will bring to completion the work he started. Finally, if spreading the Good News means proclaiming that God is a God for human beings, who promises not only to be there for the people of God but to bless all nations through them, then this also provides foundations for dialogue with other religions and with the world. For this means that Christianity has in common with other religious traditions an interest in the liberation of people and in combating poverty, violence, and

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391 “Unter Bezugnahme auf Paulus konnte die Erklärung weiter zeigen, dass der Bund Gottes mit Israel aufgrund der Treue Gottes zu seinem Volk nie gekündigt wurde.” KK 421. On the Church’s dialogue with Judaism, see ibid., 418-25, as well as the discussion of Kasper’s contributions on pp. 457-83, below.

392 On ecumenical dialogue, see KK 418-25, as well as the discussion of Kasper’s contributions on pp. 484-550, below.

393 See KK 429-31.

394 “Wenn wir überzeugt sind, dass die Ökumene ein Impuls des Heiligen Geistes ist, dann dürften wir trotz aller Schwierigkeiten überzeugt sein, dass der Geist treu ist und zu Ende führt, was er selbst angestossen hat.” KK 439.

395 See KK 450, 473.
other injustices.\textsuperscript{396} That this is actually common ground, however, shows that what motivates the Church's present engagement in dialogue is not surrender of its identity but faithfulness to its tradition and mission.

\textit{C. Conclusion}

\textit{Katholische Kirche} fills a lacuna in Kasper's systematic theology, addressing issues that \textit{Jesus der Christus} and \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi} had omitted or to which they had at best sketched a response. In it, Kasper has developed his response to the question of mediation between God and human beings. God's eschatological act of reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is for Kasper neither simply an otherworldly hope nor an unforeseeable future event; it is a visible, tangible reality even today, present in an anticipatory or sacramental way in the people God has claimed as his very own, the historical community called the Catholic Church. As God's unsurpassed act of revelation and salvation took place in the concrete history of the man Jesus of Nazareth, so the impact of Jesus's radical self-surrender remains concretely present in the world in the Body and Bride of Christ, the Church. And although the Holy Spirit "blows where it wills" (John 3:8), drawing women and men everywhere into the mystery of God's radical self-giving love, this Spirit nevertheless dwells in the Temple of the Church, empowering Christians to discern the divine work of renewal, revivification, and redemption taking place in all creation, to cooperate with this work in faith, hope, and love, and to proclaim to the whole world the faithfulness and mercy of God. In its finitude and even its scandalous imperfections, the Church of today is the icon of the Trinity, the sacrament of divine \textit{communio} for the life of the world.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{396} See KK 447.}
At the same time, the nature of the Church constantly points beyond itself toward the full manifestation of the Reign of God, for which it hopes, prays, and works, and of which its own life offers only a foretaste. Kasper’s ecclesiology thus underlined what the rest of his theology had already made clear: no speculative account of the mediation between God and human beings can ever be complete in itself. This is because the question of mediation can never circumvent the mystery of freedom. As long as human freedom has the capacity to change, to either reject or accept God’s free offer of grace, the work of mediation will remain incomplete. The question of mediation is thus an eschatological question whose answer will not be known in an absolute way until the end of history. No more should be expected of a theology of the Church, or, for that matter, a theology of God or a Christology, than a well-founded invitation to faith, a reasoned account of Christian belief and life that answers the question of mediation in a practical way.

*Katholische Kirche* might not satisfy those commentators who have sought or still seek from Kasper a more detailed account of God’s saving and liberating grace at work in the movements and cultural initiatives of the contemporary world. Nor was its aim to satisfy them, at least not directly. Kasper’s primary concern was to demonstrate the relevance of the Church as the historical community in which the salvific work of God among human beings may be beheld, adored, and finally received as an invitation to share in this ongoing work. So Kasper’s account centered on the Church’s participation in the divine life rather than the many other ways in which God communicates this life into the world. Given this constraint, *Katholische Kirche* could offer only a limited answer to the question of mediation. Nevertheless, the book demonstrates that Kasper was fully conscious of the limitations of his topic. Although he was careful to avoid

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minimizing the grace that God has bestowed on the Church, he took every opportunity to relativize the Church before the ever-greater mystery of God, to frame the question of the Church within the larger question about the Reign of God, to affix the eschatological reservation to all the Church's claims about itself. That the Church is not a 'perfect society' but a reality essentially characterized by its relationality and openness before God came to expression in a notable way in Kasper's discussion of the Church in dialogue. The identity of the Church impels it beyond itself in search of God's unbounded abundance at work within other Christian communities as well as in the religions and cultures of the world. In its own way, then, Kasper's theology of the Church contributes to the ongoing task of discerning the signs of God's unwavering faithfulness in the ongoing history of salvation.

Thus the present investigation of *Katholische Kirche* returns to the question with which it began. Kasper organized the many complementary images of the Church presented by scripture and tradition—People of God, Sacrament of the Reign of God, House of Wisdom, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit, Creature of the Word, and so forth—under a single head by describing the Church as sacrament of the *communio* among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How, then, does an understanding of the Church as the sign and instrument of God's faithfulness relate to this vision of the Church in light of the Trinity? An answer will involve a review of the major points of the foregoing analysis. God's faithfulness to the world reaches its term in the establishment of *communio* between God and human beings, among human beings, and between human beings and the rest of creation. The original state of harmony within the world, however, has been disrupted by human infidelity (sin). Does this mean that God's faithfulness has come to no effect? The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus have shown otherwise: in God's faithfulness to Jesus Christ and his message, the sin of Adam has been overcome; the promised Reign of
God, in which God will reconcile the world to himself, has in Christ broken into time. In the community of disciples Jesus gathered around himself, God's faithfulness to the covenant people, Israel, has come to its unsurpassed fulfillment. Since the Church, however, has become God's People by virtue of its union with Christ, it experiences God's fidelity in and through the love of Christ, the faithful Spouse of the Church. This union is in turn the fruit of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in the Church as its Temple. Consequently, the Church's fidelity to Christ is not a slavish conformity to institutional structures but a dynamic, communal process of listening and discernment, a dialogical unity among the members of the Church in the diversity of their charisms as well as a process of dialogue with those outside the Church who are united to her in different ways. The faithfulness of God manifested in the concrete communio of the Church has already been fully realized in the saints and above all in Mary. For the pilgrim Church, however, communio is a permanent gift and ongoing task, the gift and task of conversion.

In brief, divine fidelity is a pervasive aspect of Kasper's ecclesiology. Like Jesus der Christus and Der Gott Jesu Christi, Katholische Kirche presented the faithfulness of God as a fundamental aspect of Christian faith, a paraphrase of the mystery of salvation. This same faithfulness determines the essential nature of the Church, lays the foundations for its structure as communio, and empowers it to carry out its mission in the world with confidence and patience. It is noteworthy that Kasper explained some of the distinctive features of Catholic ecclesiology with reference to the definitive revelation of God's faithfulness in Jesus Christ: priestly celibacy, Marian piety, the indefectibility of the Church, the infallibility of the Pope. Equally interesting, however, is the fact that Kasper's explication of the faithfulness of God in this book was also broad enough to provide substantial foundations for dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism as well as other Christian churches and communions. A church that finds the grounds of
its existence in divine fidelity is a self-transcendent church, open to the new and surprising ways in which God will usher in the Reign on earth through the Holy Spirit.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

The present chapter proposed to investigate the development of Kasper's understanding of the center of Christian faith through an examination of his theological 'trilogy,' *Jesus der Christus, Der Gott Jesu Christi*, and *Katholische Kirche*. It asked whether Kasper's understanding of the central truth of faith as presented in each of these three books remained essentially the same as when he articulated his understanding of this center in his 1968 Kurzformel in terms of divine fidelity. From a certain perspective, it might seem that one would have to answer in the negative. When one considers the transition from the short formula found in “Wort und Sakrament,” through *Jesus der Christus*, which revolves around the confession “Jesus is the Christ,” to *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, which takes its structure from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, one can detect a movement from soteriological to ontological statements of faith. Whereas the first of these statements expressed the faith soteriologically in terms of divine fidelity, the second coded the soteriological content in a homology, an 'is'-statement that first of all said something about the identity of Jesus, and the third explicitly incorporated precise metaphysical language in affirming the doctrine of the Trinity. By the time Kasper wrote *Katholische Kirche*, he simply presupposed a Trinitarian framework. No short formula of faith in terms of divine fidelity occurs in any of the three books considered in this

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chapter.\textsuperscript{399} In place of such a formula one finds the statement that the Trinitarian confession is “the” short formula of Christian faith.\textsuperscript{400}

Besides this consensus over the fundamentally Trinitarian structure of the faith, one can also observe in Kasper’s three books a development of his understanding of faith’s central content. Between \textit{Jesus der Christus} and \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}, Kasper clarified the status of the analogy of being in his thought by explicitly formulating a doctrine of analogy in terms of freedom, the \textit{analogia libertatis}. In doing so, Kasper removed certain lingering elements of idealism in his thought, sharpening the dialogical structure of his hermeneutics of the faith in order to acknowledge more clearly the irreducible duality of divine sovereignty and human freedom. In \textit{Katholische Kirche}, Kasper augmented this analogy of freedom, adding to it an analogy of communication or communion that underlined its intersubjective dimension. He has thus progressively heightened his emphasis on the dialogical character of Christian faith.

In spite of this apparent disjunction between Kasper’s earlier \textit{Kurzformel} and the expressions of the center of the faith found in his three books, however, the faithfulness of God plays an important role in each of these books. This is particularly the case in \textit{Jesus der Christus}, where Kasper asserted that what grounds the reciprocal unity (expressed by the “is” in “Jesus is the Christ”) between the Crucified and the Risen One is nothing other than the faithfulness of God. While Kasper distanced himself both from this particular formulation and from the language of fidelity generally in \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}, he nevertheless explained the Trinitarian implications of this statement in terms of God’s faithfulness to himself: the cross is not a betrayal but a historical manifestation of the mystery of divine love, the immanent Trinity. For its part,

\textsuperscript{399} \textit{Katholische Kirche}, however, comes quite close. See KK 377; compare 374.

\textsuperscript{400} JC 203; DG 300.
Katholische Kirche made up for Kasper's reticence to speak of divine fidelity in Der Gott Jesu Christi by frequently invoking the language of faithfulness to describe the mystery of salvation both inside and outside the Church. In this book, Kasper could even paraphrase the whole mystery of salvation in terms of the infallibility of God's Treue-Wahrheit. At the same time, he was able to retain the essential claim of Jesus der Christus as well as the Trinitarian vision of Der Gott Jesu Christi by anchoring divine faithfulness to the created world and the covenant people in the Father's faithfulness to Jesus as manifested in the resurrection.

As long as one does not presuppose a sharp contrast between functional or soteriological and ontological expressions of the faith, then one can discern an inner unity between the Trinitarian creed and Kasper's faithfulness-formula as different expressions of the same content of faith. The doctrine of the Trinity would then express the ontological content latent in the soteriological statement, the conditions on God's side for the possibility of God manifesting faithfulness to the world in the history of salvation. To affirm God's faithfulness and love in Jesus Christ, then, is to express the whole of the faith, and to confess that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to specify the inner grounds of divine fidelity. The doctrine of the Trinity is concrete monotheism: it makes explicit what Christians mean when they call God faithful.

The unity here posited between soteriological and ontological statements of the center of Christian faith implies that Kasper's understanding of divine faithfulness as represented in the three aforementioned books can be explicated in Trinitarian terms. Such an explication might begin with the observation that, for Kasper, God is first of all faithful to himself. This means that God's self-surrender to human beings in salvation history, God's willingness to be involved in human history and even to suffer out of love for human beings, is not an instance of divine fidelity.

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401 See KK 374, 377.
masochism or suicide but the realization in time of who God is in eternity. For Kasper, God is so omnipotently free that God can give himself away completely to another without ceasing to be God; God manifests who God is by letting the other be other, by setting the other free. Otherness and the reconciliation of otherness in love are possible for God in time because God has already achieved this reconciliation, as it were, in Godself: the Father has from eternity surrendered himself to Another who has in turn freely received and accepted this self-surrender in love. The divine essence, God's eternal act of existence, is to be Lover, Beloved, and Love, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the immanent Trinity is for Kasper a meditative exposition of the pregnant biblical formula, God is love. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God is faithful to himself. This is the foundation for all that follows.

In the second place, God is faithful to his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus preaches God's radical love and mercy for human beings and exhorts his listeners to surrender themselves entirely to this divine love. He himself embodies total surrender to God and total commitment to his sisters and brothers on earth, up to his death on the cross. In his free, human act of obedience, he wills to be nothing apart from or other than God's self-communicating love for human beings. In Kasper's account, God proves to be faithful to Jesus in a double sense. On the one hand, God brings Jesus's historical existence to a totally undeducible fulfillment whose ultimate ground is not something intramundane but the free, loving act of God. God exalts Jesus as the Reign in person, the universal mediator of salvation, who reveals God's eternal faithfulness in love in an unsurpassable way, thereby showing that self-giving love is the meaning of all existence. In so doing, God verifies Jesus's implicit self-identification with God's own act of self-communication. The resurrection presupposes that the entire historical existence of Jesus had been embraced by God's eternal act of love for the Son (the hypostatic union). On the other hand, God reveals the
faithfulness of this love in a qualitatively new way inasmuch as this union does not swallow up Jesus's humanity but posits what Kasper called his human personhood. In Jesus, the mediation between God and human beings has taken place in a totally unique and undeducible way, yet also in a way that verifies the Rahnerian maxim: the greater one's union with this God, the greater the intrinsic reality of one's own humanity.  

In the third place, God is faithful to his people, the Church. God's self-communication to Jesus is at the same time self-communication to humanity in and through Jesus's self-surrender for the many. So God's faithfulness to Jesus includes faithfulness to those to whom Jesus gave a sacramental participation in his death through baptism and Eucharist. Through its incorporation into Christ, the Church is also included in God's loving faithfulness to Israel, the people of the covenant. This faithfulness becomes manifest in its history through the manifold gifts bestowed on the Church by God through the Holy Spirit to meet its changing needs in its ongoing mission to the nations. These gifts include the sacrament of marriage, in which God's faithfulness becomes tangible in the faithful love of the domestic church, and the many forms of religious life, in which the call of Jesus's evangelical counsels remains a living, challenging presence in the world. They also include the apostolic ministry, which remains effective in the Catholic Church through the college of bishops in union with their head, the bishop of Rome. The successors of the apostles, united with the successor of Peter, safeguard the truth of divine revelation through their participation in the charism of infallibility bestowed by God on the whole Church. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the Church and maintains it in the truth without thereby removing it from the conditions of the present aeon, such that its members would be incapable of sin. For it belongs to the definitive revelation of divine love and faithfulness in Jesus Christ that

all the narrow-mindedness, self-interest, and uncharitableness of Christians, even of the leaders of the Church, and all the social-structural sin that plagues the Church from within cannot frustrate the true preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments that God constantly offers to all in and through the fundamental fidelity of the Church to its ministry. At the same time, the Holy Spirit manifests God's faithfulness still more perfectly by purifying the Church through a constant call to conversion and renewal, leading it ever more completely into the full stature of its Head. In the meantime, the Church, in spite of its imperfections, will continue to be the eschatological sign of God's faithful, merciful love for the world.

And so, finally, God is faithful to the whole of creation. In the risen Christ's being-for-others and through the life-giving initiatives of the Holy Spirit, God remains effectively present with human beings, building up the Reign of the freedom of the children of God. In his faithfulness to humanity the same God has graciously incorporated the structures of human freedom and communication into this ongoing work of the salvation of the world. The Church is the eschatological sign of the coming Reign, proclaiming the signs of God's faithfulness wherever they may appear in the history and cultures of the world. Like Mary, its mother and model, the Church offers itself, its own sacramental and communal life, as an anticipatory sign and a foretaste of the salvation that God has in store for the world. In humble recognition of its finitude and sinfulness, however, the Church remains constantly in search of the ways in which the Holy Spirit makes God's ever-greater faithfulness manifest outside the borders of its present form of existence. And so divine fidelity impels the Church beyond itself in dialogue. It prompts the Church to recognize God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel and fosters a common witness to the one God and a common prophetic challenge against all forms of injustice and violence. It gives the Church a new occasion to examine its conscience, to confess how its own
sinfulness has led to unjust treatment for Jews and others and to the present state of division among Christians, and to purify itself of such attitudes and behaviors. It leads the Church to acknowledge the elements of grace and truth that other Christian communions have preserved and developed independently of the Catholic Church and calls for a new discernment of spirits on both sides regarding how an exchange of gifts could better serve their mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Such movements, too, prove to be an initiative of the Holy Spirit and a powerful sign of the faithfulness of God inviting all peoples into the divine communio, thus establishing a new and just communion among all peoples and bringing creation to its undeducible fulfillment.

In this systematization of the notion of divine faithfulness as it was presented in Kasper's three theological syntheses, the tension between faithfulness and newness that was shown in chapter three to be characteristic of Kasper's analogy of faithfulness becomes apparent. What is new about the present account is that it makes explicit the Trinitarian content latent in this tension. The eternal, mutual act of self-surrender between Father and Son becomes something new, indeed becomes history in the faithful love of the Father for Jesus and in Jesus's personal obedience to the Father. By virtue of its union with Jesus Christ, the Church has become ineradically linked to his being-for-others and so will always be the public sign and instrument of God's saving faithfulness; it has the potential, however, to carry out its mission still more effectively through self-purification and renewal in view of the particular graces bestowed on it for the evangelization of the age in which it dwells. And so the Church remains confident in the Spirit who has chosen irrevocably to dwell in the Church as his Temple, even as it looks beyond itself for the new initiatives and promptings of the same Spirit that it encounters in its missionary and dialogical activities. So God holds fast to the mystery of divine Love and to the history of salvation that has reached its unsurpassed high point in Jesus Christ, respecting the dignity of the
human race and the history they choose to enact; yet God remains free in the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into this history, both through the Church and through whatever other means God may choose. In Jesus Christ and through the Spirit, God is absolutely faithful, yet ever new.

In summary, it may be stated that the faithfulness of God, explicated in the doctrine of the Trinity, does indeed express what Kasper regards as central to the Christian faith. In this sense, divine fidelity constitutes the material criterion of the faith; it designates the one mystery of faith in view of which the many mysteries that belong to the profession of faith may be correctly interpreted and understood. This means, however, that much depends on understanding God's faithfulness correctly. How do I know that Kasper, or anyone else for that matter, has rightly interpreted this center? Who is authorized to render definitive judgment about the adequacy or inadequacy of such an interpretation? If no one, then are the faithful to be delivered up to a cacophony of opinions over the most basic affirmations of the faith? The present inquiry into the material criterion of faith thus gives way to the question of formal criteria of the faith. This is the question that Kasper has addressed in his theology of tradition and his reflections on theological truth.
Chapter Five
The Faithfulness-Truth of God and the Formal Criteria of Faith

Tradition stands out as one of the defining themes of Kasper's theological project. It was the explicit subject of his theological dissertation, Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule,¹ as well as of a number of essays written throughout his academic career.² The same theme, however, entered in one way or another into practically all of his theological reflections. This had not a little to do with the fact that tradition was one of the major themes treated by the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School.³ Indeed, one of the three guiding principles for the practice of theology within this school, alongside scholarly rigor and openness to the questions of the present day, was commitment to the living tradition of the Church.⁴

Commitment to the tradition, however, did not for Kasper mean joining the conservative camp any more than the progressive camp.⁵ According to Kasper, the ultimately intractable opposition between progressives and conservatives actually conceals the authentic concern common to both parties, namely, to lay hold of, or to hold fast to, that which is true. For Kasper,

¹ LT.
³ On the influence of the Catholic Tübingen School over Kasper's thought, see above, pp. 57-62.
⁵ On the basic concern behind the ideas of tradition and progress, see Kasper, “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip,” 199-203; “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 379-83.
then, the question of tradition was closely tied to the question of truth. More precisely, tradition (broadly understood) essentially stood at the service of truth. This, however, meant for Kasper that tradition rendered an indispensable service to the human race. A free and wholesome human existence is simply not possible apart from truth.

The question of truth is a primordial human question, and light belongs to the primordial symbols of human existence. Truth and light are not something extra which is added to the human reality; they are the medium in which human existence first becomes possible. Only where there is light and where things appear in their unconcealedness (a-letheia) can human beings orient themselves and find their way around the world.

In spite of his high valuation of tradition in the abstract, as it were, Kasper was well aware that concrete traditions have sometimes been experienced not as liberating, life-giving realities but as encumbrances that concealed the truth and hampered a just and peaceful life. In formulating his understanding of tradition and of truth, Kasper paid close attention to this dialectic between freedom and obligation. Convinced that tradition could only demand definitive commitment insofar as it was a liberating tradition committed definitively to human freedom, Kasper argued that tradition must include an element of openness and indeterminacy as a safeguard for freedom. Only if tradition makes a place for the emergence of what is new and contingent in history could it for Kasper do justice to the otherness and unpredictability of historical reality. Tradition must finally leave room for the advent of the eschatological Reign of God, the reality of which was for Kasper an indispensable presupposition for human freedom in

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9 On the relationship between the authoritative claims to truth made by tradition and their liberating power, see Bindung; “Erneuerung des dogmatischen Prinzips,” in TK 1:25-42; Wahrheit und Freiheit: Die “Erklärung über die Religionsfreiheit” des II. Vatikanischen Konzils (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1988).
history. To preserve the openness of tradition to the ever-greater glory of God's future Reign was an important motivation behind Kasper's conception of the object of theological inquiry, or theological truth.

Some commentators have sharply objected to Kasper's understanding of theological truth as the faithfulness of God confirming itself in history. Notable critiques of this kind were introduced above, in chapter one. One of the important questions raised by critics was whether Kasper's 'open' understanding of truth could accommodate the permanent validity and bindingness of dogma. This would seem to be an indispensable criterion for an authentic Catholic theology. Another question: can Kasper show that his theory of truth promotes a substantive dialogue with philosophy and the sciences? In other words, can his theory of truth do more than merely assert that theological truth is universally communicable? Can it facilitate that communication in a convincing way?

It may be helpful to dwell on one of these critical assessments because of its incisive articulation of the issues surrounding Kasper's notion of truth. Reinhard Hütter presented an analysis of Kasper's *Die Methoden der Dogmatik* in a 2009 lecture arguing for a renewal of Thomistic theological method as a paradigm for Catholic theology. This critique acknowledged significant common ground between Hütter and Kasper. Hütter's main concern in this lecture was to remedy the pervasive fragmentation afflicting the theological enterprise in the present, which has manifested itself in tension and even discord among biblical, historical, systematic and moral

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10 See above, pp. 11-16. The critiques there discussed were Plov 272-96; Pröpper, “Freiheit als philosophisches Prinzip der Dogmatik” (see p. 10n15, above); Hütt 376-88.

11 MD.

12 Hütt.
theologians. To maintain the intrinsic link between theology and the tradition of the Church—particularly the binding doctrines expressed in the creeds, the teachings of the Councils, and so forth—was for him a necessary condition for the desired unity. This link, however, was not by itself sufficient; still more important was the stability of the content of faith over time, which the tradition functioned to protect. Hütter recognized that he shared all these concerns with Kasper.

Furthermore, Hütter was no more interested than Kasper in a static and uncritical adherence to tradition. This fact emerged in a particular way in his discussion of the Thomistic methodological proposal advanced by Francisco P. Muñiz. According to Hütter, both Muñiz and Kasper agreed that the purely deductive methodology practiced by neo-Scholastic theology was not adequate to the theological task. Theology could not be satisfied simply to analyze and recombine the articles of faith in novel ways; it had to go in search of sapientia, wisdom, a deeper understanding of the truths of the faith. In this sense, both Kasper and Muñiz envisaged the object of theological inquiry as a more than propositional reality. Hütter, likewise, was simply following Aquinas when he construed the articles of faith as “instruments” by which one could gain access through contemplation to a truth distinct from each of these propositions, namely, God as First Truth. To this extent, Hütter's idea of a sapiential theology was open to a critical principle within the tradition, a concern whose place in Kasper's thought shall be discussed below.

13 On the basic concerns that motivated Hütter's paper, see Hüt 369-76.
14 See Hüt 376-77, 379-80, 400-1.
15 This proposal is available in English translation in Muñiz, Work of Theology (see p. 14n30, above). For Hütter's analysis, see Hüt 389-98.
16 See Hüt 392n36.
17 See Hüt 388, incl. n33; 392-93.
18 Hüt 399-400.
Hütter, however, was no proponent of Kasper's work. He took issue with Kasper's philosophical commitments, which he identified as a comprehensive ontological historicism in the tradition of the later Heidegger.\textsuperscript{19} Within this framework, which Hütter regarded as basic to Kasper's hermeneutics of the tradition, every act of knowing was to be regarded as “historical thought.”\textsuperscript{20} This ultimately meant that reason could never say anything universally valid; it can only speak about concrete reality. In particular, “Hellenic” metaphysical discourse overreaches its competence when it claims to explain being as it is always and everywhere.\textsuperscript{21} Hütter acknowledged that Kasper tried to bring the relativizing tendency of this framework under control with the aid of two transhistorical points of reference, namely, the eschatological truth of God and the \textit{concretum universale} of the person of Jesus.\textsuperscript{22} For Hütter, however, this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{23} Kasper's framework ruled out the possibility of any permanent content expressible in propositions that could serve as a foothold for faith. This explained why Kasper had no qualms about subjecting the doctrines of the faith to “radical comprehensive questioning.”\textsuperscript{24} Hütter inferred from this that faith in Kasper's understanding had no intrinsic connection to any particular content whatsoever. Kasper thus approximated Bultmann's notion of faith as a purely existential \textit{certitudo super omnia}.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{19} See Hüt 377-80.
\textsuperscript{20} Hüt 380n22; see 381-82.
\textsuperscript{21} See Hüt 380n22.
\textsuperscript{22} See Hüt 380-81, 383-85.
\textsuperscript{23} Hüt 400-1.
\textsuperscript{24} Hüt 383.
\textsuperscript{25} See Hüt 384-86.
In addition to undermining theology's attachment to a stable content of faith, this historicizing framework left theology isolated from other disciplines. “As an essentially historical-hermeneutical science, theology is by definition prevented from any substantive interaction with the natural sciences, let alone with philosophy.”26 By detaching faith and theology from propositions with a stable content, Kasper lifted theology out of the whole context of reasoned discourse, restricting its task to the problem of historical interpretation.

There are both strengths and weaknesses to Hütter's analysis. On the one hand, his reading of Kasper's notion of “historical thought” ignored Kasper's insistence, in the tradition of the later Schelling, that the Absolute manifests itself in history, that the universal is commingled with the contingent—with language, culture, politics.27 To this extent, faith in Kasper's understanding could also apprehend the universal by means of finite propositions. Hütter seemed to presuppose a Platonic divide between universal truth and Kasper's category of concrete historical reason. On the other hand, Hütter raised several interesting questions. How exactly did Kasper conceive of the reality of faith? Is faith for Kasper simply an existential decision, a certitudo super omnia intrinsically connected to no particular content? Is it merely a human act, or does it involve a supernatural component? More importantly, is faith capable of securing theology's connection to a stable, transhistorical content? If not, then by what means other than faith does the truth of revelation abide in history? How can one maintain the permanence of the content of faith, given the “radical comprehensive questioning” to which Kasper (according to Hütter) exposed all the propositions of the confessions and doctrines of the Church? What secures the Church's claim that its binding doctrines are true, always and everywhere?

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26 Hüt 396.

27 See above, pp. 84-86 and 89-91.
These questions may be posed in terms of the framework that the present study has developed within the preceding chapters. The category of faithfulness as Kasper understood it generates a theology from below with a basically 'dialogical' structure, which means that it presupposes the irreducible duality of divine sovereignty and human freedom. The faithfulness and love between human beings points in a particular way to the fundamental mystery of human existence. According to Kasper, the human mystery encounters its undeducible fulfillment in the infallible faithfulness and love of the God of Jesus Christ. The faithfulness of God is thus the center and material criterion of Christian faith, provided it is understood to include faith's Trinitarian content. This, however, raises the question of how the center of the faith is correctly apprehended. Given that the faithfulness and love of God is an eschatological mystery, revealed in history unsurpassably in Jesus Christ, how does one grasp it in the here and now? What role does faith play in this process, and how does its function relate to scripture, tradition, and the teaching of the Church? This is the question of the formal criteria of faith.

This chapter will trace the development of Kasper's thought on the question of truth, which is itself embedded in his theology of tradition. It will attempt to determine the relationship between this developing notion of truth and the understanding of faith that underlies it. After establishing the context for Kasper's early publications on tradition and truth, it will subject to a careful analysis his only book-length, systematic treatment of both dogma and truth, *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes.* This book was foundational to all Kasper's later reflections on truth; at the same time, it was a provisional statement of his theology, which he later modified in certain ways. The present chapter will argue that the controversy over Hans Küng's book *Unfehlbar?*
Eine Anfrage as well as Kasper's encounters with other theological approaches that emerged out of the postconciliar period motivated Kasper to adjust his emphases and to engage with dialogue-partners in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas over the question of truth.

I. Opting for the Future: Kasper's Early Accounts of Tradition and Truth

A. Background to Kasper's Early Writings on Tradition

Kasper developed his theology of tradition and a corresponding theory of truth within the first years of his career as an academic theologian. As he made his entry into the academy during the late 1950s and early 1960s, a debate over the relationship between scripture and tradition was underway in the circles of German-language Catholic theology. Josef Rupert Geiselmann, the professor of Catholic theology at the University of Tübingen who gave Kasper the idea that became the topic of his theological dissertation, had raised the question of whether a Catholic could affirm that scripture in some sense contained all the truths of Christian faith. He argued that although Trent had condemned the Reformers' doctrine of sola scriptura, it left open the question of whether one had to understand divine revelation as a body of truths contained partly in scripture and partly in tradition. In opposition to this partim-partim theory, Geiselmann


31 See LT ix.

proposed the thesis that revelation is contained both totally in tradition and totally in scripture. In the course of the debate he sparked, theologians wrestled with the questions of whether the teaching of the Church permitted such a position and how this might affect a Catholic understanding of the normativity of scripture within the tradition.

How one answered such questions bore significant consequences for the work of Catholic theology. Methodologically, if one were to acknowledge the sufficiency of Scripture in Geiselmann's sense, then one could no longer be satisfied with neo-Scholastic theological argumentation, which, in arguing for the veracity of various theses drawn from Church teaching, often made uncritical use of biblical testimony in support of these theses. One would have to approach the Bible on its own terms, not as a source for proof-texts. Ecumenically, this would open up a new avenue for a possible rapprochement between Protestants and Catholics over a question that had once seemed to be a permanent barrier to union, namely, the relationship between scripture and tradition. At stake in this debate, in other words, were the kind of epochal changes within the Catholic Church and its theology that in fact took place in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

The debate over the sufficiency of scripture made a lasting impression on Kasper. It raised the question of the conditions of the possibility of a critical appropriation of tradition. In what sense is it possible for Catholics to take something like a critical stance toward the binding tradition of the Church? What role might the Bible play in such a critique of tradition? Should other criteria be taken into account? If so, what are they, and how do they function? Questions like these guided the study that grew into Kasper's theological dissertation, which investigated the notion of tradition developed by a group of theologians who were among the principal

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33 On the function of the Bible in neo-Scholastic theological methodology, see Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology,” 32-33.
architects of the teachings of the First Vatican Council.\textsuperscript{34} They also informed Kasper's initial forays into the burgeoning ecumenical movement,\textsuperscript{35} which had received impetus from the Catholic Church at an unprecedented level in the promulgation of \textit{Unitatis redintegratio} in 1964.\textsuperscript{36} One of the first essays Kasper published in the area of Protestant-Catholic dialogue dealt in its first half exclusively with the relationship between scripture and tradition.\textsuperscript{37}

Kasper's reflections on tradition demonstrated his appreciation for what he considered to be the legitimate concerns of Protestant theology.\textsuperscript{38} According to his analysis, Martin Luther was neither interested in a naive biblicism nor in the self-assertion of private exeges over against binding doctrine. Luther's overriding concern was the Gospel, which was no written book but the living, proclaimed word taken into service by the Holy Spirit, in which the believer hears the voice of Christ. He did not want to oppose the Gospel to the Church but to remind the Church that its true nature is to be the “creature of the Word,” which places itself at the disposal of the Gospel and so preserves the centrality and the mystery of Christ himself.\textsuperscript{39} This obedience did not exclude but included the possibility of binding dogmatic assertions, since the Word of God has the prerogative to use the mouth of the Church to teach bindingly. The key for Luther was

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\textsuperscript{34} LT.

\textsuperscript{35} In addition to the full-length books to be discussed below, Kasper's early contributions to ecumenical dialogue included the following: Ökumene 330-48; “Ekklesiologische Charakter der nichtkatholischen Kirchen” (see p. 2046, above); “Die Kirche unter dem Wort Gottes,” Conc/G 1 (1965): 304-6; “Gespräch mit der protestantischen Theologie,” 334-44.

\textsuperscript{36} On the Catholic Church's entry into the ecumenical movement, see NCE, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement”; ER, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement,” accessed May 28, 2014, http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX3424500892&v=2.1&u=wash31575&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=89a51cdad27fceb5339ddd37eaf2c08d. See also pp. 484-89, below.

\textsuperscript{37} See Ökumene 330-39.

\textsuperscript{38} On the following, see Ökumene 331-32; DW 14-18.

\textsuperscript{39} DW 15.
that the freedom of the Gospel should be recognized as the fundamental criterion for the life and activity of the Church.

The idea of a transcendent Truth of revelation that made possible both definitive dogmatic teachings and a critique of the Church's tradition proved to be central to Kasper's thinking on tradition and truth. This is not to say, however, that Luther was the definitive model for Kasper's theology. In this instance, one can point to the fact that Kasper found a very similar idea of truth in Johannes Evangelist von Kuhn's notion of “objective spirit.” Kasper's intention in invoking Luther was to situate himself at a point where the authentic concerns of Protestant scholars rediscovering the indispensability for theology of the principle of tradition converged with those strands of Catholic scholarship that acknowledged the need for a critical principle within tradition. The point was an 'ecumenical' theology of tradition and truth capable of incorporating the Protestant prophetic principle into the Catholic sacramental principle.

This ecumenical interest, finally, dovetailed with Kasper's desire to elaborate a theology of tradition and truth within the horizon of freedom and history. Following Schelling, Kasper regarded the institutionalized memory of the community (tradition) as a transcendental presupposition of concrete freedom. On account of its finitude, however, no historical institution is capable of fully providing for the conditions of freedom. The exigencies of freedom demand some means by which to criticize the concrete form of tradition. Still, tradition can only function to facilitate and safeguard freedom if the free subject can somehow gain access to the ultimate


41 For a recent effort at this kind of mediation, see Kasper, “‘Credo Unam Sanctam Ecclesiam’: The Relationship between the Catholic and the Protestant Principles in Fundamental Ecclesiology,” in Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning, ed. Paul D. Murray and Luca Badini-Confaloneri (Oxford University Press, 2008), 78-88.

42 On freedom and history as basic categories in Kasper's thought, see chapter two, above, pp. 50ff.
conditions for her or his freedom, which are provided in the historical mediation of the Absolute. Consequently, if the Church and its tradition are to be understood as the universal sacrament of salvation, they must be both presencing signs of this salvific reality and capable of reform and renewal. In other words, the tradition of the Church must be both “Catholic” (sacramental) and “Protestant” (critical) if it wishes to live up to its self-understanding as the anticipatory realization within history of the Reign of the freedom of the children of God.

It must now be asked just how Kasper accounted for these two principles within his actual theology of tradition and his corresponding notion of truth. By far, the most important text Kasper wrote on these two topics in his early career was *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. This book, however, took up a number of themes that had already been developed by the theologians of the nineteenth-century “Roman School,” whose thought Kasper had studied in depth in his theological dissertation, *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*. *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* is best read in light of this formative study.

**B. Early Writings on Tradition**

1. Tradition according to the “Roman School”

In his dissertation, *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*, Kasper argued that the theologies of tradition articulated by Giovanni Perrone, Carlo Passaglia, and Clemens Schrader, three nineteenth-century professors of theology at the *Collegio Romano* (now known as the Pontifical Gregorian University) whose work had a formative influence on the First Vatican Council, bore a striking resemblance to the developmental notions of tradition proposed by the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School and by John Henry Newman. These representatives of the “Roman School” replaced an objectivist theory of revealed truth, which presented tradition as a second source of revealed propositional truths alongside the Bible, with a
dynamic and holistic vision of revelation, tradition, and the development of dogma. On this basis, Passaglia and Schrader were able to integrate magisterial authority into the framework of a differentiated notion of tradition and thus to overcome an apologetical tendency to identify the tradition for all practical purposes with the teaching office of the pope.

Giovanni Perrone offered what Kasper regarded as a transitional theology of tradition, which bore the marks of Möhler's influence, but also retained some of the polemical edge of the neo-Scholastic accounts. Initially espousing the idea that revelation is transmitted to the present partly by scripture and partly by tradition (a partim-partim theory), Perrone began in “De locis theologicis” to speak of tradition in a more comprehensive sense as the whole of revealed truth. Drawing on Patristic theology, Perrone formulated a notion of tradition that comprised not only propositional truths but the embodiment of these truths in every element of the activity and being of the Church. Tradition in this sense was a dynamic reality closely connected with the living presence of Christ in the Church through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As he developed this idea, Perrone ceased to describe the relationship between scripture and tradition in “partim-partim” language; he rather understood tradition as the clear expression of what is contained in scripture but expressed in a sometimes ambiguous way. In this way, Perrone's new theory of tradition conceived of doctrinal development as the progressive clarification of that which is already implicit in the faith of the Church. Kasper criticized Perrone's description of the teachings and practices of the Church as the “immediate embodiment” of divine tradition as well.

43 See LT 30, 36, 38.
44 See LT 42, 89-90.
45 On Perrone's understanding of the divine as well as human character of the tradition of the Church, see LT 102-43.
46 LT 38.
47 See LT 121-22, 130.
as his application of the label *regula fidei proxima* to the life of the Church.\(^{48}\) According to Kasper, this usage lent itself to a diminution of the importance of the early tradition, particularly Scripture (the *regula fidei remota*), in comparison to the activity of the Church in the present, particularly the teaching of the Pope. Perrone's theology of tradition nevertheless represented for Kasper a promising start whose further development was a task for his colleagues and students.

According to Kasper, Carlo Passaglia and Clemens Schrader\(^{49}\) approached the topic of tradition from a situation different from that addressed by Perrone. In particular, the urgency with which Perrone responded to the challenge of rationalism was absent from Passaglia's theses of 1839, which meant that Passaglia had greater liberty to explore in depth the fundamental concepts underlying Perrone's theology of tradition.\(^{50}\) Passaglia and Schrader were therefore able to distinguish more clearly than Perrone between the divine and human dimensions of tradition, although they also maintained the inseparability of these two dimensions. Their starting point was the question: what ultimately warrants the conviction of faith?\(^{51}\) For Passaglia and Schrader, faith meant trusting in the authority of a reliable witness and, through this act of trust, participating in the knowledge and experience of this witness. According to Passaglia's reading of John's Gospel and the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus Christ is the faithful apostle or ambassador of God, the witness *par excellence*.\(^{52}\) Because Jesus is God, he knows the Father better than any other and so can bear witness to the One who sent him more credibly than any other, even Moses. The mission of Christ only reached its goal, however, in the participation of all those to

\(^{48}\) See LT 53, 178-81.

\(^{49}\) Because of the difficulties of distinguishing much of Carlo Passaglia's work from that of Clemens Schrader, Kasper opted in general to consider their collective body of work as a unity. See LT 185-87.

\(^{50}\) See LT 187-92, 267-70.

\(^{51}\) On tradition as participation in divine truth, see LT 271-74.

\(^{52}\) On God's testimony to Godself in Jesus Christ, see LT 279-84.
whom he was sent in the nature and knowledge of God, the sanctification of the whole world.\(^{53}\) This meant that tradition as the proclamation of divine revelation (\textit{christianae revelationis propositio}) to the world and throughout all history is an inner moment of the \textit{Oikonomia Christi}, an unfolding of the dynamism inherent in the incarnation of the Word. The Church as witness to revelation is mystically united to Christ. The unfolding of revelation in tradition takes place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church progressively deeper into the mystery of Christ.

This unity-in-distinction between the human and divine dimensions of the economy of Christ had for Passaglia and Schrader a twofold consequence. On the one hand, the testimony of the apostles was for them the indispensable objective norm of the Church's proclamation.\(^{54}\) The Church did not lose access to this norm on account of the historical remoteness of the biblical testimony, since Christ also bestowed on the Church an apostolic teaching office that is infallible because of its participation in the truth of God.\(^{55}\) On the other hand, for Passaglia and Schrader, the Church progresses in its understanding of revelation.\(^{56}\) Passaglia revised his conception of doctrinal development more than once. In his mature theology, he denied that either the objective content of faith or the subjective act by which the faith is appropriated undergoes change; thus, for example, the faith of the Fathers of the Church was simply the one faith of the Church, both subjectively and objectively the same as that of the Scholastics. The later Passaglia located this development in the \textit{modus} of the Church's faith, that is, its knowledge or understanding of what

\(^{53}\) On the pneumatic self-transmission of Christ in the Church, see LT 284-96.

\(^{54}\) On the apostolic norm of faith and its abiding presence in the Church, see LT 296-302.

\(^{55}\) On the ecclesiastical ministry as the active, subjective norm of faith, see LT 308-28. Kasper criticized Passaglia and Schrader for restricting this dimension of witness to the hierarchy and not attending to the role of the laity as witnesses to the faith. See ibid., 396.

\(^{56}\) On the development of dogma, see LT 302-8.
it believes. For Passaglia, then, tradition was not primarily a changing collection of propositions but the abiding presence in the believing community of that for which they hoped. Tradition was the Church's participation in the truth of God, the conscience of the Church, the living Christ testifying to himself in the Holy Spirit through the mouths of the apostles. The community cannot progress beyond Christ; it can, however, grow in its reflective understanding of its living tradition.

According to Kasper, Schrader built upon the work of Perrone and Passaglia in his recovery of Melchior Cano's doctrine of the fundamental sources for theology (the *loci theologici*). Passaglia and Schrader had distinguished between two closely connected aspects of tradition: a revealed content that constituted the permanent norm of all that the Church taught, and the proclamation of the Church, in which the content of tradition becomes present and effective in the here and now.\(^{57}\) Given, however, that proclamation as the mode of existence of the content of tradition in the present is distinct from this content and therefore capable of error, one may ask: by what means does the believer come to know with certainty the content of tradition? For the Roman School, this question placed into relief the importance of the teaching office or magisterium of the Church for preserving the deposit of faith.\(^{58}\) As the guardian of tradition, however, the magisterium does not stand above the tradition or absorb it into itself; the magisterium rather functions to safeguard the classic expressions of this tradition that have emerged from the history of the Church.

In a similar way, Schrader distinguished the Bible and the other witnesses to the tradition from the apostolic tradition itself. Scripture, as the compendium of the teaching of the Apostles,
was the first written expression of the truth of tradition as a whole.\textsuperscript{59} It was the canon or standard without which one could not understand the truth of tradition. As the standard for tradition, however, Scripture could not be rightly understood apart from the living tradition.\textsuperscript{60} Only as interpreted and preached by the Church did Scripture contain all the truths of the faith. Tradition thus related to Scripture as its authentic commentary. This living process of interpretation produced other material expressions besides the Bible, written and otherwise, which Schrader collectively designated as “embodied” tradition.\textsuperscript{61} The Bible, although inspired, consisted of texts addressing a particular audience in a certain historical situation: occasional writings or Gelegenheitsschriften. In an analogous fashion, embodied tradition—the testimony of the Church Fathers, the Scholastics, the liturgy of the Church—expressed the truth of tradition vis-a-vis still other situations facing the Church in the different times and places of its history. In some cases the permanently binding character of embodied tradition was apparent: for example, in the decrees of councils. In other cases, such as treatises of theology, the permanent had to be distinguished from the ephemeral. Schrader offered three criteria in service of this end, namely, antiquity, consensus or unity, and universality. It fell to the responsible interpreter of tradition to discern the basic continuity of the faith as it came to expression in a diversity of historical situations.

Kasper saw clear signs of the influence of the Roman School in the acts and documents of the First Vatican Council, especially in its treatment of the relationships between scripture, tradition, and the Church.\textsuperscript{62} In its teachings on the canon of Scripture, the dogmatic constitution

\textsuperscript{59} On the distinctive value of the Bible within the tradition, see LT 352-57.

\textsuperscript{60} On the interpretation of the Bible within the tradition, see LT 357-67.

\textsuperscript{61} On embodied tradition, see LT 368-81.

\textsuperscript{62} On the doctrine of tradition proclaimed at Vatican I, see LT 402ff.
*Dei filius* presented tradition not as a quantity separate from scripture but as organically related to it: the canon is a work of tradition, while tradition is the normative interpretation of scripture. For the council, the canonicity of a biblical text had two elements: an ‘inner’ canonicity, which meant the objective character of the text as divinely authored (but not necessarily its having been written by an apostle), and the Church's official recognition of this inherent quality. This meant that the Council distinguished between Holy Scripture as the written Word of God and the dogmas of the Church. The dogmatic judgments of the Church are protected from error by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who safeguards revelation from dangerous misinterpretations. Nevertheless, the Council did not confuse this divine assistance with inspiration; only Scripture could be called the written Word of God.

Likewise, the conciliar debates over the relationship between the teaching of the Church and the consensus of the Fathers yielded what Kasper considered a nuanced account of the relationship between the teaching authority (magisterium) of the Church and the tradition. The magisterium was competent to render authoritative judgment over what Scripture taught. Its judgments, however, did not exhaustively interpret the meaning of Scripture as a whole or even of an individual biblical passage; the magisterium left scope for the freedom of exegetes. Hence, the teaching of tradition was distinct from and broader than the teaching of the Church. Tradition was the active presence of the Gospel at work in the whole Church, while the magisterium judged individual cases in which the identity and continuity of the authentic tradition is under dispute. So tradition and magisterium were not *gleichgeordnet*; they did not stand at the same level as parallel authorities. Rather, the Church stood under the divine-apostolic tradition as the

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63 On the relationship between scripture and tradition according to Vatican I, see LT 405-13.

64 On the relationship between the magisterium and the authentic interpretation of scripture according to Vatican I, see LT 413-22.
norm of its teaching in the present. This rule applied even to the infallible teaching of the Pope, since, according to *Pastor aeternus*, the Pope spoke infallibly as the representative of the Church as a whole; he participated in the infallibility of the Church as well as in its subordination to divine revelation.

Kasper found an important model for his own theology of tradition in that developed by Passaglia and Schrader. Their central idea, the dialogical unity between divine address and human response in the tradition process, inspired Kasper's account of salvation history as dialogue, which was fundamental for his entire theological project. Kasper followed Passaglia and Schrader rather than Perrone in affirming the abiding distinction as well as the unity between the two, a unity in difference beautifully expressed by their analogical description of tradition as the conscience of the Church. The authority of the divine dimension of tradition over the human came to expression in the irreducible interplay between the distinct structures of the living tradition—scripture, human traditions, and the magisterium—in their common task of transmitting the Gospel throughout history. Each played an indispensable role within the one living tradition.

2. From *Die Lehre von der Tradition* to *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*

*Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule* influenced the direction of Kasper's theological program in at least two respects. In the first place, the Roman School showed how a Catholic theology of tradition could accommodate a critical principle without liquidating the authority of the Church to teach in a definitive way through its official representatives. Perrone and his colleagues abandoned the *partim-partim* rubric that was characteristic of post-Tridentine theology. In place of the neo-Scholastic doctrine of tradition, Passaglia and Schrader offered a theory that stood in continuity with a Patristic sacramental notion of tradition. Their theory
consistently maintained the difference between the human and divine elements in tradition, a
difference that came to expression in the distinction between the transmitted content and the act
of transmission as well as in the plurality of witnesses to the tradition. This implied that it was
not enough for theology to consider official Church teaching the “proximate” (practically
speaking, the only) rule of faith; it also had to take into account the “remote” sources of tradition,
notably the sources invoked by the undivided Church: the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. 65
From an ecumenical perspective, this position presented clear advantages over the standard neo-
Scholastic accounts of tradition.

To postulate a critical principle within tradition, however, is to raise the question of how
one can bring its critical power to bear on the present. Thus, in the second place, the theology of
the Roman School pointed to a need to update the methods employed by Catholic theology. Neo-
Scholastic theology typically deployed the argument from tradition in an apologetical manner
that functioned to reinforce the continuity of the past with the present. If, however, tradition
meant the active self-proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit through the Church in
accord with the modus of a particular historical moment, then the argument from tradition had to
take into account not only the fundamental continuity but also the discontinuities between the
different modi. Passaglia and Schrader laid the groundwork for a regressive or dialectical
method, which, because it presupposed the continuity of the tradition, was free to explore its
discontinuities and, through reflection upon these differences, to advance in understanding of the
truth of revelation in the present day. To this extent, however, the Roman School pointed beyond
itself. According to Kasper's judgment, when Passaglia and Schrader actually deployed the
argument from tradition, they used it almost invariably in the apologetical fashion of the neo-

65 On the distinction between the regula fidei proxima and the regula fidei remota and its consequences, see
LT 40-47; MD 23.
Scholastics. In addition, they made no systematic place for the *sensus fidelium* in the argument from tradition, since they did not recognize that the whole communion of the faithful, and not just the hierarchy, played an active role in the work of tradition. These concerns converged on the task of a renewal of the doctrine of *loci theologici* and of the methods of dogmatic theology.

Following the publication of *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*, Kasper began to articulate his own theological foundations while contributing to the beginnings of what would later be regarded as a springtime of the ecumenical movement. In one 1964 essay, “Schrift und Tradition – eine Quaestio disputata,” Kasper entered into the ongoing debate over the status of scripture through a critique of Heribert Schauf’s thesis that the Church's dogmatic tradition subsequent to Trent unambiguously denied either a material or formal sufficiency of Scripture. Kasper faulted Schauf on several different levels. Regarding his source material, Kasper cast doubt on the authoritative status of the post-Tridentine catechisms on which Schauf’s argument heavily depended. More importantly, however, Kasper called into question the basic hermeneutical presuppositions that lay behind his selection of sources. By reading these texts apart from their historical context and ignoring the relevance of the Church Fathers and the medieval scholastics to his thesis, Schauf was begging the question: he had tacitly presumed that the authority behind these catechisms was in immediate possession of the truth of revelation, which was the very theory of tradition that he intended to adduce from his sources.

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66 See LT 380-81; 396-97.

67 See LT 396.

In order to escape from this hermeneutical quandary, Kasper argued that it was necessary to reconsider the more basic question of being and truth.\(^69\) To seek those truths “implicitly, verbally, and formally” contained in Scripture was to ask the wrong question.\(^70\) It presupposed that truth was a thoroughly objectifiable and propositional reality; this outlook in turn practically required one to imagine scripture and tradition as separate sources of propositional truth. The Word of God, however, need not be conceived simply as the transmission of information; it could be understood as an event of communication that addresses the whole human person, involving not only a “categorial” but a “transcendental” illumination of the person.\(^71\) From this perspective, it would be possible to affirm the sufficiency of scripture, not in the sense that it contains every dogmatic formula ever proclaimed by the Church, but inasmuch as it re-presents in a uniquely normative way the Gospel, the one font of all saving truth\(^72\) to which the individual traditions and even the magisterium must answer.

In “Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus,” also published in 1964, Kasper produced a set of Catholic foundations for ecumenical dialogue that included a sketch of his still-developing theology of tradition.\(^73\) Such foundations would not have been taken as self-evident in the mid-1960s. Prior to the Catholic Church's official entry into the ecumenical movement, its official posture toward non-Catholics had been that of controversial...

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\(^{70}\) Kasper, “Schrift und Tradition,” 211.

\(^{71}\) Kasper, “Schrift und Tradition,” 211. Here Kasper referred parenthetically to the Scholastic idea of the *lumen fidei*, which for him involved both a renewal of the person and a personal encounter with God.

\(^{72}\) See Council of Trent, decree on the sources of revelation, DS 1501.

\(^{73}\) On the general question of Catholic foundations for ecumenical dialogue, see Ökumene 330-31. For a similar exposition of Kasper's theology of tradition, see also Kasper, “Kirche unter dem Wort Gottes.”
theology: confute their errors and call them to return to the Church.\textsuperscript{74} Consequently, many Protestants viewed Catholic participation in ecumenical dialogue with suspicion. Emblematic of this suspicion was the question posed by the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, W. A. Visser't Hooft: do Catholics understand ecumenism in the same way as the member churches of the WCC?\textsuperscript{75} To overcome this obstacle, Kasper proposed a common ecumenical methodology. A mutual, give-and-take dialogue would not require either side to give up the specific concerns of its own tradition, Kasper thought, if it took the form of a shared inquiry into \textit{das Ganze des Evangeliums}, the whole of the Gospel, which would provide a common perspective from which each could interpret its own tradition afresh.

Kasper’s proposal assumed that a Catholic was free to measure his or her own tradition against the standard of the Gospel and not bound by the self-understanding of his or her church only to proceed in the opposite direction, to read the Gospel in the light of Catholic tradition. To establish that this was indeed possible for Catholics, Kasper proposed three theses on the Catholic understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition.\textsuperscript{76} First, Kasper described tradition as the living Gospel in the Church, the event of Christ’s presence in the Church through his Word. This meant that the tradition is not primarily a set of propositions but the transcendent Reality to which every verbal expression of the faith points. Since this Reality entered human history once for all in Jesus Christ, the event of tradition, second, takes place in the mode of \textit{anamnesis}, as a remembering of Christ. The eschatological character of the Christ-event meant for Kasper that the definitive testimony of ecclesial tradition could never fall into

\textsuperscript{74} On controversial theology, see pp. 484-85, below.

\textsuperscript{75} See Kasper, “The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue,” in \textit{That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today} (New York: Burns and Oates, 2004), 34.

\textsuperscript{76} For a brief account of tradition in view of the ecumenical situation in the mid-1960s, see Ökumene 331-39; Kasper, “Kirche unter dem Wort Gottes.”
error. At the same time, even infallible doctrines were to be understood as finite remembrances of God's self-revelation in Jesus, which do not comprehend and so domesticate the one divine truth but are at the disposal of this truth. In this sense Kasper could affirm with Luther that the Church stands under the Word of God. Third, this sovereignty of the Word “over against” the Church becomes present for Kasper in the normative function of scripture within the tradition. Tradition, as the living interpretation of the Bible, cannot be understood apart from scripture. On the other hand, Kasper pointed out that even for Luther, the Gospel that norms the life of the Church was not the dead letter but the living Gospel proclaimed in the Church. Hence scripture, as norm of tradition, could not be rightly understood apart from tradition. Kasper posited a reciprocal relationship between the Word of God intra nos (tradition) and the Word extra nos (scripture): each is to be interpreted in light of the other. In this sketch of the reality of tradition, Kasper brought together the Catholic principle of fullness with the Protestant principle of the sovereignty of the Word.

These two articles pointed in the direction of a future project, a synthetic account of the theology of tradition. This forthcoming synthesis would follow the trajectory of the Roman School away from the neo-Scholastic idea that the teaching office of the Church was the regula fidei proxima as opposed to scripture and tradition, which as regulae remotae exercised little tangible authority over the lives of Catholics. It would attempt to expand upon the theory elaborated by Passaglia and Schrader inasmuch as it would correct their blind spots, attending to the particular authority enjoyed by the whole body of the faithful on account of their sense of the faith as well as to the concrete consequences of their theory for an appropriate deployment within theology of the argument from tradition. This theology of tradition would present itself as an aid toward a reconciliation between the Protestant critical principle and the Catholic
sacramental principle. Of course, for such a reconciliation to take place, this doctrine of tradition would also have to follow the example of the Roman School in safeguarding the authority that is proper to the magisterium of the Church, including the authority of the Pope. Finally, this account would be grounded on a new philosophical foundation, a theory of truth that could do justice to the normative character of the contrasting expressions and explanations of revealed truth found in the history of theological reflection, including but not limited to the binding dogmas of the Church. In his 1965 book *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, Kasper ventured to develop such an account.

C. The Question of Truth: Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes

1. Context: the question of dogma

In *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, Kasper attempted to tackle the ecumenical and methodological problem of tradition at what he regarded as its neuralgic point: dogma, the solemnly promulgated and permanently binding teachings of the Church.  

He observed that the Catholic Church's claim to teach definitively on faith and morals was perceived by non-Catholics as a self-aggrandizement of the Church, its refusal to change, to listen to others, to enter into a give-and-take dialogue. Many Christians saw in dogma a hardening and an institutionalization of the Church at the expense of Christian freedom in the Spirit. Yet dogma was not always regarded in such negative terms. No less than Martin Luther maintained that definitive expressions of the faith were indispensable for the task of Christian witness: “Tolle assertiones, et Christianismum tulisti.”  

This indispensability applied even to the solemn declarations of the Catholic Church,

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77 On challenges facing the notion of dogma in the present situation, see DW 7-24.

78 DW 15. This was perhaps Kasper's favorite quotation from Luther; he has often cited it when addressing the question about the necessity of binding formulas of faith. See “Evangelium und Dogma,” *Catholica* 19 (1965): 200; “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 188 (1971): 370; “Catholic View of Confessions and Confessional Community” (see p. 170n6, above), 46; Bindung 49; “Dogma/Dogmenentwicklung,”
provided that in teaching these things the Church was conforming to its essence as *creatura verbi*. The criterion Luther used to distinguish authoritative dogma from ecclesiastical acts of hubris was *das Evangelium*, the Gospel, the living word of proclamation taken up by the Spirit to bring about the obedience of faith. The example of Luther raises the question: how can dogma be conceived today so that it preserves the sovereign freedom of Christ to speak a prophetic word to the present age through the Gospel? That is, how can one articulate the participation of dogma in the authority of the transcendent Gospel in order to leave scope for the new word that Christ speaks in the experiences and initiatives of today? Kasper thus posed his problem as the question of the relationship between dogma and the Gospel, or as he later put it, between *die Freiheit des Evangeliums und dogmatische Bindung*.79

Does Catholic theology permit one to think of the Gospel as a living reality transcending the binding dogmatic pronouncements of the Church? Kasper observed that the debate among Ernst Käsemann, Gerhard Ebeling, Ernst Fuchs, and other scholars over so-called *Frühkatholizismus* and the authentic content of the Gospel demonstrated an openness among Protestants to dogmas distinct from the raw testimony of Scripture.80 At the same time, these scholars accused Catholicism of applying to dogma the primacy that belongs to the Gospel alone. Kasper replied that this charge could not be leveled against the early or even the medieval Church.81 Indeed, the concept of 'dogma' was not central to the thinking of the Church Fathers or to the early synods and ecumenical councils. They did not typically use the word δόγμα to

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79 The full title of Kasper's 1982 essay on truth, dogma, and infallibility reads, “Freiheit des Evangeliums und dogmatische Bindung in der katholischen Theologie: Grundlagenüberlegungen zur Unfehlbarkeitsdebatte.”

80 On the treatment of the principle of tradition in Protestant scholarship, see DW 18–24.

81 On the concept of dogma in the early and medieval Church, see DW 28–34.
designate the binding content of the faith, but preferred terms like πίστις (faith) or κήρυγμα (preaching). Likewise, although the Scholastics were more inclined than the Fathers to analyze the faith into individual propositions, they preferred to speak of articula fidei rather than dogmata. It was only after the Council of Trent and the rediscovery of Vincent of Lerins in the 16th century that “dogma” and “dogmatic” became the common coin of the Western churches.\(^82\)

For Kasper, this development signified nothing short of a change in worldview within the Church.\(^83\) The modern concept of dogma bespoke a narrowing of perspective: while pistis referred to the whole of the faith—the disposition of a believing subject along with the believed content and the total way of life that reinforced its intrinsic plausibility—dogma referred to specific propositions in reference to which assent was a matter of obligation. In this way dogma also differed from the Scholastic concept of faith, since the term articula fidei construed the truths of faith as 'links' within a larger whole (the articles of the creed). Because this concept of dogma distinguished clearly between mere human teachings and those guaranteed by divine authority, it had the advantage of highlighting the freedom of the believer and thus restricting both inter- and intra-confessional disputes to fundamental issues. By reducing the essential content of faith to its objectification in propositions, however, it ran the risk of reducing the Gospel itself to propositions. The dogmatic thought-form embraced a constellation of conceptual shifts: a 'vertical' conception of authority, in which a faith-formula is recognized as a symbolic presentation of divine truth because of its inherent truthfulness, gave way to a 'horizontal' scheme, in which dogma is verified through its unbroken connection to historical revelation; the regula fidei, which once referred to the truth itself as rule and norm of Christian life, came to

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\(^{82}\) On the ascendency of the concept of dogma during and after the Council of Trent, see DW 34-38.  
\(^{83}\) On the dogmatic thought-form in the Church after Trent, see DW 38-51.
mean the rule established by the Church; the phrases *vicarius Christi* and *vicarius Dei*, which theologians at one time understood to refer to any person in whom one encountered the voice of God or Jesus Christ, were transformed into expressions of juridical authority.\(^{84}\)

Despite its predominance within neo-Scholastic Catholic theology, Kasper maintained that Catholics had no obligation to conform to this dogmatic way of thinking. In his estimation, traces of the older, more comprehensive understanding of faith, such as the Scholastic idea that the *id quod traditur* and the *actus quo traditur* form an indivisible whole,\(^ {85}\) have survived alongside the dogmatic thought-form and have even influenced the theological and doctrinal tradition of the Church. These traces have created a certain amount of scope in official Church teaching for the freedom of the Gospel over against defined dogma.\(^ {86}\) For example, although the First Vatican Council employed the modern concept of dogma to a certain extent, it also distinguished between dogma, as binding expression of divine revelation, and the deposit of faith, as the continued presence in the Church of divine revelation as such.\(^ {87}\) The Council refrained from defining the exact relationship between the two, indicating only that the analogy (similarity in greater dissimilarity) between human and divine understanding also applied between dogma and the deposit of faith.\(^ {88}\) Similarly, although Pope Pius XII’s encyclical letter *Humani Generis* (1950) strongly denounced the opinion that the mysteries of faith are never


\(^{85}\) See DW 39.

\(^{86}\) On openness in mid-twentieth-century Church teaching to the pre-Tridentine tradition, see DW 51-54.

\(^{87}\) See Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei filius*, DS 3020; DW 45.

\(^{88}\) DW 45-46.
expressed in a truly adequate way by concepts (n. 15), it nevertheless admitted that the formulas with which the Church teaches have changed over time (n. 16) and that the treasury of revelation contained in scripture and tradition is inexhaustible (n. 21). It therefore indicated the need for a return to the sources. For if Scripture really is the soul of theology, as Leo XIII stated, if theology takes its cue from the literal sense of Scripture, as *Divino afflante Spiritu* affirmed, then dogma does not by itself express the whole of the faith, but there is something still to be learned from the enduring tension between dogma and scripture or dogma and exegesis.

Karl Rahner's reflections on dogma further developed these lines of thinking. Expanding upon John XXIII's famous distinction between the content and the form of proclamation, Rahner argued that the relationship between nature and grace permits dogma to be true and at the same time rash, presumptuous, provisional, ambiguous, and prone to misunderstanding. Moreover, dogmatic formulas present themselves as expressions of an ineffable mystery that eludes exact definition. Dogmas oblige the faithful not because they perfectly reflect the content of faith, but because they facilitate church unity. Even binding dogmas can be improved.

Kasper's analysis of dogma in the theological tradition showed that dogma as such is not the be-all and end-all of Christian faith. The body of dogma defined by the Church leaves significant scope for a deeper understanding of the mysteries that they express. Nevertheless, Kasper was not fully satisfied by this result. He had not forgotten that theologians with as nuanced an understanding of tradition as Carlo Passaglia and Clemens Schrader still fell back on the neo-scholastic dogmatic method when they actually deployed the argument from tradition. Why were their efforts to escape the gravitational pull of the dogmatic thought-form ultimately

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unsuccessful? Kasper's reply to Heribert Schauf suggested that the foregoing thought-form
critique did not go far enough. The roots of the problem lay still deeper; they touched the very
presuppositions of Catholic theology, namely, its notion of truth. One can only rightly determine
the relationship between dogma and the Gospel within the horizon of the question of truth.

2. Kasper’s account of theological truth

   a. A philosophical pre-understanding of truth?

   In elaborating what he regarded as a properly theological notion of truth, Kasper was
   pursuing a radical “de-hellenization” of Christian faith and theology.\(^{90}\) He found support for this
   project in two insights from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.\(^{91}\) First, according to Heidegger,
the Greek word for truth, \(\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\alpha\), refers to the self-disclosure of the mystery of Being. This
disclosure, paradoxically, is always at the same time a veiling of Being, since Being reveals itself
precisely as untouchable, astonishing, mysterious. Heidegger accused Western thought
(beginning with Plato) of forgetting this mysterious character of Being, reducing truth to its
formal dimension, to the \textit{adequatio rei et intellectus}, the subject's correct perception and
conceptualization of its object. Over the course of the Western philosophical tradition, this option
finally developed into a purely technical view of reality that in principle left no room for the
dimension of the holy. Heidegger’s critique put the theologian on guard against uncritically
applying traditional Western notions of truth to the revealed mysteries of Christian faith.

   This, however, left the theologian with a dilemma. How can one seek a properly
theological notion of truth without adopting some pre-apprehension of what truth is? Yet if one

\(^{90}\) In later publications, Kasper explicitly identified \textit{Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes} as having participated in
the movement for a de-hellenization of Christianity. See Kasper, “Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” in
Situation und zu den gegenwärtigen Aufgaben der systematischen Theologie,” in TK 1:9n3.

\(^{91}\) On the theological relevance of “forgetfulness of Being” in the Western tradition, see DW 58-61.
were to begin with any such “philosophical question about the transcendental and existential conditions of the possibility” of revelation, wouldn't one have fallen yet again into the trap of a ready-made philosophical concept of truth? In Kasper's view, Heidegger managed to elude this vicious circle of Western thinking by moving from the problematic of thought to that of language. For Heidegger, language was not simply a possession and a tool human beings used to express the truth. Language was rather the coming-to-speech of Being itself, the pre-understanding of reality that makes thinking possible, the “house of Being” in which human persons dwell. Hence, truth was not simply that which one expressed when one spoke, but rather, truth first “happened” in the event of Being, that is, in linguistic communication. For Kasper this meant that theological truth was what came to pass in the linguistic event of the Gospel.

Consequently, a theological conception of truth could only be retrieved through a hermeneutics of the words of the Gospel. On this basis he excluded not only the “purely extrinsic methods of traditional apologetics and fundamental theology” but also any inquiry about the conditions of the possibility of revelation that intended to prove that the human being is “hearer of the Word” while bypassing the witness of scripture. To utilize such a “metaphysical” or “transcendental” understanding of truth in theology would for Kasper have meant trying to pour the new wine of revealed truth into old wineskins.

It is important to note here that the object of Kasper's criticism was not metaphysics as such but certain conceptions of truth that had grown out of the Western philosophical tradition. Kasper could not afford to jettison any and all metaphysics. If the God of Jesus Christ is a

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92 DW 61.

93 On the theological relevance of Heidegger’s analysis of language, see DW 61-65.

94 DW 64-65.

95 DW 65.
faithful God, and if faith in the word of divine revelation really transforms one's situation, then revelation presupposes not only words but the situation encountered by words and brought to speech in words. This interconnection between word and reality means that the truth of the word has ontological implications: truth is not only cognitive but constitutive of reality. In point of fact, this notion of truth dovetailed with the salvation-historical framework Kasper had begun to develop in his 1963 essay “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte.” He thus grounded his reflections on truth implicitly in a historical ontology, albeit one whose broader implications he had not yet worked out. In so doing, Kasper’s apparent intention was to develop a theory of truth coherent with the aims of kerygmatic theology without at the same time endorsing a one-sided focus on the word of proclamation. According to Kasper, the Word of God does indeed transform reality, and not just the existential situation of its hearer, although the transformation in question is visible only within the horizon of human faith, which itself arises from hearing the Word. In sum, the Kasper of *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* was a theologian in search of a metaphysics, particularly one outside the tradition of the ancient Greeks. His basic option tended to exclude the neo-Scholastic and transcendental-Thomist varieties.

b. Truth in the testimony of scripture and tradition

Kasper’s principal task in developing his theology of truth was an exegesis of the truth concept of the Old and New Testaments. Taking his cue from Heidegger’s philosophy of language, Kasper attempted to reconstruct the experience of truth captured in the words the Bible used to denote truth: *emeth, aman, aletheia, evangelion*. His exegesis disclosed two complementary aspects of the biblical notion of truth. First, truth has the character of an event

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96 On the relationship between word and reality, see DW 63-64.

97 In DW (63n19), Kasper referred to a passage in “Grundlinien einer Theologie der Geschichte” (1964) that can be found in GG 94ff. On this essay, see above, pp. 100-3; on development in Kasper’s notion of salvation history as horizon for theology, see pp. 98-118.
that modifies reality and becomes effective in the present, namely, the event of communication, the speaking of a word and its reception. Second, truth has the character of a promise, which embeds itself in a history and transcends itself toward the unforeseeable newness of the future. In the event of truth, the faithfulness of God verifies itself today while announcing an even greater future fulfillment.

In order to reconstruct the primordial experience of truth coded in the usage of the Old Testament, Kasper interpreted the most common biblical term for truth, emeth—a polyvalent word that in the later books of the Old Testament simply denoted the truth of the teachings of faith and so approximated the meaning of the Greek word aletheia—in light of its linguistic root, aman.\(^98\) When aman is used to modify a subject, it does not denote an essential property of its subject, but rather indicates that this concrete subject exhibits its properties in reality, that it does what one expects it to do, that it proves itself. Consequently, when the Bible speaks of the emeth of God, it refers to that which the Israelites have come to expect of God: “YHWH is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithfulness and kindness.”\(^99\) Emeth points to an experience of God as true to Godself, as a God on whom one can rely, who can be trusted to manifest divine justice, love, grace, and fidelity in history through words and deeds of power. The Hebrew language unites emeth in a particular way with words: truth manifests itself in the word that proves effective, that brings about what it says. For this reason the Bible connects the truth of God closely to divine promises and especially to the covenant with Israel. Because the word of God is treu, the gracious word of the covenant creates a new situation: it means that God's Fidelity-Truth (Treu-Wahrheit) has in the covenant become a firm foothold for the

\(^98\) On the Old Testament terms emeth and aman, see DW 65-71.

\(^99\) Exod. 34:6 (translated from Kasper’s German); see DW 69.
existence of the covenant-people, a foundation upon which they can build. Finally, where the
divine promise is apprehended as treu, where it receives the amen of the people, it has
manifested the authority (Recht) of the Lord to carry out his word. The word has thereby proven
itself worthy of the obedience of faith. In this sense, the Bible also calls the laws of God “true.”
The self-verification of God's Fidelity-Truth in the word is at the same time the proclamation of
God's Lordship over history.

The New Testament brings this experience of divine truth as self-verifying fidelity to new
eexpression in the word εὐαγγέλιον, “good news” or “gospel.” According to Kasper, this
concept was already present in Isaiah 52:7, which presented the proclamation that YHWH was
king as bringing peace and salvation to its hearers. In the thinking of the ancient world, the
enthronement of a new king became a reality in the act of its announcement. Gospel, then, is
constitutive of reality. By manifesting the authority of the enthroned king, it modifies the
situation of the one who receives it in faith. Furthermore, as the divine emeth prompted the
development of confessional formulas like that found in Exodus 34:6—“YHWH is a merciful
and gracious God . . . rich in faithfulness and kindness”—so the Christian Gospel generated
credal statements such as “The Lord is Jesus” (see Rom. 10:9) and “Jesus is the Christ” (see Acts
5:42). In this manner, the notion of gospel recapitulated the Old Testament notion of emeth.

The ancient creeds just cited indicate the Christological content that Paul and Mark
introduced into the concept of Gospel. For both, evangelion meant the proclamation that the

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100 On the connection between emeth and euangelion, see DW 71-72.
101 “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace,
who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ’Your God reigns.’”
102 See DW 69.
103 On the function of euangelion in the New Testament, see DW 72-77.
new aeon had arrived in Jesus, who now reigns as Lord. Kasper pointed out three main features of this specifically Christian experience of the Gospel. First, Jesus is understood to be the active “subject” of the Gospel—the Lord whose authority becomes effective in its proclamation—as well as the “object” it proclaims.\textsuperscript{104} Second, however, Christ's victory over the world cannot be separated from the act by which that victory is announced. This implies that the preaching of the apostles is included in the one reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the fact that the biblical term Gospel embraced both Christ's active testimony to himself in the present and the faith community's memory of past events of proclamation indicates that Christian preaching began very early on to draw upon a growing body of traditional teachings. These teachings, however, became Gospel inasmuch as they were proclaimed to the present in the power of the Spirit. Contemporary biblical scholarship has amassed abundant evidence of this two-pronged tradition process at work in the Gospels and throughout the writings of the New Testament. Third, the preaching and teaching that is constitutive of the Gospel includes an authoritative claim over the present. This authority may even involve the exclusion of persons from the community of disciples, as Mark's gospel (8:38) and Paul's anathema-statements (1 Cor. 16:22, Gal. 1:8) imply. In brief, Kasper argued that the concepts of \textit{emeth} and \textit{evangelion} provided a firm biblical foundation for the idea of authoritative dogma. There is in the Gospel no contradiction between institution and authority on the one hand and spirit on the other.

At this point, however, Kasper thought it necessary to distinguish the authority of the Gospel from earthly claims to authority through two qualifications.\textsuperscript{105} He noted, first, that biblical claims to authority always rest on eschatological grounds, that they have the character of

\textsuperscript{104} DW 73.

\textsuperscript{105} On the eschatological, historical, and covenantal dimensions of \textit{emeth}, see DW 77-80.
promises. This was in a sense to make explicit what is implied by the biblical concept of *emeth as faithfulness-truth or proven reliability (Bewährtheit). Just as faithfulness pertains to what will be in the future, so divine *emeth pertains in a special way to the eschaton, God's absolute Future. This, however, raises the question: what makes it possible for one to apprehend the definitive reliability of divine truth, and thus God's eschatological authority over history, in the word proclaimed here and now? What prevents a purely extrinsicist and authoritarian interpretation of the claim deployed by dogma? Here Kasper added a second qualification: considered in view of its function within the biblical canon, divine truth in both its already-effective authority and its anticipatory or promissory character emerges within a salvation-historical context, the concrete history of divine promise and fulfillment initiated by the divine election of and formation of the covenant with Israel.

According to Kasper, then, the self-verification of God's Faithfulness-Truth takes place not in pagan or Greek fashion as epiphanies of an unchanging Ground of being, but rather within the moving horizon of the covenant-history, wherever there takes place in the living word of proclamation the unexpected fulfillment of the promise contained in the word of sacred tradition.\(^{106}\) The Old Testament witnesses a process that moves from promise to fulfillment to an even greater promise, constantly connecting memory of past saving events with expectation of God's continued presence with his people. For example, God's self-revelation to Moses breaks the classical epiphany pattern when God appeals to the collective memory of Israel—“I am the protector-God of your fathers” (Exod. 3:6)—before promising to lead them into the holy land.\(^{107}\) In a similar fashion, the preface to the Decalogue indicates a close connection between God's

\(^{106}\) For a comparison between the pagan notion of epiphany and its biblical counterpart, see DW 78-80.

\(^{107}\) DW 79. Translation of Exod. 3:6 is drawn from Kasper's text.
powerful intervention in the Exodus from Egypt, the authority of God to issue the law in the present, and God's ongoing promise of life for the covenant people. Within this ongoing process, the surplus of fulfillment in comparison to promise indicates that its term can be no less than the very advent of YHWH, in which God will be all in all (see 1 Cor. 15:28). From this Kasper inferred that one must be open to the shattering of concrete thematizations of divine promise, as in the case of the proclamations of the prophets. Every formulation of the truth of revelation must make way for the new, surprising, and “outbidding.”

This promise-fulfillment schema, Kasper admitted, could not be applied to the post-Easter situation without modification. For the Christian, God has already given his definitive Amen to the world, and the world to God, in the person of Jesus.\textsuperscript{108} The gospel of John expressed the newness of the revelation of divine emeth in Jesus Christ through a Christocentric doctrine of truth that took up the Greek idea of a self-manifesting, eternal Ground of reality, uniting it, however, with the biblical, eschatologically-grounded notion of truth. Because the Son has made known the eschatological Truth of the Father (see John 1:18), John could also say that the very ground of creation, the Light of the world in whom there is life (see John 1:4, 9), has come into the world in Jesus. So John clearly affirmed the already-present reality of truth in Christ. Yet he also recognized and expounded upon the prophetic openness of truth in terms of the Paraclete, the “Spirit of truth [who] will guide you into all the truth.”\textsuperscript{109} For John, the Holy Spirit is the prophetic power animating the proclamation of Jesus in the Church. This means that the Spirit does not act independently of Christ, but takes up the disciples' recollection of Christ and renders him present in their faith and preaching. At the same time, the Spirit does not merely impose the

\textsuperscript{108} On the Johannine notion of truth, see DW 80-84.

\textsuperscript{109} John 16:13; see DW 81.
past as a law upon the present, but in his personal freedom makes present the “coming” Christ as a new event of salvation. It is in the Spirit of prophecy, and not in the flesh, that the glory of Christ the Savior is revealed and the truth of Christ becomes an abiding, life-giving presence in the world. So the Spirit unfolds the once-for-all reality of Christ, not into a static theological system, but into the 'lived truth' witnessed in the faith and love of the community of disciples (see John 3:21, 8:31). In the Spirit, truth remains a way into the future, but only insofar as it maintains its link to the person of Christ and renders him present today in power.

According to Kasper, the Bible's dynamic, historical, prophetic notion of truth has never entirely disappeared from the theological tradition. Throughout the history of the Church, great theologians, notably Origen, Thomas Aquinas, and John Driedo, have maintained a distinction between the letter of the Bible and the living, pneumatic reality of the Gospel; this distinction was further confirmed in the teachings of the Council of Trent. At the same time, Kasper pointed out that an opposing trend—from living Gospel to letter, law, institution—also ran through the whole tradition. He saw this trend at work in a shift in the meaning of the term evangelium (gospel) in the post-apostolic Church: where it had meant for Paul and Mark the event of proclamation that ushers in the new era, it rapidly became the ordinary designation for the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection attested in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. One important factor in this process of decline is the unfortunate fact that 'gospel' in its dynamic sense has been taken up repeatedly as a slogan for movements that invoked the spiritual and charismatic dimensions of Christianity as a weapon against its institutional and authoritative dimensions. The Catholic Church has not always responded to these challenges in a balanced manner.

110 DW 82.

111 On the concept evangelium in the history of theology, see DW 84-95.
way; its reaction to the Reformation in particular included a bolstering of its institutional form at the cost of a suppression of its charismatic nature.

Kasper reckoned the present divisions among the churches and the outsourcing of the prophetic dimension to the secular sphere, of which he mentioned Marxism and the Third Reich as examples, to be in no small part the bitter fruits of the severing of charisma from institution, which had formerly been united in the biblical notion of truth.\textsuperscript{112} In order that theology might be able once again to support a constructive tension between these two elements, Kasper prescribed a renewed reflection on theological foundations, namely, a reconsideration of the roots of the theological notion of truth in the theology of the Trinity and especially in the personal reality of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{113} Because the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and yet proceeds from both in a new way distinct from the procession of the Son, the Spirit reconciles in his person the once-for-all mission of the Son with the prophetic newness of his own mission. The Holy Spirit embodies the unity-in-tension between institution and charisma, binding dogma and prophetic openness. In this way, the Spirit is the ultimate ground for the unity of the definitive and provisional elements in Kasper's theological notion of truth.

c. A fundamental theology of truth

In his exegesis of the biblical notion of truth, Kasper claimed that he had uncovered an experience of truth quite different than that found in the Western philosophical tradition.\textsuperscript{114} It dealt neither with merely-propositional truths nor with an epiphany of the mystery of Being, but with the prophetic proclamation in a concrete time and place of a future, eschatological reality. Granting this distinction, Kasper was nevertheless aware that certain elements from Greek

\textsuperscript{112} DW 95.

\textsuperscript{113} On the pneumatological foundations for a renewed theology of truth, see DW 95-98.

\textsuperscript{114} DW 84.
philosophy were taken up even within the Bible's developing understanding of truth, not to mention the almost two millennia of theological tradition that followed. He intended to preserve and develop the many elements of this tradition that he judged to be compatible with an authentically biblical concept of truth. This intention, however, did not alter the fact that Kasper perceived a basic opposition between the Greek or Western idea of truth and that of the Bible.

Kasper found the core of the Western tradition's reflections on truth expressed in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, who defined truth as the adequation of rational judgment to reality.\(^{115}\) He distinguished this notion from the modern, technical concept of truth, which in its “forgetfulness of Being” identified truth with certain objectifiable propositions.\(^{116}\) By contrast, \textit{adaequatio rei et intellectus} presupposed that truth was something that resided in things in the world, and that it was grounded not in the human knower's mind but in the mind of God. According to this conception, my act of knowing is nothing less than Being coming to itself; consequently, at no time does truth, as the \textit{Bei-sich-sein des Seins}, become my creation and possession, to manipulate as I wish. It would likewise be incorrect to label this concept of truth as ahistorical, since the Western tradition spoke of a rift between mind and reality that took place in history, which the acquisition of certainty in human knowledge promised one day to remedy. This is why philosophers since Plato have conceived of knowledge as \textit{anamnesis}, knowing-again, Being returning to its primordial integrity. Nor could Western thinking on truth be reduced for Kasper to mere objective, cosmological knowledge as opposed to anthropological, existential knowledge. The two formed a single whole for the Western mind, so that certainty about the world meant at the same time certainty about one's own existence. In short, for the Western mind,

\(^{115}\) On the common ground between the biblical and the Western philosophical understandings of truth, see DW 99-100.

\(^{116}\) Compare DW 58-61.
truth comes to itself in and through the process of history. In this sense, Kasper thought that the Western concept of truth shared the same basic concerns as the Bible's.

According to Kasper, it is not the fact “that” truth comes to itself in history but “how” this takes place that really set the biblical notion of truth apart from that of Western philosophy.117 Pointing out that the Gospel had been proclaimed not only in a Semitic thought-form but also in that of the Greeks, Kasper argued that an authentic expression of biblical faith in different thought-forms must be possible in principle on account of the universal claim of the Gospel message. The Bible therefore exhibited an “ever-differing qualification” of its understanding of truth.118 This implies that divine truth is free to realize itself in the thought-forms of different historical eras while remaining the self-same truth. The freedom of the Gospel prohibits that any single “qualification” or thought-form in which it expresses itself should become its obligatory vehicle, lest the Gospel lose its capacity for novelty and degenerate into a dead letter.119

It is at this point that Kasper differentiated his understanding of truth from that of Western philosophy.120 According to his account, the Western concept of truth deals with the coming-to-itself of what has always already existed, the knowledge of a thing's essence (Wesen) or, to use a phrase from Hegel, its “having been-ness” (Ge-wesen-sein).121 But if truth is merely an epiphany of what has been, then history does not involve a transcendence of the past toward a new, unforeseen future but an ever-deeper penetration beyond appearances to the unchanging

117 For the following, see DW 100-1.
118 DW 101.
119 DW 101.
120 On the Western notion of truth as enslavement to the past, see DW 101-3.
121 DW 101.
ground of reality, in effect, an “eternal recurrence of the same.”  

Kasper echoed Schelling’s judgment that the only God available to this kind of quest for truth is the “Gott am Ende,” the God who grounds and underwrites all that is and ever was.  

Nihilism lies latent in this notion of truth, since neither God nor man has the freedom to transcend what has been nor to accomplish anything truly new.  

The Bible on the other hand deals everywhere with the new, surprising, and unexpected.  

In the prophets and above all in the New Testament, God is ever renewing the situation of human beings, forgiving sins, opening up new avenues and new possibilities. This is possible because God is the Urneue, who is not chained to the eternal essence of the world but also present in its potency, who is the possibility of a new beginning in history, who can therefore promise what is new. With a grain of salt, Kasper described theological truth as the inadequatio rei et intellectus, the promise of that which cannot be contained in static essences or derived from what has already come to pass. Truth in this view has a hope-structure, which means the truth of God cannot be apprehended in a finished concept but only in the mode of believing hope.  

In order to express more precisely the difference between the biblical experience of truth and the aforementioned philosophical concept, Kasper proposed a definition of truth in terms of what he called the theologische Differenz. He was adapting the Heideggerian notion of “ontological difference” to the special case of theological truth. According to Heidegger, truth

122 DW 102, 103.

123 DW 103.

124 Hence the blunt judgment Kasper pronounced on “metaphysical thought” four years later: “Das unableitbar Neue hat in diesem Denken keinen Platz.” Erfahrung 139.

125 On newness as characteristic of the biblical notion of truth, see DW 102-4.

126 On Kasper’s notion of theological difference, see DW 104-5.
takes place in the event of the ontological difference, that is, in the “oscillating transition” or in the “revealing-concealing clearing” that moves from Being to beings.\textsuperscript{127} In a comparable fashion, Kasper envisaged truth coming to pass in the theological difference, which is the never objectifiable identity and difference between promise and fulfillment, present promise of salvation and its eschatological fulfillment, or, to take up themes discussed earlier: Theological truth happens in the identity and difference between authoritative teaching or proclamation, which already establishes in the present an eschatologically-valid authority, and the annunciation of future fulfillment, which is open to the ever-greater absolute Mystery of God; it happens in the tension between letter and spirit, between the historical Jesus and the pneumatic Christ of faith.\textsuperscript{128}

Theological truth is not simply 'promise' if this is understood to exclude any claim to authority, which would amount to an evasion of one's duty to confess the faith in the present situation. Nor is truth simply 'dogma' in the sense that one could deduce from it a rigid set of laws or an axiomatic system closed to new developments. Truth takes place in the tension between clear, timely testimony to the good news and anticipation of a future known to God alone.

Kasper's notion of truth in the theological difference implies that the full truth of dogma transcends the truth that can simply be objectified into propositions.\textsuperscript{129} He found support for this view in the high scholastic definition of \textit{articulus fidei} as a perception of divine truth that points beyond itself toward the mystery so perceived.\textsuperscript{130} The truth of the article of faith does not consist in an exhaustive objectification of divine truth; it rather transcends its own finite mode of

\textsuperscript{127} DW 104.

\textsuperscript{128} “Die theologische Differenz denkt Wahrheit aus der nie objektivierbaren Identität und Differenz von Verheissung und Erfüllung, gegenwärtiger Heilszusage und deren eschatologischer Erfüllung oder, wie wir früher Behandeltes aufgreifend nun sagen können: Theologische Wahrheit ereignet sich in der Identität und Differenz zwischen vollmächtiger Lehre, Verkündigung, die bereits gegenwärtig eschatologisch gültiges Recht aufrichtet und Ankündigung von zukünftiger Erfüllung, die auf das je grössere absolute Geheimnis Gottes hin offen ist, sie ereignet sich in der Spannung von Buchstaben und Geist, von historischem Jesus und pneumatischem Christus des Glaubens.” DW 104-5.

\textsuperscript{129} On medieval Scholastic antecedents to Kasper's theological difference, see DW 105-6.

\textsuperscript{130} See \textit{Summa theologiae} 2-2.1.6; DW 105.
expression in view of the surplus of meaning found in the mysteries of the faith. Hence the object of faith for Thomas was not any set of finite propositions, however profound, but the unfathomable mystery grasped in the articles of faith.\textsuperscript{131} In this sense, scholastic theologians like Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas already grasped what Kasper meant by the theological difference. Nevertheless, as men of their time, the Scholastics translated the theological difference into “a metaphysical transcendence of God and his mysteries” that for Kasper remained within the ambit of a Western essentialist thought-form.\textsuperscript{132} He thus looked elsewhere for models that could articulate the theological difference and its implications for the truth of dogma within the horizon of contemporary historical consciousness.

The tradition of German Idealism provided Kasper with the models he sought.\textsuperscript{133} Hegel understood truth not as a fixed quantity available in propositions but as the “Whole” working out its reality within the process of history. The Tübingen theologian J. E. Kuhn made use of Hegel's categories to express the transcendent character of the Gospel and the historical character of revealed truth, distinguishing between, on the one hand, the different historical expressions and symbols of the faith, and on the other hand, the one “objective Spirit” to which they point.\textsuperscript{134} Gadamer for his part showed how this conception might be made fruitful in a hermeneutics of dogma. According to Gadamer, cognition presupposes a prejudgment of reality as horizon for all experience. Concrete experience questions this prejudgment and either confirms it or modifies it through correction, extension, or differentiation. This modified judgment becomes a new prejudgment, open to further experiences. For Kasper, Gadamer’s reflections on the historically-
conditioned character of human knowledge highlighted with new clarity the indispensable role of experience as well as prejudgments in every act of knowledge.

From these thinkers Kasper acquired categories with which to explain the truth of dogma in the tension between the definitive and the provisional, the “already” and the “not yet.”  

Truth in the theological difference does not erect a wall that closes believers off from reality and from the future; rather, it both requires and enables believers to remain open to both. In this perspective, dogma need not be a substitute for experience. Dogma may instead be understood as a “dynamic functional concept,” analogous to a prejudgment in Gadamer's thought, which arises from the Church's previous experience of the Gospel and anticipates its confirmation in future experiences. Dogma serves as a horizon for the experience of the community; it may therefore be questioned, extended, and updated by experience. Unlike Gadamer's prejudgment, however, the horizon of dogma anticipates a future that has already been decided. The Church can be certain that its dogmas will not lead it blindly into an “empty openness,” since they have their ultimate ground in the eschatological definitiveness of the Christ-event. In other words, the dogmas of the Church will surely be confirmed by some future experience, even though one cannot work out in advance precisely how this confirmation will take place.

3. The concrete forms of truth in the Church

Kasper's theory of truth in the theological difference has consequences for the manner in which one deals with a claim to truth within the Church. The fundamental difference between the one, transcendent Truth of revelation that is the Gospel and the many testimonies to this truth works itself out concretely in the tension between scripture and tradition and in that between the

135 For the following, see DW 108-9.
136 DW 108.
137 DW 108.
magisterium and the whole community of believers. Each of these represents one mode in which the definitive truth of the Gospel has come to expression within the history of the Church. Their irreducibility and inseparability correspond to the Church's historicity and are for that reason basic to the structure of the Church. The same interconnectedness generates a fundamental principle for the hermeneutics of tradition, which Kasper named “the principle of the analogy of faith”: “each witness to the faith possesses its truth only inasmuch as it is heard along with the other witnesses.”\(^{138}\) This principle prohibits the absolutization of any one of these witnesses. It is only when each is respected in its uniqueness and its limitations that the Gospel is set free to speak a prophetic word to the present and thus to open the way to the future.

Kasper's account of the loci theologici in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* expanded upon the one he developed in *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*.\(^{139}\) He divided it into two topics: the place of scripture in the Church, including its relationship to dogma, and the significance of dogma for the Church. Regarding the first topic, Kasper made it clear that the written word of scripture is not identical to the Gospel.\(^{140}\) Rather, Holy Scripture is a privileged witness to the Gospel as the concrete, historical form in which the Church's apostolic origin, its “Beginning in Fullness,” stands over against the post-apostolic Church.\(^{141}\) In forming the canon, the Church subjected itself to the Bible as a permanent and irreplaceable norm over its whole existence. At the same time, the historicity of Scripture implies that it must be interpreted in a historical way. Modern exegesis has heightened awareness of the fact that the Bible is a diverse

\(^{138}\) DW 118; see also 115, 122, 124.

\(^{139}\) See LT 402-22. Both accounts were presented as interpretations of the teachings of the First Vatican Council on the relationships between scripture, tradition and magisterium.

\(^{140}\) On the relationship between scripture and the Church, see DW 110-26.

\(^{141}\) DW 112. On Möhler’s concept of “Beginning in Fullness,” see above, p. 61.
collection of writings, each of which testifies to the Gospel within certain concrete circumstances. The differences among the component parts of the Bible raise the question: How does one discern the indivisible norm canonized by the Church, the one Gospel in the many biblical books? Notwithstanding the legitimacy of the “literal sense” uncovered by critical methods, the problem of the unity of the canon demonstrated to Kasper just how necessary it was for theology to take into account not only the historical sense of the biblical text but also its Wirkungsgeschichte, the “history of its effect” that is the living tradition of the Church. The Bible is not a self-explanatory document, a textbook of Christian beliefs. It finds its meaning within the life of the believing community. Conversely, the interpretative tradition, which includes the Church's binding dogmas, makes no sense apart from the text it interprets. The analogy of faith demands that scripture be read in light of tradition and vice versa.

Like the Bible, dogma has its own particular authority within the broader context of the life of the Church. In this context, Kasper meant by 'dogma' any of the various ways in which the Church exercises its teaching authority. He understood such teachings as events in which the eschatological and definitive Fidelity-Truth of Christ comes to pass in an anticipatory or preliminary way. Whereas scripture witnesses to the impact of the Gospel in the primordial

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142 For Kasper, the notions of “law” and “gospel” can best be understood not as “two [separate] eras of the history of salvation” or “two different kinds of divine revelation,” but as two elements dialectically united within the one word of God. Consequently, not only the New Testament but even the Old Testament testifies to the Gospel. See Kasper, “Law and Gospel,” in Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968-70), 3:298.

143 See DW 124.

144 DW 123-26; compare 117.

145 According to Kasper, one of the main concerns behind Geiselmann's assertion of the relative material sufficiency of scripture was to legitimate such a reciprocal relationship between scripture and tradition. See Kasper, review of Die mündliche Überlieferung als Glaubensquelle by Johannes Beumer, ThQ 144 (1964): 493.

146 On the place of dogma within the tradition of the Church, see DW 126-38.

147 See DW 128.
Church of the Apostles, dogma testifies to the promise and challenge of the Gospel in relation to the circumstances of the present day. In dogma, the believing community exercises its right to bear witness to the ongoing presence of Christ in the world in a definitive way. This means that dogma participates in the absoluteness of Christ's eschatological promise that the Church will remain in the truth.¹⁴⁸ Dogma is therefore binding on the Church. This definitive, binding quality does not mean, however, that any set of propositions acquires the absoluteness proper to the Gospel alone. Individual dogmas respond to different circumstances, serve different purposes, and take different concrete forms—kerygma, doxology, mystagogy, confession of faith, anathema.¹⁴⁹ They witness in different ways to different aspects of the one truth. Furthermore, a formula or doctrine appropriate to one circumstance may prove to be unhelpful, confusing, or misleading under other circumstances. Consequently, dogma permits the truth it attests to be formulated in a new way, provided that this reformulation does not involve a revision of its binding content or a negative judgment over a previous dogmatic formula.¹⁵⁰ The hallmark of every authentic effort to update the testimony of the dogmatic tradition is to take its eschatological character—the definitiveness of its testimony to the faith in relation to the historical situation to which it was addressed—seriously.¹⁵¹

What applies to the teachings of the Church in general also holds for the way in which the Pope exercises his teaching office.¹⁵² According to Kasper's reading of the First Vatican Council, the Pope renders authoritative judgment over the truth of the faith when he teaches ex

¹⁴⁸ DW 128-29; see also 127.
¹⁴⁹ On the various functions of dogma within the Church, see DW 134-38.
¹⁵⁰ DW 137.
¹⁵¹ DW 129.
¹⁵² On infallibly proclaimed papal dogmas and their reception in the Church, see DW 130-34.
cathedra, that is, as representative of the universal Church. This doctrine of papal infallibility, however, does not mean that the Pope has a monopoly on the Gospel; rather, the infallibility of papal teaching must be understood in terms of the infallibility of the whole Church. This is true for Kasper even as regards the formulation of dogma: although dogmas require no confirmation apart from themselves (ex sese) as regards their Rechtsgrund, the formal grounds for their validity, they nevertheless do require some Erkenntnisgrund, that is, some prior basis in the faith of the universal Church, and it is incumbent upon the Pope as representative of the whole Church to ascertain this basis by some suitable means. Likewise, when a dogma is defined as infallible, it is by that very act handed over to the Church in which it is interpreted through the process of reception. It can happen that the “deeper meaning, foundation, limits, and interconnectedness of a dogma to other truths” was not entirely clear at the time of its proclamation, as for example the implications of the Council of Nicea had to be clarified in a subsequent, heated process of reception as well as at the First Council of Constantinople.\footnote{DW 131.} The historical process by which dogma is received and interpreted in the Church is analogous to the historical interpretation of Scripture in the tradition of the Church. It corresponds to both the enduring meaningfulness and the historically-conditioned quality of dogma. It arises neither from “opportunism and relativism” nor “intellectual dishonesty;” it rather expresses “both the indisposability of the Gospel and the historical fidelity of God to his Church.”\footnote{DW 139-40.}

4. Analysis

*Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* yielded a twofold fruit. On the one hand, it presented an account of dogma that situated dogma in relation to four loci theologici: scripture, tradition, the
magisterium, and the whole faith community (sensus fidei, consensus fidelium). This was a milestone in Kasper's theological project. Even though tradition was one of the central themes of his work during the early and mid-1960s, he had not prior to 1965 worked out a sustained account either of dogma or of the loci theologici, both basic components of tradition. On the other hand, this book developed an original and radical reflection on the nature of theological truth that functioned as the theoretical basis for Kasper's doctrine of the loci. These results merit a differentiated judgment.

Kasper's “postmodern” account of the theological loci elaborated on the vision of tradition produced by the Roman School.155 The doctrine of loci developed by Clemens Schrader, which itself built upon the thinking of Giovanni Perrone and Carlo Passaglia, opened up some much-needed breathing room that had been lacking in the neo-Scholastic doctrine of tradition. By highlighting the importance of Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, Schrader's thought went a long way toward breaking theology's almost exclusive concentration on recent magisterial teaching. This in turn paved a way for a return to the sources within theology, as well as ecclesiastical reform, ecumenical dialogue, and the inculturation of the Gospel.

The doctrine of loci presented in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes advanced the Roman School's tradition in three distinct ways. First, it bolstered the foundations of Schrader's account of the loci in an explicit theory of theological truth. Kasper explained the truth attested by scripture and tradition as the self-identification or self-verification of God's Fidelity-Truth that takes place in the overbidding fulfillment of the divine promise of salvation. This means that the truth of the Gospel is to be found above all in the concrete acts of communication in which each

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155 In 1990, Kasper termed the theology of tradition presented in the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on divine revelation Dei verbum a “postmodern” account of dogma inasmuch as it elevated no single locus theologicus to the status of a definitive principle and criterion over the other loci. The description fits Kasper's own account nicely. See “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 182.
locus theologicus proved or proves fruitful as a salvific encounter with Christ for its recipient. The particular authority enjoyed by each locus follows from the particular historical mode in which that locus attested or attests to the Gospel, while the interconnection between these loci follows from the unity of the Gospel they communicate. Second, Dogma articulated in the analogia fidei the basic hermeneutical principle to which the distinctions and interconnections among the loci give rise. One can only discern the Gospel attested in the Bible, for example, by interpreting it in light of tradition, dogma, and the sensus fidelium. This principle facilitated, third, an emendation of the Roman School’s account of the authority of dogma. In spite of the positive achievements of their theory of tradition, their understanding of dogma focused exclusively on the role of the magisterium in defining Church teaching. In conjunction with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the analogy of faith pointed toward a broader vision in which the whole community of the faithful played an active role in working out the meaning of dogma.

Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes, then, made a positive contribution to the mid-twentieth century debate over scripture and tradition. On the one hand, it safeguarded the specific and irreducible authority of dogma and the necessity of dogma for the proclamation of the Gospel in the present, which may be regarded as the basic concerns of those who in debating with Geiselmann maintained the material insufficiency of Scripture. Because the Church participates in the definitive victory of divine truth over error in Christ, it can be confident that what is definitive in its testimony will endure. On the other hand, this book affirmed that the binding teachings of the Church are by themselves not enough, that dogma does not obviate but in fact requires a return to the testimony of scripture and tradition. By itself, even definitive dogma expresses the truth of revelation “in fragment”; its claim to truth must always be

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156 Kasper has frequently used the formula das Ganze im Fragment, which he borrowed from von Balthasar, to express the simultaneous definitiveness and provisionality of the various dogmatic, liturgical, cultural
contextualized in view of the other *loci theologici*. The tension between these *loci* gives rise to dialogue, first among the Catholic faithful, then among all who believe in Jesus Christ, and finally among all persons of good will. The biblical notion of truth points each of these dialogues to a common point of reference, namely, the Gospel, the divine promise of salvation for the world and the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus Christ. Even where there is apparently intractable disagreement over right teaching (orthodoxy), one can still engage in dialogue over concrete truth, that is, over which way of life best does justice to human hope and human existence (orthopraxis).157

Here, however, questions arise. How precisely does one discern the Gospel in the tensions among its various witnesses? Through his account of the *loci* and his principle of analogy Kasper had indeed set the parameters of the problem, but he had not solved it. What distinguishes an adequate synthesis of the traditional data from an inadequate one, other than its respect for all the particular *loci*? In other words: at what point can one say that a particular theology is indeed true? Does the inherently convincing power of God's Faithfulness-Truth only emerge after a process of historical reconstruction? If not, then what ultimately gives one access to divine truth?

The underlying question here is whether Kasper could provide an adequate account for the actual event of the Gospel, in which the word of revelation is heard and accepted in faith. His argument was that the experience of divine truth takes place within the context of a historical community of faith and its divine tradition. The concrete life of the community lends plausibility to its proclamation of the Gospel. But what enables one to apprehend the eschatological basis of representations of the mystery of salvation in the Church. See Ökumene 342; “Erneuerung des dogmatischen Prinzips,” 37; “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 192.

157 See DW 141-42.
the community's authority—the definitive self-verification of God's Fidelity-Truth in Jesus Christ—in the historical, provisional, unfulfilled sign of the community, however plausible this sign may be? What makes the act of faith connatural to the would-be believer? Granted that the concrete circumstances that facilitate Tom's receiving the call to faith are specific to his case, does not Tom's act of faith involve some illumination of his subjectivity by the light of God's eschatological glory? And does not the same apply to Jane's and Harry's faith as well?

This line of questioning finally leads to an inquiry into the “hearer of the Word,” the subject who apprehends the proclamation of faith as convincing, who perceives the faithful God in the divine promise. Such questions seem to be excluded, however, by Kasper's account of theological truth. Here he distinguished between the concept of truth in the Western philosophical tradition and the truth of the Gospel on the grounds of the “ever-differing qualification” of the latter. The emeth of God often shatters the concepts and categories in which it is expressed; thus, the biblical authors freely utilize both Hebrew and Greek thought-forms in view of the exigencies of their situations. Kasper thereby felt authorized to reject a Western concept of truth grounded in a metaphysics of essences in favor of a more historically-conscious thought-form that makes room for the newness and futurity of truth.

Because Kasper was careful to articulate a series of agreements between the Greek or Western concept of truth and that of the Bible, it is not clear just how comprehensive a rejection of the Western tradition he intended. Did Kasper want to scrap the entire Western metaphysical tradition? Judging from his reflections on the interconnection between word and reality, it at least seems unlikely that he wanted to liquidate metaphysics as such. Perhaps Kasper merely intended that Western metaphysics should be aufgehoben or sublated into a more comprehensive

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158 DW 101.
(historical) framework. Even this latter case, however, would represent a fundamental shift that would necessarily impact that considerable portion of Church teachings that speaks in metaphysical categories, although not with the same radical consequences as the former case.

A few concrete consequences of Kasper's rejection of a Western notion of truth manifested themselves within *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. First, it placed the vast majority of the reflections on truth found in the Catholic theological tradition under suspicion. Surprisingly, Kasper criticized Thomas Aquinas's otherwise congenial distinction between the articles of faith and the *res* to which they point on the grounds that the transcendence it applied to theological truth was a “metaphysical transcendence of God and his mysteries” rather than a “historical transcendence” moving from promise to overbidding fulfillment.\(^{159}\) Second, and for similar reasons, Kasper rejected Karl Rahner's transcendental method as incapable of generating adequate foundations for a biblical theology of dogma.\(^{160}\) He did so, moreover, in spite of his agreement with many of the conclusions Rahner drew in his reflections on dogma. Kasper was convinced that the Church of his day needed to be reminded of the biblical experience of truth in history, and that both traditional metaphysical and transcendental categories stood in the way of this task.

Kasper's disagreement with Thomas and especially with Rahner appears to have diverted his attention away from the believing subject, the “hearer” of the word of the Gospel. In *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, Kasper demonstrated his awareness of the traditional teaching that faith involves a gracious illumination of the subject by which the living Gospel is inscribed on the

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\(^{159}\) DW 105-6.

\(^{160}\) See DW 61, 64-65.
hearts of believers. Nevertheless, the idea of faith as a supernatural, infused habit played no significant role in his presentation of the truth of faith. For Kasper, the decisive factor that determined one's receptivity to the truth of faith was not the quality of one's subjectivity but one's relationship to the Church and its tradition. Thus in response to Bultmann, who regarded “a methodological explanation of the self-understanding pregiven in human existence” as the pre-understanding required for a correct interpretation of Scripture, Kasper maintained the necessity of the pre-understanding provided by ecclesial tradition, apart from which one cannot arrive at the idea of a question of God innate in the human subject.

Kasper's lopsided focus on the 'objective evidence' of tradition to the near exclusion of a 'turn to the subject' leads to some difficult problems. Regarding his concept of faith in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes, one cannot rule out Hütter's thesis that the early Kasper was operating from a conception of faith as an existential certitudo super omnia. This exposes him to the charge of extrinsicism, whereby the act of faith involves some compromise of one's authentic subjectivity. From a different angle, it becomes unclear apart from some reflection on the believing subject what gives rise to the particular authority and competence attributed by Kasper to the sensus fidelium. Can the agreement of the whole Church over matters of belief arise from somewhere other than the graced interiority of authentic believing subjects?

Kasper's theory of the loci theologici may be judged positively without unambiguously endorsing the foundation he laid for it in his theory of truth. The latter would seem to be problematic if it is incompatible with Western metaphysical reflection on the notion of truth, as

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161 DW 44, 88-89; see also “Schrift und Tradition,” 211.

162 DW 117.

163 DW 117-18.
Kasper apparently thought. This judgment is odd even from a purely biblical perspective, since the wisdom tradition and the gospel of John were able to incorporate Greek philosophical notions within a Hebrew-biblical way of thinking. It seems as if Kasper's early thought, with some modifications, might be compatible with a more sympathetic reading of the Western metaphysical tradition than he actually rendered in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. Such a rapprochement would in turn open the door to a more positive evaluation of the 'turn to the subject' and a more adequate conception of theological faith that could help to iron out the ambiguities in his theory of truth.

D. Adjustments to the Picture in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*

Kasper's fundamental-theological reflections on truth in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* formed part of the basic structure of his theological program. His essays in the years immediately following its publication showed that the theory of truth he proposed therein was presupposed by his subsequent reflections.\(^\text{164}\) A few of these pieces presented minor variations of, additions to, and developments of this theory.

In two essays published in 1966—“Die Bedeutung der Heiligen Schrift für Kirche und christliches Leben nach der dogmatischen Konstitution Über die göttliche Offenbarung” and “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung”—Kasper applied the framework he developed in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* to the reception of the Second Vatican Council's teachings on divine revelation.\(^\text{165}\) He found in the dogmatic constitution *Dei verbum* a confirmation of much of what

\(^{164}\) Clear allusions to this concept of truth may be found in Kasper, “Evangelium und Dogma” (see p. 333n78, above), 206-7; “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung” (see p. 309n2, above), 29-30; MD 70-71; “Verhältnis von Evangelium und Dogma” (see p. 136n43, above), 70; “Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen” (see p. 24n59, above), 409, 414; Gesetz 62-64.

\(^{165}\) Schrift; Kasper, “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung.”
he had presented in his treatment of scripture, tradition, and the truth of dogma.\textsuperscript{166} Like \textit{Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes}, \textit{Dei verbum} went beyond a propositional notion of the truth of revelation. It taught that revelation effects a salvific encounter with God that nourishes and supports the believer, imparting life and strength to him or her. Within this soteriological framework, \textit{Dei verbum} developed a renewed theology of the Bible that highlighted its unique dignity and authority within the Church. The Church stands under the norm of the Word of God spoken once for all in the history of salvation, above all in Jesus Christ; since, however, the Bible is the preeminent witness to the Word, the Church also stands in a very real way under the word of scripture. This means that Holy Scripture must inform the whole life of the Church; it must be regarded as the starting point and criterion for Church renewal (\textit{Dei verbum} 26), the soul of all theology, the source of all preaching and catechesis, and not as a window-dressing that merely confirms the status quo. In addition, \textit{Dei verbum} acknowledged that in scripture, God speaks to human beings in a human way; it therefore affirmed the positive contributions of historical and literary disciplines to the interpretation of the Church's normative text.

While returning to the Bible something of the dignity it enjoyed in the Catholic Church prior to the Counter-Reformation, \textit{Dei verbum} maintained that the Word of God attested in the Bible could not be separated from the Word as preached, believed, and lived in the tradition of the Church.\textsuperscript{167} To this extent, the dogmatic constitution affirmed the mutual interdependence of scripture and tradition that followed from Kasper's \textit{analogia fidei} principle. He noted with approval that \textit{Dei verbum} refrained from asserting the existence of traditions not contained in scripture; instead, it presented tradition as a pneumatic reality, the living presence of the Gospel

\textsuperscript{166} On the nature of revelation and scripture according to \textit{Dei verbum}, see Schrift; “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” 17-20, 34-36.

\textsuperscript{167} On the nature of tradition in relation to scripture according to \textit{Dei verbum}, see Schrift 55-56; “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” 17-19.
in the Church. It thus gave no support to the Baroque Scholastic *partim-partim* thesis, which regarded scripture and tradition as two separate sources of revealed truths.

At the same time, Kasper was not entirely satisfied with *Dei verbum*’s teachings on tradition in relation to scripture. For him, the constitution's description of tradition as “all” that the Church is and all that it believes (*Dei verbum* 8) bore an unfortunate uncritical ring, which seemed to overlook those elements of the life of the Church that have over the course of its history contradicted its witness to the Gospel.168 Moreover, while affirming the normativity of the Bible over the Church, *Dei verbum* did not clearly specify how the Bible exercises its normative role over against inauthentic traditions.169 Because of its emphasis on the inseparability of scripture and tradition, the Council had left unsolved the hermeneutical problem raised by the debate over the sufficiency of scripture.

In “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” Kasper found the beginnings of a solution to this problem in the Council's remarks on the role of spiritual experience in the development of tradition (*Dei verbum* 8) and on the sense of faith bestowed upon all the faithful that comes to expression in their living witness to the Gospel (*Lumen gentium* 35).170 Here he saw an opening to his understanding of truth as the self-verifying Faithfulness-Truth of God and to a “hermeneutics of Christian mission,” whereby a particular act of proclamation verifies itself as right teaching when it demonstrates its capacity to awaken faith, hope, and love in the situation it

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168 See Kasper, “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” 18, 30, where Kasper reacted to paraphrases of the Council’s statement with only a parenthetical exclamation point (!). The above explanation for his reaction to the offending phrase comes from “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 179.


addresses. This dynamic, pneumatic moment set the tone for a new sketch of a hermeneutics of tradition along the lines of *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*.

With his hermeneutics Kasper hoped to transcend the alternative between a Romantic idea of tradition that so emphasized the active presence of Christ in the Church that it elevated the consciousness of the Church in the present above every norm and standard, and a conservative conception of tradition as continuity with some 'golden age' of the past, which could only conceive of subsequent history as a decline from that age. He proposed a third, biblical and eschatological idea of tradition, placing at its center the identity between the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ, actively present in the Church today through the Holy Spirit. Kasper thus recast in explicitly Christological language his idea that theological truth emerges in the identity-in-difference between promise and fulfillment. He incorporated into this idea a (Jewish and Lucan) notion of tradition as creative continuity with the past, and with this the basic concerns of the 'conservative' notion of tradition. He put this conservative principle to work, however, in the service of tradition in the (Pauline and Johannine) sense of prophetic freedom in the present. Continuity with the apostolic kerygma represented for Kasper one criterion that aided the Church in its efforts to align or identify its proclamation with the voice of the risen Christ, who awakens faith and brings the dead to life today by the power of his word.

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This raises the question of how the identification of the Crucified with the Risen takes place in the concrete—the question of theological (as well as catechetical and homiletic) method.\textsuperscript{175} In Kasper's thinking, each focal point of the elliptical unity between Scripture and Tradition plays its own distinctive function: scripture is the normative witness to the unrepeatable foundation of tradition, while tradition is the living interpretation of the “Beginning in Fullness” attested in scripture. The irreducible difference between the testimony of the Bible and the present situation means that the preacher cannot be satisfied simply to point out superficial correspondences between the two. Rather, one must treat them as concrete communicative events, each of which transmits the self-same Good News to a specific community and within a specific historical context. As Kasper put it in another 1966 essay, “Exegese – Dogmatik – Verkündigung,” all the writings of Scripture and all preaching intend to proclaim God's faithfulness and salvation in Jesus Christ within the changing situations of the Church.\textsuperscript{176} This meant for Kasper on the one hand that the work of theology (and that of preaching) cannot bypass the exegete's analysis of the historical situation in which the biblical proclamation first manifested its life-giving power. The theologian and the homilist, on the other hand, must carefully discern in dialogue with the church community the analogy between the soteriological center of the biblical text and the questions and challenges facing the church today. So Kasper derived from the unity-in-difference between scripture and tradition a division of theology into two relatively independent specializations: on the one hand, biblical and historical theology, and on the other hand, dogmatic and pastoral theology.

\textsuperscript{175} On the status and hermeneutics of scripture, see Kasper, “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” 34-41.

This division anticipated the two-pronged theological methodology Kasper proposed in a paper delivered at a conference of German dogmatic theologians held January 2-5, 1967 in Munich, which he later published under the title *Die Methoden der Dogmatik: Einheit und Vielheit*. In this essay, Kasper expanded on his recently formulated theological hermeneutics in two ways. First, he situated his methods in reference to the Second Vatican Council's call for a more biblical and pastorally-oriented theology as well as to the history of theology and the changing conceptions of the theological task. In formulating what Kasper called the dogmatic thought-form, theology after Trent was attempting to buttress the Church's legitimate claim to continuity with Christ and the Apostles, but at the cost of suppressing the differences in the history of the proclamation of the Gospel that arose from the changing circumstances in which the Church has preached Christ. The result was a neo-Scholastic dogmatic theology that neither rooted itself in the testimony of the Bible nor communicated its relevance to the lives of ordinary Christians. Moreover, Kasper regarded the recent efforts of academic theologians to correct this situation in response to the Council's challenge as disorganized and dissonant, though well-intentioned. He concluded that a new theological method was needed, one that respected the relative independence of the historical or exegetical task of theology from its speculative task. In particular, theology needed to recognize the relative priority of the historical over the speculative task. This meant that historical theology could no longer be expected to prove the theses of dogmatic theology; it must be allowed to ask its own questions, to inquire into the

177 MD.

178 On the situation facing Catholic theology after the Council, see MD 9-19; on the history of theological methods, see ibid., 21-33.

179 On the Word of God and the eschatological mission of the Church as the starting point for theology, see MD 35-46.

180 On the historical task of theology, see MD 47-60.
differences between the proclamation of the Gospel then and now. Kasper was convinced, however, that a careful account of these discontinuities would not conceal but bring into relief the profound continuities in the theological tradition that follow from the oneness of the reality they preached, namely, the Faithfulness-Truth of God making itself known to human beings according to the particular mode of its hearer.

This same concept of theological truth made possible the synthesis Kasper effected in Die Methoden der Dogmatik between the speculative and pastoral tasks of theology. This was the second way in which he developed his doctrine of theological method within this paper. For Kasper, truth in the biblical sense is what verifies itself, what turns out as it says. If, however, one takes seriously the universality of the truth of the Gospel, then it must be possible for theology to correlate the 'promises' implicit in every human history with their unexpected fulfillment in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Theology must show that its statements are the “concretization, fulfillment, and outbidding” of the hopes and longings that can be observed “in the essential structures common to every history.” The task of theology, then, is thoroughly pastoral; it must serve to translate the theological tradition into a prophetic and liberating word for the contemporary world. At the same time, the universal claim of theological truth implies the existence of certain stable, intelligible structures in reality. Consequently, Kasper maintained that in its 'turn to the phantasms'—its reflection on the Church's experience of salvation in Jesus Christ—theology has the right and indeed the duty to pose the questions of metaphysics. In doing so, he was in no way departing from the fundamental theology of truth that he articulated in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes. This theory of truth did indeed include a notion of being and thus

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181 On the speculative and communicative task of theology, see MD 61-87.
182 See MD 70-71.
183 MD 79.
made room for metaphysical concepts, provided that these allowed themselves to be understood as 'unfinished' concepts, expressions of the existential questions and concerns touching every person and all reality, concepts open to a gracious fulfillment.\textsuperscript{184}

As discussed above, however, Kasper did not think that the Western notion of truth lent itself to the formulation of 'open' concepts of this kind. His retrieval of metaphysical inquiry thus went hand in hand with the death of a particular metaphysics. It presupposed that “essence-thinking within the horizon of cosmos and nature” had been surpassed in favor of a new thought-form that “recognized freedom, time and history as that which is most comprehensive.”\textsuperscript{185}

It would seem appropriate at this juncture to comment on Hütter's critique of \textit{Die Methoden der Dogmatik}. One of his major complaints against Kasper's methodological proposal was that it underwrote a profound and radical questioning of the propositional content of faith, up to and including the articles of faith contained in the creeds. In spite of some infelicitous statements of his position in \textit{Die Methoden der Dogmatik}, however, Kasper had no intention of “undo[ing] the last traces of any propositional content of the faith itself,” as Hütter seemed to suggest.\textsuperscript{186} Kasper made it clear in \textit{Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes} that the Church had the authority to take a definitive stand on the content of the faith.\textsuperscript{187} Such definitive decisions set a limit for Kasper on all attempts to render a revisionist interpretation of the tradition. However, \textit{Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes} also made it clear that Kasper considered a rejection of Western metaphysics, at least as far as its theory of truth was concerned, within acceptable bounds.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{184} In DW 108, Kasper referred in connection with Gadamer to “dynamic functional concepts.”

\textsuperscript{185} MD 73-74.

\textsuperscript{186} Hüt 383-84.

\textsuperscript{187} See DW 129, 137.

\textsuperscript{188} See DW 99-106.
This raised questions, as has been seen, about Kasper's understanding of faith and consequently about how it was possible for the believer to apprehend the Faithfulness-Truth of God in history apart from a laborious historical and hermeneutical reconstruction. *Die Methoden der Dogmatik* did not yield more satisfactory answers to these questions.

In addition to producing an outline for a new theological paradigm, Kasper made his theory of truth fruitful in an original notion of orthodoxy and in a retrieval of the patristic theory of types. “Zum Problem der Rechtgläubigkeit in der Kirche von morgen” was Kasper's contribution to a volume discussing sociological research conducted by Frans Haarsma that brought to light a divide between official Church teaching and the beliefs of the average Catholic. Among other things, Kasper's comments included a critical evaluation of the notion of consensus that stood behind Haarsma's negative judgment about the present situation of the Church. Kasper labeled this a static conception of consensus based on a propositional understanding of truth. He opposed this to the kind of consensus described in *Dei verbum 8*, which comes to pass in the dialogical interplay between the sense of the faith stirred up in believers by the Holy Spirit, the witness of Scripture and Tradition as the objective norms of faith, and the leadership of the magisterium. According to Kasper, the unity of the Church in the one truth depends not upon a simple adherence to propositional truths but on the continued involvement of each of these elements in the ongoing dialogue that constitutes the life of the Church.

“Zum Problem der Rechtgläubigkeit” presented an incremental development of the notion of truth Kasper produced in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. He described this truth-

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189 Recht. On the sociological situation in the Church, see ibid., 37-43.

190 On the notion of a consensus of the faithful, see Recht 44-53.
concept in its synchronic aspect as a communicative understanding of truth.\footnote{191} Just as I awaken to my own freedom only after I have been touched by the freedom of another, so truth, according to Kasper's understanding, becomes a reality in the act in which it is communicated between persons. Hence dialogue within the Church is essential to its remaining in the truth. The magisterium is responsible for safeguarding the freedom of all to participate in this dialogue; it therefore has the authority to render a binding dogmatic decision in situations where this freedom may otherwise be obstructed.\footnote{192} This intra-church dialogue, however, does not take place for its own sake, but facilitates the ongoing dialogue of revelation, the self-communication of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.\footnote{193} While this personal encounter can and must be expressed in propositions, individual propositions must be interpreted as different expressions of this one Event of truth. The truth of a dogmatic proposition does not stand on its own, but is essentially connected through the \textit{hierarchia veritatum} to all the other truths of faith.

Kasper regarded the problem of the Church's unity in belief as an instance of a larger problem, namely, how a continuity of the Church in the truth can be maintained within the discontinuities of history.\footnote{194} The question of consensus points not only to the synchronic aspect of truth, but also its diachronic aspect. In “Zum Problem der Rechtgläubigkeit,” he described this aspect of truth in terms of the patristic theory of types. He compared the relationship between the form of thinking prevalent in one era of the Church's history and the thought-form that succeeded it with the correspondences drawn by the Church Fathers and even by the Bible itself between events in the history of salvation (types) and their fulfillment in the eschatological age to come.

\footnote{191}{On the relationship between truth and dialogue, see Recht 54-62.}
\footnote{192}{On the role of the magisterium within the intra-ecclesial dialogue, see Recht 62-65.}
\footnote{193}{On the central truths of the faith and their expression in a multiplicity of propositions, see Recht 66-87.}
\footnote{194}{On the historicity of the truth of faith, see Recht 87-96.}
(antitypes). The truth of a traditional expression of faith comes to fruition where it functions as a type or model for new symbols and expressions that communicate the faith in the situation facing the Church in the present. As in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, where Kasper found a modern analogy to the biblical understanding of truth in Gadamer's idea of prejudgment, so in “Zum Problem der Rechtgläubigkeit,” he connected his typological understanding of truth with Hegel's idea of “determinate negation.”¹⁹⁵ For Hegel, one knows a thing only in delimiting it against, and therefore in negating, something else. For example, Catholic teaching on God negates biblical images that seem to suggest that God has fingers or feet. This negation, however, is not a total negation of what is negated but a determinate or circumscribed negation, which therefore maintains some degree of continuity and identity with the subject of the negation, just as the antitype remains connected to its type. Catholics believe that God is present and active in the world, 'as if' God had a body. For Kasper, determinate negation offers one way to conceive of the continuity between the distinct successive patterns of thinking in which the one Fidelity-Truth of God took concrete shape over the course of the Church's history.

One and the same theory of truth informed the developing framework for Kasper's reflections in the first few years following his publication of *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. He applied this framework to a variety of problems, making some minor modifications to it as his thinking developed. In the form it took during the 1960s, Kasper's theory of truth had several concrete consequences on his thought. It involved a strongly negative judgment on the Western metaphysical tradition in general and on Rahner's transcendental theology in particular. It rendered his understanding of faith somewhat ambiguous. It also led to a certain relativization of the propositional dimension of theological truth. At the end of the 1960s, however, Kasper's

¹⁹⁵ See Recht 91-92.
theory was indirectly subjected to external pressures produced by the official investigation of his colleague and former teacher, Hans Küng. In the midst of this investigation, Kasper was forced to reevaluate some of the more radical consequences of his thought.

II. The Küng Affair: A Shift in Emphasis

During the years in which Kasper was sketching the foundations of his approach to theology, a conflict was unfolding between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and Hans Küng, then professor of theology at the University of Tübingen. Küng, whom Kasper had assisted at Tübingen while writing his Habilitationsschrift, had been among the youngest theologians to serve as periti at the Second Vatican Council. An outspoken advocate for reform of ecclesial structures, he was unsatisfied with some of the results of the council, and so expressed his own ecclesiological vision in Die Kirche. In May 1968, the CDF summoned Küng to Rome for a discussion over certain opinions he espoused in Die Kirche. Although Küng never appeared for this discussion, he entered into a correspondence with the CDF that dealt with his ecclesiology as well as the CDF's procedures for investigating the work of a theologian. Küng's sharp criticism of Pope Paul VI's July 1968 encyclical Humanae vitae stoked the flames of this increasingly heated exchange.

Küng's 1970 book Unfehlbar? Eine Anfrage emerged out of these ongoing clashes. He understood his own experiences with the CDF as the latest chapter in a history of the Roman

196 Documentation may be found in The Küng dialogue: a documentation on the efforts of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of the Conference of German Bishops to achieve an appropriate clarification of the controversial views of Dr. Hans Küng (Tübingen) (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1980).
198 Küng, Unfehlbar.
Curia abusing its claim to authority within the Church. For Küng, the idea of an infallible ecclesiastical teaching authority functioned as a superstructure that bolstered these exaggerated claims. It enabled the leadership of the Church to ignore the findings of modern science, history and critical exegesis and to impose outdated theological opinions as obligatory upon the faithful, who were compelled to sacrifice intellect to an act of will. This, according to Küng, was what happened in the promulgation of *Humanae vitae*. He took the negative popular reaction to this encyclical and the hundredth anniversary of the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor aeternus* as an opportune moment to inquire into what he considered to be a decisive challenge to the credibility of the Catholic faith, namely, the doctrine of infallibility.

Küng raised the question: “Does the infallibility of the Church depend on infallible propositions?” This question took for granted that the doctrine of infallibility expressed something real and fundamental about the Church. Jesus promised that he would remain with his disciples (Matt. 28:20), that he would send them the Spirit (John 14:16, 16:13), that the Church would be preserved in the truth (Matt. 16:18; 1 Tim. 3:15). These promises are guaranteed absolutely by the faithfulness of God. Nevertheless, Küng maintained that the Church had in fact erred in its doctrinal tradition and that it had been compelled more than once to alter positions it had officially espoused. Moreover, if the prohibition on artificial birth control

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199 On the postconciliar situation prompting his reflections, see Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 9-24. For a brief history of errors committed by the magisterium, see ibid., 25-27.

200 On the encyclical *Humanae vitae* as occasion for a new reflection on an infallible teaching office in the Church, see Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 27-50.


202 See Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 114-16.

203 Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 141.

204 See Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 141-42.
reiterated by *Humanae vitae* represented a formally infallible teaching of the ordinary magisterium—and Küng agreed with the minority report of the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control in affirming this—then the reaction to this encyclical could be taken as evidence that the Church had erred in the case of at least one “infallible” doctrine. In light of this development, Küng asked whether the existence of a statement that can never fall into error is even possible. And if not, then how can one continue to affirm that the Church remains in the truth?

Küng's response to these questions depended in part upon what can be described as a concrete, historical analysis of language.\(^\text{205}\) According to Küng, the meaning of ordinary language depends upon a variety of cultural and contextual conditions that are subject to change. Language has a history. Hence, the truth of a statement is not static but dynamic. Nothing can guarantee that an expression of truth valid today might not hinder understanding and lead people astray tomorrow. Küng did not think that this understanding of truth could be reconciled with the teaching of the First Vatican Council. According to *Unfehlbar?*, Vatican I asserted the possibility of “infallible propositions,” that is, “statements which must be considered from the outset as guaranteed free from error on account of a divine promise . . . which are not only *de facto* not erroneous but in principle simply cannot be erroneous.”\(^\text{206}\) If one accepts the historical character of language, however, it is difficult to imagine that any proposition could be so formulated that its meaning in a future historical context could never be erroneous. This gives the lie to any and all claims that a doctrine of the Church will always enjoy freedom from error on the basis of the formal authority of the Pope or council who proclaimed it. Consequently, the infallibility of the

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\(^{205}\) On the historical character of language in general and of dogmatic formulas in particular, see Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 128-41.

\(^{206}\) Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 122.
Church as a whole, which Küng preferred to call its indefectibility, cannot depend upon the incapacity for error of the propositions with which it teaches. On the contrary, the Church will remain in the truth in spite of the errors into which it will inevitably fall. Christ's promise to the Church is valid, but this promise does not cover the 'mouth' of the Church, which is subject to the rules common to all speech.

The publication of *Unfehlbar?* created a situation that urged a response from Kasper. His former mentor, now colleague and friend came under attack for the position he took in the book not only from the CDF but from a number of prominent theologians, among whom Karl Rahner penned some of the sharpest critiques. More than a personal affinity for Küng and the importance of the issue at hand motivated Kasper's contribution to this discussion. Kasper's position on the truth of dogma bore some important similarities to that presented in *Unfehlbar?* Both emphasized the historical character of language and truth. Both believed that a revision of the prevailing theological understanding of dogma was in order. At the same time, both took seriously the historical faithfulness of God to the Church and its consequences for the enduring relationship of the Church to the truth. It was therefore no mistake on Küng's part when he included several lengthy quotations from Kasper in *Unfehlbar?* And when Rahner, in light of

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208 Küng, *Unfehlbar*, 143.


these quotations, identified Kasper's position on infallibility with that of Küng, he was to a certain extent correct. Not entirely, however. There were important differences between Kasper and Küng on the question of infallibility as well as on the more fundamental question of truth. It was up to Kasper not only to defend the common ground he shared with Küng but to clarify where they parted ways.

Kasper responded to the controversy over Küng's book in “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit.” The overarching goal of this essay was to defend Küng from what Kasper considered short-sighted, overly harsh, or otherwise poor criticisms of his book. He argued that Küng had raised legitimate questions regarding the doctrine of infallibility and that he had not renounced his obligation as a theologian to the tradition of the Church by publishing this book. At the same time, Kasper rejected Küng's answers to these questions on the grounds that they depended on an inadequate theory of truth. In the process, Kasper clarified his own understanding of truth, which, unlike Küng's, consciously presupposed a certain relationship between language, truth and reality, or in other words, a metaphysics.

Kasper defended the legitimacy of Küng's inquiry. He pointed out that Küng's critics had failed to appreciate the dimension of truth highlighted by his account of infallibility. According to Küng's historically-conscious mindset, truth and praxis form a unity: the concrete situation in which a proposition is uttered is as relevant to its truth as its semantic meaning. A statement that speaks the truth in one situation could easily be one-sided or exaggerated, and thus

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212 Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit.”


misleading in another situation. This, however, means that the existence of an “infallible proposition” is practically impossible, if one understands “infallible proposition” as a statement or formula guaranteed never to fall into error because it fulfills certain formal criteria. M

Moreover, Kasper argued, Church doctrine never claimed the existence of infallible propositions in this sense. Contrary to Küng’s reading in *Unfehlbar?*, the First Vatican Council did not speak of infallible propositions as such but of the infallibility of certain acts of persons or authorities. To this extent, Kasper denied that Küng’s thesis conflicted with binding Catholic doctrine.

Kasper admitted, however, that on the grounds of the impossibility of infallible propositions, Küng also denied the Council's assertion that the Pope can propose a doctrine as free from error by way of an infallible act. Nevertheless, Kasper pointed out that Küng’s objection rested not only on more or less dubious philosophical grounds but also on unsolved theological questions about the nature of ecclesial authority. Kün

Küng raised the question: can one adequately distinguish between infallible acts of the magisterium and fallible ones on the basis of well-defined criteria? Although Vatican I taught, according to Kasper, that the Pope speaks infallibly whenever he speaks as the representative of the universal Church (that is, when he speaks *ex cathedra*), it did not specify under what precise conditions one could be certain that such an *ex cathedra* pronouncement had (or had not) taken place. Does the Pope's explicit intention to speak out of the chair of Peter constitute sufficient grounds to determine that he has done so? Or might one be permitted to ask whether and how the Pope has discerned that he really represents the whole Church in this concrete instance? In such a case, the Council's assertion that

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217 On the question of criteria for infallible doctrinal pronouncements, see Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 367-68.
ex cathedra decisions are not subject to reform through an ecclesial process of reception would be beside the point. Kasper concluded that to challenge the sufficiency of certain formal criteria as Künig had done was within the pale of Catholic theology.

While Kasper recognized Künig's inquiry about infallibility as legitimate, he could not agree with Künig's answer to the infallibility question. As noted above, Künig took the fundamental concerns behind the doctrine of infallibility seriously, since these are grounded in the faithfulness of God and the eschatological nature of the Church. So he affirmed that the Church is indefectible in principle. He added, however, that this indefectibility did not include any guarantee that the teachings of the Church would never err; on the contrary, “the Church will remain in the truth, in spite of all possible errors!” According to Kasper, Künig did not erect a Barthian dialectic between God and humanity with this statement; Künig explicitly affirmed the Church's participation in the infallibility of God. Nor had he denied the Church's right to make use of propositions and even to declare certain formulas binding on the faithful. Künig understood such formulas, however, as purely pragmatic measures prompted by a certain historical situation, and for this reason he denied that they enjoyed protection from error. Kasper found in Künig's understanding of infallibility a thoroughly functionalist notion of language and truth. This framework ultimately conflicted with Künig's intention to promote the sovereign freedom of the Gospel over the Church. On the one hand, it failed to explain how the Church could remain in the truth in the concrete instance in which a certain opinion challenged the foundations of the faith. If the Church were to err in judging such a proposition, would that not mean that it had radically defected from the truth, that Christ's promise had failed? On the other

218 On Künig's interpretation of the infallibility of the Church, see Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 369-71.

hand, it apparently forced Küng to conceive of ecclesial authority as pure authoritarianism. How, other than through the pure juridical power of the hierarchy, could the Church justify imposing as binding on the faithful a formula that might well be false? Underneath both of these issues, Kasper found a basic theological problem: Küng saw in the proclamation of the Church only the pragmatic activity of human beings, and not a manifestation of the definitive truth of the Gospel, the word of God making itself known in human words. This problem was in turn rooted in the philosophical horizon of Küng's thought: he had not attended to the ontological significance of historically-conditioned propositions.220

The issue that for Kasper formed the core of the problem of infallibility as well as its solution was the nature of truth. In order to surmount the impasse in Küng’s account, Kasper offered two brief reflections on truth that remained fundamentally along the lines he had established in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. On the one hand, truth in the theological sense takes place in the event of testimony.221 This means that the infallibility of the Church becomes a concrete reality when the testimony of an infallible witness to the faith (the *infallibilitas in docendo* of the magisterium) finds acceptance as authoritative by an infallible recipient (the *infallibilitas in credendo* of the believing community). If either one of these were to remove itself from this dialogical context, the truth would be distorted. For Kasper, this rule applied both to the definition of a dogma, which requires some process for ascertaining the faith of the Church, as well as to its reception or interpretation by the whole Church. The discovery of truth and the preservation of such discoveries is a communicative enterprise.


221 On dialogue as the place where the infallibility of the Church becomes present in history, see Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 371-72.
On the other hand, since the event of testimony takes place within history, the truth of dogma has, besides this synchronic dimension, also a diachronic dimension.\textsuperscript{222} Kasper did not consider the history of the truth of faith to be a simple logical progression or a smooth, linear ascent; on the contrary, dogmatic propositions can and have become mingled with “opinions, ideological backgrounds, motives and so forth . . . which may be erroneous.”\textsuperscript{223} In this sense, Kasper’s understanding of the truth of dogma had quite a bit in common with Küng’s. Unlike Küng, however, Kasper presupposed a definite relationship between language, truth, and reality. If truth refers to “what confirms itself in history and will prove itself in the future,”\textsuperscript{224} as \textit{Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes} suggested, then the definitive testimony of the Church must actually refer to reality; it cannot simply be a set of rules for speech with a dubious relationship to truth, unless the promise of Christ were to be invalidated. Kasper clarified that in the case of an individual doctrine, it is its \textit{Grundausrichtung} or fundamental orientation that participates in the indefectibility of the Church as a whole; this essential thrust emerges out of the broader context of the Church’s living process of interpretation, a process Kasper described in \textit{Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes} and other works. He thus distinguished his view from the designation of certain dogmatic formulas as “infallible propositions.”\textsuperscript{225} Kasper nevertheless maintained that in spite of its susceptibility to misinterpretation, a dogmatic formula cannot finally preclude access to the truth testified by the Church on account of its radical orientation to this truth. In this sense, he affirmed the existence of propositions that, in spite of their shortcomings, are always true.

\textsuperscript{222} On the permanence of infallible dogmatic acts, see Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 372-74.

\textsuperscript{223} Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 373.

\textsuperscript{224} Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 373.

\textsuperscript{225} Kasper attributed this view to Karl Rahner. See Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 373; Rahner, “Zum Begriff der Unfehlbarkeit in der katholischen Theologie,” 9.
In summary, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit” indicates that in his initial response to the Küng affair, Kasper shifted the accent on his theory of truth. The content of this theory—the biblical notion of truth in its present and future dimensions, the dialogical context and ontological background from which truth emerges—reappeared here without significant modification. Kasper's tone changed, however. Whereas in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, he emphasized the difference between his theory of truth and those rooted in Greek metaphysics, in this essay he spoke of the unity of the truth of propositions and the truth of being. Whereas in *Die Methoden der Dogmatik* he spoke of “questioning everything,” in this essay he affirmed the enduring truth of dogmatic propositions. While Kasper did not hide his sympathy for Küng's thinking—he indeed defended Küng from the charge of heresy—he was also careful to point out where he differed from Küng. In particular, Kasper shared Küng's conviction that God in his faithfulness will maintain the Church in the truth. Yet Kasper thought himself justified in inferring from the same divine fidelity ontological conclusions about the definitive character of dogma, while Küng did not.

What ultimately gave rise to this divergence between Kasper and Küng over the implications of God's Faithfulness-Truth for dogma and ecclesial authority, given the conceptual affinities between their theologies on other points? In “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” Kasper stated that their disagreement was basically philosophical: they differed over the relationships among language, truth, and reality. He further maintained that Küng intended to remain within the tradition of the Church, arguing that the questions Küng raised stayed within the realm of open questions in the interpretation of the teachings of the First

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226 See Kasper, “Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit,” 374-76.

Vatican Council. Kasper's argument implied that questions about the metaphysical status of truth ought not be regarded as a litmus test for orthodoxy. But what if the metaphysical differences between Kasper and Küng actually ran deeper than he had initially thought? What if Küng's theory of truth led to significant divergences between him and Kasper over the interpretation of the Christological and Trinitarian articles of faith? In these cases, might the dogmatic tradition affirm certain metaphysical positions and preclude others as contrary to right teaching?

An important development in Kasper's understanding of the status of metaphysics in theology took place in the production of his Christology book *Jesus der Christus*.228 This book was released in the midst of Küng's ongoing conflict with Rome, specifically in 1974, the same year that Küng published his book *Christ sein*.229 Both books bestowed a prominent methodological status upon a historical-critical reading of the Gospels, using it as a criterion for Christology in general and for a right understanding of the Christological doctrines of the early Church in particular. Kasper, however, attempted to formulate his Christological criterion, the identity of the crucified Jesus with the risen Christ, in such a way that it made room for the metaphysical questions that would be posed by the later doctrinal tradition. Consequently, when he turned to the teachings of the first ecumenical councils, he did not find pristine biblical ideas encrusted with the alien matter of Greek metaphysical language; rather, he found decisive testimony to the Gospel that responded to challenges to the faith issued in ontological language. The questions of the age demanded ontological answers from the Church. In particular, Kasper found in the concept of person coined at Nicea and developed by the theological and dogmatic tradition the kernel of an original, Christian metaphysics, an ontology of freedom and person.

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228 JC. For discussion of this book, see pp. 173ff., above.
appealed to this ontology to justify his procedure of reading the relationship between Jesus and the Father as the historical expression of Jesus's divinity. So understood, the history of Jesus provided him a basis on which to retrieve the teachings of Chalcedon as well as the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. In brief, Kasper's position in *Jesus der Christus* implied that not all differences over metaphysics fall within the pale of Catholic faith. The doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity constitute abiding norms governing a theologian's metaphysical option. To put the matter in terms of the discussion in chapter four: the faithfulness of God, Kasper's material criterion of Christian faith, includes definite Trinitarian content.

This development in Kasper's understanding of the material criterion of faith, along with certain developments in Küng's position that appeared in *Christ sein*, influenced Kasper's judgment about whether or not Küng stood at odds with the formal criterion of faith, whether he remained within the Catholic tradition. In “Christologie von unten?,” a contribution to a 1975 volume on modern Christologies, Kasper contrasted the approach he developed in *Jesus der Christus* from other attempts at a Christology 'from below,' particularly Karl Rahner's and Hans Küng's. In his critique of *Christ sein*, Kasper acknowledged with approbation the starting-point of Küng's Christology from below, namely, the specifically Christian 'thing' to be found in the facticity of salvation history. He also affirmed that Küng maintained the identity between the Jesus retrievable by historical methods and the Christ apprehended in faith, in spite of the fact that he set his Christology 'from below' in opposition to a classical approach to Christology 'from above.' Kasper wondered, however, whether Küng was entirely consistent with his program of a rigorous Christology from below when he acknowledged the reality of the

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230 See above, pp. 301-8.

231 Kasper, “Christologie von unten” (see p. 182n58, above), 141-70.

232 On Küng's approach to a Christology from below, see Kasper, “Christologie von unten,” 159-63.
resurrected Christ encountered here and now by the faithful. How can a purely historical criterion for Christology account for Christian faith in the resurrection? Is one not forced to supplement this criterion with some additional element 'from above'? In other words: did Küng's attempt to proceed rigorously 'from below' function to conceal his dependence on an authoritative teaching tradition in the Church? For Kasper, then, Küng's position in Unfehlbar gave rise to an apparent methodological inconsistency in Christ sein.

Kasper further argued that Küng's ambiguous relationship to the formal criteria of faith led to ambiguities over whether his Christology adhered successfully to the material criteria of faith.²³³ Kasper identified Küng's assertion that God spoke and acted in Jesus, that in Jesus God definitively revealed to the faithful his loving nearness, as the core content of his Christology. Such expressions are not false, but they sidestep what Kasper considered to be the actual Christological question, namely, whether Jesus is “God's 'only-begotten Son,' who works 'without confusion and without separation' in and through Jesus's humanity,” or merely a human being in whom God is graciously and actively present.²³⁴ According to Kasper, Küng's nuanced reading of the biblical notion of preexistence could be understood in an orthodox sense, yet it left the impression that only the God of Jesus Christ, and not the Son of God, enjoyed eternal preexistence. Still more troubling to Kasper was Küng's struggle to assimilate the idea contained in the designation of Mary as Theotokos, namely, that God could undergo birth. Because the Church's definitive teaching authority played no methodological role in Küng's Christology, it became difficult for Kasper to affirm unambiguously that this Christology indeed expressed faith

²³³ On the content of Küng's Christology from below, see Kasper, “Christologie von unten,” 163-65.

²³⁴ Kasper, “Christologie von unten,” 163; see also 146.
in the biblical God of history, the God who is capable of incarnation, rather than in the apathic God of Plato.

In “Christologie von unten?” Kasper posed his doubts about Küng's position as a question, and he insisted that he was not accusing Küng of heresy. In “Christsein ohne Tradition?,” a contribution to a collected volume of essays critiquing Christ sein, Kasper reconsidered his judgment on Küng in light of the rest of Küng's major academic publications. In Christ sein, Küng presented Christian existence not only as “a particularly good thing” but as something ineluctably tied to the Church and its tradition. Küng wished to remain in the Church, and Kasper took him at his word. One's commitment to ecclesial tradition, however, is not only a matter of subjective intention but of objective criteria. By setting his own reconstruction of the historical Jesus over the tradition of the Church as criterion for discerning what is truly Christian, Küng had, in Kasper's view, set the personal judgment of an academic theologian above the authority not only of tradition and magisterium but even of scripture itself. Kasper contrasted this with Küng's position in his dissertation on the theology of justification, in which he presented scripture, tradition and magisterium as an indivisible unity. Küng did not accord the dogma of the Church any role in his reading of the historical Jesus, preferring instead to interpret Jesus according to the criterion of human subjectivity. As was shown above, however, this procedure yielded ontological ambiguities that endangered the incarnate reality of the mystery of salvation. For Kasper, this result revealed the full significance of Küng's unwillingness, expressed in Unfehlbar?, to recognize a definitive dimension in the doctrinal

236 On what follows, see Kasper, “Christsein ohne Tradition” (see p. 128n16, above), 19-34.
tradition of the Church. His subjective intention to remain within the tradition stood in profound tension with what works like *Unfehlbar?* and *Christ sein* actually asserted.

With “Christsein ohne Tradition?,” Kasper parted ways with the theology of Küng. He continued to acknowledge that he and Küng shared a common purpose: to mediate between binding ecclesial tradition and human reason, particularly in the form of historical-critical method. Nevertheless, Kasper's published comments on Küng's theology testified to a development in Kasper's thinking, a move away from Küng and toward the metaphysically-oriented theological tradition. This move was not a departure from the overall direction of his theological project, in which the manifestation of revealed truth in a multiplicity of witnesses—scripture, tradition, magisterium, the *sensus fidelium*—remained a prominent theme. The question raised by Kasper about the ontological content of faith—“Are the ontological statements of traditional Christology only a historically conditioned conceptual form of faith in Christ, which are not unconditionally binding, or do they belong to the binding substance?”—presupposed a concern for tradition and its normativity. This development, however, involved an adjustment of Kasper's former attitude toward Western philosophy. It also involved a shift of emphasis in his thinking on tradition. Kasper's critical posture toward an imbalanced estimation of the role of magisterial teaching in theology, which he shared with Küng, faded into the background, to be replaced by a new emphasis on the indispensability of doctrinal teaching for a proper understanding of the theological principle of tradition.

As is the case with any critique, Kasper's writings on Küng necessarily presented Kasper's own theology in a partial way. More specifically, these essays pushed into the

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238 See Kasper, “Christsein ohne Tradition,” 34.

239 Kasper, “Für eine Christologie in geschichtlicher Perspektive” (see p. 206n148, above), 181.
background Kasper's notion of truth as the self-verification of divine faithfulness in history. Having distanced himself decisively from Küng’s understanding of tradition, method, and truth, Kasper was once again free to reconsider his own ideas in a more systematic fashion.

III. Metaphysics, Transcendentality, Faith: Fundamental Questions Revisited

During the course of the clash over Küng's theology, Kasper was also critically engaged with a number of other theologians and theological methodologies, focusing on, although not limiting himself to, the foment of studies on Christology in the European context. This environment was undergoing such rapid change that by the mid-1970s, European theology was forced to come to grips with problems that it had not known only a decade earlier. The neo-Scholastic paradigm had collapsed, and Catholic theologians were engaged in the reception of Vatican II's call for a more biblically-grounded and pastoral theology. No new, unified paradigm for theology, however, was emerging from these efforts. Theologians disagreed on the status to be accorded to recent historical-critical biblical exegesis, as illustrated by the debate between Küng and Kasper. Nor did scholars reach a consensus over the issue of the relationship between theory and praxis, a question raised by the still-emerging political and liberation theologies. In brief, Catholic theology was in turmoil over the question of its identity.

Over the decade and a half following his publications on Küng, Kasper endeavored to meet the new situation facing Catholic theology with a series of essays on theological foundations and method. He attempted in these essays to integrate the insights he acquired during his debates with Küng into his overall theological program, which was in no small part shaped by his early reflections on tradition, truth, and theological method. In the process, he reaffirmed the basic orientation of his theological understanding of truth as the faithfulness of God coming to pass in history. At the same time, he came more and more to appreciate the broad common ground that this dynamic understanding of truth shared with the theory of truth formulated in the metaphysically-oriented theological tradition. As he worked to mediate between the two, he began to align himself more explicitly with the aims of transcendental theology, although he understood these aims in a distinctive way. To this extent, one could speak of a certain rapprochement between Kasper and Rahner during this period.

A. Recovery of the Metaphysical Tradition

As mentioned earlier, a new emphasis on the metaphysical content of the Catholic tradition emerged in Kasper's theology during the Küng affair. Kasper's discovery of an inchoate ontology of person in the teachings of the early Christological councils led him to criticize Küng's Christology on account of the ambiguity of its metaphysical content. This is not to deny, however, that the theme of metaphysics had emerged in Kasper's thought prior to the 1970s. On the contrary, a nascent metaphysics can be detected in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, and the interest in metaphysical questions that was latent in that book became thematic in *Die Methoden der Dogmatik*. These facts raise the question: what did Kasper's explicit commitment to a personalistic metaphysics really mean for his relationship to the broader Western tradition of metaphysical thought? Did it function like a bridge that closed the gap between Western
metaphysics and his central theological concerns? Or did Kasper understand it as an alternative to Western metaphysics, following the pattern he established in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*? In fact, Kasper grew in sympathy for Western metaphysics during and after the Küng affair. A brief survey of selected essays from this period will suffice to verify this claim. In 1975, the year in which Kasper published his critique of the Christology from below presented in *Christ sein*, he also produced “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip: Systematische Überlegungen zur theologischen Relevanz der Geschichte.” According to this article, the present state of theology was conditioned by a larger crisis, a broken relationship between tradition and Western culture comparable to the situation triggered by the Gnostic movement in the early Church. This situation called for no less than a fundamental reflection on the questions of tradition and progress in the context of the basic anthropological category of truth. This essay resembled his 1966 piece on the hermeneutics of tradition, “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” inasmuch as both centered on a reflection on Jesus Christ as the embodiment of tradition and on his enduring presence to the Church in the Holy Spirit. In “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” however, Kasper, in the interests of making room for a biblical notion of tradition, rejected both prongs of the dilemma he found in Western philosophy between a “progressive” and a “conservative” concept of tradition. By contrast, in “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip,” Kasper spoke of a “first enlightenment” in which Greek philosophy, namely Plato and Aristotle, set aside an uncritical

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241 Kasper, “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip” (see p. 171n11, above).

242 On the situation facing theology and tradition in the present, see Kasper, “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip,” 198-203.


notion of tradition in favor of one in which reason functioned to elicit the authoritative element in received tradition and to bring it to bear on the present. Medieval philosophy likewise maintained that authority (or tradition) and reason together conditioned the possibility of a true, authentic human existence. This classical and medieval synthesis, as well as that proposed in the modern era by the Catholic Tübingen School, influenced the philosophical pre-understanding of tradition—“an act-being unity and a process in which tradition and interpretation are held together indissolubly”—that Kasper used as a heuristic to derive a properly theological idea of tradition from his Christological and pneumatological reflections.

Kasper's procedure in “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip” presupposed—contrary to the position he took in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes—that there was a basic compatibility between such Western philosophical concepts as tradition, authority, and reason and their counterparts in biblical revelation. He expressly affirmed this compatibility in “Offenbarung und Geheimnis,” a paper delivered at an academic conference on Hindu-Christian dialogue. Kasper found the understanding of revelation common to the Western tradition expressed in the concept of logos. By his analysis, this term meant that the manifestation of reality—reality coming to itself—takes place not in the authoritative recounting of a myth but in reason and language, that is, in a reasoned account of reality. Reality is fundamentally ordered toward human reason as the place in which reality is revealed, and truth consists in the correspondence between reason and reality. Though ordered to reason, Kasper argued that this concept of revelation was not

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246 On the transition from mythos to logos in the Western tradition, see Kasper, “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip,” 204-5.


rationalistic; on the contrary, for the Greeks, the infinite Reason in which reality had its ultimate ground transcended the grasp of human comprehension and so could only be brought to expression through negation. The acknowledgment of mystery found in Greek negative theology demonstrated a real affinity between the concept of logos and the biblical understanding of revelation; indeed, it formed the basis for the synthesis that took place in the Gospel of John.

This is not to say that the two were identical. For Kasper, the biblical concept dabar referred to the manifestation of the ultimate ground of reality not in the logos common to all human beings but in the logos tou theou, the word of God. This word is proclaimed not always and everywhere but in concrete times and places and by particular messengers, at the divine initiative; it is an effective word that brings about change in reality; it takes shape both in word and act, whereby the act verifies the word, while the word clarifies the act; it emerges out of the context of a struggle with error and lies; it happens within the sequence of Old and New Testament that culminates in Jesus Christ. Dabar defined the mystery-dimension of revelation as its 'historicity' understood in each of these five senses. Consequently, the Johannine synthesis represented a heightening of the tension between revelation and mystery in the concept of logos. Kasper nevertheless insisted that this synthesis did not destroy the Greek concept. It rather specified that the mystery of the human person and the mystery of all reality find their answer and fulfillment in the Triune mystery of divine love. The mystery of God both safeguards the inviolable mystery of creation and bathes it in light, revealing that its final end and its bliss is to participate in the divine life of kenotic, self-surrendering love.

With this synthesis Kasper affirmed the enduring significance for theology of the philosophical tradition that began with the Greeks. It was therefore no surprise that he reacted

250 On the sublation of logos into the biblical idea of the logos tou theou, see Kasper, “Offenbarung und Geheimnis,” 140-43.
with dismay to the stagnation he observed within his European context in the dialogue between philosophy and foundational theology.\textsuperscript{251} In “Zustimmung zum Denken,” Kasper's last public address as a professor of theology at the University of Tübingen, he pleaded for a restoration of the status of metaphysics within theology. He wished to distance himself as clearly as possible from the movement for a “de-hellenization” of Christianity in which he participated in his early career.\textsuperscript{252} To be sure, Kasper thought that metaphysics needed to be pursued in a new way, on foundations adequate to the challenge of modernity. The patristic synthesis between Christian theology and Greek philosophy knew nothing of the radical atheism advanced by the Enlightenment in Europe for the sake of human autonomy. Kasper had already argued in his \textit{Habilitationsschrift} that the later Schelling had laid bare the nihilistic end of the line of thought that by the third phase of the Enlightenment had run its course. More than this, however, Schelling showed that a return to metaphysical thinking and thus to the question of God was possible within the horizon of history and freedom. Kasper presented this Schellingian path to metaphysics as a reflection on the conditions of the possibility of affirming the infinite dignity as well as the finitude of the human person.\textsuperscript{253} In any event, Kasper found in Schelling the possibility of a contemporary recovery of the Thomistic synthesis between theology and philosophy.

While Kasper received the Western metaphysical tradition in general more favorably after his debate with Küng than before, he demonstrated a particular sympathy for the thought of


\textsuperscript{252} “Zustimmung zum Denken,” 258-59. On Kasper's participation in the de-hellenization trend, see pp. 338-40, above.

\textsuperscript{253} Kasper, “Zustimmung zum Denken,” 268. At this point, Kasper united his earlier work on Schelling with his later recovery of transcendental method. On Kasper and transcendental method, see below, pp. 399-408.
Thomas Aquinas during this period. Admittedly, even within *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, Kasper showed a reserved appreciation for Aquinas's recognition of the more-than-propositional content of the articles of faith. His reservations in that instance were due to the “metaphysical”—as opposed to historical or future-directed—character of the transcendence Aquinas attributed to divine truth. By contrast, in his 1975 essay “Name und Wesen Gottes,” Kasper praised the Angelic Doctor for creatively reformulating Aristotelian metaphysics in such a way that it made room for the sovereign freedom of the Christian God as well as the value and dignity of contingent, historical reality. Beginning with an analysis of his doctrine of divine names, Kasper argued that the whole edifice of Aquinas's thought was marked by reverence for the incomprehensible mystery of God. This even applied to Aquinas’s identification of God with the all-encompassing Ground of being—“and everyone calls this God”—a point in Aquinas's (and, incidentally, in Rahner's) theology that had been a source of irritation for Kasper. What saved Aquinas at this point was that he did not simply presuppose the concept of being common to the cosmocentric thinking of his time; he rather undertook a comprehensive rethinking of being itself from within the horizon of the theology of creation. According to Aquinas, being is not just static form or substance; it is first of all act and event. So God for Aquinas is pure Act, and the being of the creature is nothing other than the event in which God communicates to that creature its actual existence. The result was a dynamic doctrine of analogy that preserved the infinite qualitative difference between God and creatures while affirming that each creature,

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254 See DW 105-6.
255 DW 106.
256 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes” (see p. 109n177, above). For discussion, see pp. 109-12, above.
257 Kasper, “Name und Wesen Gottes,” 183-84. For critical comments, see Erfahrung 133-34; “Gottesfrage als Problem der Verkündigung” (see p. 74n73, above), 142; “Karl Rahner – Theologe in einer Zeit des Umbruchs,” ThQ (1979): 270.
precisely in its contingency, historicity, and unrepeatability, participates in the very mystery of God.\textsuperscript{258}

“Name und Wesen Gottes” appears to have been the beginning of a trend in Kasper's publications to point back to Aquinas as an exemplar for theology today.\textsuperscript{259} In an article on theological method published two years later, Kasper proposed a retrieval of the Thomistic notion of theology as “science of God.”\textsuperscript{260} He observed that the various theological methods being put into practice in the present, which he classified generally as hermeneutically-oriented theologies, shared a common weakness, namely, that they had not adequately considered the question of truth in its significance for theology.\textsuperscript{261} The reflections on truth he went on to offer seemed at first blush identical to those he penned in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes. He rejected as inadequate for theology a conception of truth as “objective statements in the sense that natural scientists and historians understand this,” opting instead for a biblical understanding of truth as “the faithfulness of God, which verifies itself in history through word and deed, which has definitively appeared in Jesus Christ and will be revealed as the ground and telos of all reality in the end at the coming of the Reign of God.”\textsuperscript{262} In this essay, however, he tacitly linked this concept of truth to the Thomistic notion of God as First Truth. Calling God the ground and goal of faith was for Kasper the equivalent of saying that the historical fidelity of God is the object

\textsuperscript{258} Only six years prior, however, Kasper was apparently less optimistic about the congeniality to historical consciousness of the idea of God as actus purus. He thus opted instead for Nicholas of Cusa's dialectical notion of God as both actus purus and potentia pura. See Erfahrung 139-40.

\textsuperscript{259} This trend, however, had its roots in a long-standing interest in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, which came to expression in an academic paper Kasper wrote on Aquinas's Quaestiones disputatae de veritate as a student at the University of Tübingen. See WH 34, as well as pp. 92, 109-12, and 231, above.

\textsuperscript{260} See Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft” (see p. 136n45, above).

\textsuperscript{261} On the hermeneutical paradigm for theology, see Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 192-96.

\textsuperscript{262} Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 196.
and referent of the confessions, faith-formulas and dogmas of the Church.\textsuperscript{263} A theology whose object is truth in this sense is “science of God,” a “theological theology” that considers God as its proper object, while reflecting on created realities precisely to the extent that they relate to God as their origin and goal.\textsuperscript{264}

This led Kasper to a conception of theology as \textit{Symbolik}, that is, reflection on the “symbols of faith.”\textsuperscript{265} This meant reflecting first of all on Jesus Christ as “the one symbol and sacrament of faith,” second, on the many “symbols of faith” in which one encounters Christ, especially the confessions and proclamations of faith one finds in Scripture and the tradition of the Church.\textsuperscript{266} Chapter four of the present study discussed three book-length studies that fit this model of theology nicely: \textit{Jesus der Christus}, which was in many ways an elaborate commentary on the ancient confession “Jesus is the Christ”; \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi}, which followed the structure of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, but could just as well be understood as an unpacking of the Johannine dictum “God is love”\textsuperscript{,}\textsuperscript{267} \textit{Katholische Kirche}, which contextualized the ecclesiological article of the creed within the broader context of faith in the Trinity and salvation history.\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Der Gott Jesu Christi} carried out the project of a “theological theology” more explicitly than the others.\textsuperscript{269} Among other things, Kasper attempted in this book to effect a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{263} See Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 197.
\item \textsuperscript{264} Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 197.
\item \textsuperscript{265} On Kasper's conception of dogmatic theology as \textit{Symbolik}, see Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 196-200.
\item \textsuperscript{266} Kasper, “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” 198.
\item \textsuperscript{267} DG.
\item \textsuperscript{268} KK.
\item \textsuperscript{269} Kasper in fact described the project he undertook in this book in exactly these terms. See DG 28, 383.
\end{itemize}
renewal of Aquinas's theological and metaphysical synthesis from within the horizon of freedom
by sublating Aquinas's *ipsum esse subsistens* in a notion of the Father as “absolute Person.”

As will be seen later, when Kasper revisited his own understanding of theological truth in
1986, he looked to the thought of Aquinas as an exemplary synthesis of the biblical and
philosophical notions of truth. He also looked to a theologian who had been the recipient of
many a critique from his pen, namely, Karl Rahner.

**B. Kasper, Rahner, and Transcendental Method**

Rahner has had an enormous influence on theology in the twentieth century and
beyond. It is not a surprise, then, that Rahner also influenced Kasper's work. It will suffice to
cite two examples. First, as discussed above, Rahner's understanding of dogma in historical
perspective was an important impetus for Kasper's reflections on the truth of dogma,
notwithstanding Kasper's efforts in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* to break free from Rahner's
concept of truth. Allusions, usually without a footnote, to Rahner's dictum that dogma is both
'end' and 'beginning' can be found scattered throughout Kasper's writings. Second, Kasper took
over various elements of Rahner's theology of God within his own reflections on the Trinity, such
as Rahner's theology of mystery and his *Grundaxiom*. This was the basis of Cyril O'Regan's

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270 See DG 187-98.

271 On Rahner's theology and its influence, see Martin Dudley, “On Reading Rahner,” *Scottish Journal of
Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to his Life and Thought* (New York: Crossroad,
1986); Karen Kilby, “Karl Rahner,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*,

272 See DW 54-55.

273 See Ökumene 332; Recht 63, 65; “Christologie von unten,” 152; Bindung 51. For Rahner's own
reflections on this point, see Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology” (see p. 305n402, above), 149-54.

274 On Rahner's notion of mystery, see DG 164-65, 328-30; on the *Grundaxiom*, see ibid., 333-37, as well as
p. 244, above.
2013 thesis that Kasper's *Der Gott Jesu Christi* developed and corrected a number of aspects of Rahner's *The Trinity*, but on the whole followed the paradigm there initiated by Rahner.\(^{275}\)

In Kasper's early work, however, his critical remarks toward Rahner were more conspicuous than Rahner's influence on that work. William Loewe has described Kasper's criticisms of Rahner as "a constant subtheme" in his writings.\(^{276}\) Loewe pointed to several instances in which Kasper asserted that Rahner's thought presupposed an identity between thought and being in the sense maintained by the German Idealists.\(^{277}\) This implied that Rahner had failed to recognize and surmount the basic issue on which Idealism had foundered. Kasper's theological option seemed to compel him to regard this failure as a fatal flaw and to regard Rahner's methods as untenable. From this perspective, it is not surprising that Kasper rejected transcendental method in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* as an obstacle to a properly theological concept of truth.

In his 1975 critique of Rahner's Christology from below, Kasper qualified and, to a certain extent, softened his earlier lapidary charge.\(^{278}\) Observing that practically the entire Western metaphysical tradition depended on some identity between being and thought, as indicated for example by the Scholastic axiom *ens et verum convertuntur*, Kasper identified the decisive issue as how this identity is understood in the concrete. Here Aquinas received high marks for construing the relationship between philosophical knowledge and salvation-historical


\(^{276}\) Loewe, "New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper" (see p. 7n3, above), 37n32.

\(^{277}\) Loewe, "New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper," 37.

\(^{278}\) On the identity of thought and being in Aquinas and Rahner, see Kasper, "Christologie von unten," 156-57n57, 158n65, 168n90.
reality as one of *convenientia* rather than necessity. Rahner, on the other hand, did not for Kasper pay sufficient heed to the element of contingency in this relationship.

The precise issue raised by Kasper was the nature of the relationship between transcendentality (thought) and history (being). In his critique of Rahner's Christology, Kasper pointed out that Rahner's transcendental approach led him to focus his attention on the problem of the unity between humanity and divinity in Jesus. In so doing, Kasper argued, Rahner ignored the biblical problematic, that is, the question of the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Kasper regarded as a symptom of Rahner's distance from the Bible's personal or dialogical perspective his unwillingness to follow traditional Trinitarian theology in designating Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as 'persons'. This result indicated to Kasper that Rahner's understanding of the divinity of Jesus was basically determined by his transcendental analysis; he did not allow this conception to be adjusted or corrected by the data of salvation history. In this case, history played no constitutive role in Rahner's theology. History lacked the power to say anything new, that is, anything that transcendental method had not already said.

Kasper's charge against Rahner in this essay was closely related to the one he leveled against the idea of truth developed by the Western tradition in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*.

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280 Kasper was here connecting his analysis of Rahner's transcendental starting point with Wilhelm Thüsing's thesis that Rahner, in line with traditional Christology, so focused on the question of Jesus's inner constitution that he drowned out the biblical emphasis on the relationship between the Father and Jesus. See Thüsing, “New Testament Approaches to a Transcendental Christology,” in *A New Christology*, by Karl Rahner and Wilhelm Thüsing, trans. David Smith and Verdant Green (New York: Seabury, 1980), 43-211.

281 If one were to follow the line of reasoning pursued by Cyril O'Regan in “The God of Jesus Christ in Continuity and Discontinuity,” 118-19, one could argue that the charge that Rahner's Christology was not sufficiently determined by the biblical data indicated not that Rahner’s methods were flawed but that he was not completely consistent with his own presuppositions. Such an analysis would in fact converge with the judgment Kasper rendered on Rahner's theology in 1986. See pp. 407-8, below.

282 See DW 101-6.
There he argued that truth in the Western mind, unlike in the thinking of the Bible, referred to that which has always been and excluded that which is to come. Yet by 1975 Kasper was beginning to rehabilitate a major representative of Western metaphysics, Thomas Aquinas, as an ally for a theology pursued in the horizon of freedom and history. Was such a rehabilitation also possible for Rahner and his methods?

In fact, when Kasper began to notice the weaknesses of the various hermeneutical theologies in play within Catholic scholarship, he started to acknowledge how transcendental reflection had contributed to his thinking and what it could contribute to the larger theological scene. As mentioned earlier, Kasper proposed in his 1977 essay “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft” that dogmatic theology conceive its task no longer as a mere hermeneutics but as *Symbolik*, reflection on the traditional “symbols of faith” as symbolic or quasi-sacramental manifestations of the Fidelity-Truth of God, which has been revealed in an unsurpassable way in Jesus Christ.283 For Kasper, this conception of theological method could respond to modern objections raised against the traditional (scholastic) understanding of theology as science, indeed as “science of God.”284 The key point for the present discussion is that Kasper appealed to transcendental method in his defense of the scientificity of this form of theology.

Kasper replied to two objections.285 In the first place, it was objected that theology relies on traditional authorities and therefore is not scientific. In response, Kasper pointed to the results of modern linguistic philosophy, according to which ordinary language, and the linguistic communities in which these languages live, constitute transcendental preconditions of all

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thought. Thus, even the natural sciences depend on language as an unuestioned given. Granted this point, however, one could still ask: whence the idea of a transcendent Fidelity-Truth of God brought to speech in the testimony of tradition, on which Kasper predicated his method of speculative reflection on the traditional symbols of faith? Here Kasper utilized transcendental reflection, arguing that each historically concrete language presupposes a “preapprehension of perfection,” an intuitive grasp of an ideal situation free from the alienations that obstruct communication in every concrete community. Every act of freedom and of reason anticipates in hope such a not-yet-realized situation. This hope, however, may be articulated in quite different ways. Christian faith, which looks forward in hope to the coming Reign of God, represents for Kasper a thematization or determination of this indeterminate element in human knowing. Faith concretizes the universal claim implicit in all language through prophetic critique of every ideology and systemic injustice in the Church and in the world that threatens free, peaceful, equitable communion among human beings. Faith demonstrates its reasonability by confirming and supporting a humane world.

Admittedly, the kind of transcendental reflection executed here by Kasper differed from the objects he envisaged in his criticisms of Rahner. Kasper clarified what he meant by transcendental method in “Freiheit des Evangeliums und dogmatische Bindung in der katholischen Theologie: Grundlagenüberlegungen zur Unfehlbarkeitsdebatte.” In this 1982 article, Kasper revisited the debate sparked over a decade earlier by Küng’s *Unfehlbar?* with a view to the foundational questions being addressed by theology in the present, particularly the

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287 *Bindung*. 
question of truth. Developing the position he took in “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft,” Kasper again looked to transcendental method to explain how binding and definitive claims to truth were, contrary to Küng’s arguments, possible and even necessary within the horizon of historical thinking.

Kasper sketched his understanding of “transcendental-reductive” method against the background of two other methodological models for theology. The Scholastic idea of theology as an axiomatic, deductive science depended on Aristotle, whose concept of science rested in turn on his metaphysical commitments. As being for Aristotle had its roots in first causes, so science was derived from first principles that expressed insight into those causes. Aquinas for his part was able to adapt Aristotle’s metaphysics into a broader vision of salvation history in which all reality proceeded from God and returned to God; within this scheme he understood theology as a subaltern science derived from the science of God and the saints. In any event, when the medieval idea of a comprehensive cosmic order collapsed within the modern period, so did the Scholastic understanding of theology as deductive science. New methodologies emerged with the advent of the hypothetical-experimental model of modern science. According to Kasper, hermeneutical theology in its various forms treated the truths of faith as hypotheses by attempting to verify them within the experiences of the faithful in the present. In spite of their legitimate aims, hermeneutical theologies were for Kasper constantly in danger of functionalizing the truth and thereby dissolving Christianity’s unconditioned truth claims.

288 On the debate with Küng, see Bindung 43-47; on the history of the concept of infallibility, see ibid., 47-53; on the binding character of truth, see ibid., 54-57.

289 On deductive and inductive methods in theology, see Bindung 57-60.

290 See Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae 1.1.2.
Besides the axiomatic-deductive and the hypothetical-inductive methods, however, Kasper saw a third option for theology in transcendental-reductive method.\(^{291}\) He explained that the philosophy of Immanuel Kant proceeded “reductively,” moving from the experience of objects to the unconditioned conditions antecedent all experience. In this way, Kant intended to provide “prolegomena” to a future metaphysics that did not depend on an idea of cosmic order but instead anchored itself in experience. Kasper noted the critique leveled by Metz, among others, against transcendental method on the grounds that it leads to an ideologization of the status quo, indeed to a new kind of “Denzinger theology.”\(^{292}\) While he agreed that this was the case in certain instances, he did not think Metz's charge applied to transcendental method as such. On the contrary, transcendental reflection can promote a prophetic criticism of Church and world when it acknowledges that it is always mediated through historical experience and that the absolute, unconditioned 'object' of this reflection cannot finally be comprehended in a concept but only grasped at in historically-conditioned, finite pre-apprehensions. It was above all the Catholic Tübingen School who in Kasper's judgment respected the historicity of knowledge in their pursuit of the questions posed by transcendental thinking.

According to Kasper, then, transcendental method as applied within theology proceeds from the linguistically and institutionally mediated experience of the Church in salvation history.\(^{293}\) It asks about the conditions of the possibility of this historically given content and about that which is unconditionally valid in it. It does not, however, attempt to deduce \textit{a priori} that which is given in the historical experience of the Church. This appears to be how Kasper himself tried to apply transcendental method within his own work. In “Dogmatik als

\(^{291}\) On transcendental-reductive method, see Bindung 61-63.

\(^{292}\) Bindung 61.

\(^{293}\) See Bindung 63ff.; Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 187.
Wissenschaft,” for example, Kasper began with the question of the scientificity of theology, made an inquiry into the history of theological method, and proposed as an alternative to hermeneutical methods a model of dogmatic theology as Symbolik, which was in part based on the work of Johann Adam Möhler. Only subsequently to these theological considerations did Kasper inquire into the conditions for the scientific legitimacy of such a conception of theology, which, as it happened, turned out to be conditions of the possibility of any science whatsoever.

Later on, in a 1987 lecture on the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on religious freedom Dignitatis humanae, Kasper found that the fundamental arguments advanced by the declaration proceeded in a similar, “reductive” fashion: beginning with the present historical situation, in which freedom of conscience is broadly recognized as a human right, the Council Fathers inquired about and found the conditions for the possibility of this development within revelation, namely, in the unique and inviolable dignity of the human person.

For Kasper, transcendental theology in the sense here described contributed something indispensable to Catholic theology in a historically-conscious age. In an article written for the Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe on dogmatic theology, Kasper argued that the various forms of hermeneutical, political, liberation, and contextual theologies, notwithstanding their important contributions to Catholic theology, did not adequately address the question of truth, and consequently ran the risk of functionalizing, that is, ethicizing and politicizing Church dogma. Over and above these approaches, he saw the need for a “catholic” or universal theology.

296 See Kasper, Wahrheit und Freiheit, 32.
that could establish convincingly the conditions of the possibility of a transcendent, universally-communicable truth within history.\textsuperscript{298} Kasper regarded as the most viable candidates for such a theology “the different forms of transcendental theology,” namely, the “subjective-aprioristic” approach practiced by Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, the more “objective-symbolic” or aesthetic approach of Hans Urs von Balthasar, and a more historical approach that extended the approach of the Catholic Tübingen School (here Kasper was referring to his own option).\textsuperscript{299} Such theologies are capable of “reducing” (in a rightly understood sense) the various mysteries of the faith to the one Mystery contained in them all, and thus of demonstrating the inner intelligibility of faith.\textsuperscript{300} To them is entrusted the still more crucial task of reconstructing the \textit{preambula fidei}, the loss of which constituted for Kasper the essence of the crisis facing theology in the present.\textsuperscript{301}

How did Kasper's appropriation of transcendental method affect his judgment of the theology of Rahner? In a 1986 conference paper titled “Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” Kasper credited Rahner for pointing twentieth-century Catholic theology back to the metaphysical question and for providing categories with which to speak of definitive truth within the horizon of history.\textsuperscript{302} By demonstrating that the very dynamism of human knowing reaches out toward absolute Mystery, Rahner showed that the free, undeducible self-revelation of God was “that which is (in a rightly understood sense) necessary for man.”\textsuperscript{303} He thus overcame the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{298} Kasper, “Dogmatik,” 196.
\item \textsuperscript{299} Kasper, “Dogmatik,” 196.
\item \textsuperscript{300} Kasper, “Dogmatik,” 198.
\item \textsuperscript{301} See Kasper, “Dogmatik,” 202.
\item \textsuperscript{302} On Rahner's contribution to the theological tradition, see Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 185-87.
\item \textsuperscript{303} Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 186.
\end{itemize}
extrinsicism that so hampered theology in its encounter with the modern idea of human autonomy. After these words of praise Kasper went on to question not Rahner's transcendental method as such but his “concrete execution” of this method. The issue was the same as in Kasper's earlier criticisms—the relationship between transcendentality and history—but it was now a question of applying a sound method in an inappropriate way.

Much that Karl Rahner left open when he defined the relationship between transcendentality and history worked itself out when he applied transcendental method to theology, which is particularly concerned with this relationship. Rahner did not always succeed in safeguarding the historical undeducibility and uniqueness of the truth of revelation, though he clearly wished to do so in principle.

One consequence of Kasper's appropriation of transcendental method, then, was that he stopped criticizing Rahner's theological approach in an undifferentiated or blanket fashion. What, however, was the payoff of this appropriation? How did it serve to advance his understanding of the truth of revelation and tradition?

C. Theological Truth Revisited

The discussion of Kasper's critique of Küng earlier in this chapter noted a heightening of the importance of the authoritative claim of tradition within Kasper's thought. This tendency was on display in the account of the principle of tradition he published in his 1975 article “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip.” After developing a philosophical pre-understanding of tradition as an act-being unity—a conception that reflected the prophetic and typological idea of truth he had found in the Old Testament in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*—Kasper filled out this notion by turning to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus in his public ministry and above

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all on the cross embodies the self-surrendering Love of God handed over to human beings, he himself is for Kasper the person, act, and content of tradition. At the same time, it was only in the apostolic testimony to the resurrection that Jesus was definitively revealed as such. And since God's unsurpassable divine self-communication cannot be passed on through anything less than God, the tradition of the Apostles must be the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-kindled memory of Jesus in the hearts of the faithful. Kasper designated the Christic and pneumatic reality of tradition das theologische Erkenntnisprinzip schlichthin, “the” theological principle of knowledge and the transcendental condition of faith.\textsuperscript{307} To be sure, the one Tradition becomes concrete in a variety of symbolic-sacramental manifestations (liturgy, synods, the testimony of the saints) that testify to Tradition in manifold, though fallible, ways. Yet while the Church may advance beyond such individual traditions, there can be no progress beyond Tradition in its theological essence.\textsuperscript{308} Kasper's newfound emphasis on the normativity of Tradition corresponded to the emergence within his thought of the Patristic threefold criterion—scripture, the rule of faith, and apostolic succession.\textsuperscript{309} This, along with the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, functioned as the decisive factors in Kasper's judgment on the theology of Küng.

Given the norm of tradition, however, the question arises: how can one understand the definitive, binding claims of tradition as anything other than a heteronomous imposition on human freedom? Here Kasper found it necessary to consider the conditions of the possibility of human knowing and especially of human freedom. He pursued different variations of this

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{307} Kasper, “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip,” 212.

\textsuperscript{308} Kasper made this point particularly clear in the 1985 revised version of this essay. See “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 399.

\textsuperscript{309} Kasper, “Christsein ohne Tradition,” 24-26; see also “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip,” 198.
\end{footnotes}
transcendental reflection in different publications. In “Freiheit des Evangeliums und dogmatische Bindung in der katholischen Theologie,” he spoke of a pre-apprehension of an unconditioned or absolute dimension of reality in each concrete act of knowledge and communication. This Absolute is regularly expressed in propositions, such as “Human life must be respected unconditionally,” although such propositions are in general as prone to poor formulation and misinterpretation as ordinary language. Kasper added, drawing on an insight from post-idealistic philosophy, that the indeterminate character of one’s apprehension of the Absolute, its openness to different modes of expression, functioned to safeguard human freedom. As Kasper explained: when I am grasped in freedom by an unconditional claim, I am by that very token set free, because what grasps me is unconditionally open, transcending the limits of finite propositions.

From this vantage point, Kasper explained Christian faith in the language of J. E. Kuhn as the claim that the unconditioned and indeterminate reality that conditions human knowing and human freedom has entered definitively and determinately into the world in Jesus Christ. The determinacy of the Gospel, which prompts a decision about Jesus—a definitive Yes or No—is the basis for the binding character of the tradition of the Church. This same concreteness, however, gives the dogmatic tradition its liberating power. By presenting the transcendental presupposition of freedom in concrete propositions, dogma frees one from uncertainty about an otherwise vague and indeterminate Absolute—a condition Josef Simon termed the “tyranny of

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311 On the transcendental preapprehension of definitive claims to truth, see Bindung 63-64.

312 Bindung 63.

313 On the concrete determination of this preapprehension in the dogmatic claims of Christian faith, see Bindung 64-67.
the provisional.” At the same time, the liberating potential of the tradition also requires that one be mindful of the “theological difference” between dogmas and the transcendent Truth they express. Dogmas retain the pre-apprension structure that obtains for all language: they are *articula fidei*, self-transcendent formulas, doxological pronouncements. Kasper located the definitiveness of a dogmatic formula not in its immunity to misinterpretation—for Kasper, a dogma can indeed be one-sided and misleading—but in the fact that it is perpetually worthy of reflection. In his thinking, human liberation does not consist either in rigid adherence to propositions or in the wholesale elimination of one's commitment to dogma, but in a critical interpretation of and reflection upon dogma in light of the ever-greater Truth.

With the aid of transcendental method, Kasper went on to revise the account of theological truth he had published in his 1965 monograph, *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. In January of 1986, Kasper addressed the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Philosophie* in Katholisch-Theologischen Studien at a conference held at Haus St. Ulrich in Augsburg on the theme, “Truth in Unity and Multiplicity.” In his paper, “Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” he reversed his earlier judgment on the classical Greek concept of truth, affirming its compatibility with the biblical experience of truth, particularly inasmuch as both affirm that truth is something pre-given, not created by human beings but possessing an independent existence (An-sich-sein).

As has been noted, Kasper's change of mind was conditioned by a crisis afflicting Catholic theology in the present, which in this essay he named a “crisis of truth.” In this crisis,

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314 Bindung 65.
315 Bindung 65.
316 Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie.”
various theologians called into question the *An-sich-sein* of truth in one way or another—not only Küng, who affirmed the infallible faithfulness of God but denied the enduring truth of propositions, but also thinkers like Gotthold Hasenhüttl, who understood the truth of theology as a matter purely of its meaningfulness *pro me*, while ignoring the ontological status of the reality on which this meaningfulness depends. The same also applied for Kasper to liberation theology. Kasper did not appear to have any qualms with a theology for the poor whose goal was to translate Christian faith into action through a liberating praxis. Nor did he object in principle to identifying liberating praxis as the object of theological reflection. The problem arose where this priority of praxis over theory became a reduction of all doctrinal formulas to culture-dependent, replaceable expressions of a completely inapprehensible (völlig unfassbar) revelation—and Kasper saw this even in Leonardo Boff, “a relatively moderate representative” of liberation theology.\(^{318}\) According to Kasper, this position finally amounted to a form of autonomy according to which there is nothing absolute or definitive that precedes human beings, but only that which issues from historical praxis.

Against this background, Kasper acquired a new appreciation for the concerns behind the classical and medieval idea of the primacy of theory, which presupposed that truth was something that stood over against human beings and that exercised a claim over them.\(^{319}\) In this respect he saw a profound agreement between the biblical notion of truth and its classical, metaphysical counterpart.\(^{320}\) Both were ultimately interested in *was Bestand hat und Bestand verlieht*, what endures and imparts endurance. Kasper still recognized a difference between the

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\(^{319}\) See Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 174-75.

\(^{320}\) On the relationship between the biblical and Western philosophical notions of truth and the synthesis between the two in the theological tradition, see Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 175-80.
two: metaphysical thought grounded truth in an essential property of being, whereas the biblical notion rested ultimately on God's own Faithfulness-Truth, promised in history and grasped in faith. In spite of this difference, however, the Bible itself not only acknowledged their complementarity but even developed a synthesis between the two, first in the Wisdom literature and then in the Gospel of John. By joining the historically-disclosed truth of faith to metaphysical categories, this synthesis served to substantiate that the truth of revelation was universally communicable. This flew in the face of the early Kasper's conviction that the universal communicability of faith presupposed its liberation from the categories of Western metaphysics. Thus, in “Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” Kasper recanted the de-mythologization project of _Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes_ and embraced the biblical and traditional synthesis between salvation-historical and metaphysical truth.

In this new venture Kasper found in Thomas Aquinas an exemplary articulation of the unity-in-difference between philosophical and theological truth. He admitted that Aquinas's explicit reflections on truth were essentially exercises in pure philosophy, devoid of any reference to the biblical notion of truth. Nevertheless, all of Aquinas's reflections proceeded from a salvation-historical framework (the _exitus-reditus_ scheme). From this perspective, there can only be one truth, since truth has only one source, God. The same truth, however, can be considered in view of distinct formal objects. According to Aquinas, philosophy considers reality insofar as it exists (sub ratione entis); this formal object comprehends even God insofar as God is the ultimate ground of being. There is, however, another science that considers God as God has revealed Godself to the faithful (sub ratione deitatis), and the rest of reality as it appears in the

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light of faith. Theology is thus distinct from philosophy; it deals not with truths deducible from philosophy but with the truth given in revelation, namely, God as First Truth. Aquinas also recognized the provisional character of the knowledge given in faith. By believing, one merely participates in a preliminary way in the science of the saints, which consists in the beatitude of the eschatological vision of God.

Aquinas, then, was able to preserve the historical, eschatological dimensions of theological truth in his synthesis between the theological and metaphysical notions of truth. Moreover, as discussed above, Kasper perceived in Rahner's transcendental method, correctly understood, an indispensable tool for reconstructing a metaphysical notion of truth within the horizon of history. This in turn made possible a new synthesis between philosophical and theological truth.

Kasper offered five theses toward such a synthesis. First, he argued that theology could embrace the classical notion of truth as _adaequatio rei et intellectus_ (the correspondence theory). This does not contradict the pregivenness of theological truth in the communion of the faithful (consensus theory); it rather expresses the absolute normativity of the truth of the Gospel over against its re-presentations in the Church. Understood in this sense, correspondence theory also identifies the content in view of which the different symbols of faith can be correlated with one another in the _hierarchia veritatum_ (coherence theory). Second, the truth of revelation is universal and universally communicable. The plausibility of the Gospel derives from its power to shed light not only on matters like concrete situations of injustice but on the very mystery of the human person and on the whole of history. Theology thus embraces metaphysical discourse.

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323 On retrieving the traditional understanding of truth within the horizon of history, see Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 183-89.

324 For a sketch of the later Kasper's theological concept of truth, see Kasper, “Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 189-93.
the other hand, metaphysical discourse rightly understood does not exclude, third, the historical
dimension of truth. Theological truth is historical as embodied truth, lived out in every realm of
the Church’s existence; as the manifold expression of transcendent truth in a plurality of
statements, concepts, images, and symbols; and as concrete, salvific truth addressed to specific
cultural, social, and intellectual situations. Fourth, to solve the difficult problem of the
relationship between history and truth, one must ultimately seek a solution in reflection on Jesus
Christ, who reconciles historical and eternal truth in his Person, and on the Trinity, in which is
revealed the subsistence of the Truth of God in three distinct and interrelated hypostases, which
is the ultimate basis for the unity and multiplicity of truth in history. This means, fifth, that the
last response to the question of truth can only be a reductio in mysterium Dei, contemplation of
the ever-greater mystery of divine love. The theological pursuit of truth is not only science but
wisdom, doxology, mysticism, proceeding from prayer and leading to faith, hope, and love.

“Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie” represented a milestone in Kasper’s
reconciliation with the Western metaphysical tradition in general and the Thomist tradition in
particular. Without giving up the historical understanding of truth he gleaned from the testimony
of the Bible in Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes, he removed its polemical, anti-metaphysical and
anti-transcendental elements. A quick examination of his subsequent publications shows that the
synthesis he developed in “Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie” continued to operate in his

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325 It is this dimension of theological truth that for Kasper admits an ideology-critique. Kasper,
“Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie,” 192.

326 At this point Kasper aligned himself with von Balthasar’s understanding of theological truth. See Kasper,

327 On Kasper’s notion of reductio in mysterium, see above, pp. 169-72.
later thought.\textsuperscript{328} Without belaboring the point, it may simply be illustrated by reference to a lecture Kasper delivered in 2009 at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, titled “Freedom and Communion as Basic Concepts of Theology.”\textsuperscript{329} In a new, 'postmodern' situation characterized by a broad sense of resignation before ultimate questions and an irreducible pluralism of opinions over the truth, Kasper saw both a challenge and an opportunity for the Church to reclaim the biblical proclamation about God. Without opposing this God to the 'God of the philosophers,' Kasper nevertheless expressed his esteem for Schelling, who offered theology categories capable of facilitating its task of translating the biblical testimony about God into a language accessible in the present day, namely, the language of freedom. In particular, Schelling made a crucial choice in his later philosophy that enabled him to conceive of God as “a living, speaking and self-bestowing God who can be called upon and addressed.”

He no longer strove to conceptualize the absolute by ascending to it from below but hoped to think and understand reality as if from above, from the logically necessary but unthinkable absolute. He wanted to show the power of the God idea to reveal and illuminate reality, and thus demonstrate the truth of God in the sense of a self-manifestation of God in and through reality—an attempt which corresponds with the biblical understanding of the truth as the self-manifesting fidelity-truth of God.\textsuperscript{330}

When truth is understood as the faithfulness of God verifying itself in history, then the task of theology is not so much to prove the existence of God as to show that the truth of faith has the power to disclose a liberating and life-giving vision of reality. Such a project would carry out the work of a wisdom Christology from within the horizon of freedom, demonstrating that the


\textsuperscript{329} On what follows, see Kasper, “Freedom and Communion as Basic Concepts of Theology” (see p. 140n66, above).

\textsuperscript{330} Kasper, “Freedom and Communion as Basic Concepts of Theology.”
concrete person Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of and the interpretive key to the traces of wisdom present in creation and in all human cultures. As such, it would uphold and concretize the synthesis between theological and metaphysical truth Kasper proposed in 1986.

D. The Basis of the Truth of Faith

At the end of the present investigation of the formal criteria of faith in Kasper’s theology, there remains the question: what ultimately warrants belief in the truth of tradition? It may be recalled that, according to Hütter's analysis, Kasper's methodological proposal required one to understand faith as an existential act of confidence in a content that ultimately eluded propositional expression. Faith in this sense did not give the believer a mode of access to the transhistorical truth of faith, unlike faith understood in a Thomist sense as a supernatural, infused habitus. Given Kasper's reconciliation with Rahner, Thomas, and the wider Western metaphysical tradition in his later thought, one may ask whether these developments also enabled him to embrace a more adequate concept of faith.

An examination of an account of faith Kasper penned prior to the conclusion of his debate with Küng will provide a useful point of reference. Kasper's 1972 book *Einführung in den Glauben*, based on a course he taught between 1970 and 1972 as an introduction to contemporary theology, contained the most extensive account he produced during his early career that dealt with the nature of faith. In chapter five, Kasper provided a succinct description of faith as a free act and a way of being human. In subsequent chapters he unfolded various dimensions of his understanding of faith: faith is not only act, but involves a definite content (chapter six); in the life of faith one experiences a foretaste of the reality of salvation (chapter seven); in particular,

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331 See Hüt 384-86.

332 EG7.
faith brings about reconciliation and communion among the faithful (chapter eight). Kasper, however, predicated this treatment of the nature of faith, first, on a discussion of the situation facing faith in the present (chapter one) and of the question of meaning, which emerges out of this situation, as an approach to faith (chapter two); second, on a historical reconstruction of Jesus as the witness to faith (chapter three) and a foundational reflection on the ultimate grounds of the disciples' faith in Jesus (chapter four). In brief, Kasper argued that the question of meaning motivates one to search for the basis of faith within history; that ultimate basis, however, is not any set of historical experiences or signs but the ever-greater Fidelity-Truth of God as it discloses its self-evidence in and through these signs to the believer.

Kasper's argument was not without nuance. On the one hand, he was taking a stand against a particular neo-Scholastic approach to the question of the basis of faith, which attempted through an analysis fidei to disclose ultimate foundations for the act of faith. He found that this approach led to a dilemma between claiming a rational proof for faith (which would mean that faith was not a free act) and portraying faith as something ultimately unreasonable. For Kasper, neither a traditional apologetics of historical signs, nor the interior motives highlighted by Blondel's method of immanence, nor an appeal to the Church and to the lives of faithful Christians really constituted knock-down proofs of the truth of faith; they rather represented evidence of the credibility of faith. According to the teaching of Vatican I, faith rests on nothing less than the auctoritas Dei revelantis, the authority of the God who reveals. On the other hand, Kasper distinguished between the auctoritas Dei imperantis, an authority that simply demands obedience, and the auctoritas Dei revelantis, an authority that convinces and reveals itself as convincing. The truth of God makes its inner certainty known to human beings: this means that

333 On the traditional strategies for justifying faith, see EG7 66-71.
God provides the conditions that allow human beings to apprehend divine revelation as true. Kasper appealed in this connection to the Scholastic idea of the “light of faith” and the “illuminating grace of faith,” which he understood as the bestowal on the human subject of a “connaturality and congeniality” to the truth of God.334

Now statements like this make it sound as if Kasper had indeed adopted the Thomist view of faith as a supernaturally-infused *habitus*, perhaps as early as 1970. These remarks, however, were qualified by Kasper's continued commitment to the theory of theological truth he had explicated in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*.335 In *Einführung in den Glauben*, the idea that truth in the biblical sense is the event of the verification or validation of the divine promise served to justify his thesis that the resurrection alone ultimately justified Christian faith.336 Now to say that truth has the character of an event is not necessarily objectionable. One question raised by this conception, however, is whether Kasper conceived the event of truth as something ephemeral, subject to doubt perhaps immediately after it has taken place.337 From this perspective, might faith not be perpetually exposed to uncertainty?

Scripture does not point backward to an ultimate, intrinsically certain ground, but forward to the future anticipated by Jesus's resurrection. The certainty of faith is the certainty of hope. This means that faith will always be under dispute in history and that the believer will never have his faith behind him, but always ahead of him. Here the Gospel passage

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335 On truth as a communicative event, see above, pp. 340-43; on the resurrection as the event of truth that grounds Christian faith, see EG7 62-66; on the nature of theological truth, see ibid., 65-66.

336 Plovanich regarded the occasional or event-like character of Kasper's notion of truth, particularly as it functioned in his Christology, as one of the main weaknesses of his theory of truth and of his theology as such. See Plov 293-94.

337 There is a precedent in Kasper's theology that prompts this question. In one of his earliest essays, Kasper described the gracious, salvific activity of God in the world that takes place in and through creatures, particularly in human subjects, as a transient light and as *gratis gratis data* rather than *gratia gratum faciens*. His point was that the event of divine grace does not become a new determination of the existence of the subject through whom God works. See Kasper, “Primat und Episkopat nach dem Vatikanum I” (see p. 289n375, above), 79-80.
rings true: “I believe, Lord; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:23). Not only the *simul iustus et peccator*, but even a *simul fidelis et infidelis* is possible for the Catholic. The faith of the believer is always on the line.\(^{338}\)

Kasper was correct in the sense that there is no absolute proof for the content of faith. Faith does not admit of this kind of certainty. At the same time, Kasper's emphasis on this incomplete, 'not-yet' aspect of faith seems to undermine the stability of what has already been established in the act of faith. Is Kasper's idea of truth as something that cannot be securely grasped in the present, something that can only be apprehended in hope, compatible with the notion of faith as a stable (even if not necessarily permanent) disposition of a subject? Does it not rather suggest that the truth of faith is something fleeting, something that evaporates, as it were, before it can have a lasting effect on a subject?

Movement in the direction of a solution to this problem was already apparent in chapter four of *Einführung in den Glauben*.\(^{339}\) Although Kasper regarded the openness of faith as necessary for the sake of freedom, he also maintained that freedom in the concrete depended on a basic option for meaning. Hence, wherever the postulate of openness is elevated to an absolute, such that it hinders the free person's capacity to render a definitive decision about meaning, then this openness actually poses a danger to freedom. Freedom points to the possibility of ontological judgments, such as the judgment that truth, meaning, and freedom precede the human being and condition her or his decisions about them. The question for Kasper's theology is: to what extent can such judgments be rendered about the human subject and particularly about the nature of his or her act of faith?

\(^{338}\) EG7 72-73.

\(^{339}\) On the apprehension of absolute truth in history, see EG7 73-74.
This is not a question that Kasper could answer without turning his attention to the human subject in history. It may be argued, however, that the later Kasper was at least open to such a turn. One could regard as signs of such openness the positive reception of transcendental method in general and of Rahner in particular that was underway within Kasper's thought in the late 1970s as well as Kasper's first, tentative steps toward a dialogue with the work of Bernard Lonergan during the same period.340

Further indications of a newfound interest in the human subject became visible in essays Kasper published in 1985. Kasper, who described himself as a dilettante in the field of history, nevertheless hazarded in “Kirchengeschichte als historische Theologie” to address the topic of method in church history with four theses based on Johann Sebastian von Drey's idea that an inner unity existed between church history and theology.341 He began to substantiate this unity in his second thesis.342 Here he argued against Ranke's objectivist understanding of history on the grounds of “the constitutive significance of the subject” for historical inquiry.343 For Kasper, the modern principle of subjectivity meant that “subject is the only possible universal approach to reality, the medium of an objective, if also necessarily perspectival and fragmentary, knowledge of reality.”344 He followed Eduard Spranger's interpretation of the “presuppositionlessness” of science, which stated that one should subject one's presuppositions to critique and so bring them...


under control, and not that one should emancipate oneself from one's intellectual tradition.\textsuperscript{345} Kasper connected this with his transcendental analysis of scientific discourse, which implied that every act of historical knowledge presupposed a preapprehension of the whole of history. He concluded that it was possible for the church historian to incorporate a certain dogmatic \textit{a priori} into her or his research, and so to contribute to the work of historical theology, without prejudice to the integrity of the historical task. In particular, by proceeding from the self-understanding of the Church as expressed in each particular historical era, church historians could render an account of the self-realization of the mystery of the Church in history, of how the Church presented or failed to present the Gospel authentically in the changing historical forms of its teaching, liturgy, piety, artwork, and so forth.\textsuperscript{346}

For Kasper, historical erudition alone was not capable of distinguishing between the authentic and the inauthentic in the history and tradition of the Church.\textsuperscript{347} This task rather required a \textit{sentire ecclesiam}, a refined sense for the tradition, which Kasper understood as a gift of the Holy Spirit. He further elaborated on the spirit-bestowed subjective conditions that enabled authentic theological work in “Theologie und Heiligkeit,” a short essay introducing a 1985 collection of brief biographies of theologian-saints.\textsuperscript{348} There he connected the theological task with three of the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Isaiah 11:2-3, namely piety, knowledge,

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\[346\] See Kasper, “Kirchengeschichte als historische Theologie,” 111-14.

\[347\] On the indispensability of the \textit{sensus fidei} or \textit{sentire ecclesiam} for a correct appraisal of the historical witnesses to Church tradition, see Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 402. The passage in question did not appear in the 1975 version of this essay, “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip.”

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and wisdom.³⁴⁹ Displaying his renewed appreciation for Western metaphysics, Kasper described the gift of piety in connection with the Greek notion of *eusebia* as “reverence for that which is, bound with an awe-filled openness to the ever greater and ever deeper dimensions of reality.”³⁵⁰ This notion of piety proved to be an attitude fully appropriate to scientific endeavor inasmuch as it embraced critique of superficial ideas as well as of one's own biases. In theology, reverence for reality also included humbling oneself before God in prayer and contrition for sin, as well as a readiness to listen again and again to the word of God and to others who receive that word with reverence. While piety was not for Kasper a substitute for the knowledge that is the fruit of both hard work and spiritual insight, it was the presupposition of this work. The gift of wisdom, finally, referred to the “eyes of the heart” (see Eph. 1:17), a connaturality to the divine mystery graciously bestowed on the believer by God.³⁵¹ The essence of this connaturality was for Kasper the believer's loving intimacy with God. So mysticism belonged for Kasper to the essence of theology.

These reflections led Kasper to a somewhat different position on the relationship between theory and praxis in theology than the one he would develop in “Das Wahrheitsverständnis der Theologie.”³⁵² The latter focused on what Kasper labeled a peculiarly modern understanding of the priority of praxis, which regarded human activity, rather than any truth that precedes human beings, as the *locus* of that which is ultimate and absolute. He rejected this modern idea as incompatible with the priority of listening and receiving over doing that he regarded as fundamental for the entire theological tradition. “When theology in the present, however, is

³⁴⁹ On the charisms of piety, knowledge, and wisdom, see Kasper, “Theologie und Heiligkeit,” 9-12.


³⁵² On theory and praxis in theology, see Kasper, “Theologie und Heiligkeit,” 12-16.
frequently defined as reflection on praxis, this usually does not refer to the modern concept of praxis; rather, all emphasis is placed on the praxis that arises out of faith and thus out of the pregiven, lived truth of the Gospel.”³⁵³ Kasper welcomed this notion of the priority of praxis as a welcome corrective to a tendency in German theology to be so involved in the world of academia that it becomes detached from the preaching, worship, and service that constitute the life of the Church. He likewise agreed that theology had to be an advocate for human dignity and in this sense to enter into the realm of politics, although he continued to oppose a dissolution of theology into the political realm. The particular vocation of theologians calls them into solidarity above all with those honestly seeking answers to the perplexing questions of human existence. Who could bear the weight of these questions while remaining faithful to the ecclesiastical tradition other than holy and virtuous theologians, for whom faith and praxis, love of God and love of neighbor, form an indissoluble unity?

In 1987, Kasper assembled these individual insights into the brief volume Was alles Erkennen übersteigt: Besinnung auf den christlichen Glauben,³⁵⁴ in which he attempted “a more fundamental-theological reflection on the question: What is faith?” than he had produced in Einführung in den Glauben.³⁵⁵ This book reflected Einführung in den Glauben in several respects: it began by considering the situation facing faith in the present, which, however, was in many respects different from the situation he described in the early 1970s (chapters one and two); it offered a number of approaches to faith within this situation (chapter three); it described faith essentially as a free act, which, however, was bound to a certain content (chapter four); it gave an account of the relevance of faith to human beings today (chapter six) and of the ecclesial

³⁵⁴ BG.
³⁵⁵ Kasper, Vorwort to Das Evangelium Jesu Christi, WKGS 5 (2009), 11.
nature of faith (chapter seven). There are, however, two major structural differences between *Was alles Erkennen übersteigt* and *Einführung in den Glauben*. First, *Einführung in den Glauben* prefaced its chapter on the basis of the truth of faith with a chapter on Jesus Christ as witness to the faith. By contrast, *Was alles Erkennen übersteigt* included no sustained Christological reflection. This was connected with a second difference: in *Was alles Erkennen übersteigt*, the chapter on the truth of faith (chapter five) did not precede the chapter on the act of faith, but followed it. The very structure of the book indicated a change in Kasper's understanding of the truth of faith.

Drawing especially on material from the Old Testament, Kasper described the act of faith as “a becoming-secure and gaining confidence in God, which chases away all anxiety and so makes possible rational activity.”^356^ He provided a helpful analysis of this act into several basic attitudes.^357^ For Kasper, faith meant first of all listening, being open and receptive to what is new and other, as opposed to self-satisfaction and perfect self-sufficiency. It required conversion in the sense of a willingness to turn away from familiar ideas, entrenched attitudes, and old patterns of behavior that embodied such self-sufficiency. Faith included an attitude of hope and courage, a willingness to strike out into the unknown and to embark on a journey, holding fast to a goal that is not yet in sight. Such courage would be rash without trust. Kasper clarified, however, that the trust involved in faith was not blind but a loving response to the love God has shown to oneself. This love necessarily involved prayer—communication with the beloved—but it equally involved action, loving service for one's neighbor. This activity, finally, was for Kasper no anxious activism but calm, peaceful self-possession, concerned only with glorifying God. The

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^356^ BG 199.

^357^ On the basic attitudes involved in faith, see BG 202-4.
attitudes Kasper found in the act of faith pointed to a way of life, a process of constant conversion and of growth in virtue and in relationship with God.\textsuperscript{358} Indeed, faith is a beginning and a source of that life already now, a life “before, from, and in God.”\textsuperscript{359}

Having discussed the nature of the act of faith, Kasper went on in chapter five to ask about the basis, that is, the truth of faith.\textsuperscript{360} “Upon what is our faith grounded? Upon what is it built? What gives it its certainty?” From the outset he ruled out any rationalist solution to this problem, which for him included any claim that faith is justified by its correspondence to human needs or by its fitting into a closed anthropological or sociological system established by pure reason. Such a solution was for Kasper incompatible with the basic attitudes of faith described in the previous chapter, which included courageous hope in something not fully comprehended by reason. Kasper concluded, just as he had in \textit{Einführung in den Glauben}, that the revealed truth and faithfulness of God was the ultimate basis of faith. Yet he did not find this answer entirely satisfactory. It seems to run in a circle: God alone is the basis for faith in God. How, then, does one enter into this circle? How does one become conscious of the truth of God? At issue here is the intelligibility or reasonableness of the act of faith, which had also been the basic concern of the analysis of faith pursued by neo-Scholastic theology.\textsuperscript{361} Although Kasper still did not identify with their answers, he began to take their questions more seriously.

Kasper's response expanded on the brief paragraph in the chapter on the truth of faith in \textit{Einführung in den Glauben} that alluded to subjective conditions for the certainty of faith, the

\textsuperscript{358} On faith as a way or ongoing process, see BG 204-6.

\textsuperscript{359} BG 200.

\textsuperscript{360} On the problem of coming to know the basis of the truth of faith, see BG 207-8.

\textsuperscript{361} On the \textit{analysis fidei}, see BG 210-11.
“light of faith” and the “eyes of faith.” He began by appealing to Augustine, who pointed out that the ultimate Truth that God is cannot be established on a still more ultimate basis. Therefore, if one acknowledges God as the basis of one's existence, this can only be because the very truth of God has “dawned” on one. Thomas Aquinas, for his part, showed that this light of truth shining on the human person was no blinding imposition on the person but the gracious elevation and illumination of her or his natural powers of reason. The unaided intellect can indeed grasp the external signs of revelation as reasons that belief is something appropriate and humanly possible. For Aquinas, however, each such act of knowing involved a preapprehension of the whole of reality. The longing to know contained therein could not be satisfied by such piecemeal knowledge. Reason, therefore, is open to illumination by the light of faith. So elevated, the subject is empowered to grasp in the exterior word divine truth in its inherent certainty. Kasper found this truth beautifully expressed in a pregnant phrase from Aquinas: *Ubi amor ibi oculus*—where there's love, there's an eye. In another work Kasper commented on this quote: “True love makes us not blind but seeing; it reveals another person to us as trustworthy and worthy of love.”

Pursuing the question still further, Kasper gave the last word to von Balthasar, highlighting his account of how and by what means the light of divine truth comes to dawn on the subject. In von Balthasar's view, according to Kasper, the “objective evidence” of revelation, namely, Jesus Christ, brings with him the light that empowers the believer to recognize him as

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362 On the eyes of faith and the light of faith according to Augustine and Aquinas, see BG 209-12.

363 Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 3.35.1.2; quoted in BG 212.


365 On von Balthasar's account of the light of truth, see BG 213.
the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This light is the self-evidence and the convincing power of divine love. The mystery of triune Love makes its inherent credibility known by lifting the veil that shrouds the mystery of creation, unmasking the self-contradictory character of sin and proclaiming that free, self-surrendering love has the power to overcome sin, since Love is both the ground and the goal of all reality. Kasper's inquiry into the truth of faith reached its end in a reduction of this truth to the mystery of triune Love. His account was aptly summarized by von Balthasar's formula: glaubhaft ist nur Liebe—love alone is credible.

So the end result of Kasper's appropriation of transcendental methods for his understanding of the truth of the faith-tradition was his option for the solution proposed in von Balthasar's “objective-symbolic” transcendental theology to the problem of faith and its truth. It is interesting in this connection that William Loewe found in Kasper's affinity to von Balthasar an opening for a possible extension of Kasper's general theological categories through “such notions as conversion, symbol, and the imagination.” Kasper's descriptions of the basic attitudes that belong to faith present notable points of contact with Bernard Lonergan's notion of conversion. At the same time, it is not crystal clear that Kasper thought of the basic attitude of faith as a stable disposition of the subject; it is possible that he considered it an occasional and even fleeting event of the subject's being illuminated in the light of divine truth. The fact, however, that Kasper definitively turned away from his initial understanding of truth with its

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366 BG 213.

367 On the power of this light to disclose and to transform reality, see BG 214-29.


369 Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” in CK 91.
overwhelming orientation toward the future suggests a greater openness in the later Kasper to a less occasionalist account of the believing subject.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be helpful to revisit the questions raised by Kasper's writings on the subjects of tradition and truth. First, how does one acquire certainty about the content of Christian faith? More specifically, what grounds the knowledge one receives in faith about the truth of revelation? Kasper has given essentially the same answer to this question throughout his vast bibliography. Nothing less than the transcendent Truth of God ultimately justifies Christian belief. This Truth is not a clear and distinct concept or a series of propositions. Truth in the theological sense is finally identical to God's very Self, whose infallible faithfulness and love has been revealed unsurpassably in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. One cannot seek any more ultimate justification for the content of faith than is given at its center, in the self-evidence of divine love. As von Balthasar put it: love alone is credible.

Given, however, that the mystery of the Trinity grounds the truth of faith, one may still ask how this transcendent truth becomes immanent in the history of creation. To answer this question, one must move from a theological to a salvation-historical perspective. According to Kasper, it is ultimately in the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the eschatological, definitive truth about God and about creation enters into history and becomes accessible to human beings in their freedom. Because, however, the truth of Christ was only proclaimed in its fullness through the Spirit-guided preaching of the Apostles, this apostolic

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370 Kasper provided a succinct summary of his theology of tradition in “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 185-90. The following conclusion largely takes up the order of presentation found in that text.
preaching participates in the eschatological character of Christ himself. The Apostles belong to the permanent foundation on which the Faithfulness-Truth of God manifests itself in history.

How does the apostolic norm of the faith abide over the course of this history? This raises the question about the *loki theologici* that together constitute the living tradition of the Church. In the first place, according to Kasper, the personal testimony of those joined to the apostolic college in accord with ecclesiastical norms belongs permanently to the form through which the deposit of faith is transmitted. So apostolic succession is for Kasper obligatory on the Church, even though it does not by itself guarantee the purity of the tradition. The living presence of the truth of the Gospel in the Church is, second, the work of the Holy Spirit, who writes the Gospel on the hearts of believers (2 Cor. 3:3). The Spirit brings the truth of God, which is God's love and faithfulness, to expression in manifold ways in the life of the Church: liturgy, sacraments, religious communities, popular piety, artwork, media, as well as the ordinary lived witness of faithful Christians. On account of human finitude and especially sin, however, the life of the Church does not only reveal the truth of the Gospel; it also conceals this truth. Thus, third, the apostolic norm over the Church has concrete form in Holy Scripture. The Spirit-inspired word cannot be rightly understood, however, unless it is also interpreted in the spirit in which it was written. So the Bible stands, fourth, within an interpretative tradition, which includes various dogmatic judgments as well as theological, speculative, practical, and mystical commentaries.

The apostolic tradition, then, abides in the Church in a manifold form. This corresponds to the historicity of truth, a characteristic that became fixed in Kasper's notion of truth since he formulated it in *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*. After 1965, however, Kasper came to recognize the ambiguity of terms like 'history' and 'historicity.' In 1986, he circumscribed what he meant

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371 See Gesetz 57ff.
by the historicity of truth in three points. Theological truth is (1) embodied in the whole life of the Church (2) in a pluriform way, which in part corresponds (3) to the multiplicity of concrete situations and historical contexts in which the Church preaches the good news to the world. It was above all in relation to this situation-relative aspect of truth that Kasper spoke of the possibility and even the necessity of a critique of the ideological form of the truth immanent in the tradition. This aspect admits of progress and decline, of a process of reform that seeks an ever greater humanization of the Church and the world, a process that only comes to an end at the eschaton.

The tensions that exist among the plurality of witnesses to the apostolic tradition prompt the further question of how one can determine the one Truth testified by the many witnesses. How does one go about discerning the truth of revelation? In what does a spiritual interpretation of the Bible—and of its interpretative tradition—consist? Kasper has answered these questions with a description of a hermeneutics of tradition and of criteria operative in that hermeneutics. From a diachronic perspective, Kasper has referred to a criterion of coherence, which involves interpreting the different traditional witnesses according to the analogy of faith; he has sometimes termed this a typological exegesis. Since scripture and tradition testify to the one truth of faith within the modes of the particular contexts they addressed, a careful analysis of these historical contexts in all their differences can help one discern the one truth in the analogous correspondences among these witnesses. Synchronically, the main criterion is consensus. The growth of such consensus within the Church requires that the intra-ecclesial process of communication proceed with as little obstruction as possible so that all the charisms within the Church receive a hearing. This process requires a degree of tolerance for difference, even for

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positions that may at first blush sound heretical. By patiently working through these differences, the faithful allow the Spirit to work through the gifts he bestows on them and to lead the Church into all truth.

What was at issue for Kasper in this growth of the Church in the truth was not, however, the acquisition of a truth not already grasped in faith, but only a development of the Church’s understanding of the truth of faith. Although Kasper has always maintained that the truth of faith is not only an eschatological reality but is effective already now in the life of the believer, he has not always maintained this already-now dimension in a convincing way. This is because, first, his early conception of theological truth gave the impression of an ephemeral event on which the subject could apparently acquire only a tenuous and fragile grasp, and second, because he initially excluded metaphysical and transcendental notions of truth, and consequently any substantial reflection on the believing subject, as inadmissible within theological reflection on the truth of faith. It has been argued in this chapter that Kasper’s later writings showed a greater openness to a ‘turn to the subject’ that could serve as a supplement and a corrective to his otherwise heavily future-oriented understanding of theological truth. In particular, Kasper spoke in *Was alles Erkennen übersteigt* of the illumination of the subject by the light of divine truth. It is this light that ultimately allows the believer to recognize the Faithfulness-Truth of God mediated through the various traditional symbols of faith; apart from this light, no amount of scholarly cleverness can help one gain access to the revealed truth contained therein. By appealing to Augustine, Aquinas, and von Balthasar, Kasper was able to provide a more satisfactory explanation of how the subject could apprehend within history the faithfulness of God, which, according to Kasper's thinking, will only become fully manifest at the glorious advent of the eschatological Reign of God.
These promising beginnings suggest that Kasper’s thought might be open to a still more explicit reflection on the subject. That is, it might be possible, as William Loewe has suggested, to expand Kasper's theological categories to include the Lonerganian category of conversion.\(^{373}\) One advantage of such a modification is that it would make possible a significant clarification of various places in Kasper's writings where he seemed to reject the modern notion of subjectivity.\(^{374}\) It could be shown that such passages need not refer to subjectivity as such, but to an inauthentic subjectivity that did not recognize the value of belief, that is, assent to a certain socio-linguistic tradition such as a religious tradition.\(^{375}\) The category of conversion could also help make explicit the dialectic of authenticity and inauthenticity that is implicit in each of the dialectical accounts of the history of theology and dogma that are so characteristic of Kasper's theology. It is not suggested here that Kasper actually took up the turn to the subject in this sense, but that such a change could be made without altering the overall trajectory of his thought. The revision of Kasper's understanding of theological truth that took place in his later writings was a major factor that made such a development conceivable.

The conclusion of the present study will expand on this thesis about the compatibility between Kasper's thought and Lonergan's notion of conversion. For present purposes, however, it will suffice to mention just one point. For Lonergan, the religious convert is oriented by virtue of his or her conversion to communion with other religious converts.\(^{376}\) To this extent, the communion of the faithful, the Church, is for both Lonergan and Kasper the concrete place of

\(^{373}\) On conversion, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (see p. 75n75, above), 237-43.


\(^{375}\) On belief, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 41-47.

truth. If this is the case, however, then what can one say about other religious communities and traditions in relation to the transcendent truth of revelation? Is there a vacuum of theological truth outside of the Church? Kasper has consistently argued to the contrary. In particular, during his decade of service to the Church as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Kasper placed an accent on the already existing unity among the historic Christian churches and ecclesial communions as well as between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people. This is not to say that being a Christian of one stripe or another and being Jewish ultimately amount to the same thing. On the contrary: according to Kasper, the differences among these communities, no less than their similarities, give rise to the ecumenical and interreligious dialogues that express their already-now existing unity in the truth as well as their common desire for purification and growth in the one Truth of God. This raises the issue of Kasper's involvement in dialogue with Jews and other Christians, which is the topic of chapter six.
Chapter Six
The Faithfulness of God in Dialogue

The present study of Kasper's notion of the faithfulness of God, particularly chapter four, has argued that, for Kasper, this faithfulness becomes manifest in history above all in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹ The same faithfulness, however, abides in the world over the course of time in those who acknowledge God's loving offer of self in Jesus Christ as grace and gift, accept it, and commit themselves to God through the working of the Holy Spirit by their act of faith.² The believing community's fidelity to the God who gives away everything for their sake calls the community in turn to give themselves away for others; it propels them beyond themselves into encounter with others, into mission and dialogue. The Church is the eschatological sign of God's Reign to the extent that it transcends itself toward other Christians, toward persons of the Jewish tradition and of other religions, and toward the whole world, proclaiming and living out the truth of God's mercy and love.

Precisely as the sign and sacrament of divine faithfulness, however, the Church does not cancel out but affirms God's sovereign freedom to create and to save. In the freedom of the Spirit God can and does make use of other peoples and cultures as signs and instruments of divine love and mercy for all creation and the whole of humankind. All the more can those communities whose identity connects them to God's self-revelation in history, who explicitly acknowledge God's saving acts and trust in God's promises, manifest the faithful love of God at work in the world. These monotheistic communities have a unique capacity to be signs of divine love even in

¹ See the discussion of JC and DG in chapter four, above, pp. 169ff.
² See KK, as well as the discussion of this book on pp. 253ff., above.
relation to the Church. To the extent that it enters into dialogue with these peoples, the Church surrenders its self-sufficiency and entrusts itself more fully to the mystery of God through the medium of the other, and in so doing realizes more perfectly its own mystery as the eschatological sign of God's love, mercy, and fidelity.

Chapters four and five of the present study argued that the faithfulness of God was a central theme in Kasper’s theology. On the one hand, divine fidelity may be dubbed the material principle of Kasper's theology inasmuch as it expressed for Kasper what was central to his understanding of the Gospel message. On the other hand, because Kasper so closely associated fidelity with theological truth, that is, the truth that the faith-tradition transmits and upon which theology reflects, one could also rightly call it the formal principle of his theology. In both these chapters, the principle of divine fidelity highlighted what might be termed the dialogical dimension of Kasper's theological enterprise. This suggests that the faithfulness of God could provide a useful perspective from which to understand Kasper's involvement in ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue, a perspective that would relate the ministry that defined the latter portion of Kasper's career to the theological foundations he had developed as an academician.

Chapter six examines the operation of Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness in his contributions to ecumenical and Jewish-Catholic dialogue. It begins by revisiting the theology of tradition discussed in chapter five, which presented the authentic tradition of faith as the sacramental re-presentation of God's Faithfulness-Truth within history. In the present context, the specifically dialogical dimensions of this vision of tradition, especially its function as a foundation for ecumenical dialogue, will be highlighted. This notion of tradition corresponds to Kasper's understanding of the Church as a sacrament of dialogue, that is, the sign and instrument of the communion of God with human beings and of human beings with one another. The
chapter continues by examining how the structures of Kasper’s theology of tradition work themselves out within interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. It focuses on the dialogue between Jews and Catholics, with which Kasper became particularly involved after 2001, and on that between Lutherans and Catholics, in which he had been active for the whole span of his academic and pastoral careers.

I. Tradition as Foundation of an Open Identity

It was noted above, in chapter five, that ecumenical concerns were an important motivation behind the theology of tradition Kasper formulated in his early career.\(^3\) Indeed, several of the writings in which Kasper explained his understanding of tradition were explicitly intended as contributions to ecumenical dialogue.\(^4\) In one of these, an essay titled “Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus,” Kasper noted what by that time had become a commonplace observation: the present state of division among Christians constitutes a hindrance to the credibility of their proclamation of the Gospel.\(^5\) He added, however, that insofar as this situation has resulted in Christians coming together in ecumenical dialogue with one another, it could also be regarded as a salutary corrective for the way they had up to that point carried out the task of proclamation and mission, which for Kasper coincided with the task of tradition. He thought that ecumenical dialogue could be a healing experience insofar as it moved Christians “to learn first of all to bear with one another in patience, then to appreciate and to love

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\(^3\) See pp. 316-20, above.


\(^5\) On what follows, see Ökumene 339.
one another precisely in our differences, and to continue alongside one another until, having mutually enriched one another, we finally regain ourselves.”⁶ This “self-regaining” meant for Kasper both a renewal of the traditions of each church and a convergence among these traditions, even to the point of restored ecclesial unity. The dialogue among the churches has as its aim the restoration of an authentic dialogue over the truth of the Gospel within one Church. Kasper concluded: “Thus, dialogue is the form in which tradition, and therefore the understanding of scripture, takes place.”⁷

The thesis of this chapter is that dialogue—within the Catholic Church as well as among the Christian churches, between Christianity and Judaism, among all the world religions, and finally between the Church and the world—is the praxis proper to tradition understood in Kasper’s sense as intrinsically linked to the faithfulness and truth of God. This thesis will be substantiated by reference to the ways Kasper himself engaged in ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue. Before entering into these matters, however, it will be helpful to discuss just what is meant by the relationship here posited between dialogue and tradition in Kasper’s thought. To facilitate this discussion, there follows a brief review of the account of tradition discussed at length in chapter five.⁸

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⁶ Ökumene 339.

⁷ Ökumene 339.

⁸ In addition to pp. 316ff., above, see especially Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” in TK 1:72-100; “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition” (see p. 143n80, above), 161-90.
A. Tradition and Dialogue

According to Kasper, the question of tradition is bound up with the question of truth, which reads: how do I live a true, worthwhile, fully human life? At this basic, anthropological level, tradition consists in a community's symbolically encoded memory of the experiences of past generations that gives direction and meaning to the lives of persons in the present and future generations. From time to time, however, a historical community may become aware of the fact, perhaps as a result of an encounter with another civilization, that much of what they accept as true and obvious is actually anything but intuitive. Crises of this kind in the West gave rise to a “first Enlightenment” in the philosophical tradition of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as well as the subsequent but more familiar “second Enlightenment” of the modern era. For Kasper, the valid insight underlying both “enlightenments” was that tradition cannot perform its proper function as orientation for right living if it remains simply the transmission of information. Tradition is not only an 'objective' content to be handed on but the 'subjective' articulation, appropriation, and enactment of that content. Only as an act-being unity, a living reality, the 'objective spirit' of the community, can tradition facilitate and guide persons in a truly human, free existence.

The unity between act and content that Kasper regarded as characteristic of tradition in general applied in an analogous way to the theological tradition. An act-content unity can be discerned in the Old Testament's typological and prophetic notion of truth. For Kasper, however, the reality of tradition reached its unsurpassable high point in history in the person of Jesus Christ. According to Kasper's reading of the Gospels, Jesus, although he located himself within

9 On the anthropological category of tradition, see Kasper, “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 79-90.


the Jewish tradition, interpreted this tradition with such astonishing freedom that he even presented his own word as the definitive Word of God. For Christians, Jesus embodied this Word and this divine tradition, above all in the handing over (in German, Überlieferung; in Latin, traditio) of his own person for the salvation of the world. The act and the content of divine tradition come to their unsurpassable unity in his personal obedience to the Father unto death. For Kasper, however, this meant that an authentic understanding and appropriation of the content of tradition lay beyond the unaided abilities of human beings. God provides the subjective conditions for the transmission of divine tradition within the Church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This leads to Kasper's theological definition of tradition: “God's transmission of self, through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, to continuous presence in the Church.”

God's faithful presence to the world is realized in a unique way in the tradition of the Church—in all that the Church is and all that it believes (see Dei verbum, no. 8).

Within this definition of tradition, the work of the Church stands in no way on the same level as the work of the triune God. To be sure, the Church was for Kasper indispensable to the divine tradition, since the definitive victory of divine truth in Christ could not remain present in history if it lacked an authoritative witness. At the same time, Kasper insisted that the inseparability he posited between the risen Christ and the apostolic Church was not an identification between the two. Christ remains distinct from and sovereign over his Church. This sovereignty came to expression within Kasper's account of tradition in his “postmodern”

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understanding of the *loci theologici*. Because neither scripture, nor any collection of traditions, nor the authoritative teachers of the Church, nor the believing community can claim to possess the whole truth of the Gospel in isolation from the others, it follows that no one can lay hold of divine truth for oneself, but can only access this truth by entering into the dynamic interplay among all these individual *loci*. This is not to deny that the authentic believing subject has the truth in a real, if anticipatory, way. Faith, however, is not a static possession of divine truth but a drive to transcend oneself in the direction of the traditional symbols of revelation, and in and through their mediation, toward God the Ever-Greater.

There are many resonances between the account of tradition here summarized and the reflections on the nature of dialogue Kasper produced at the beginning of his tenure as secretary and then president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. In the first place, the idea that dialogue is not just an exchange of words or ideas but involves the entire reality of each dialogue-partner has its paradigmatic instance in the total self-surrender that is the life of the triune God and that constitutes the essential reality of divine tradition. One could also point in this connection to the incarnate response of the Church to God's self-communication, which embraces the Church's entire life, as well as the response of the individual Christian who accepts the gifts of the Spirit with love, utilizing these charisms to the full in living out her or his vocation. When one looks to

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the concrete structure of the Church's response to God's self-communication that is its tradition, one observes, in the second place, that the interplay between scripture and tradition and between the communion of the Church and its official representatives resembles the interaction between partners in a dialogue. In particular, just as each dialogue-partner must show due respect for the other, refraining from imposing his or her will on the other by force, in order to preserve the authenticity of dialogue,\(^\text{17}\) so each *locus theologicus* must be given its proper place in order to avoid any distortion of the truth of tradition. Thus, both the essential reality and the basic structure of tradition as Kasper explained it may be designated as dialogical.

It was within the open system or dialogical interplay among the *loci theologici* in their unity and multiplicity that Kasper found room within the Catholic tradition for the ecumenical impulse of the postconciliar period.\(^\text{18}\) The purpose of the synchronic dimension of this process, the intra-Church dialogue, was for Kasper that all the ministries and initiatives bestowed by the Spirit should receive a hearing and be given the opportunity to become a leaven within the faith community. Of course, the fruitfulness of this dialogue rested on its continued commitment to the truth of revelation passed on in scripture and tradition. Precisely this kind of dialogue, however, was for Kasper open in principle to asking whether ideas, practices, and institutions that have developed outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church might represent authentic initiatives of the Holy Spirit intended for the edification of the faithful and the sanctification of the world. Could the essential concerns of the Protestant Reformers, and even certain ecclesial structures that grew out of the traditions that succeeded them, fall into this category? Kasper himself thus affirmed that the process of tradition involves an openness to an ecumenical


\(^{18}\) On the place of ecumenism within tradition, see Kasper, “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 189.
exchange of gifts. More recently, Kasper has hinted at a broader significance of this affirmation by applying the idea of an exchange of gifts to dialogue between Catholics and Jews.\(^\text{19}\)

For Kasper, however, the value of an exchange of gifts within intra-church, ecumenical, or interreligious dialogue ultimately depended on whether this exchange facilitated the proclamation of the Gospel in the world, which is the goal of tradition as such.\(^\text{20}\) This points to the third sense in which Kasper understood tradition as a dialogical affair: its aim is to proclaim and to anticipate the coming of the Reign of God through the dialogue between church and world. This missionary dimension was a key constituent of Kasper's understanding of ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue alike.\(^\text{21}\) Or perhaps it would be better to say that for Kasper, dialogue with Judaism and with other Christian churches belonged to the mission of the Catholic Church.\(^\text{22}\) Kasper's contributions to Jewish-Christian dialogue in particular urged Christians and Jews together to pronounce a prophetic critique on all forms of indifference, injustice, and violence in the modern world.\(^\text{23}\) His writings on ecumenical dialogue, on the other hand, presupposed that the goal of ecumenism was that Christians should be restored to visible union within one Church, which implied unity in the mission of the Church. The fact that Christians could to some extent proclaim the Gospel with one voice was therefore cause for celebration.\(^\text{24}\)

\(^{19}\) On the place of ecumenism within tradition, see Kasper, “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 189.

\(^{20}\) On the goal of tradition, see Kasper, “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 189-90.


\(^{22}\) Kasper incorporated both forms of dialogue under the heading of the mission of the Church. See KK, chapter six.


The relationship between tradition and dialogue in Kasper's thought may be summarized as follows. For Kasper, the Catholic faith-tradition may be described as dialogical with respect to its essence, its structure, and its aim. Ecumenical and Jewish-Catholic dialogue, when rightly understood and practiced, enter into the essential reality and the concrete structures of this tradition, and they contribute to the accomplishment of its goals. In this sense, the communities with which the Catholic Church engages in dialogue participate in the tradition of the Church; they share in some measure the Church's own participation in the Faithfulness-Truth of God. It is not implied here that these communities are sanctified, as it were, solely on account of something they receive from the Catholic Church. According to Kasper, Jewish-Christian and ecumenical dialogues are not monologues in which the Catholic Church alone speaks; they are true exchanges involving mutual give and take. Each participant brings its own unique gifts to the table. This, however, means that the Catholic Church cannot be expected, as a precondition for its participation in dialogue, to give up its claim that it has a unique and universal significance within the history of salvation. The Catholic Church for Kasper maintains that the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is the central event in the history of the world, and that its tradition stands in continuity with that event. It does not claim to possess all truth, but it does claim to be “the place of truth” where the truths of creation and human ingenuity come to themselves in the light of Christ. This raises the question of Kasper's ecclesiology.

B. The Catholic Church as Sacrament of Dialogue

The foregoing discussion highlighted an important feature of Kasper's theology: for Kasper, church and tradition go hand in hand. Or, to paraphrase William Loewe, Kasper's category of tradition opens up a conceptual space in which an institutional church, as the

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“vehicle” that carries tradition through the course of history, becomes intelligible. Therefore, having discussed the dialogical character of Kasper's theology of tradition, it seems appropriate to say something about the 'dialogue-partner' to which this account of tradition points. Kasper's reflections on tradition constituted a fundamental ecclesiology, the basic framework upon which he built his vision of the Church. More concretely, the unity-in-difference between the crucified Jesus and the risen Christ, exalted in the Spirit, corresponds to the self-sameness of theological truth in its diverse historical modes: as the fixed testament to the Church's normative origins (Holy Scripture), as the mores and reflections of the faith community that make up its living commentary on the Bible (Tradition), as the writings and artifacts that witness to the one Tradition as it existed in the past (traditions), as the “sense of the faith” (sensus fidei) bestowed upon the whole faith community, and as the teaching authority (magisterium) bestowed on its leaders to clarify the boundaries between faith and unbelief. As the Ort der Wahrheit, the place, sign and instrument of divine fidelity-truth, the Church exists in the tensions among these distinct historical modes of the one Truth of revelation.

This is not to say that Kasper's ecclesiology may safely be reduced to his theology of tradition. Such a claim would do justice neither to the complexity of the Church as a theological subject nor to the particularities of Kasper's understanding of the Church. The development of Kasper's ecclesiological thought demonstrates something of the flexibility of his theory of tradition as a framework for ecclesiology. In Katholische Kirche, Kasper himself recounted how the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops and the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council that emerged from it prompted his shift from a pneumatocentric perspective influenced

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26 Loewe identified tradition and institution as two correlative theological categories (among others) that he considered basic to Kasper's thought. See Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” in CK 83.

27 Kasper provided a helpful narrative account of the development of his relationship with and understanding of the Church in KK 19-67.
by his colleagues at the University of Tübingen to a trinitarian and communitarian vision of the Church based on the insight that *communio* is the hermeneutical key to the Council's ecclesiology.\(^\text{28}\) One could illustrate the significance of this shift by tracing the dialectic of institution and event within Kasper's ecclesiology: his earlier, more pneumatocentric ecclesiology emphasized the event-character of the Church, while his later theology gave the institutional structure somewhat more weight. For example, one might observe the subtle difference between the ecclesiology of the 1968 essay “Wort und Sakrament,” in which the sacramentality of the Church was derived from its relationship to the event of the re-presentation of Jesus Christ in word and sacrament,\(^\text{29}\) and that of the 1984 essay “Die Kirche als universales Sakrament des Heils,” in which the nature of the individual sacraments is explained in reference to the prior sacramental structure of the Church.\(^\text{30}\) The point is that Kasper's ecclesiology underwent significant changes even as the understanding of tradition on which it was grounded remained unchanged in its main lines.

The stability of Kasper's theology of tradition corresponded to a basic continuity amidst the various changes that took place in Kasper's ecclesiological thought. This continuity came to expression in Kasper's understanding of the Church as sacrament. A sacramental idea of the Church pervaded Kasper's ecclesiological writings. It was present in his earliest essays on ecclesiological topics,\(^\text{31}\) and it was fundamental to *Katholische Kirche*, the ecclesiological

\(^{28}\) See KK 44-45.

\(^{29}\) See Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” in GG 303-5; compare Ökumene 342-43.

\(^{30}\) See Kasper, “Kirche als universales Sakrament des Heils” (see p. 138\text{n}56, above) 245-51. Compare KK 146, as well as p. 265, above.

\(^{31}\) See Kasper, “Primat und Episkopat nach dem Vatikanum I,” in GG 418, 421-22, 438, 440; Ökumene 342-44; “Ekklesiologische Charakter der nichtkatholischen Kirchen” (see p. 20\text{n}46, above), 56-62.
synthesis that formed a sort of capstone to his theological and pastoral career.\textsuperscript{32} A survey of the titles that make up his bibliography reveals that the noun Kasper most often connected to the word \textit{Kirche} (church) using the preposition \textit{als} (as) was \textit{Sakrament};\textsuperscript{33} the noun \textit{Ort}, used in the sense of a concrete place in history in which salvation becomes an effective reality—roughly a synonym for “sacrament”—comes in second place.\textsuperscript{34} One could in part explain the preeminence of this idea in Kasper’s ecclesiology as an effort at \textit{ressourcement}: Kasper, like other twentieth-century Catholic theologians, sought to get beyond a one-sided juridical ecclesiology by retrieving a patristic (sacramental) vision of the Church.\textsuperscript{35} In addition, Kasper had to a certain degree taken his cue from the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, although his use of sacramental categories predated the promulgation of the conciliar documents.\textsuperscript{36}

The correspondence here posited between Kasper’s theology of tradition and a sacramental idea of the Church emerges when one observes that Kasper has frequently employed

\textsuperscript{32} See KK 126-31.


\textsuperscript{35} On the Church as sacrament, see Otto Semmelroth, \textit{Die Kirche als Ursakrament} (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1953); Edward Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christus sacrament van de Godsontmoeting} (Bilthoven: Nelissen, 1959); Karl Rahner, \textit{Kirche und Sakramente}, Quaestiones disputatione 10 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1960). For an overview, see Avery Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church}, expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002), chapter four.

\textsuperscript{36} For early references to a sacramental understanding of the Church, see Kasper, “Primat und Episkopat nach dem Vatikanum I,” 418, 421-22, 438, 440.
sacramental language in describing the reality of tradition. One of the most basic claims of his theology of tradition is that a Vergegenwärtigung or re-presentation of the saving work of Christ takes place in the event of tradition. In this connection, Kasper has more than once drawn upon a description of tradition originating from Johann Sebastian von Drey: in the tradition-process, Jesus Christ hands himself over ever anew in an abiding presence (zu beständiger Gegenwart) with his disciples. On more than one occasion, however, Kasper has pointed out that when one isolates this dimension of tradition from its objective criteria, it can lead one to identify the spirit of Christ immediately and uncritically with the spirit of the present moment. This is why he has always tried in his accounts of tradition to balance the idea of re-presentation with that of Erinnerung (memory, anamnesis). He thus described tradition as a unity of being and act that involves both the transmission of an objective content and the responsible involvement of a present-day believing subject, both an identification of divine promise with its fulfillment in the Spirit today and a differentiation of spirits that makes use of the objective criteria of tradition. The dimension of promise just mentioned points to a third aspect of Kasper's theology of tradition: each individual witness to tradition bears a surplus of meaning that points beyond itself.

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in anticipation of the final, eschatological manifestation of divine truth.\textsuperscript{42} Now

_Vergegenwärtigung, Erinnerung, and Antizipation_ are all key components of Kasper's account of

word and sacrament.\textsuperscript{43} This is why Kasper could summarize his tradition-theology as a

sacramental and typological account of tradition.\textsuperscript{44} It stands to reason that a theology of the

Church grounded in such an idea of tradition would take the form of a sacramental ecclesiology.

The correspondence between Kasper's sacramental ecclesiology and his theology of

tradition becomes even clearer when one examines the contours of his sacramental idea of the

Church. More specifically, the unity-in-tension within Kasper's ecclesiology between the reality

of salvation and the sacrament that is its concrete sign and instrument reflects the tension

between the “already” and “not yet” that is characteristic of Kasper's theology of tradition.\textsuperscript{45} On

the one hand, the sign is not what it signifies: the Church is not the fullness of time, it has no

authority over God's eschatological self-revelation in Jesus Christ but rather stands under the

divine Word and serves him. Especially in his early career, Kasper emphasized the pneumatic

reality of the Church: the Church “happens,” its essence is realized, wherever the Holy Spirit

uses its institutions and structures, its sacraments, sacramentals, and ministers, to re-present

God's once-for-all act of salvation in Jesus Christ and to anticipate the eschatological

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\textsuperscript{43} See in particular the discussion of the twofold transcendence that takes place in word and sacrament as

presencing signs and instruments of salvation in Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 303-5. He appealed in this

connection to the conviction of the early Church “dass Jesus Christus selbst der eigentliche Spender der Sakramente

ist, dass jedes Sakrament also ein personaler Akt der Christusbegegnung ist und dass es die vergegenwärtigende

Erinnerung des Heilswerks in Jesus Christus und die Antizipation der eschatologischen Herrschaft Gottes darstellt.”

Ibid., 304.
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\textsuperscript{44} See Recht 91-92; “Tradition als theologisches Erkenntnisprinzip,” 90, 93-96; “Verhältnis von Schrift und

Tradition,” 168, 179-80, 185-87.
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\textsuperscript{45} On the identity and difference between the Church as sign and the salvific reality it signifies, see Kasper,

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transformation of the world begun in Christ. This is why the early Kasper gave special emphasis to the event-character of the Church: he wanted to highlight the Church's role in salvation history rather than the concrete forms it has used to carry out that role at any given point in its history. To a certain extent, then, Kasper prioritized the question of the Church's mission over that of its concrete form. The concrete, historical Church is the “sacrament of salvation” and the “sacrament of unity” only insofar as the various dimensions of its existence communicate the reality of justice, peace, and reconciliation to the world; it sacramentally represents Christ only insofar as it represents (acts on behalf of) others. In this way, Kasper hoped to differentiate his theology of the Church as sacrament from other twentieth-century Catholic sacramental ecclesiologies in which he found a tendency to abstract from concrete ecclesiastical structures and practices and to romanticize the Church. Only a Church that is human as well as divine, real as well as ideal, is capable of reform and renewal.

On the other hand, if the salvation of the world in Christ were not an abiding reality in history, concretely realized in some visible, tangible, communal form, this would give the lie to the basic Christian conviction that God's love and faithfulness to human beings have been affirmed definitively in Jesus Christ. This, according to Kasper, is why the Good News of the Reign of God will always be connected to the historical Catholic Church, which manifests the

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46 See Ökumene 342-43; “Wort und Sakrament,” 304.

47 In doing so, he gave the Church wide latitude to determine the concrete shape of the sacraments it administered. See Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 307-8.


49 For a critique of other theologies of the Church as sacrament, see Kasper, “Wort und Sakrament,” 293-95.

50 On the Church as the place where God's Faithfulness-Truth abides in history, see Kasper, “Kirche als Ort der Wahrheit,” 262-66.
Reign in the world in an authentic, indeed “infallible” way, although its teachings will never perfectly and exhaustively articulate the mystery of the Reign as long as history goes on. Thus Kasper has stated in his reflections on tradition that the Church will never cease to exist. This permanence applied for Kasper not simply to the existence of some institution called ‘Church’ but also to the basic structures that allow the Church to carry out its mission in the world. Because the believer does not proclaim the Gospel to himself or herself but receives it as a gift of God's grace, the sacramental form of the Church always presents the Gospel as something beyond its recipient (extra nos): in the scriptures, which stand (to a certain degree) 'over against' the Church, as well as in ordained ministers, who stand (to a certain degree) 'over against' the community. At the same time, the Gospel is grace and salvation for the believer only insofar as it transforms him or her and becomes a reality in him or her. Hence the Gospel also manifests itself in the Church as something intra nos: the scriptures are proclaimed with authority within the Church community (during the liturgy, for example) and in the light of its tradition; the leaders of the Church manifest their authority not by dominating the community but by fostering the spiritual gifts of its members, who each contribute something unique to the fulfillment of the Church’s mission. As sacrament of the Spirit, the Church is what Kasper calls an “open system”: it is not

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51 See Ökumene 336; “Die Welt als Ort des Evangeliums,” in GG 221.

52 Kasper, “Welt als Ort des Evangeliums,” 221.

reducible to a single element of its structure (the Pope, for example) but exists as “dialogue” or as a unity in diversity.\textsuperscript{54}

After the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985, Kasper developed a new synthesis of these diverse elements of his ecclesiology—its “already” and “not yet,” its Christological and pneumatological dimensions—on the basis of the analogy of \textit{communio}.\textsuperscript{55} In “Kirche als Communio,” Kasper interpreted the ecclesiology of the Council against the background of a basic human longing for communion, which no human society or political order has yet been able to satisfy. According to Kasper, the answer the Council offered to this basic human longing was communion with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. For the Council, however, this participation in the life of the Trinity, which is salvation itself, was also the essence or mystery of the Church. To be sure, neither the Council nor Kasper claimed that the Church was identical to this dynamic, salvific reality. Rather, the Church is obliged to make its visible structures ever more transparent to the divine life. Kasper nevertheless maintained that the proclamation of the word and administering of the sacraments serve to foster the believer’s union with God. Moreover, to the extent that Christians are united to the Father by the Spirit through word and sacrament, they are also united to one another. Kasper thus linked the two meanings of the phrase \textit{communio sanctorum}: participation in the goods of salvation (the first sense) brings about fellowship among believers (the second sense). This fellowship, however, is not an end in itself but serves the Church’s mission to build up the Reign of the freedom of the children of God in the world. For Kasper, then, the Church as the sacrament of \textit{communio} between God and human beings was also the communally-structured sacrament of \textit{communio} among all human beings.


\textsuperscript{55} For his first sketch of a \textit{communio}-ecclesiology, see Kasper, “Kirche als Communio,” in TK 1:272-89.
One final aspect of Kasper's sacramental ecclesiology, which emerged especially from his reflections on Vatican II but was also present in various ways throughout his ecclesiological writings, is pertinent to the present discussion. During the 1970s, Kasper began to use the language of *Lumen gentium*, no. 8—the one Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church—to describe the permanent connection between the sacramental 'sign' of the Church and that which it signifies. This idea from the Council highlights the ecumenical dimension of Kasper's sacramental ecclesiology. On the one hand, it expressed the normativity of the concrete Catholic Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, 'the' public sign and instrument of God's love and faithfulness to human beings and the whole of creation. On the other hand, by using the somewhat obscure phrase *subsistit in* instead of the simpler *est*, the Council according to Kasper had refrained from identifying the 'sign' totally with the 'signified,' thus acknowledging God's sovereign freedom to use persons and communities outside the Catholic Church as signs and instruments of divine fidelity to the world. Thus, when Kasper discussed the *subsistit in* of *Lumen gentium* 8 in some detail, he also called attention to the very next words of the document: “many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside of its visible structure.” For Kasper, moreover, this “sanctification and truth” could even in some particular instances be signified more clearly outside the Catholic Church than within its sacramental structure. If one moves from an exclusive focus on the question, “Which Church is the Church founded by Christ?” to consider also the question, “What best enables the Church to carry out its mission?”—the horizon to which Kasper's sacramental ecclesiology, working in tandem with his theology of

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57 See Ökumene 343; KK 263-64.
tradition, draws attention—one is not only open to but positively urged for the sake of the Gospel to pursue an exchange of gifts between churches, that is, an ecumenical dialogue.

On the framework of his symbolic-sacramental conception of tradition, Kasper fashioned his idea of the Church as a communally-structured sacrament. As Kasper argued in 1987, a Church so understood is dialogical in its very essence. This Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, the 'official' sign and instrument of the Reign of God for the whole world. Precisely this sacramental character, however, means that the Church is not a self-sufficient dispenser of salvation; it must rather conform itself to the salvific will of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, God manifests this will not only in the leaders of the Church but in the charisms bestowed on all its members; only through dialogue and cooperation among these diverse members can the Church effectively carry out its salvific mission within the world. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit also carries out the eschatological transformation of the world through various peoples and communities other than the 'official' sacrament of God's Reign.58 Through its dialogue with these communities, the Church discerns aspects of the mystery of Christ that it has not yet fully realized in itself and so conforms itself ever more fully to its own essence, mystery, and mission as the one holy Church of Christ. The Church as sacrament of salvation is the dialogue-partner that corresponds to the dialogical structure of tradition.

C. Conclusion

Chapter five argued that Kasper closely connected the faithfulness of God with his understanding of theological truth. The fact that this notion of truth was central to his account of tradition meant that for him, divine fidelity played an important role in tradition. By way of a summary of the foregoing discussion, it may be helpful to elaborate on this role. For Kasper,

history and freedom give rise to difference, newness, tension. Human traditions, while essentially oriented toward truth, can nevertheless go astray amid change. The tradition of the Church, however, has both a divine and a human element: divine address is in the world insofar as it has a human response. The eschatological finality of the Christ event means that the response of the Church united to him can never fundamentally fall away from the truth. At the same time, this union is not an identification between Christ and the Church; this unity always includes a difference, namely, Christ's Lordship over the Church. Divine tradition, the living voice of the Gospel, is the conscience of the Church; it is united with the Church, and yet stands over against it; it is *Gabe und Aufgabe*, both a gift to the Church and a perpetual responsibility to repent from sin and seek purification and renewal. At the center of Kasper's understanding of tradition, which can neither be identified with the Church nor separated from it, one finds a unique relationship between God and human beings, the dialogue of (special) salvation history, the stability and irreversibility of which have their roots in the fidelity of God.

By divine faithfulness, God maintains the link between the Church in its sojourn through history and its “Beginning in Fullness,” the definitive revelation of God in the crucified and risen Christ.\(^{59}\) This happens not in a static but in a dynamic way, through the working of the Holy Spirit who in every historical situation reminds the Church of its origins and so leads it ever more deeply into the full truth of Christ. God's fidelity is in this sense the unifying factor amidst the tensions between the different witnesses to the one tradition. This fidelity, in the form of the *analogia fidei*, is what holds scripture, as the written testament to the apostolic kerygma, together with its living interpretation in the life and teaching of the Church. It is also what binds the faithful, in their ongoing discernment of the spiritual sense of scripture, with the magisterium of

\(^{59}\) On Möhler's concept of “Beginning in Fullness,” see above, p. 61.
the Church, whose authoritative judgments do not replace the *sensus fidelium* but serve to maintain the Church's rootedness in the whole tradition and so to foster its freedom. This same faithfulness finally ties the Church to the world. For the same God who is faithful to the Church also remains faithful to creation: divine fidelity unites the special history of salvation to general salvation history. This grounds the correspondence (*analogia entis*) between the definitive Truth of revelation and all that is true and good in the world's great cultures, religions, and scholarly traditions: truth cannot contradict truth.

Thus, Kasper's understanding of tradition in terms of faithfulness is a principle of dialogue. Between the sacred page and the contemporary believer, between exegete and dogmatician, between the lay faithful and the official teachers of the Church, between the whole Church and those who stand outside its walls, divine fidelity establishes a reciprocal relationship while respecting the abiding distinction between the 'dialogue-partners.' It is the foundation for an open, dialogical ecclesial identity. Conversely, dialogue pursued in honest commitment to tradition is transformed from a mere exchange of niceties to the place in which the Fidelity-Truth of God is disclosed anew, a foretaste of the Reign that brings about reconciliation, justice, and peace. Thus, when one conceives tradition with Kasper as essentially rooted in God's faithfulness, dialogue emerges as the fundamental praxis of tradition.

II. The Living Tradition in Dialogue

If the above analysis is correct, then for Kasper, dialogue and tradition are mutually interdependent: dialogue depends on tradition as that which establishes the necessary conditions for dialogue, including the stability or self-identity of the dialogue-partners, while tradition depends on dialogue as the concrete, living manifestation of tradition, the medium in which the
vitality of tradition makes its mark on the world. If this is the case, then one would expect that Kasper's theology of tradition would have some impact on his understanding and praxis of ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue. The following will analyze two examples of dialogue in Kasper's career from the perspective of his theology of tradition: his involvement in the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism, and his contributions to the dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. This investigation will serve to illustrate the potential and the practical consequences of Kasper's dialogical theology of tradition, and by extension, his notion of divine faithfulness.

A. Jewish-Christian Dialogue

1. Kasper and Judaism prior to 2001

Kasper's participation in the Church's dialogue with Judaism can only be properly understood against the background of a revolutionary change in the relationship between Christians and Jews that took place after the conclusion of the Second World War. The Shoah—the systematic slaughter of six million Jews carried out by the Third Reich under the leadership of Adolf Hitler—provoked a much-needed examination of conscience within the Christian world. Although the racial ideology of the Nazi regime was a novelty in comparison to the anti-Jewish attitudes that prevailed in medieval Europe, the long and shameful history of antipathy toward Jews within Christendom led in the case of far too many believers to tolerance and indifference for,

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and even to active participation in, the atrocities of the Third Reich. Consequently, one of the first public statements by Christians in response to the Shoah, namely, the “Address to the Churches” produced by the Seelisberg Conference (Switzerland, July 30-Aug. 5, 1947), not only condemned anti-Semitism but implored Christians to avoid presenting the faith in a way that would “support antisemitism under whatever form.” In the years that followed, churches and Christian groups made further statements condemning anti-Semitism and presenting guidelines for Christian discourse about Jews and Judaism. At the request of Pope John XXIII, Cardinal Augustin Bea produced a document on the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people that was eventually promulgated as section four of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions Nostra aetate (1965). This statement condemned anti-Semitism in all its forms, basing this condemnation not only on human dignity and the law of love but on the unique relationship that exists between the Church and Israel.


From a Kasperean perspective, *Nostra aetate* must be regarded as a moment in the living tradition of the Church. This means, on the one hand, that as a conciliar declaration, an act of the magisterium of the universal Church, *Nostra aetate* constitutes an irreversible determination of the Church in its relationship to the Jewish people. As head of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Kasper repeatedly cited this document as proof of the Church's permanent commitment to dialogue with Judaism, as will be seen below. On the other hand, as Kasper has repeatedly asserted, tradition can never be reduced to the acts of the magisterium. The official teaching of the Church is one thing; the process by which the Church receives this teaching, comes to understand it more fully, relates it to the central mysteries of the faith, integrates it into the whole tradition, and then incorporates it into the Church's life, liturgy, interpersonal relationships, charitable activity, and missionary work, giving it flesh and blood and breath, is another. This difference becomes very clear in the case of Christian-Jewish relations: given the ponderous history of Christian hostility and persecution against Jews, one could not expect that the mere promulgation of a document would be enough to bring about reconciliation. As Kasper observed during his tenure as head of the CRRJ, *Nostra aetate* was only “the beginning of a new beginning.”

The significance of *Nostra aetate* should be measured within the context of broader changes within the relationship between Jews and Catholics. The legacy of Pope John Paul II represents perhaps the best indicator of a positive change in the dialogical climate triggered by the Council's declaration. From his historic 1986 visit to the synagogue in Rome to his

64 See Kasper, “Christians, Jews, and the Thorny Question of Mission” (see p. 43n110, above), 459, 461, 464.

pilgrimage to the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2000, John Paul earned his reputation as a pioneer in the work of reconciliation between Christians and Jews. In addition to the acts of individuals, however, Jews and Christians have also organized institutional structures to facilitate the growth of this relationship. In this area, Americans led the way with the establishment of bodies like the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' sub-commission for Catholic-Jewish Affairs (later the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations) and publications like the Journal of Ecumenical Studies at Temple University (an early forum for studies in Jewish-Christian as well as ecumenical dialogue). International organizations have since followed. In 1970, representatives from Rome and from the International Jewish Commission for Interreligious Consultations formed the International Jewish-Catholic Liaison Committee (ILC). Four years later, the Vatican created the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ), a permanent organ of the Roman Curia for the promotion of Catholic-Jewish relations in the universal Church; this body was later attached to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Among the CRRJ's contributions to the realization of the vision of Nostra aetate are three significant documents: “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra aetate, no. 4” (1974),66 “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church” (1985),67 and “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” (1998).68 Although a number of concrete consequences within the life of the Church—a thoroughgoing change in the presentation of Jews in catechesis, for example—


still remain to be implemented, what has actually followed from the promulgation of Nostra aetate amounts to a reversal of the former trajectory of Catholic-Jewish relations.

Kasper entered into his academic career just as this official dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism was commencing. Jewish-Christian dialogue, however, was not a focal point of his research. This fact was reflected in remarks Kasper made when he took on the role of the head of the CRRJ, a responsibility that fell to him as the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He stated at that time that he did not feel qualified to carry out the responsibilities of the head of the CRRJ, since had not engaged with the theological questions raised by Jewish-Christian dialogue in a substantive way during his academic career.69

A comparison of Kasper's Jesus der Christus (1974) with the Christology text his colleague and friend Hans Küng published the same year, Christ sein,70 illustrates the relatively minor degree to which the early Kasper was involved in the still-young fraternal and theological dialogue between Jews and Catholics. Küng counted as one of the chief motivating factors behind his Christology text not only the dialogue among all the world religions but particularly the dialogue between Christians and Jews.71 By approaching Jesus “from below” through the application of historical-critical methods, Küng hoped to find a new starting point for Jewish-Christian dialogue over Jesus, one that did not insist from the outset upon post-biblical dogmatic assertions about Jesus's divinity.72 By contrast, Jesus der Christus did not demonstrate any particular interest on Kasper's part in the special relationship between Judaism and Christianity.


70 Hans Küng, Christ sein (Munich: R. Piper, 1974).


Because Kasper was concerned to ground the unique identity and the universal relevance of Christianity in the confession that Jesus is the Christ, he tended to emphasize the scandalous uniqueness of Jesus over against his Jewish contemporaries. He thereby left ambiguous the status of rabbinic Judaism until the end of the book, where he briefly developed a positive connection between salvation in Christ and all the world religions, including Judaism by implication. Kasper’s statement in *Jesus der Christus* that “Israel as a whole” rejected Jesus may be recalled in this connection. As was argued in chapter four, these words reflected the contrast between Jesus's message and person and the reactions of those to whom he addressed his message, including even his own disciples. Although these words contained no apparent anti-Jewish sentiment, and while it would be anachronistic to measure them against the “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate, no. 4,” nevertheless, by speaking of the rejection of Jesus by “Israel as a whole,” Kasper seemed to be presenting all Jews, or at least all those in first-century Palestine, as Jesus's enemies, a practice that the 1947 “Address” of the International Council of Christians and Jews had already implored Christians to avoid. It seems unlikely that Kasper took this into account when he wrote his Christology book.

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73 On the newness of Jesus vis-a-vis his Palestinian Jewish context, see JC 77-82.
74 See JC 320-22.
75 JC 91, 120, 143; for discussion, see p. 187, above.
76 The present study concurs on this point with the critiques of Gerard Sloyan and William Loewe. See Gerard S. Sloyan, review of *Jesus the Christ, Commonweal*, April 14, 1978, 253-54; Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper” (see p. 7n3, above), 47-48.
77 In the introduction to the new edition of *Jesus der Christus*, however, Kasper alluded to the new state of relations between Christians and Jews that would need to be taken into account in constructing a comparable Christology today. See Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, WKGS 3 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007), 13.
Dialogue between Christians and Jews, particularly on a theological level, was still quite a new thing to Kasper when he published *Jesus der Christus* in 1974. In the same year, Kasper made a positive contribution to Jewish-Christian relations by editing, in collaboration with Hans Küng, “Christen und Juden,” the first volume of *Concilium* dedicated to this topic. In the editorial introduction to the volume, which he co-authored with Küng, the two Tübingen professors lamented that in the encounters between Jews and Christians that had taken place within the decade following *Nostra aetate*, religious convictions and theological understanding have usually remained off the table. With “Christen und Juden,” the editors of *Concilium* intended to compensate for this deficit by providing a public forum for a substantive theological dialogue between Christians and Jews, in hopes that such an effort might help break down mistrust between the two sides, as well as a degree of ignorance of Jews and Judaism that continued to persist on the Christian side. Given his later comments about his lack of involvement in this area, it is not hard to imagine that Kasper had himself in mind when he wrote these words.

Whether or not this editorial represented an admission of ignorance on the part of the editors, it reflected a real deficit within the German-language theological context of the day. In 1977, a Jewish-Christian dialogue group (Gesprächskreis Juden und Christen) under the umbrella of the Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken charged the theological faculty of the University of Freiburg with the task of improving the presentation of Jews and Judaism within Catholic religious education, catechesis, and priestly formation within the German context, in compliance

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with *Nostra aetate* and the “Guidelines and Suggestions” for its implementation produced by the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1974. The first stage of this project or *Lernprozess Christen Juden*, in which the participants studied print materials used in religious education and catechesis, revealed that *Nostra aetate* had unfortunately had little tangible effect within these crucial areas.\(^{81}\) According to their analysis, catechists and educators were handicapped by the paucity and inaccessibility of theological reflection on the current state of the question of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Hence, in a second stage of this *Lernprozess*, the research team proposed theological foundations and a didactic model for the construction of more adequate religious education materials. In the articulation of these foundations, however, the team was itself hampered by the relative absence of Catholic theological studies, to say nothing of a theological consensus, over the questions touching Jewish-Christian relations. They therefore sought to supplement this deficit in two ways: through collaboration with scholars in other contexts, such as the theological faculty at Temple University in Philadelphia, and through a survey that posed some key questions about a Catholic understanding of Judaism to prominent German theologians.

Kasper was one of five theologians—of whom Wilhelm Breuning, Bernhard Casper, Klaus Hemmerle, and Karl Lehmann were the others—whose responses to the questionnaire were published in *Freiburger Leitlinien zum Lernprozess Christen Juden*.\(^{82}\) His response represented his first published theological reflection on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.\(^{83}\) Accordingly, he presented his reflections as preliminary ideas, addressing not so much

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\(^{81}\) See Peter Fiedler, ed., *Das Judentum im katholischen Religionsunterricht: Analysen, Bewertungen, Perspektiven*, Lernprozess Christen Juden 1 (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1980).

\(^{82}\) The questions posed and the five responses are reprinted in Biemer, *Freiburger Leitlinien zum Lernprozess Christen Juden*, 134-57.

\(^{83}\) On what follows, see Hinweise 150-51.
the individual questions of the survey as their underlying themes, doing so more briefly than any other respondent (in little over two pages), and entitling this piece *Hinweise*, “indications” or “suggestions.” Recalling his resolution of the identity-relevance dilemma in *Jesus der Christus* and anticipating *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Kasper observed that the data of scripture, tradition, and history are ambiguous when considered apart from a basic faith-option, adding that the faith-option of the Christian clearly differs from that of the Jew. One risks losing one's identity as a Christian when one decides solely on the basis of sensitivity to one's Jewish dialogue-partner whether one will consider Romans 9-11 a 'canon within the canon' or how one will appraise the religious significance of the person and ministry of Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection. For Kasper, belief in Jesus as the definitive bringer of salvation is the fundamental hermeneutical option apart from which the whole edifice of Christian faith falls apart.

On the other hand, when the Christian firmly anchors himself or herself in the option for faith in Christ, new possibilities for conceiving the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and thus new opportunities for dialogue, open up. Kasper saw this basic option for Jesus's unique salvific significance best expressed in the Überbietungsformeln or “superlative formulas” of the New Testament (as for example in Matthew 12:41-42: “something greater than Jonah,” “something greater than Solomon”). For Kasper, however, this option in no way diminished that which Jews and Christians have in common. When one looks upon the unique claim of Jesus in the new light of present-day interreligious experience, one can understand it

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84 Hinweise 150.
85 Hinweise 150; compare Biemer, *Freiburger Leitlinien zum Lernprozess Christen Juden*, 135.
86 On the relationship between Jews and Christians in the present day, see Hinweise 151-52.
87 Hinweise 152.
“not merely in an exclusive sense but at the same time inclusive in its exclusivity.” Thus, although the Christian cannot acknowledge any way of salvation independent of the cross of Christ, he or she can recognize in the Jewish religion (among other places) salvific events that anticipate or re-present in some way Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. This statement has important consequences for Kasper's understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. It suggests that when Kasper spoke of Christ as the surpassing fulfillment of God's promises to Israel—a key element in Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness—he did not understand this in the sense of the substitution-theory, in which God rejected the original people of the covenant, substituting the Church in their place as the “New Israel.” As will be seen below, Kasper made this more explicit in his reflections on the biblical notion of covenant during his time as head of the CRRJ.

Kasper added one further point of significance for Jewish-Christian dialogue. He observed that the Überbietung-model could incorporate what he called the model of representation. In conjunction with the model provided by Romans 9-11, this model of representation provided Kasper with the basic framework in which he would interpret the relationship between contemporary Judaism and Christianity. Kasper had explained his notion of representation in Jesus der Christus within the context of his model of human interpersonal existence, as discussed above in chapter four. The solidarity that exists among human beings rests on the fact that each person makes room for the freedom of every other: each uniquely represents all. Jesus does this in an unsurpassable way: precisely because Jesus is the one

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88 Hinweise 152.
89 Hinweise 152.
90 On Kasper's notion of representation, see Hinweise 151-52.
mediator between God and human beings, he is also the new Adam, the one representative of all humankind, who does not cancel out but rather enables each person to be a representative on behalf of others. Within this model, one could begin to envisage the relationship between Christians and Jews not as a monologue but as an exchange of gifts in which each has something unique to offer to the other. As Kasper put it: “Present-day Judaism and Christianity are sich wechselseitig [mutual, reciprocal] signs of divine judgment and divine mercy for one another.”

Twelve years later, disturbed by a growing conviction that the “atheism of the masses” posed a grave threat to the contemporary world, Kasper enlarged his appreciation for the particular gifts the Jewish people offer to Christians and to all humankind. In 1993 Kasper, as bishop of Rottenberg-Stuttgart, delivered a lecture to the Gesellschaft für Christliche-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Society for Christian-Jewish Collaboration) on the fifty-fifth anniversary of the pogrom orchestrated by the Nazi regime against the Jewish population of Germany, commonly known as Kristallnacht. Although this crime, carried out by the Third Reich against its own people, was itself repulsive enough, Kasper highlighted the still more troubling fact that the majority of the German populace responded to the pogrom not with outrage but indifference.

Half a century later, Kasper saw a new kind of indifference threatening the peoples of Europe: not an indifference toward evil, but an individualistic tolerance that was satisfied merely to withdraw from participation in evil while remaining indifferent toward the good of one's neighbor. This for Kasper represented nothing less than a loss of the dimension of responsibility,

92 Hinweise 152.

93 On Massenatheismus as a sign of the times, see DG 18-24.


a removal of the transcendent dimension from conscious human existence, the ultimate cause of
which was indifference toward God.

In light of this troubling state of affairs, Kasper charged Jews and Christians alike to be
prophetic witnesses on behalf of human responsibility before God and one another.96 He pointed
out that the common heritage binding Christians and Jews has preserved this responsibility of the
“I” before the “Thou,” a central theme of contemporary personalist philosophy, since both
traditions are rooted in an “I-Thou” relationship with God.97 For Kasper, this common heritage
did not mean that Jews and Christians should relate to one another merely as reminders of their
common past. It rather calls Christians and Jews to encounter one another as brothers who draw
their identity and their life from a common source and who are thereby empowered to testify to
one another about their hope in the God who saves, each in their own way.98 This fact underlined
for Kasper the need for Christians, particularly in Germany, to repent of the violence and
persecution directed against Jews in which Christians have directly participated or toward which
they have turned a blind eye. He further urged Christians and Jews to join together in witness to
their common hope in God and to the dignity of each person created in God's image, which
precludes every form of violence, injustice, and indifference.

In the few publications Kasper produced during his academic and episcopal careers that
touched on Jewish-Christian relations, one can observe Kasper appropriating the teaching of
Nostra aetate in a gradual way, reflecting in his own person the general process of reception that,
according to his theology of tradition, takes place in the Church after the promulgation of any

96 On Christian-Jewish relations in the present, see Kasper, “Die Reichspogromnacht und die


magisterial teaching. Although the officially sanctioned Catholic-Jewish dialogue that developed after the Second Vatican Council apparently had very little impact on Kasper's theology at first, as his thinking matured, he began to draw connections between this dialogue and his central theological concerns, Christology and the theology of God. These initial connections anticipated his contributions to Jewish-Christian dialogue as head of the CRRJ, when he reflected in greater depth on the mystery of divine faithfulness in light of the new situation of relationship between the Church and Judaism.

2. Kasper’s contributions after 2001

In 2001, Kasper received the cardinal's hat and was installed as the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). This placed him at the head of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ), a body united with the PCPCU. As head of these two groups until his retirement in 2010, Kasper was a member of the Roman Curia and thus a participant in the ministry of the church of Rome. He thereby took on a qualitatively new role within the living tradition in general and the Catholic-Jewish dialogue in particular. Just as Kasper understood ecclesial authority not as that which ends all dialogue but as the power to foster and facilitate communication and dialogue within the Church, all the more as head of the CRRJ did Kasper intend “to promote dialogue, and not to officially guide its development or to decide on its outcome.” Through his curial ministry, Kasper embodied the living tradition of the Church in a new way, by his fostering of as well as his participation in Jewish-Christian dialogue.

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100 Kasper, “Christians, Jews, and the Thorny Question of Mission” (see p. 43n110, above), 459.
From the very beginning of his tenure as head of the CRRJ, Kasper unambiguously confirmed his commitment, and the commitment of the Catholic Church, to strengthening the relationship between Jews and Christians through dialogue. Thus, at the beginning of his welcome address to the 2001 meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in New York City, he stated: “I am committed to this task. I am committed to work together with you for the reconciliation of our two faith communities, on the basis of a total mutual respect for our respective traditions and convictions.”

Kasper reinforced this theme in a talk titled “Spiritual and Ethical Commitment in Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” which he delivered two months later at a meeting of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Here Kasper discussed the twofold foundation of present-day Catholic-Jewish relations, which were declared binding upon the Church in 1965 with the promulgation of *Nostra aetate*: the inviolable dignity of the human person, which excludes anti-Semitism along with every form of hatred and persecution, and the unique relationship that exists between Christians and Jews as sons of Abraham, worshippers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and believers in the promises made to the patriarchs. The dialogue that followed *Nostra aetate* confirmed the fundamental principles of this relationship both through a clarification of the meaning of dialogue, in which one does justice to one's partner by respecting the partner's deeply-held religious convictions, and through a deepening shared reflection on the roots of their mutual commitment to justice in the religious heritage Jews and Christians hold in common, their belief that the human person is

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made in the divine image. Thus, both the binding teaching of the Church and subsequent statements, gestures, and experiences verify Catholic commitment to the ongoing Jewish-Christian dialogue.

In subsequent statements and public remarks, Kasper frequently reiterated the themes expressed in these addresses—mindfulness of the pain Christians have caused to Jews throughout their history as well as the atrocities of the Shoah, *Teshuva* (repentance) for the sins of Christians against Jews, the irrevocable character of *Nostra aetate*, its condemnation of anti-Semitism, the common heritage that binds Christians and Jews, the nature of dialogue as an encounter involving both authentic witness to the truth and unconditional respect for the otherness of one's dialogue-partner, the Church's permanent commitment to dialogue with the Jewish community, and the words, deeds, and personal witnesses that have embodied this commitment. It is worth mentioning here that the notion of God's faithfulness (loyalty, truthfulness) to Israel has also frequently recurred in Kasper's statements as head of the CRRJ, usually in connection to the theology of the covenant, as will be seen below. He constantly underlined these themes because he was aware that the wounds of the past posed no small obstacle to communication between Christians and Jews. In this light, it is understandable that an out-of-context statement or a careless gesture from the Christian side could quickly become an occasion for offense on the Jewish side, regardless of its intention. He understood the importance of affirming the stability of the relationship in the face of such a dialogical crisis.

A crisis of this kind, sparked by the promulgation of *Dominus Iesus* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on August 6, 2000, was already underway when Kasper took office.\(^{104}\) This declaration was widely understood as undercutting the foundations of

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\(^{104}\) On the reactions to *Dominus Iesus*, see Richard Boudreaux and Larry B. Stammer, “Vatican Declares Catholicism Sole Path to Salvation,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2000, accessed August 12, 2015,
interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. Its publication prompted leaders of the Jewish community in Rome to withdraw from a Vatican-sponsored Day of Jewish-Christian Dialogue that had been scheduled for October 3, 2000 but was subsequently postponed indefinitely.105 Addressing these concerns, Kasper acknowledged that this document evoked “painful memories of the past” and expressed his regret that it hurt and offended many Jews.106 He explained that this was not the document’s intent; *Dominus Iesus* was an instruction aimed at Catholic theologians to address certain pluralistic theories of religion that were threatening to undermine the self-understanding of Christianity, as well as that of Judaism, as revealed religions.107 This instruction, Kasper pointed out, was but one document among many. Taken together, the official statements of the Church and its leaders since *Nostra aetate*, including a clarification by the then-prefect of the CDF, Cardinal Ratzinger,108 bespeak the uniqueness of the Church’s relationship to Judaism and its consequent commitment to Christian-Jewish dialogue. This fact in no way eliminates the very real differences of conviction that separate the two communities, which need to be respected in dialogue; such differences came to pointed expression in *Dominus Iesus*. Still, neither *Dominus Iesus* nor any other single official statement on Jewish-Christian dialogue could


105 See margin notes in Origins, October 5, 2000, 263-64.

106 Kasper, “Good Olive Tree” (see p. 43n110, above), 13. See also “Jewish-Christian Dialogue” (see p. 331n75, above).

107 On what follows, see Kasper, “Good Olive Tree.”

address every aspect of the relationship between the Church and Judaism. It left such questions open to further discussion and reflection.

One such question was how the covenant God struck with Israel relates to what Christians call the new covenant. In his remarks on *Dominus Iesus*, Kasper observed that *Nostra aetate* definitively excluded the theory of substitution, an old and widespread theological opinion that asserted that Israel had been rejected and replaced by the Church as the new covenant people.109 On the other hand, Kasper rejected the idea of a “mere coexistence between the two covenants” as incompatible with the self-understanding of both communities as well as with their unique relationship.110 How then can one articulate the theology of covenant while doing justice to both Christians and Jews?

At a dialogue dealing with the theme of covenant held at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT in December 2001, Kasper made his first attempt to develop such a theology.111 Without presuming to articulate an understanding of covenant that would be entirely acceptable to his Jewish interlocutors, he proffered a reading of the concept of covenant in the Old Testament that mirrored his typological theory of tradition. On the one hand, the formula “I am your God, you are my people” captured for Kasper the unity and essence of the covenant.112 On the other hand, since this covenant-relationship has a historical term, namely, the people of Israel, the history of this people is also a history of the ups and downs of this relationship, of

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112 Kasper cited Leviticus 26:12 and Jeremiah 7:23, but this formula appears in other passages as well: Jeremiah 11:4, 30:22; Ezekiel 36:28. Given the eschatological tendencies of Kasper’s theology, it is somewhat surprising that the quoted formula appears in the present rather than the future tense. See “Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”
infidelity and its consequences as well as repentance, mercy, restored fidelity, and the formation of new or renewed covenants: the covenant with Noah, that with Abraham and his descendants, the Mosaic covenant on Sinai, the renewal of this covenant at key moments in Israel's history, and finally the prophetic promise of a future eternal covenant. For Kasper, this series of covenant-renewals corresponded to a series of theologies of the covenant; here he distinguished a deuteronomic, a priestly, and a prophetic interpretation. The New Testament located itself within this framework: the Last Supper tradition in Paul and Luke attached itself to the prophetic idea of a new covenant, while the Mark-Matthew tradition spoke in priestly language of the blood of the covenant. The point of both traditions was that the covenant finds its fulfillment in the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Most Jews, however, could not accept this message, and it became the dividing line between Christians and Jews. Second Corinthians and especially Hebrews sharpened this discontinuity by drawing a contrast between the new covenant in Christ and the old covenant. For Kasper, however, these epistles did not go so far as to suggest that the new covenant supplanted and replaced the old, an idea that first appeared in the Letter of Barnabas and the writings of Justin.\footnote{Kasper, “Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”}

Although this substitution theory led to a widespread portrayal of rabbinic Judaism as “an obsolete, outdated religion” within Christian artwork and culture, it never became official Church teaching.\footnote{On traditional accounts of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, see Kasper, “Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”} In fact, according to Kasper, most of the Christian tradition showed little interest in developing an explicit theology of covenant. The Lutheran tradition dealt with covenant within the law-gospel framework, while Catholic theology thought in terms of the old and the new law, relating the old covenant to the new covenant as “promise and preparation” to
“superior fulfillment.” Much later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Reformed tradition developed a “foederal theology” that had an impact on Pietism and Idealist philosophy, and in the twentieth century, Karl Barth made his own original contribution to this field. Kasper credited to ecumenical theology (which influenced Nostra aetate) and to recent exegetical work a more profound reflection on God's “unshakeable loyalty” in the light of a new reading of Romans 9-11, which led to the theory of the “unbroken covenant” between God and Israel. Unlike the substitution theory, this new idea allowed Christians to affirm the abiding significance of the Jewish community within salvation history on the basis of divine fidelity.

According to Kasper, Nostra aetate and the “unbroken covenant” theory left open to theological speculation “the crucial issue of the Jewish-Christian dialogue,” namely, how the old covenant in its permanent validity relates to what the New Testament calls the “new” and “eternal” covenant. He spoke of a plurality of theories rather than a consensus over this question among either Catholic or Protestant theologians. One theory, which asserts the existence of only one covenant tradition, tended for Kasper to endanger the uniqueness and identity of either Judaism or Christianity, while the complementary theory of two covenants ran the risk of obscuring the Church's indissoluble link to its Jewish roots. For his part, Kasper aligned himself with Barth: because this relationship between covenants and covenant-peoples has its roots in the eternal mystery of divine election, it must also be described as a mystery. It cannot for Kasper be reduced to a neat theological formula, except perhaps for a negation like that used by Chalcedon.

118 On the mystery of God's covenant(s) with Israel and the Church, see Kasper, “Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue”; “Issues Concerning Future Dialogue between Jews and Christians” (see p. 43n110, above).
to describe the unity between Christ's two natures: "without confusion and without separation."\textsuperscript{119} Its ultimate meaning will only be disclosed in the eschaton.

The mystery of the Church and Israel can, however, be portrayed in images.\textsuperscript{120} Paul's parable of the wild olive branch of the Gentile church grafted to the Jewish rootstock is prominent among those evoked by Kasper. He also adopted the image of Jews and Christians as brothers—an image used by Pope John Paul II, among others—as well as Abraham Heschel's image of a mother (Judaism) and her child (Christianity). Far from mere flights of fancy, such metaphors have practical consequences for Kasper. Jewish identity and Christian identity are permanently distinct realities—the familial images make this especially clear—yet these communities have at the same time a uniquely intimate relationship with one another. According to Kasper, the Gentile Church draws strength from its Jewish roots (see Rom. 11:17-24); conversely, when the Church turns itself against Judaism, as it has done so often, it atrophies, wavering in the commitment to justice that is part and parcel of its identity. Citing Heschel, Kasper suggested that something similar might be said of Judaism. Hence, “for the sake of their respective religious identities, Jews and Christians cannot turn away from each other. In their diversity, they are dependent on one another.”\textsuperscript{121} In this sense, Kasper could apply the notion of an exchange of gifts to relations between Christians and Jews, and not only to the ecumenical relations between Christian churches.\textsuperscript{122}


\textsuperscript{120} On the biblical images for the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, see Kasper, “Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”

\textsuperscript{121} Kasper, “Theology of the Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”

The special relationship between Judaism and Christianity lays the groundwork for fraternal cooperation in the work of making the Reign of God manifest in the world. In “Juden und Christen—Schulter an Schulter,” Kasper identified three areas in which the combined efforts of Christians and Jews promise to strengthen both communities as well as to edify the world. To put the matter another way: in these three areas, Jews and Christians can carry out in tandem the task of tradition. First, as communities whose respective identities are grounded in remembrance of God’s saving acts in history, Jews and Christians together can keep alive the “dangerous memory” of the turbulent history of their relations, warning future generations to avoid the mistakes of their past and pointing the way forward to a more just and godly future. Second, as peoples awaiting in hope the consummation of God’s promise of salvation for the world, Christians and Jews together can be prophetic witnesses to the goodness of creation, the inviolable dignity of each bearer of the image and likeness of God, and the responsibility of the human family to work for authentic peace and justice. The messianic consciousness of these communities should likewise unite them against every false prophecy, every inner-worldly ideology and every “final solution” to the problems facing humankind. Finally, as distinct and irreducible faith-traditions, Judaism and Christianity can enter into a dialogue with one another in order to understand and acknowledge the unique identity of each tradition, to practice mutual respect for one another in their differences, and even sometimes to challenge one another and thus to learn from one another. Standing “shoulder to shoulder” in this way, Christians and Jews in dialogue can be in all their differences a sign and foretaste for the world of the peace, justice,


and solidarity among peoples promised by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.\textsuperscript{126} Through shared memory, messianic consciousness, and dialogue, Christians and Jews can cooperate in the “mission of God” which is also the mission of the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation and heir of the divine tradition.\textsuperscript{127}

Given that the Church and Judaism share a common mission to the world, is there nevertheless also a sense in which the Church has a mission to the Jews? In 2002, this sensitive question, which has evoked painful memories of Jews forced to convert to Christianity, came to the fore within the American context in an animated discussion among Christians and Jews triggered by the publication of “Reflections on Covenant and Mission,” a document published under the auspices of the National Council of Synagogues and the USCCB’s Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.\textsuperscript{128} Kasper himself had broached the question of mission in a 2001 piece in which he argued that Judaism occupies a singular place in Church teaching that was in no way diminished by the promulgation of \textit{Dominus Iesus}.\textsuperscript{129} There he argued that 'mission' in the sense of a call to conversion from idolatry to the one true God did not apply to Judaism. This for Kasper explained why the Church sponsors no organized mission to the Jews. The Catholic co-authors of “Reflections on Covenant and Mission,” who cited Kasper's 2001

\textsuperscript{126} The phrase refers to a rabbinic gloss on Zechariah 14:9, according to which Israel will stand “shoulder to shoulder” with the nations on the day of the Lord, united by faith in the one God. See Kasper, “Juden und Christen – Schulter an Schulter,” 256.

\textsuperscript{127} On the mission of God as the basis for the theology of mission, see KK 413-14.


\textsuperscript{129} On the meaning of a Christian mission to the Jews, see Kasper, “Good Olive Tree,” 14.
comments, went still further.\textsuperscript{130} They argued that the Jewish people is called to a distinctive mission in the divine plan of salvation that corresponds to the unbroken covenant with God in which this people still stands. Consequently, although Christians may and ought to enter into interreligious dialogue with, and in this sense evangelize, Jews, they may no longer pursue the conversion of Jews to Christianity, since this would disrupt the special mission entrusted by God to the Jewish people. This conclusion triggered glowing praise from some and sharp criticism from others. For Cardinal Avery Dulles, it was tantamount to a surrendering of the Christian's obligation to preach the Gospel to all nations.\textsuperscript{131}

Later the same year, the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College invited Kasper to speak on this hot-button question.\textsuperscript{132} With some trepidation, he consented. In his talk, he argued that the difficult and uncomfortable nature of the question of mission resulted not only from the word 'mission' and its associations with force and even violence directed against Jews by Christians, but also from the fact that this word highlights basic differences between the two traditions. Thus, on the one hand, Kasper maintained in continuity with his previous reflections that, because of what Christians and Jews have in common “and because as Christians we know that God's covenant with Israel by God's faithfulness is not broken (Rom. 11:29; cf. 3:4), mission understood as call to conversion from idolatry to the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9) does not apply and cannot be applied to Jews.”\textsuperscript{133} Consequently, “[t]here cannot be the same kind of behavior toward Jews as there exists toward gentiles,” as the absence of an organized Catholic

\textsuperscript{130} On the following, see USCCB Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission,” 219-21.


mission to the Jews attests. To this extent Kasper could agree with the delegates of the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. On the other hand, according to Kasper, one must qualify that precisely those common grounds on which Jews and Christians stand—the scriptures, the covenant, the promises of God, messianic hope—are also matters on whose interpretation they disagree. The Christian believes that she or he has encountered in Jesus the Messiah whose coming both Jews and Christians await, through whom God works the redemption of the whole world; this for Kasper implies that the continued efficacy of the Jewish covenant has its ultimate foundation in Jesus the Christ. If one joins the Second Vatican Council in describing Christian mission as “nothing else and nothing less than the manifestation of God's plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history” (Ad gentes, no. 9), then, Kasper concluded, this mission requires Christians to testify to their faith in Jesus Christ not only before the nations but also in Christian-Jewish dialogue. For Kasper, the same conclusion followed from the nature of authentic dialogue, which must acknowledge and not suppress the differences between dialogue-partners.

The main point of Kasper's talk was that the question of a Christian mission to Jews can only be adequately addressed within the larger question of a Christian theology of Judaism. According to Kasper, however, Catholics have yet to reach a consensus over such a theology. Perhaps the most characteristic aspect of this presentation was that it did not propose an exhaustive answer to the burning questions surrounding the mission-issue so much as a new


135 Compare Hinweise 151-52.


perspective and a stimulus to further discussion. Kasper understood “Reflections on Covenant and Mission” in the same vein, not as a statement of “the” Catholic position but as an attempt to advance the inner-ecclesial dialogue over the interpretation of Nostra aetate as well as to articulate its implications for the question of mission. By affirming the importance of this task and offering his own contribution, Kasper continued to model what he understood to be the ordinary function of ecclesiastical authority: to encourage and facilitate the ongoing dialogue of tradition within the Church, and by extension, that between Christians and Jews (and Muslims).

The present discussion has not dealt much with Kasper's use of the language of faithfulness within Jewish-Christian dialogue. In point of fact, it was quite common for Kasper, and indeed for many others, to speak of God's faithfulness to Israel in this context. Kasper sometimes cited John Paul II to precisely this effect. This pope and others tended to evoke this theme with reference to the idea of the “unbroken covenant,” which has since become commonplace in Jewish-Christian dialogue. References to the faithfulness of God played an important role in the Roman Catholic section of “Reflections on Covenant and Mission.” This document used several quotations from a presentation by Cardinal Kasper cited above, including the following: “God's grace, which is the grace of Jesus Christ according to our faith, is available to all. Therefore, the church believes that Judaism, i.e., the faithful response of the Jewish people

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141 See Kasper, “Relationship of Old and New Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue” (see p. 43n110, above); USCCB Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission,” 219.

142 USCCB Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission,” 218, 220.
to God's irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to his promises."\textsuperscript{143}

Finally, Kasper referred frequently to God's faithfulness or fidelity in a revised version of his 2001 lecture on the theology of covenant, titled “The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”\textsuperscript{144}

As Kasper observed in both of his treatments of the theology of covenant, however, the specific relationship between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” was in no way a settled issue. As has been shown, Kasper himself did not think this relationship could be reduced to a single formula, not even the language of faithfulness. Consequently, in some contexts he avoided speaking of God's faithfulness at all. For example, in a 2007 letter to Hanspeter Heinz, Kasper expressed his sympathy with Heinz's intention to affirm the continuing efficacy of God's covenant with Israel, which Heinz rightly grounded in divine faithfulness, and in his conclusion that Christians do not have a mission to the Jews in the same sense as to persons of other religions.\textsuperscript{145} Kasper, however, took issue with Heinz's suggestion that the salvation of the Jews takes place independently of Christ. Within the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue, Kasper asserted, the language of faithfulness of itself is ambiguous.

Kasper's theological reflections over Judaism during his ten years as head of the CRRJ followed the main lines he had established during his first few years in this office.\textsuperscript{146} In summary, it may be said that Kasper's contributions to Catholic-Jewish dialogue concretized his theology of tradition both in its form and in its content. In dialogue with Judaism, the Church as

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 220; Kasper, “Good Olive Tree,” 14.

\textsuperscript{144} See Kasper, “Relationship of Old and New Covenant as Central Issue in Jewish-Christian Dialogue.”


\textsuperscript{146} For recent examples of Kasper's theology of Jewish-Christian relations, see Kasper, “Juden und Christen—das eine Volk Gottes,” 418-27; foreword to \textit{Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today}, x-xviii.
a whole, and Kasper in particular, experienced what for Kasper is the perennial content of the
Christian tradition—the Faithfulness-Truth of God—in a new way, namely, in the unique
religious heritage preserved by contemporary Judaism. This new discovery took place in and
through the various dialogical tensions that constitute Kasper's vision of tradition. It began with a
new situation, the atrocities of the Shoah, which posed a challenge to the received tradition. This
provoked a return to the sources, a recovery of the testimony of the Old and New Testament
(including Romans 9-11) and a rereading of subsequent tradition in this light. On this basis, the
Church officially clarified its teaching in Nostra aetate, which, along with the words and deeds
of important pioneers in this dialogue and other Church documents, created a new situation in
Jewish-Catholic (and Jewish-Christian) relations. This dialogue of traditions cannot, however, be
reduced to the 'monologue' of magisterial Church teachings; it rather involves informal
encounters between Christians and Jews throughout the world as well as scholarly meetings,
often dealing with questions on which the Church has no official position. Documents like
Nostra aetate and Dominus Iesus, in spite of the limitations of each, and official bodies like the
CRRJ function to secure the foundations of this worldwide conversation: the irrevocable
commitment of the Church to the Jewish people as well as to its own faith tradition. The best
such documents and institutions also serve to encourage and facilitate dialogue, removing
misunderstandings and other obstacles while suggesting avenues for further exploration and so
fostering a truly fraternal relationship between Christians and Jews. Jewish-Christian dialogue
will become a vital element of the Church's living tradition not apart from or in spite of the
magisterium, but through an honest and robust interchange between the magisterium and the
whole Church.
B. Dialogue with the Lutheran Churches

The foregoing account of Kasper's involvement in Catholic-Jewish relations provides a useful prelude to the subject of the remainder of this chapter, namely, Kasper's contributions to ecumenical dialogue. It gives a first concrete illustration of Kasper's dialogical theory and praxis of tradition, which, as shall be seen, he also applied within ecumenical dialogue. This particular illustration has the advantage of being more compact than a case study taken from the ecumenical dialogues. As noted above, Kasper was not particularly involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue prior to his appointment as head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. By contrast, Kasper was already contributing to ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics during the 1960s, in the earliest years of his academic career. Unlike his understanding of the relationship between Christians and Jews, Kasper's reflections on the divisions among Christian communions (particularly Lutherans and Catholics) and their reconciliation developed and matured over the course of half a century. To these reflections the present study now turns.

1. Background

A variety of factors gave rise to the present-day divisions between the Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation. It was, however, the sixteenth-century dispute between Martin Luther and Catholic authorities over the doctrine of justification that set the tone for the future theological differences among the churches. Luther came to the conviction that justification by faith alone was the center of the Gospel and the doctrine upon which the whole Church stands or falls. This conviction became the basis for his critique of various aspects of the life of the Church of his day, such as the sale of indulgences. Met with sharp resistance, Luther

147 On the history of the Protestant Reformation, see ER, s.v. “Reformation”; NCE, s.v. “Reformation, Protestant (On the Continent).”
began to denounce ecclesiastical authority as an obstacle to the truth of the Gospel. Though excommunicated, he nevertheless gained the support of a number of princes, and his doctrines and reforms, as well as those of the other Reformers, spread into major cities within the Holy Roman Empire. Efforts to heal the growing rift between Protestants and Catholics failed, and each side sealed their divisions with formal condemnations directed against the doctrines of the other. The polemics that arose from this dispute colored essentially all theological treatises, especially those dealing with the Church, produced during and after the Reformation. The main streams of Catholic and Lutheran thought that flowed from the Reformation period into the early twentieth century may be classified as “controversial theology” inasmuch as they were constructed in opposition to the doctrinal positions of the other church.¹⁴⁸ This kind of theology gave little attention to the common heritage that unites Lutherans and Catholics and to the basic concerns animating the other side.

While attempts to heal these divisions date back to the time of the Reformation itself, the experiences of the twentieth century provided new impetus for the work of Christian unity.¹⁴⁹ In the first place, the experience of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 provoked the realization that the widespread fragmentation among Christians had become an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations, the very raison d’être of the Church. Many have identified this conference as the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, since out of this experience flowed three major ecumenical initiatives—the International Missionary Council, the

¹⁴⁸ On controversial theology, see NCE, s.v. “Theology, History of.”

World Conference on Faith and Order, and the World Council of Life and Work—which later converged into the international ecumenical body known as the World Council of Churches.

In the second place, the violent conflicts and international tensions of the twentieth century, particularly the two World Wars, both marred the credibility of Christians, many of whom passively assented to or actively participated in the atrocities of these conflicts, and urged, or even compelled, Christians to come together in practical cooperation and common witness. The rise of National Socialism in Germany, for example, provoked Christians of different Protestant denominations like Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Niemöller to unite under the banner of the Barmen Declaration in order to present a unified Christian front against Nazi ideology.

In the third place, a certain sensibility for the mystery of the Church was on the rise among both Protestants and Catholics especially during the first half of the twentieth century. The roots of this development can be found in increased attention among Protestants and Catholics alike to the sources of Christianity, manifested already during the nineteenth century in biblical studies, patristic research, the Oxford Movement and the liturgical movement. Among the fruits of these waves of renewal may be counted the ecclesiological concern of the

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150 On the influence of the two World Wars on the ecumenical movement in Europe, see Vereb, *Because He Was a German*, 1-9; Siggelkow, “The Ecumenical Movement,” 259; ER, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement.”

151 See Vereb, *Because He Was a German*, 71-72.

152 This opinion was famously expressed by Romano Guardini in “Vom Erwachen der Kirche in den Seelen,” *Hochland* 19 (1922): 257-67. On growing attention to the Church within the burgeoning ecumenical movement, see Vereb, *Because He Was a German*, 31-41; NCE, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement.”

153 See NCE, s.v. “Biblical Theology.”

154 See NCE, s.v. “Patristic Studies.”

155 See NCE, s.v. “Oxford Movement.”

Anglican bishop Charles Brent, who championed the aforementioned Faith and Order movement, and the ecclesiology of the Catholic theologian Karl Adam, which influenced Pius XII's encyclical on the Church *Mystici corporis* (1943). In short, the twentieth century saw a certain ecumenical convergence upon theological themes centered around the mystery of the Church.

So practical, affective, and theological factors created fertile ground for an international movement toward the unity of Christians. A multitude of factors likewise contributed to the initiation of bilateral dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. On the one hand, the social and political life of German Christians since the Reformation era had been stamped by the politico-religious governing principle, *cuius regio, eius religio* (“Whose domain, his religion”), which gave rise in the German states to persecution of both Protestants and Catholics and thus to animosity between the two. Bitter memories of this difficult past motivated Germans to seek something new once the monarchy collapsed. This openness facilitated the rise of National Socialism in Germany, but it also spurred German Catholics and Lutherans to reassess the historical and theological issues surrounding the Reformation and to take the first steps toward dialogue in the period between the two world wars. The dialogues between Lutherans and Catholics that took place in Germany during and after World War II under the banner of the Una Sancta movement provided an important precedent and model for the officially-sanctioned international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue that began in 1965.

These German beginnings resonated, on the other hand, with developments taking place elsewhere in the world. A report on the doctrine of justification produced by the 1963 Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki, whose purpose was to facilitate a clear

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157 On developments in Germany as background to the beginnings of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, see Vereb, *Because He Was a German*, 4–9, 67-120; NCE, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement.”
proclamation of this central theme of the Gospel, sparked within the Lutheran world a vigorous discussion over the interpretation of justification within the present-day context.\textsuperscript{158} Within many Lutheran circles, this led to a greater receptivity for dialogue with Catholics over Reformation themes, not only in Germany but in the United States and elsewhere. Thus, once the Catholic Church officially opened its doors to ecumenical dialogue in 1964, Lutherans and Catholics in the United States wasted no time in initiating bilateral dialogues, preempting even the commencement of the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in 1965.\textsuperscript{159}

Kasper's first theological writings belonged to an era in which Catholics were making their first church-sanctioned forays into the realm of ecumenical dialogue.\textsuperscript{160} The Catholic Church's participation in the ecumenical movement was burdened during those first years by the icy history of its relations with its would-be dialogue-partners. Out of fear that participation in ecumenical meetings would promote ecclesiological relativism, Pius XI had forbidden Catholics in the encyclical \textit{Mortalium animos} (1928) from engaging with other Christians in this fashion (no. 8). This meant that the only legitimate means for Christian unity was the return of non-Catholic Christians to the Catholic Church (nos. 10, 12). Although authorities in the Catholic Church in fact tolerated to a certain degree, and in some cases even promoted, subsequent attendance of Catholics at ecumenical gatherings, this prohibition remained the official policy of the Church until 1949, when the Holy Office produced the instruction \textit{Ecclesia Catholica} establishing guidelines for limited Catholic involvement in ecumenism. In the meantime, the


\textsuperscript{160} On the Catholic Church's entry into the ecumenical movement, see NCE, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement”; ER, s.v. “Ecumenical Movement.”
efforts of Archbishop Lorenz Jaeger, Cardinal Augustin Bea, and Pope (now Saint) John XXIII, among others, bore fruit in the formation in 1960 of a new curial body, the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and the promulgation in 1964 of the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, which signaled the Catholic Church's wholehearted commitment to the ecumenical movement. It was understandable that non-Catholic Christians should have greeted this reversal of policy with the suspicion that under the guise of openness to ecumenical dialogue, Catholics in fact intended to proselytize their dialogue-partners. The burden of proof fell on Catholic theologians to demonstrate the openness of their tradition to the give and take of authentic dialogue.

2. Classic ecumenism: contributions between 1962 and 1972

Kasper's main contribution to this work during the 1960s was to construct theological foundations that would function to safeguard the basic concerns of Luther and the Reformers while integrating them into a broader 'Catholic' context.161 By formulating his model of tradition as an open system, he aimed to unite the essential content of the Protestant formal principle (the sovereignty of the Word of God over the Church) with the Catholic sacramental principle (the representation of the Gospel in the life of the Church and its official teaching). In this synthesis, Kasper strove to avoid the excesses of a strict *sola scriptura* and its Catholic mirror image, which he has termed *solo magisterio*.162 Similar interests were at work in his articulation of the doctrine of analogy with reference to Schelling's ideas of freedom and history as well as the metaphysical thought of Aquinas. Kasper intended thereby to incorporate a soteriological or existential moment into a sapiential framework, namely, an analogy of freedom and history

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161 On the ecumenical concerns behind Kasper's theology in general and his formulation of the principle of tradition in particular, see pp. 316-20, above.

grounded in a historical ontology of freedom. When William Loewe, in his analysis of Kasper's fundamental theological option, correctly pointed out Luther's influence on Kasper, he told only half of the story. Kasper was attempting a creative renewal of Catholic theology out of its own tradition that at the same time mediated between Catholic and Protestant perspectives.

Kasper's notion of divine fidelity formed an important part of this project of mediation. For Kasper, the doctrine of justification basically meant that God loves each human being with a faithful and incomprehensible love: God has definitively accepted and affirmed each one in Christ apart from any merit of one's own, and this divine love, through the working of the Holy Spirit, delivers one from anxious self-interest and frees one for loving service to one's neighbor. Although Kasper produced this interpretation of the doctrine of justification quite late in his career, his language echoed descriptions he penned decades earlier of the liberating power of God's faithfulness to human beings. In other words, Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness expressed for him what the doctrine of justification also intended to articulate: the essential contents of the Gospel, the central mystery of Christian faith. As God's emeth or Faithfulness-Truth, however, divine fidelity designated not only the 'material principle' but also the 'formal principle' of Kasper's theology, since it lay at the conceptual center of Kasper's fundamental theology of the Word of God and consequently of his theology of tradition. By speaking of truth in the personal, relational, and historical category of faithfulness, Kasper

163 On the link between Luther and Kasper's basic methodological option, see Loewe, “New Catholic Tübingen Theology of Walter Kasper,” 42-45, and the discussion on pp. 80-81 and 92-98, above.


highlighted the soteriological or liberating dimension of the traditional (philosophical) notion of truth, and so laid the groundwork for a notion of tradition that was not at odds with but positively oriented to Lutheran existential concerns. Practically speaking, this meant that by linking divine promise to its unexpected fulfillment, by identifying the crucified Jesus with the pneumatic, risen Christ in the event of tradition, the faithfulness of God incorporated a critical and liberating moment: it set up a “hermeneutics of Christian mission” that interprets the forms of preaching and Church life in terms of their effectiveness in “raising the dead to life” and “bringing about a new creation” under the conditions of the present age.166

In his early efforts to demonstrate the openness of Catholic theology to the impulses of the Reformation—and in contrast to later writings—Kasper laid emphasis on what Catholic theology and life had in common with that of other Christians. For example, in “Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus,” a 1964 essay on Catholic principles of ecumenism, Kasper sketched a theology of tradition designed both to maintain the indispensability of tradition for the correct interpretation of scripture and to do justice to the sovereignty of the Word of God over the Church, particularly as this was expressed in the primacy of scripture over against church traditions.167 While the infallible teaching authority of the Church constituted an essential component of this theology of tradition, Kasper’s overall presentation displaced this component from the central role it played in the neo-Scholastic doctrine of tradition, instead emphasizing the significance of the other loci theologici: scripture, the practices and artifacts (traditions) of the Church of the past, and the sensus fidelium alive in the Church today. This procedure highlighted the scope within the unity of the Catholic tradition


167 For Kasper’s early sketch of a Catholic theology of tradition that made room for the sovereignty of the Gospel over the Church, see Ökumene 331-39; “Kirche unter dem Wort Gottes,” 304-6. See also pp. 330-32, above.
for a diversity of expressions of the one truth of faith. Kasper added that it would be possible within such a vision of tradition for the Catholic Church to recognize the Augsburg Confession as one such expression of Catholic faith, provided it were interpreted in a way that did not exclude as heretical the binding doctrines of the Church, for example, those of the Council of Trent. He thus proposed an ecumenical program that proceeded toward full visible union among the separated churches by way of a restoration of the state of dialogue among their traditions, through which the one divine tradition could grow and flourish in a new way.

To speak of a state of dialogue among churches, however, is to assume that the Catholic Church recognizes, or at least can recognize, other Christian communities as churches in some sense. Thus, in the second half of the same essay, Kasper developed a Catholic ecumenical ecclesiology of the Church as sacrament. Here, too, he emphasized ecumenical openness rather than the distinctiveness of Catholic identity, although he utilized the resources of the Catholic tradition to achieve this end. Kasper's intent was to move beyond a one-sided identification of the Catholic Church with the one Church willed by Christ toward an ecclesiology in eschatological perspective. He wanted an ecclesiology capable of accommodating those strands of Catholic tradition that intimated the existence of ecclesial reality outside the institutional boundaries of the Church as well as those that spoke of the Church not as a self-enclosed reality but one in need of purification, conversion, and growth into the full stature of Christ.

168 On scope for diversity within the Catholic tradition, see Ökumene 337-39.
169 See Ökumene 338.
170 See Ökumene 338-39.
171 Ökumene 340-48; see also “Ekklesiologische Charakter der nichtkatholischen Kirchen.”
172 On the transition from a static to a historical and eschatological understanding of the Church, see Ökumene 340-42.
For these reasons, Kasper opted for a sacramental model of the Church. According to Kasper, a sacramental ecclesiology on the one hand had scope for the eschatological dimension, since the Church, as the sacramental sign of the saving presence of Jesus Christ in the world, is not identical with Christ himself, but rather points beyond itself toward the consummation of the world at the second coming of Christ. On the other hand, Catholic sacramental theology provided categories in which it was possible to conceive of the ecclesiality of communities outside of the Catholic Church. Kasper wrote:

As with the individual sacraments, however, it may also be said of the Church that, within this aeon, both quantities [sign and signified] need not unconditionally and in every case coincide; they might come apart. We must distinguish not only validity and liceity, but also validity and fruitfulness. The visible signs may be in place—by analogy, visible church membership may exist—while the real, spiritual reality of the life of the Church is absent because of improper disposition, inadequate faith and an absence of love. Conversely, the sacramental signs may be lacking or improperly administered, thus the exterior signs of Church membership may not exist perfectly or at all, while the inner reality of grace is present on account of a *votum sacramenti* or a *votum supplens*.

According to Kasper's sacramental analogy, Church membership is ordinarily manifested in the visible signs officially recognized by the Catholic Church. These visible signs, however, do not in every case bear fruit in an authentic Christian existence. This distinction between the static signs and the becoming-event of church membership implies that ecclesiality, like sacramentality, is not an all-or-nothing reality but one that admits of different grades. The same distinction enabled Kasper to speak of non-Catholic communions as *Kirchen im Werden* (churches in becoming), *Kirchen im Aufbau* (churches in the making), and incomplete particular churches. For Kasper, the vitality of faith and love within these churches indicated that their

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173 For Kasper's application of the categories of sacramental theology to the theology of the Church, see Ökumene 342-44.
174 Ökumene 343.
175 Ökumene 343.
specific ecclesial forms manifested the grace bestowed on the world by Christ in a real, if imperfect, way. The Catholic Church, in its efforts to signify the fullness of this grace ever more clearly, may well have something to gain from dialogue with these churches. So Catholics, too, can approach ecumenism as a two-way street.176

Kasper’s point in developing these ecclesiological foundations was to liberate the churches for dialogue and cooperation over what he considered their most pressing concern, namely, the proclamation of the Gospel within the modern world.177 For Kasper, the crisis of modernity presented to the churches both a grave challenge, since it calls for renewed reflection over the very heart of the faith in light of contemporary culture, as well as a new opportunity, since, within the perspectives opened up by a fresh re-reading of the Gospel message, many of the old controversies lose their divisive character. From this perspective, a forward-looking ecumenism (Ökumenismus nach vorne) that addressed the exigencies of Christian mission in the modern world seemed a most promising avenue for dialogue.178 One could therefore state that the main ecumenical problem for the early Kasper was also the main problem posed to theology, namely, the question of tradition: how to communicate the Gospel within the modern world. As has already been seen, the considerable attention Kasper paid to the questions surrounding the theology of tradition throughout the 1960s indicated its centrality to his theological project.179

176 On the ecumenical implications of a sacramental ecclesiology, see Ökumene 344-46.

177 On the common task of proclamation facing all Christians, see Ökumene 339; “Kirche unter dem Wort Gottes,” 306.


179 See pp. 316-75, above.
His contributions to ecumenism, however, indicated that this theme was no less central to his ecumenical reflections.\textsuperscript{180}

Compared to the question of tradition, it would appear that the question of the Church, or at least certain aspects of this question, belonged for Kasper to the formerly controversial questions which in the present represented less and less daunting obstacles to unity in the light of new insights into the meaning of the Gospel. Admittedly, in “Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten,” Kasper made it clear that he still perceived fundamental differences between the Catholic Church and the historic churches of the Reformation.\textsuperscript{181} But what differences did he have in mind? Given the twofold structure of the essay, he could have been referring to disagreements on the level of the theology of tradition (for example, over the general question of an infallible teaching authority within the Church) or on the level of ecclesiology (for example, over the relationship between the Eucharist and church membership). It is at least questionable, however, whether Kasper counted ecclesial ministry among these disagreements at the time he wrote this essay.

Kasper justified his claim that these communities represented “churches in the making” not only on the basis of the “fruitfulness” of their ecclesial life, but because he could already see the unity of the one Church manifesting itself visibly in these communions through confessions of faith, through sacramental forms, and through a ministry (\textit{Amt}) that even they do not understand to be simply a “democratic delegation” from below but as a divine authorization from above, in which an ecclesial vocation (\textit{Berufung}) to ministry is even considered necessary.\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{180} In addition to “Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus” and “Kirche unter dem Wort Gottes,” see Kasper, “Schrift und Tradition” (see p. 20n-46, above), 205-14; “Gespräch mit der protestantischen Theologie,” Conc/G 1 (1965): 340-44.

\textsuperscript{181} Ökumene 338.

\textsuperscript{182} Ökumene 343.
Kasper clarified his position in 1970, when he stated in an essay on the topic of church ministry that he did not consider this question to be the decisive church-dividing issue.\textsuperscript{183} In “Amt und Gemeinde,” Kasper observed that both the Reformers and the Council of Trent located their differences within their understandings of Christ: no less than the soteriological dimension of Christology was at issue in the question of justification. Thus, in his own sketch of a theology of ministry in the Church, Kasper proceeded from the perspective of two fundamental mysteries of Christian faith, Christology and pneumatology. This methodology was consistent with and in fact demanded by the sacramental ecclesiology he had adopted early in his career. From this point of view, church ministry must ultimately be viewed as a symbolic reality (\textit{Zeichenwirklichkeit}): one can determine its essence only by looking beyond the sign to the \textit{Sache} to which it refers.\textsuperscript{184}

The authority exercised by ecclesial ministers must for Kasper be interpreted first of all from a Christological perspective.\textsuperscript{185} In Jesus's personal form of existence—his obedience to the Father in loving service for others—a radical critique of all forms of earthly authority paradoxically coincides with new foundations for authentic authority. Unlike earthly authorities, Jesus's authority does not overpower and enslave others but bestows on them the freedom of the children of God. On the one hand, this unity of authority and service, of identity and activity in the person of Jesus provided the fundamental perspective from which Kasper interpreted authority in the Church. From it he inferred that humble service and exalted vocation form a unity in ecclesial ministry: the minister is no mere functionary of those he or she serves but is

\textsuperscript{183} On the status of ecclesial ministry in ecumenical dialogue, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 413-14.

\textsuperscript{184} Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 414.

\textsuperscript{185} On the Christological foundations for ministerial offices in the Church, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 392-99.
radically set apart by the divine call and wholly claimed for this service. Eschewing the language
of sacramental character (in the de-hellenizing fashion typical of his early work), Kasper retained
its essential content on the basis of a calling to service that claims the whole person. He thereby
broke down the disjunction between a 'Protestant' notion of ministry that exists in the concrete
act or event of service and a 'Catholic' notion of ministry as a stable institution or relatively
independent property of the office-holder. On the other hand, a Christological model of authority
presented to Kasper a critical standard by which to judge the use (or abuse) of authority in the
Church. In this connection, Kasper asked whether a Church that has more and more become the
most conservative of institutions has not lost sight of its mission, namely, to be an “institution of
freedom” and a servant of all, especially the poorest of the poor.\textsuperscript{186} Church authority only re-
presents the authority of Christ to the extent that it “represents” others, dedicating itself to the
cause of their freedom and salvation.\textsuperscript{187}

Kasper applied this Christological vision of authority first of all to the whole priestly
people of God, in the manifold charisms bestowed on its members by the Spirit for their service
on behalf of the world.\textsuperscript{188} To clarify the specific form of authority that accrues to ecclesial
ministers within this charismatically-structured Church, he complemented this Christological
perspective with a pneumatological reflection.\textsuperscript{189} In dialogue with scholars such as Rudolf Sohm
as well as his Catholic and Protestant colleagues at Tübingen, Kasper conceived of the Church as
a charismatic community whose fundamental structure is collegial. Since the one Spirit bestows
every charism upon its members, all must work together in fraternity and love for the building up

\textsuperscript{186} Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 398.


\textsuperscript{188} Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 399-400.

\textsuperscript{189} On the charismatic structure of the Church, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 399-403.
of the one Church. Within this perspective, ecclesial ministry in the narrow sense emerged as a special charism dedicated to serving the unity and freedom of the People of God by overseeing the intra-ecclesial dialogue and fostering the mutual cooperation of its individual members. As the freedom of the Spirit is realized in a plurality of distinct charisms and their interplay, so this freedom also comes to expression, contrary to Sohm's thesis, in the bestowal of a special charism or ministry of leadership that exists for the service of, and therefore stands both “in” and “over against,” the rest of the community. In cases where conflicts arise among the different charisms, this ministry carries out its service to the community precisely by exercising its authority to restore their harmonious cooperation. The authority to render a definitive decision in cases of need is therefore not an alien element in the structure of the Church but a sign and instrument of the authority of Christ at the service of his Church.

This pneumatological perspective highlighted one further aspect of ecclesial ministry. Both the New Testament and the early Church Fathers testified to the existence of variety in the concrete deployment of church authority in different places and times. Kasper inferred from this that the Church has a high degree of freedom to determine the concrete form of ecclesial ministry in response to the needs of the age. Just how far does this freedom extend? For Kasper, there was one point on which Catholics could give no ground in ecumenical dialogue. The basic structure of ministry as “in” and “over against” the community represented for him a determination iure divino of the structure of the Church, even if this is not central to the essence of the Church in the

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190 On the place of ecclesial ministry within the charismatic structure of the Church, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 404-9.


192 On the flexibility of the concrete forms in which the Church deploys ecclesial ministry, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 409-10.
same sense as word and sacrament. This, however, left quite a bit of room for variation. Kasper did not intend here to suggest a revival of, say, the organizational structure of the church of Corinth while discarding all subsequent developments. Mentioning in this connection the oft-raised proposal to lift the Roman ban on married priests, Kasper offered a few additional suggestions. He observed that the history of the Church has witnessed a certain entanglement of the ministry of leadership with the charismatic of teaching, which has led to a kind of charismatic monopoly on the part of Church leaders. On Kasper's analysis, this has contributed not only to a dysfunctional relationship between ecclesial ministers and their communities but also to the overtaxing of the ministers themselves. Might it not be possible to lighten their loads, for example, by separating the various functions of priesthood as it now exists into a variety of different ministries?

What did these reflections mean for ecumenical dialogue? Kasper made two relevant points. First, he applied the above-mentioned strategy of ecumenism nach vorne to the question of ministry. He argued that the theories and practices of ministry at work in the churches would converge to the extent that each church strove to conform its practice of ministry to the Christological principle of authority as service and to the pneumatological principle of discernment (by way of dialogue within the church and with the world) of the new spiritual gifts bestowed upon it within this historical moment. Second, he hinted at the possibility that the Catholic Church could in principle recognize the ecclesiality of non-Catholic communities on

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195 On the ecumenical implications of Kasper's account of ecclesial ministry, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 413-14.
pneumatological grounds.\textsuperscript{196} Kasper conceived of the Church as a charismatic community, an “open system” characterized by a constructive tension among the various charisms bestowed by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{197} In times of crisis, this Church has not infrequently received renewed vitality and fervor from new outbreaks of the Spirit originating not from the hierarchy but out of the lay faithful and religious communities. For Kasper, “the” great ecumenical question was whether Catholics could perhaps recognize in the Reformation one such \textit{charismatisch-pneumatischer Neuaufbruch}, a work of the Spirit that promised a revitalization of the Church.\textsuperscript{198} Kasper’s reflections on the historical malleability of church ministry suggested that the form of ministry exercised in these churches presented no obstacle in principle to such a recognition. Indeed, he even observed that the threefold form of ministry (bishop, presbyter, deacon) that has become normative in the Catholic Church has never been doctrinally defined as an unconditionally irreversible, \textit{iure divino} development.\textsuperscript{199} His apparent intent in pointing this out was not to advocate that the Church shed its episcopal structure but to suggest that it might be able to recognize the validity of and accommodate other forms of ministry.

The significance of this insight became clear in 1971, when Kasper applied it to the then six-year-old Church-sanctioned dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics. “Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen” was a contribution to the discussions that took place during the first round of the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, which

\textsuperscript{196} On the pneumatological grounds for ecumenical convergence over ministry, see Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 401-2.

\textsuperscript{197} Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 401.

\textsuperscript{198} Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 402.

\textsuperscript{199} Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 409.
ran from 1967 to 1971. It built upon the early fruits of that dialogue, which included a certain convergence over the doctrine of justification as well as the common efforts of the churches to renew their understanding of ministry in view of scripture and tradition as well as the needs of the present—ecumenism nach vorne. If the divisions between churches had their origin in a dispute over the Sache and center of the Gospel, Kasper asked, might not the present state of agreement over justification indicate that the judgment of the Catholic side over Lutheran ministries needs to be updated? Is it possible that in light of these convergences the question of ministry has lost, or may presently lose, its church-dividing character?

Kasper addressed three objections to a possible recognition of Lutheran ministries by the Catholic Church. The first objection was that Lutherans had not preserved the sacramental signs proper to presbyteral ordination, namely, that priests are to be ordained through laying on of hands by a bishop standing in succession with the Apostles. The second, which Kasper distinguished from the first, was that the Lutheran churches had not preserved the reality of apostolic succession. The third was that no common understanding of ministerial office exists between Lutherans and Catholics. For Kasper, none of these objections was decisive. He summarily dispensed with the third, arguing that it was unnecessary to agree to call ordination to ministry a “sacrament,” provided that both sides could agree on the content of what Catholics

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201 On what follows, see Ämter 97-99.

202 On the issue of the preservation of the sacrament of orders in Lutheran churches, see Ämter 99-104.

203 On the issue of the essence of apostolic succession, see Ämter 104-8.

204 On the issue of the understanding of church ministry, see Ämter 108-9.
call the sacramentality of ministry.\textsuperscript{205} What Kasper considered essential was that both sides should acknowledge that the minister stands both “in” and “over against” the community, as he had explained in “Amt und Gemeinde.”\textsuperscript{206} From this it followed for Kasper that ordination lays claim upon the whole person of the minister and is consequently unrepeateable—a conclusion that accorded with the actual practice of Lutherans. While the kind of agreement described here leaves quite a bit of room for differences in understanding, Kasper did not regard such differences as church-dividing.

Kasper spent the bulk of “Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter” dealing with the first and second of these objections. At first glance, the argument that the Lutherans have not retained the episcopal form of ordination practiced in the Catholic Church would appear to be final.\textsuperscript{207} It is a simple matter of historical record that the Lutheran reformers failed to garner the support and cooperation of ordained bishops. Kasper, however, attempted to circumvent this difficulty by citing the research of Yves Congar, Charles Journet and others who claimed to have discovered within the history of the Church a tradition of “presbyteral succession.”\textsuperscript{208} According to these scholars, there have been instances in history in which priests have functioned as ministers of the sacrament of orders both in the early and in the medieval Church. Exegetically, Kasper added, the Bible made no clear-cut distinction between the office of *episcopos* and that of *presbyteros*. Dogmatically, no magisterial teaching asserted such a distinction prior to *Lumen gentium*, which distinguished between them as different levels of the sacrament of orders; even this, however, left open for Kasper the question of whether this distinction was *iure divino* or *iure humano*.

\textsuperscript{205} Ämter 108-9.


\textsuperscript{207} On the idea of presbyteral succession in relation to ministry in Lutheran churches, see Ämter 99-104.

\textsuperscript{208} Ämter 100.
Taken together, these facts suggested that not only the *episcopos* but even the *presbyteros* might be empowered by his ordination to dispense the sacrament of orders, at least in extraordinary cases. If Kasper’s argument was sound, then it would be possible for the Church to recognize the Lutheran form of ordination as a valid, if illicit, sacrament standing within a presbyteral succession that reaches back to the Apostles.

In this essay, however, Kasper’s main concern was the second objection, namely, whether Lutheran churches in fact stand in succession to the Apostles.²⁰⁹ The distinction Kasper drew between the question of validity and the question of apostolic succession followed from his sacramental ecclesiology: for Kasper, *Sukzession der Amtsnachfolge* is the sacramental form that signifies apostolic succession, but not the *Sache* itself, nor even a guarantee that the *Sache* has been preserved.²¹⁰ For Kasper, apostolic succession referred first of all to the Church’s fidelity to the faith and preaching of the Apostles, which is an event in the Spirit. If the Gospel is living and active within a church, if that church has preserved the living tradition stemming from the Apostles, then it stands in apostolic succession. The most important question for Kasper was therefore the ecclesiological question: has this community remained in pneumatological continuity with the one saving tradition? If so, then it has the substance of apostolic succession, and the apostolicity of its ministries follows from the apostolicity of the church.

From this perspective, the fact that the fathers of the Second Vatican Council found in “the ecclesial communities separated from us” a *defectum* with regard to the sacrament of orders²¹¹ is beside the point. On the one hand, by recognizing that the Holy Spirit has used these

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²⁰⁹ On the apostolicity of Lutheran churches, see Ämter 104-8.
²¹⁰ Ämter 104.
²¹¹ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 22. For Kasper’s interpretation, see Ämter 106.
communities as instruments of salvation, the Council in Kasper's view had already affirmed that these communities stood in a positive relationship to the one apostolic tradition and could thus be designated in an analogous way as apostolic churches. On the other hand, Kasper argued as he had in “Amt und Gemeinde” that the Church has a certain amount of latitude to determine the precise manner by which the sacrament of ordination is to be administered. He concluded that the Catholic Church has the freedom to recognize the apostolicity of a community even apart from that community's conformity to the form of the sacrament of orders currently normative within the Catholic Church. Kasper admitted that the private opinion of a theologian could not be the decisive factor in such an act of recognition; what is needed is a spiritual process of discernment involving both churches on all levels of their ecclesial lives. He therefore concluded his paper by calling for such a process of discernment in the churches, encouraging both sides to ask themselves just how important their remaining differences are over against the will of Christ that there be only one Church.

The essays on tradition, ecclesiology, and ecclesial ministry examined in this section reflected Kasper's optimism for a rapid rapprochement between Catholics and Protestants, particularly Lutherans. This same optimism was characteristic of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Kasper served as Catholic co-chairman of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, the international bilateral commission assembled by the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Secretariat for

212 See Unitatis redintegratio, no. 3; Ämter 106-7.
213 See Ämter 105.
214 See Ämter 108.
215 See Ämter 109.
Promoting Christian Unity that during his tenure produced (in 1971)\textsuperscript{216} and published in its final form (in 1972) “The Gospel and the Church.”\textsuperscript{217} This was the commission's final report on the first round of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, adopted at its fifth session (February 21-26, 1971) in San Anton, Malta—hence its nickname, the Malta Report. As the report explains, the first session of dialogue dealt with the topic of “Gospel and Tradition” (nos. 4, 14-34). The theme of the second session, “World and Church under the Gospel,” flowed from the agreement over tradition reached in the first session (nos. 35-46). Standing on this common basis, the commission moved on in the third and fourth sessions to ecclesiological questions, namely, “The Gospel and Ministerial Office in the Church” (nos. 47-64) and “The Gospel and the Unity of the Church” (nos. 65-75).

This first round of dialogues progressed in the same direction as the reflections examined above that touched on Lutheran-Catholic relations. As Kasper's first contributions to ecumenical scholarship included a number of reflections on the principle of tradition, so the Malta Report began with a fundamental reflection on revelation and its historical transmission by means of the apostolic tradition (nos. 14-34). Then, proceeding on this basis, both Kasper and Malta drew conclusions about the norms governing the authentic deployment of ministry within the Church, the possibility that the churches could mutually recognize one another's ministries, and the implications of this for ecclesial unity. Malta, for its part, went further than Kasper's personal reflections by suggesting that some acts of intercommunion between Lutherans and Catholics might already be possible and recommending that the churches consider permitting

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\textsuperscript{217} “Schlussbericht der lutherisch/katholischen Studienkommission 'Das Evangelium und die Kirche','” \textit{Una Sancta} 27 (1972): 11-25; “Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission” (see p. 2n9, above). In what follows, direct quotations are drawn from the English version.
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intercommunion under certain circumstances (no. 73). Be that as it may, the Malta Report, particularly in its “Catholic” sections and joint statements, virtually amounted to a synthesis of the ecumenical reflections of the early Kasper. Insofar as it went further than Kasper's publications prior to 1972, Malta further demonstrated that Kasper's theology resonated with those who hoped for a quick reconciliation between Catholics and Lutherans.

The affinities between the Malta Report and Kasper's understanding of tradition becomes quite clear when one examines its treatment of the relationship between Gospel and tradition. Starting with the question of the right understanding of the Gospel (no. 14) and taking advantage of the methods and results of contemporary theology and biblical exegesis (no. 15), the dialogue-partners were able to agree that “one can only access Jesus's life and preaching by way of the primordial Christian tradition” and that “the Gospel fundamentally depends on the testimony to the Easter event” (no. 16). Furthermore, while both Lutherans and Catholics agreed that scripture played a critical normative function vis-a-vis all subsequent tradition, they could also jointly state that an exclusive contrast between scripture and tradition was no longer tenable (no. 17). The international dialogue drew this conclusion from the historical fact that scripture itself emerged from the oral tradition of preaching the Gospel within the early Church. Behind this inference, however, lay the dogmatic judgment that the one event of salvation in Christ cannot be separated from its re-presentation in the Holy Spirit as salvation for today through the proclamation of the Gospel (see no. 16).

Dialogue then turned to the question of the concrete criteria, formal and material, by which later articulations of the Gospel are to be judged. The section describing the Catholic perspective on the question of formal criteria (no. 20) essentially adopted the view of the early Kasper: the Word of God becomes effective in the dialogical interplay between official and non-
official charismata in the Church, both of which stand under the rule of scripture. Admittedly, the Lutheran dialogue-partners presented a different view: for them, the living word of preaching was the ordinary mode by which the scriptures are authoritatively interpreted, while under certain circumstances the whole People of God may be authorized to confess the faith definitively in response to new questions (no. 19). Both dialogue-partners agreed, however, that the church can make such authoritative judgments, and also that this authority stands not above but beneath and at the service of the Word of the Lord (no. 21). For both partners, the primary criterion of such historical developments was the Holy Spirit, who makes the work of Christ manifest in them as the event of salvation (no. 18), who unceasingly leads the Church into the truth and maintains it in the truth (no. 22). The document added that the Catholic ideas of indefectibility and infallibility should similarly be interpreted as the dynamic action of the Holy Spirit within the Church's struggle against error and sin (no. 23).

Turning to the question of a material criterion for traditional development, both partners agreed that there is a foundation and center of the Gospel, namely, the eschatological saving act of God, which cannot finally be reduced to a single formula (no. 23). This stands in continuity with Kasper's reflections on the material criterion of Christian faith.\footnote{On the question of a material criterion for Christian faith, see pp. 169-72, above.} Malta, however, treated one topic to which Kasper's theology prior to 1971 had not explicitly attended, namely, the doctrine of justification. Still, it dealt with this topic in a Kasperean fashion: working within the framework of the account of tradition described above, the dialogue-partners arrived at a consensus over certain facets of the doctrine of justification in the light of which their remaining differences appeared to be mere differences in emphasis. The Catholic partners were able to affirm that God's gift of salvation to the believer was not contingent on human achievement,
while the Lutheran partners could agree that God's righteousness in Christ was for the sinner not merely an exterior declaration of justification but a reality that embraced the whole of his or her new life (no. 26). Moreover, although the doctrine of justification in this sense referred to the whole mystery of salvation, much of what Paul wrote on the topic emerged out of a polemical confrontation with “Jewish legalism” (no. 27). Thus, as the Bible itself interpreted the mystery of salvation using other analogies—reconciliation, freedom, redemption, new life, new creation—so the doctrine of justification can and must be articulated anew in light of changing historical circumstances.

This theoretical consensus over the meaning of justification raised a practical question: could the dialogue-partners also agree on the criteriological function of justification for the life and structure of the church (no. 28)? For Luther, justification by grace was the doctrine on which the church stood or fell; he felt compelled to form a new confessional community precisely because the church of his day engaged in concrete practices that he thought contradicted the truth of justification. Consequently, for Lutherans, one must ask of all church structures and traditions whether they enable or, conversely, obscure the unconditional character of justification (no. 29). The question was whether Catholics could affirm a similar understanding of justification. Here, too, the Malta report offered a characteristically Kasperean response, addressing this question indirectly through a statement on Christian freedom as criterion for the life of the Church (no. 30). Both partners agreed that, because the Gospel bestows on the Christian freedom from sin, from the law, from death, and for service of God and neighbor, church structures would have to be judged illegitimate if they infringed upon this freedom. Admittedly, Malta did not explicitly say that the dialogue-partners understood this criterion of freedom to be an adequate translation
of the criterion of justification for the modern world. To the extent that they did, however, both sides affirmed the normative role of justification within the structure and life of the church.

If Christian freedom is such a criterion for the Church, then the Church is obligated to adjust its structures and disciplines in order to best preach the Gospel of freedom within a particular historical situation (see nos. 31-34, 46). The agreement over justification, therefore, along with some additional reflections on the historicity of the Church and its preaching (nos. 42-46), formed the foundation for subsequent convergences between the two sides over the questions surrounding ministerial office in the church (nos. 47-64). The latter section essentially summarized Kasper's theology of ministry. The preaching of the Gospel, said Malta, requires personal witnesses and ministers; this ministry belongs to the Church, the priestly People of God (no. 48). Because this pilgrim people continues to labor under the conditions of the present aeon, however, it needs its own structures and ministries to re-present to the Church the saving work of Christ until he comes again (no. 49). Lutherans and Catholics could therefore agree that ministry exists both “in” and “over against” the community, and that the minister represents Christ precisely insofar as he brings the Gospel to expression, although the concrete practice of ministry so conceived remained a problem for both partners (no. 50). The Church as a whole, its ministries included, realizes its apostolic character to the extent that it stands on the foundation of the apostles, faithfully transmitting and actualizing their testimony before the world (no. 52). Lutherans could affirm the value of an unbroken line of succession reaching back to the apostles, provided it were understood as a sign, not a guarantee, of succession in the apostolic faith (no. 57).219 Since, however, the right proclamation of the Gospel takes place within the interplay among all the spiritual charisms bestowed upon the Church, both official and free, Church

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219 Kasper similarly regarded the “institutional criteria” for valid ordination as “fulfilled signs” rather than “guarantees” that a particular minister exercised the substance of the apostolic ministry. Ämter 108.
ministry may not be understood as an isolated entity but rather as one dimension of the charismatic and collegial structure of the Church as a whole (no. 53). The New Testament reported different forms of ministry in the early Church (no. 54). At different times in its subsequent history, the Church has deployed these forms selectively in response to the exigencies of different missionary situations (no. 56). So church ministries have changed over time (no. 55) and are capable of renewal. Malta itself called for a new examination of the utility of the office of prophet for the present time (no. 56).

On the basis of these convergences as well as other recent developments, including the suggestions of Kasper and others that Lutheran ministries were ministries of charismatic origin that stood in a presbyteral line of succession, as well as Vatican II's qualified recognition of the ecclesial character of Lutheran churches, the Catholic dialogue-partners called upon the authorities in the Catholic Church to reconsider whether Lutheran ministries could now be officially recognized (no. 63). The Malta report reached still further than this, even recommending “that the church authorities make possible occasional acts of intercommunion” between Roman Catholics and Lutherans (no. 73) in spite of remaining tensions between the dialogue-partners over a variety of topics, including that of papal primacy (no. 67; see no. 9). What is clear is that these recommendations flowed naturally from, and were in part the fruit of, the ecumenical work of Kasper's early theological career.

Kasper's direct and indirect contributions to Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the 1960s and early 1970s were akin to what he later termed “classical ecumenical theology.” In order to overcome the controversial theology that had been the usual mode of theological reflection of Catholics upon Protestants and of Protestants upon Catholics, Kasper applied a hermeneutics of

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unity to Catholic-Lutheran relations, seeking by way of a fresh inquiry into scripture and tradition a higher synthesis capable of reconciling Lutheran and Catholic theological tendencies or emphases to one another. For Kasper, however, such a synthesis could only succeed if it also addressed the crisis facing the churches in their missionary efforts to a historically-conscious world. Kasper's style of “classical” ecumenism took the form of an ecumenism nach vorne.

The early Kasper's ecumenical methods corresponded to the main lines of his early systematic reflections. The essays examined in this section not only presupposed Kasper's theology of tradition but followed the early Kasper's emphasis on the dimensions of freedom, novelty, and futurity in tradition, highlighting the Church's license to take into its service new forms of expression and new ecclesiastical structures in order to proclaim the Gospel more credibly within the present context. Precisely this task presented a valuable opportunity for ecumenism, since the contemporary crisis of which Kasper has frequently written affected all Christian churches, not just the Catholic Church. Kasper's attention to tradition in a future-oriented and missionary key corresponded in at least two ways with his early sacramental ecclesiology: first, it underlined the variability of the visible form of the Church, including its forms of ministry; second, it pointed out that the inner reality of the Church—its catholicity and apostolicity, for example—could in principle be realized in communities standing outside of the institutional boundaries of the Catholic Church. The common thread running through all these aspects of Kasper's early ecumenical theology was the preeminence of the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was for Kasper the criterion par excellence for discerning the authentic apostolic tradition from later accretions. The same Spirit was the primary indicator of the apostolicity and ecclesiality of an ecclesial community, including its ordained ministers. While visible, historical continuity in institutional and ministerial structures was for Kasper an
important sign of the Catholic Church's adherence to its apostolic foundation, he regarded it as a sign and not a guarantee that a given ecclesial minister should manifest the substance of apostolic succession.

Kasper's early writings on ecumenical topics showed that he recognized and affirmed the effectiveness of divine faithfulness not only in the Catholic Church, but also in Lutheran churches. The relationship he envisaged between Lutherans and Catholics could be compared to the pneumatic bonds that unite the many members of the Church in the one body of Christ. Joined to one another by the Holy Spirit, these members receive from the same Spirit a multitude of charismatic gifts, which bear great potential to build up the Church, provided that they are deployed in the spirit of charity and cooperation. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit has bestowed particular gifts on the Lutheran churches, such as an ardent devotion to the Gospel, that have already motivated renewal within the Catholic Church and that promise still greater fruits, once they are reconciled with the gifts peculiar to the Catholic tradition.221 The faithfulness of God becomes manifest in the movements of the Spirit that have drawn these churches together into dialogue and continue to lead them on the path toward full unity.

In the style of classical ecumenism, the early Kasper focused somewhat more on that aspect of divine fidelity apparent in the spiritual gifts offered by non-Catholic communities than on the complementary aspect manifested within the Catholic Church. This emphasis began to shift in 1973.

3. The question of fundamental differences: contributions during the 1970s and 1980s

Optimistic expectation for a rapid reunion of churches ran high on the European continent in the early 1970s. As the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue was preparing its

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221 See Kasper, “Amt und Gemeinde,” 402.
recommendation that their respective churches open their doors to acts of intercommunion under certain circumstances, Lutheran and Reformed Christians in Europe were hammering out what would be called the Leuenberg Concord, an agreement ratified on March 16, 1973 that established pulpit and altar fellowship among the participating churches.\textsuperscript{222} In light of the historic ecumenical events (albeit of qualitatively different kinds) at Malta and Leuenberg, not to mention the promise of still further avenues of dialogue being pursued at the same time,\textsuperscript{223} the exciting prospect of a restoration of communion between Catholics and Lutherans, practically unimaginable only a decade beforehand, suddenly appeared to be within reach. Unlike in the case of the Leuenberg Concord, however, communion among Lutherans and Catholics would require, in view of Catholic doctrinal commitments, that the ministries practiced by Lutherans be formally recognized as valid by the Catholic Church. To facilitate such a recognition, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft ökumenischer Universitätsinstitute, a research group of Catholic and Protestant professors of theology, published \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter}, a “memorandum” of twenty-three theses that stated the case for a mutual recognition of ministries between the churches, along with research papers in support of these theses.\textsuperscript{224} Reflecting the optimism of the age, the authors of the Memorandum concluded on the basis of their research that, “theologically speaking, nothing decisive stands any longer in the way of a mutual recognition of ministries.”\textsuperscript{225}


\textsuperscript{223} See discussion of the question of a Catholic recognition of the CA, below, pp. 519-29.

\textsuperscript{224} \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter: Ein Memorandum der Arbeitsgemeinschaft ökumenischer Universitätsinstitute} (Munich: Kaiser and Mainz: Grünewald, 1973).

\textsuperscript{225} \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter}, 25, thesis 23.
Not everyone shared this optimism, however. Already during the first round of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, four of the Catholic participants—Heinz Schürmann, Anton Vögtle, J. L. Witte, and Bishop Hans Ludvig Martensen—expressed doubt that the convergence over church ministries reached in the first round of dialogue was sufficient grounds to support the recommendation of the final report that occasional acts of intercommunion be permitted.\textsuperscript{226} For its part, \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter} intended to remove such difficulties by reinforcing the case for mutual recognition with additional research. Nevertheless, it too was greeted with criticism both from the German Bishops' Conference and from professional theologians.\textsuperscript{227}

If one were simply to consider the optimism for a mutual recognition of ministries apparent in “Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen” and “Das Evangelium und die Kirche,” one might have expected that Kasper would have sided with the proponents of \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter}. Indeed, in a brief commentary on the work of the commission titled “Ökumenischer Fortschritt im Amtsverständnis?,” Kasper credited the Memorandum for disseminating the most important results of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue over ministry to a broader audience, whose surprise at its claims indicated that they had not previously paid attention to the ecumenical dialogue.\textsuperscript{228} According to Kasper, \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter} correctly affirmed that Lutherans and Catholics agreed over the basic structure of ecclesial ministry (which stands “within” the priesthood common to all the

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\item \textsuperscript{226} For the “special statements” of these participants expressing reservations on these points, see “Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission,” 349-51.
\item \textsuperscript{227} For discussion of \textit{Reform und Anerkennung kirchlicher Ämter}, see Karlheinz Schuh, ed., \textit{Amt im Widerstreit} (Berlin: Morus, 1973). For the position of Cardinal Lorenz Jaeger and the German Bishops' Conference, see ibid., 139-42, 149-50.
\item \textsuperscript{228} On the convergence over ministries that had been the fruit of the ecumenical dialogues of the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Kasper, “Ökumenischer Fortschritt im Amtsverständnis?,” in \textit{Amt im Widerstreit}, 52-55.
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\end{footnotesize}
faithful, yet also possesses a special calling that sets them “over against” the priestly community) as well as its role in the church (to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and lead the community). Moreover, although the members of the ecumenical research group could not together call ministerial ordination a sacrament because of their contrasting understandings of “sacrament,” they had nevertheless come to an agreement over the substance of what Catholics call the sacramentality of ordination, namely, that it involves a special gift of the Holy Spirit that completely claims the ordained person and so cannot be repeated, and that it is to be administered by the laying on of hands and prayer. Kasper himself had already marshaled all of these points in favor of a mutual recognition of ministries.

At the same time, however, Kasper denied that these areas of progress, significant in themselves, demonstrated the thesis of the Memorandum that nothing more stood in the way of a mutual recognition of ministries. In siding with the German bishops, Kasper modified his ecumenical posture, shifting his emphasis from those points on which both dialogue-partners agreed to their remaining differences. Primary for Kasper among the unsolved questions was that of apostolic succession. He approved of the consensus reached between Lutherans and Catholics over apostolic succession, namely, that its essence is continuity in the apostolic faith and not the outward sign of an unbroken line of succession reaching back to the Apostles, and that this apostolicity of the Church necessarily includes an enduring apostolic ministry of some kind. At this point, however, Kasper posed a question that had not entered into his published contributions to ecumenical dialogue up to this point: is the Church's apostolicity bound to the

229 See Kasper, “Ökumenischer Fortschritt im Amtsverständnis,” 55.

episcopate? Does church ministry in its full sense require communion with the college of bishops?231

Kasper reflected at greater length on this question in “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?” 232 According to this essay, the fact that the threefold episcopal form of ecclesial ministry (including the distinction between bishop and presbyter) did not arise until the second century need not imply that episcopal succession is merely one form of ministry among others.233 On the contrary, the historical facts—the foundations for episcopal ministry in scripture, the simultaneous formation of the episcopal organization of the Church and of the canon of Scripture, the leadership of the local church by a bishop in the long-standing common practice of East and West—raise a strictly theological question, whether communion with the bishops belongs to the essential structure of succession in the apostolic faith, whether the episcopate corresponds to the essence of the Gospel. If scripture and tradition form an indissoluble unity, then for Kasper, one must answer this question in the affirmative.

This option for the indispensability of the office of bishop corresponded to basic tendencies within Kasper’s theology.234 In his Christological reflections, Kasper has repeatedly affirmed that the “cause” of Jesus is intrinsically linked to his person, and this claim corresponded to the inseparability of the words of proclamation from the ‘doing’ of the word, of Christian testimony from personal, lived witness. This for Kasper dovetailed with the idea that the Gospel could not retain its full, authentic form over the course of history apart from the

231 See Kasper, “Ökumenischer Fortschritt im Amtsverständnis,” 56.


233 On the historical question about the episcopate and the corresponding theological question, see Kasper, “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt,” 227-28.

234 On the grounds for the episcopal structure of the Church in the theology of tradition and in Christology, see Kasper, “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt,” 228-29.
persons officially commissioned as its witnesses. Kasper would not have affirmed that every bishop always preaches the Gospel authentically; episcopal ordination does not in this sense guarantee succession in the apostolic tradition. The office of bishop nevertheless belonged for Kasper to the essence of the act of evangelization in the tradition of the apostles. Kasper therefore registered his agreement with Joseph Ratzinger's dictum: “Succession is the outward form of tradition, tradition is the content of succession.”

A question of internal consistency arises at this point: how does the indispensability of the episcopate relate to Kasper's sacramental ecclesiology, which up to this point had played a foundational role in his ecumenical work? On the one hand, Kasper maintained his earlier premise that sign and signified can sometimes come apart. That is, episcopal succession may not be considered an *ipso facto* certain guarantee of authentic apostolic teaching, since a bishop can remove himself from communion with the Church through flagrant heresy and thereby lose his office. On the other hand, he shifted his attention from the limit-cases of sacramental theology to the normative case. The testimony of faith is bound in a positive and constitutive way, even if not exclusively, to its authorized witnesses. Episcopal succession signifies that the bishop is authorized to preach not by the community but by Christ. If faith comes from hearing, then the believing community cannot simply preach to itself; it must rather receive the Gospel from someone commissioned to this task, who has in this sense been set “over against” the

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community. Continuity in the office of bishop thus belongs to the full form of the Gospel: it is *iure divino*, an essential sign and a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for succession in the apostolic tradition. Where the apostolic tradition is, there is communion with the college of bishops. In this sense, tradition and succession *kann nie grundsätzlich auseinanderfallen*, they can never in principle fall asunder.\(^{238}\) Kasper used this same sort of language to describe the realization of God's eschatological future in the Church: because the eschatological definitiveness of God's Faithfulness-Truth has been revealed in Jesus Christ, the Church will never fall back into the status of “synagogue,” it will never decisively fall away from Christ.\(^{239}\) There will always be a Church in which the truth of revelation is accepted in faith. This means that the believer can be confident that the Word of God will always be proclaimed by an authoritative witness and heard and accepted in faith in the episcopally-structured Church.

In his insistence on this point, Kasper did not intend to put an end to dialogue but to clarify the degree of consensus as well as the remaining differences between Lutherans and Catholics over ministry in the Church. Like the authors of the Memorandum, Kasper himself had argued in “Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen” that apostolic succession could be validly signified and transmitted by other means than the laying-on of hands by a bishop.\(^{240}\) He further suggested that Church doctrine could in principle permit ordination by other means than the three rites presented in the Memorandum.\(^{241}\) Kasper mainly criticized the thesis of the Memorandum for obscuring the relationship between apostolic succession and

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\(^{238}\) Kasper, “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt,” 229.

\(^{239}\) Kasper, “Welt als Ort des Evangeliums,” 221.

\(^{240}\) See Ämter 104-8.

communion with the episcopate. For if episcopal succession constitutes the normative form of apostolic succession, as Catholics claim, then one could not expect to retain the full reality of succession simply by reviving a form of succession that had once been valid in the past while ignoring its relationship to the present-day episcopate. On the contrary, if such an act signified a denial that the office of bishop is necessary for Church unity, as was for Kasper the intention of the *satis est* of the Augsburg Confession, it would rather constitute for Catholics a break from the essential structure of apostolic succession. If, on the other hand, Lutherans were to express some degree of openness to the traditional signs of apostolic succession, this would open up new possibilities for union among the churches.

But what if such an openness to communion with the episcopate belonged to the very basis of Lutheran identity? In his 1970 doctoral dissertation, Vincenz Pfürn advanced the thesis that one of the foundational documents of the Lutheran churches, the Augsburg Confession or *Confessio Augustana* (CA), is fundamentally Catholic in its structure and content and could therefore serve as the basis of a reconciliation between Catholics and Lutherans. Motivated by Pfürn's work and by the upcoming 450th anniversary of the CA in 1980, European Lutheran-Catholic dialogue shifted its attention especially during the late 1970s to the question of whether the Catholic Church could officially recognize the CA. Kasper formulated his first, tentative

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242 On the following, see Kasper, “Ökumenischer Fortschritt im Amtsverständnis,” 57-58; “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt,” 230.

243 See Kasper, “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt,” 228-29.


245 See John A. Radano, *Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification: A Chronology of the Holy See's Contributions . . . to the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 66-68. One significant collection of essays on the CA published during this period was Harding
opinion on this new initiative in “Was bedeutet das: Katholische Anerkennung der Confessio Augustana?,” a brief response to papers given at a meeting of the Hochkirchlichen Vereinigung Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses (High Church Association of the Augsburg Confession) at Schloss Schwanberg in September 1976.246 His cautiousness in this piece may have reflected the fact that he was not sanguine at that point about the CA’s judgment over episcopal succession, as the comments he had made four years earlier over the CA’s satis est seemed to indicate. This judgment, however, apparently arose more from general familiarity with the CA than from a detailed study of the document; Kasper had not published anything significant on the CA up to this point. He therefore restricted himself to commenting on what it would mean for Catholics to “recognize” the CA.247

Kasper made three relevant points.248 First, a Catholic recognition of the CA would constitute a step toward unity in plurality between Catholics and Lutherans. It would mean that the Catholic Church recognized the CA as one valid expression of the catholic and apostolic faith, which would imply that the Reformation impulse advanced therein was compatible with the teaching of the Church as presented at the Council of Trent and afterward and continued to bear significance for the whole Church. Second, the meaningfulness of a Catholic recognition of the CA would depend on a Lutheran “recognition” of the same.249 That is, it would be necessary to determine whether Lutherans could still identify themselves with the original intentions of the

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247 For general, anthropological comments of the category of recognition, see Kasper, “Was bedeutet das,” 152.

248 On what follows, see Kasper, “Was bedeutet das,” 152-56.

Reformers as reflected in the CA. This question emerges because, for Lutherans, the authority of the confession depends on whether it correctly interprets the Bible, a judgment that one cannot presume to be definitive in light of changes in biblical interpretation that have arisen from the influence of historical-critical methods. Lutherans would also need to clarify the CA's relationship to other Lutheran confessional documents, some of which have condemned binding Catholic dogma; such condemnations would preclude unity if they remained in force. Third, in order to avoid false expectations, both sides would need to clarify the role of recognition in relation to the goals of the ecumenical movement. A mutual recognition of churches would stop short of the goal envisaged on the Catholic side, namely, an organic unity in which all Christians would be one Church. Lutherans and Catholics would have to clarify their vision of the unity that they seek, which would require dealing with the question of the papacy, the Catholic ministry of unity. In relation to this, recognition of the CA could only constitute an intermediary goal.

In comparison to the impasse reached earlier in the 1970s over the question of a mutual recognition of ministries, however, such an intermediary result would have constituted a quite significant step toward unity. Hence, as the debate over a possible recognition of the CA grew more intense, Kasper began to emphasize more strongly than in 1976 its significance for present-day ecumenism. In a 1978 conference paper, “Die Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” Kasper affirmed, with a more optimistic tone than in 1976, the 'Catholic' intention, structure, and content of the CA from the perspective of its ecclesiology. According to Kasper, the CA understood the Church as the “congregatio fidelium,” the concrete community of the faithful.

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constituted not by its own will to assemble but by God through word and sacrament.\textsuperscript{251} This church is not merely an invisible church of the pure but a church with visible, institutional elements, which will always embrace saints and sinners until the end of time. Moreover, the CA affirmed that ordained ecclesial ministers, bishops as well as priests, who stand “over against” the community by virtue of their ordination, belong essentially to the constitution of this church. This reading stood at odds with the criticisms leveled against the CA at the Diet of Augsburg (1530) by Johann Maier von Eck and others.\textsuperscript{252} Unlike Eck, Kasper found in the CA a Catholic ecclesiology that stood within the Augustinian tradition. More to the point, the neuralgic ecclesiological issue in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues of the 1970s, the essentially episcopal form of ecclesial ministry, appeared to Kasper to present no difficulty from the Lutheran perspective as presented by the CA. In this sense, Kasper found in the CA a promising (at least from a Catholic perspective) starting point for a new ecumenical discussion.

Did this analysis mean, however, that the CA merely represented a diplomatic effort at compromise that ultimately betrayed the fundamental intentions of the Reformers? In response to objections raised on the Lutheran side to this kind of 'Catholic' reading of the CA,\textsuperscript{253} Kasper's investigation proceeded to exposit the 'Protestant' or 'evangelical' ('evangelisch') starting-point for the otherwise 'Catholic' ecclesiology of the confession.\textsuperscript{254} Although the CA defined the Church according to Kasper in a fully 'catholic' way as the \textit{congregatio fidelium}, it conceived of this community of believers no less decisively as an 'evangelical' reality, that is, as the community “in

\textsuperscript{251} Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 84. On the ecclesiology of the CA, see ibid., 84-87.

\textsuperscript{252} On the critical reception of the CA at the Diet of Augsburg, see NCE, s.vv. “Augsburg Confession” and “Eck, Johann.”

\textsuperscript{253} See Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 84.

\textsuperscript{254} On the Protestant starting-point of the CA, see Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 88-93.
which the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments administered according to the
Gospel.”

The CA held fast to the Reformation impulse by placing its Catholic understanding of the Church within an all-encompassing perspective whose center and criterion was the Gospel of God's righteousness, which meant “that God justifies each one who believes that one has been accepted through grace for Christ's sake, not because of one's own merits but because of Christ.”

Many aspects of the life of the Church during the time of the Reformation came under criticism through the Reformers' application of this standard, including the cult of the saints and the idea of the Mass as sacrifice, topics that Kasper bracketed out of his reflections in 1978. His main point was that the criterion of the Gospel did not exclude in principle a fully Catholic understanding of ecclesial ministry; according to the CA, the Reformers were prepared to subject themselves to the rule of the bishops, provided that the bishops subjected themselves to the criterion of the Gospel. Admittedly, in a revised version of this paper, Kasper observed that because the CA handled church ministry in its discussion of abuses rather than its discussion of the essence of the Church, it left the door open to abandoning the episcopally-structured church and the institution of new ministries in the event that the CA should be rejected by church authorities, which in fact came to pass. Nevertheless, the fact that the CA intended to restore communion with the bishops showed that the Reformers understood the evangelical impulse first of all as a leaven for the renewal of the existing church rather than a warrant to break away and

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255 CA, art. 7; Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 88.

256 CA, art. 5; Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 88-89. Compare CA, art. 4.

257 See Kasper, “Augsburger Bekenntnis im evangelisch-katholischen Gespräch,” 90. This observation agreed with the passing comment Kasper made on the satis est of the CA in 1973. See “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt,” 228-29.
start a new church. In this sense, Kasper called the CA an ecumenical “Magna Carta” for its own day as well as today.\textsuperscript{258}

The situation of the churches 450 years after the Reformation has for Kasper created a new opportunity for the churches to receive the 'catholic' and 'evangelical' initiative presented by the CA.\textsuperscript{259} For Catholics, Kasper wrote, the CA raised the question of how the primacy of the Gospel over the Church can be realized in the concrete. This challenge of the CA dovetailed with Kasper's critique of the baroque and neo-Scholastic elements in Catholic theology, which essentially identified tradition with the magisterium of the Church and in so doing obscured the primacy of scripture as well as the role of other witnesses to the tradition along with their critical potential.\textsuperscript{260} The CA thus represented a challenge to the authorities within the Catholic Church, including the Pope, to practice their ministries concretely as a service on behalf of, and not a hindrance to, Christian freedom. For Lutherans, the CA's 'catholic' structure, its willingness to submit itself to the authority of the bishops and to an ecclesial process of reception, raised the question of whether the binding authority of the Church is not in fact necessary for the sake of a right proclamation of the Gospel. Who is competent to decide where the Gospel is proclaimed in its purity and the sacraments administered appropriately? Has the principle of Scripture as its own interpreter proven its worth in the aftermath of the Reformation, or has it rather been the cause of new divisions? In short, where else can one encounter the Gospel other than in and through the Church? This included the question of the value of the creeds and the testimony of the early Church, which were normative for the CA. Bypassing the question of a mutual

\textsuperscript{258} Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 99.

\textsuperscript{259} On the question of a reception of the CA in the new situation facing the churches, see Kasper, “Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht,” 95-100.

\textsuperscript{260} On the neo-Scholastic doctrine of tradition, see DW 38-51; “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition,” 174-76; as well as pp. 316-18 and 327-29, above.
"recognition" of the CA, Kasper instead suggested that a "reception" of this document by the churches in the present could be the occasion for a mutual enrichment of both churches on the road to the restoration of a visible communio-unity between Catholics and Lutherans.261

In these and other essays published in the years leading up to 1980 on the topic of the CA, Kasper maintained a cautious but hopeful outlook on the trajectory of the Lutheran-Catholic discussion.262 The fact that ecumenical dialogue had discovered in one of the Lutheran churches' foundational documents an important resource for overcoming the impasse over ministry in apostolic succession was perhaps the most obvious reason for his renewed hopefulness. To a certain extent, these common ecclesiological foundations permitted Kasper to return to his "classical" ecumenical posture, which conceived of the separated churches as different living expressions of the one saving Tradition, which could enrich one another and the world by entering into dialogue and being reconciled to one another. The CA showed that it was conceivable that the churches could be fundamentally united over what belongs constitutively to Christian existence, such as the essential signs of the apostolicity of the Church; in such a case, diversity over other matters was possible and indeed a sign of health and vitality within the living tradition. Kasper tempered this hopefulness with caution, however, since, after the disappointments of the dialogue of the early 1970s, the existence of a basic consensus between the churches even over matters that one or the other church considered essential to Christian identity could no longer be taken for granted. In 1977, for example, Kasper still found it


necessary to ask whether his Lutheran dialogue-partners could still receive the CA's positive valuation of the Apostles' and Nicene-Constantinopolitan creeds, to say nothing of its attitude toward the episcopacy.\textsuperscript{263}

Kasper grew still more cautious as the debate over a possible recognition of the CA began to heat up. In “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” a thoroughly revised version of “Die Confessio Augustana in katholischer Sicht” that Kasper presented in 1979 and published in 1982, he reviewed the historical context in which the CA was formed (the confession's relationship to the different theologies of the Reformers and its role as foundation for a confessional church after 1530) in light of the evolving debate over its meaning and significance for the churches today.\textsuperscript{264} This wider perspective enabled him to determine more precisely than in 1980 the role played in the CA by the doctrine of justification by grace alone, a major theme of Lutheran criticism of the CA within the debate of the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{265} According to Kasper, Luther identified the line of demarcation between belief and unbelief with the doctrine of justification, which represented his own fundamental option on Christology and theological anthropology. This meant for Luther that the whole of Christianity was at stake in the question of indulgences as well as the question of the cult of the saints—issues that Kasper had passed over in earlier versions of this essay. Melanchthon, on the other hand, in his efforts to protect Luther's central insight from becoming merely a negation of the humanism of Erasmus, sought to integrate Luther's doctrine of justification into the faith of the whole Church. This allowed him in the CA to classify practices that Luther considered church-dividing simply as abuses that could

\begin{footnotes}
\item[263] See Kasper, “Augsburger Bekenntnis im evangelisch-katholischen Gespräch,” 97.
\item[264] Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana” (see p. 451n53, above).
\item[265] On the doctrine of justification in Luther, Melanchthon, and the CA, see Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” 37-47.
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be tolerated to a certain extent if at least the norm of the Gospel of justification were recognized by the Church. Melanchthon thereby produced a model for reconciling evangelical freedom with the Catholic principle of fullness.

Kasper admitted, as he had in earlier publications, that the *satis est* of the CA served to legitimate the Reformers' subsequent decision to break away from Catholic unity.²⁶⁶ It did so, first, by excluding a unifying church ministry from the criteria necessary for unity, which it identified as the proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments; second, by defining unity in faith, whose criterion was the doctrine of justification, as norm for sacramental practice and church leadership. At the same time, the CA showed that the Reformers thought it possible and even desirable for the sake of the freedom of the Gospel to maintain communion with the episcopally-structured church. According to Kasper's analysis of the present ecumenical situation, much depended on whether one considered the 'catholic' and 'evangelical' principles to be fundamentally opposed, as Luther thought, or reconcilable in principle, as Melanchthon sought to demonstrate in the CA.

In “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” Kasper identified infallibility as the question on which the reconcilability of Catholic fullness and evangelical freedom had to be decided in the contemporary context.²⁶⁷ By this he did not mean the infallibility of the Pope in particular so much as the infallibility of the whole Church, which was constitutive of Kasper's theology of tradition.²⁶⁸ In light of the CA's double attitude toward

²⁶⁶ On criteria for the unity of the Church, see Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” 47-51.


²⁶⁸ On the infallibility of the Church, see above, pp. 278-79, 290-91, 355-57, and 450-52.
the bishops, Kasper posed the question to his Lutheran counterparts: is the Church capable of decisions that can no longer be reversed in principle? Can it bind itself irrevocably to the episcopal college, for example, or is such a decision always subject to review based on a new reading of the Gospel? And who is competent to decide whether the teachings or structures of the Church conform to the Gospel? Who liberates the Gospel from your or my limited interpretation of it? For Kasper, however, the CA also raised the question of infallibility for Catholics: how can the sovereignty of the Word of God over the Church be preserved if the Church is in any sense infallible?

By way of a solution, Kasper proposed as a model for the right relationship between Church authority and the Gospel his vision of the Church and its tradition as an open system standing between the “already” and the “not yet” of salvation history. On the one hand, for Kasper, the Gospel's unconditional claim on the consciences of believers becomes concrete in a quasi-sacramental way in the authority of church leaders to make binding and sometimes irreversible decisions over faith and church disciplines. On the other hand, this does not mean that the Pope or the bishops immediately possess the authority of the Gospel, since the infallibility exercised by church leaders is none other than that of the whole Church. The infallibility of the Church embraces the tension between ministry and community that ensures the lay Christian's freedom to seek an ever more perfect embodiment of the fullness of the Gospel in the Church. Magisterial teaching does not for Kasper collapse this tension, but rather

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269 On what follows, see Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” 56.

270 See Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” 54.

271 In this context, however, Kasper connected his theology of tradition and church with the patristic ecclesiology of communio and the evangelical starting-point of the CA. On what follows, see Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” 56-57.
shifts the inner-ecclesial dialogue into a new mode and so preserves the dialogue in the form of a conversation over the right reception of this new teaching. Kasper thus pointed the whole ecumenical discussion back to the principle of tradition, just as he had in his treatment of apostolic succession in 1973.

One would have ruled out such a solution to the problem of infallibility from the outset if one interpreted the doctrine of justification rigorously as the single overarching criterion of Christian existence, as Luther, and even the CA to a certain extent, did. In both “Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?” and “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” Kasper attempted to show that such an understanding of justification would call into question the basic ecumenical agreement over the principle of the inseparability of scripture and tradition and would therefore indicate a fundamental difference between the churches. Thus, as prominent Lutheran theologians continued to criticize the CA and the movement for its recognition on the grounds of an “evangelical deficit” in the CA, leading to further frustration on both sides of the dialogue, Kasper began to grapple with the possibility that the failure of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue to yield a reconciliation between the churches in spite of all apparent convergences might point to insuperable differences between the dialogue-partners.

In “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft: Zum Stand des ökumenischen Gesprächs zwischen katholischer und evangelisch-lutherischer Kirche,” Kasper attended to the basic presuppositions of Lutheran and Catholic theology in order to clarify the meaning for church unity of the consensus over basic truths that had been the fruit of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue up

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272 The question of fundamental differences remained unstated in these essays, however. For an explicit discussion of this question within a different ecumenical context, see Kasper, “Taufe, Eucharistie und Amt in der gegenwärtigen ökumenischen Diskussion,” 305-6.

to that point. According to Kasper, a significant stream of Catholic ecumenical theology operated under the presupposition that a unity among the churches would take place according to the model of “communio-unity,” that is, a unity in diversity. For if the fundamental articles of faith point beyond themselves to the one Reality they signify, then the believer's assent to the articles of faith may be understood as a fides implicita (implicit faith) in the totality of revealed truth, which unites her or him to all other believers in spite of differences that might exist between the ways they believe and profess the faith. Observing that some Catholic theologians applied this concept of fides implicita to churches with different confessions, Kasper argued that a consensus of faith could exist between such churches provided that each church recognized the binding teachings of the other as legitimate developments from the fundamental truths of faith rather than heretical corruptions of this common foundation.

As Kasper had already shown in his analysis of the CA's idea of church unity, the Reformers proceeded from a different conception of fundamental consensus: assent to the doctrine of justification as criterion of all traditions and structures within the Church. The fact that national and international Lutheran-Catholic dialogues had repeatedly indicated that justification was no longer a church-dividing issue suggested that this model might also be acceptable to both sides. In “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” however, Kasper pointed

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274 Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft” (see p. 170n6, above), 161-81.

275 Kasper's own proposal that the churches engage in a mutual reception of the CA presupposed a communio-model of Church unity. See Kasper, “Augsburger Bekenntnis im evangelisch-katholischen Gespräch,” 93-94. On Catholic conceptions of unity in faith, see “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 165-69.

276 This is a Thomistic insight basic to Kasper's theology of tradition. See Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae 2-2.1.7, as well as p. 352, above.

out that everything depended on how one interpreted and critically applied this doctrine.\textsuperscript{278} In light of the abiding tension between the dialogue-partners over the role of justification as hermeneutical principle of the whole of Christian life, Kasper wondered to what extent the idea of justification espoused by his Lutheran counterparts followed not the trajectory of Melanchthon but that of the early Luther by presenting pure passivity as the only fitting human comportment toward God's unconditional offer of grace. A basic theological and anthropological option of this kind would for Kasper have entailed a comprehensive reinterpretation of the faith that touched the basic affirmations of Christology (the relationship between Jesus's humanity and his divinity) as well as Mariology, ecclesiology, and a fundamental theology of tradition and dogma. Particularly in conjunction with the principle of \textit{sola scriptura}, this hermeneutical perspective would rule out the idea—essential to Kasper's theology of tradition—that the Word of God not only stands “over against” the Church in the scriptures but also remains living and effective “in” the Church as the concrete place of truth.\textsuperscript{279} From this standpoint, it is easy to understand why the churches have not yet resolved their differences over church ministry. Taken to its logical conclusion, the doctrine of justification understood in the tradition of Luther would force one to reject as unbelief hefty portions of the faith and life of the Catholic Church, which would preclude the possibility of a \textit{communio}-unity among the churches. This fundamental option diverges radically from the faith confessed by Catholics.

This is not to say that Kasper was ready to give up on the possibility of unity between Lutherans and Catholics. On the contrary, he immediately followed this inquiry into fundamental

\textsuperscript{278} This insight was implicit in Kasper's analysis of the different accounts of justification produced by Luther and Melanchthon. See Kasper, “Kirchenverständnis und Kircheneinheit nach der Confessio Augustana,” 37-47.

\textsuperscript{279} On Catholic and Protestant differences over the formal criteria for Church unity, see Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 173-75.
differences with a list of results from ecumenical dialogue that pointed in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{280} His point was that the methodology of classical ecumenism, which had served admirably to break the ice that had surrounded Lutheran-Catholic relations in the pre-Vatican II era, was no longer adequate to the current state of the dialogue. If the dialogue-partners want to avoid spinning their wheels, they need to risk the discomfort of an honest and penetrating inquiry into the differences between the churches as well as their common ground. Only thus could one hope to distinguish between fruitful avenues for dialogue and mere ecumenical niceties.

To summarize: between the early 1970s and the late 1980s Kasper made the transition from a “classical” ecumenical posture toward his Lutheran dialogue-partners to a more sober, less enthusiastic attitude, paying more attention than before to the remaining differences between the churches. While the familiar features of his early ecumenical theology did not disappear as a result of this transition, a shift of emphasis had taken place: from a focus on freedom and futurity to a reminder that what makes possible Christian freedom and the future of the Church is precisely its boundedness to its “Beginning in Fullness,” to the whole of the apostolic norm established in the first centuries of the Christian era; from a sacramental ecclesiology that highlights the distinction between “sign” and “signified” to one that makes it clear that their fundamental unity and inseparability is the normative case, and their separation is the limit-case; from pointing out the work of the Holy Spirit in ecclesial communions outside the Catholic Church to highlighting the need for each charism to be united with the college of bishops, which carries on the ministries of unity and leadership entrusted to the Apostles by Christ.

This shift meant that Kasper was striving more and more to emphasize God's faithfulness at work in the Catholic Church, a dimension of divine fidelity that he could not express to the

\textsuperscript{280} On convergences between Catholics and Lutherans over the principle of tradition and questions that remain unanswered, see Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 175-79.
same degree within his earlier, “classical” approach to Lutheran-Catholic relations. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, Catholic controversial theology had so emphasized the effectiveness of divine promise within the concrete, institutional Catholic Church that it became virtually impossible to recognize the operation of the Spirit outside of this Church. To demonstrate that an authentic dialogue between churches, a mutual exchange of gifts that empowered both partners to proclaim the Gospel more effectively to the world, was possible in this situation, it was necessary for the Catholic partner to affirm the unique spiritual gifts bestowed on other Christian communities. Yet the enthusiastic beginnings of Catholic involvement in the ecumenical movement, coupled with the radical criticism of tradition that had been the unanticipated result of the rise of historical-critical exegesis, gave rise to the opposite danger: an eclipse of the unique heritage entrusted to the Catholic Church, its identity as sacrament of God's Reign of freedom in the world. In this new situation, the same preconditions of dialogue required Kasper to reaffirm the special divine commitment promised to the concrete, sacramentally-structured church, the People of God established by Christ and led by the successors to the Apostles, the college of bishops in union with the pope.

For Kasper, the unique mode in which divine fidelity manifests itself in the Catholic Church bore significance for the very process of ecumenical dialogue among the churches. Understood within the framework of a *communio*-ecclesiology, the gift of infallibility is not something that simply overrides consensus and so puts an end to dialogue. Rather, by allowing the Church to witness to the truth within a particular situation in a definitive way, the infallibility of the Church motivates dialogue to move toward a more satisfactory common witness to the ever-greater truth of faith and so to bring about a new consensus more firmly rooted in the fullness of the truth. Within Kasper's understanding of tradition, the 'catholic' principle of
fullness provided an indispensable counterpart to the 'evangelical' critical principle inasmuch as it safeguarded the ongoing dialogue of tradition, which today includes ecumenical dialogue, from absolutizing the experience of one era (the disaster of the sixteenth century, for example) and so obscuring the lessons learned by the Church in other times and places (the unifying function of the bishops, creeds, and biblical canon in the face of the Gnostic crisis, for example). In extreme cases, this kind of forgetfulness could undermine even the very presuppositions of faith and so preclude a meaningful consensus among the churches that was at the same time faithful to the heritage of the Apostles—a basic goal of ecumenical dialogue.

This raises a crucial question for ecumenical dialogue. If it is true that the 'catholic' principle here described represents a fundamental presupposition of a dialogue between churches, then would it not be the case that a disagreement between churches over the value of this principle amounted to a basic, irreconcilable difference? How can there be a meaningful ecumenical dialogue without such an agreement?

4. A dialogue among churches: contributions during the 1980s and beyond

As noted already, Kasper did not think that the differences between the churches were so permanent and irreconcilable that they precluded any attempt at dialogue. Merely to pose the question is not to imply that such differences certainly exist. Contrary to the analysis of some theologians, Kasper had already suggested in “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft” that many of the results of ecumenical dialogue pointed to a significant common ground between the churches in spite of their abiding differences. Lutherans and Catholics have agreed that there is an intimate link between the word of God and the people of God: communion with Christ and

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communion in the church go hand in hand. To be sure, the dialogue-partners have differed over the value of consensus: Lutherans have set the Gospel (with the doctrine of justification at its center) as an exterior norm “over against” any consensus in the church, even that of an ecumenical council, while Catholics, who have admitted the normative function of Scripture, have nevertheless affirmed its indissoluble link to tradition and church, such that they perceived the word of God at work both “in” and “over against” the church, operating in the consensus of the faithful as well as in Scripture and the creeds. At the same time, Lutherans and Catholics have consistently affirmed the inseparability of scripture and tradition as well as the normative role of scripture within tradition—a result whose value Kasper has repeatedly underscored. Likewise, both dialogue-partners have agreed that the church can and does make use of ecclesial ministries in order to carry out its mission, although for Lutherans the nature of the church does not demand this. In general, according to Kasper, the churches have converged over the practical implementation of church life to a degree that is surprising in light of their continued disagreement over ecclesiological principles.

In light of the prickly question of fundamental differences, what is the significance of this practical and (to some extent) theological consensus? In the first place, it prompted for Kasper the question of whether Lutherans and Catholics have not yet reflected deeply enough in ecumenical conversation on the reality of the church. Might not the convergence between the churches on the level of practical ecclesiology suggest that the doctrine of justification in fact

282 This was for Luther a basic conviction. See Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 172.
283 See Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 173-75.
284 See Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 175-76.
286 On the question of the Church within the horizon of the basic anthropological and theological questions raised by the doctrine of justification, see Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 178-81.
permits a greater degree of active human participation in the divine work of salvation than the rigorous interpretations of some Lutheran theologians claim? Could justification accommodate a common theological valuation of the practical consensus between Catholics and Lutherans over institutional structures? Apropos the status of the existing ecumenical consensus: does justification preclude the possibility that God could use a consensus among Christians to witness in a definitive way to the meaning of the Gospel? Kasper concluded that the most urgent task facing Lutheran-Catholic dialogue was to clarify their understanding and practice of church life against the background of the basic questions of theological anthropology raised by the doctrine of justification. Only after the dialogue-partners have clarified the significance of a consensus in the church could they agree on their assessment of the meaningfulness for church unity of a consensus achieved in ecumenical dialogue.

This kind of convergence over ecclesiology would depend upon reflection over the practical experience of being church. Thus, in the second place, the existing consensus indicated to Kasper the importance of Lutherans and Catholics undergoing, to the extent that this was possible, shared experiences of church life. From the beginning of his academic career, Kasper had been calling for an elevation of the ecumenical discussion to a new plane, from a dialogue among theologians to a dialogue between churches. An agreement between theologians only demonstrates whether a reconciliation between the churches is possible; the actual restoration of unity must involve official acts on the parts of churches. The importance of such action became especially clear to Kasper in light of the emerging importance of the question of the

287 On the task of developing a common theological valuation of institutional structures in the Church, see Kasper, “Apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem” (see p. 448n38, above), 347-49.

288 See Ökumene 339, 344-45; “Gesamtchristliche Relevanz der reformatorischen Bekenntnisschriften,” 142.

Church within ecumenical dialogue. The debate over a possible recognition of the CA by the Catholic Church represented for Kasper an important shift in this direction. While he initially questioned what was meant by “Catholic recognition of the Confessio Augustana,” he latched onto the idea that the churches themselves, and not just individual Christians, should take some common action, whether that should mean indicating in some official way that a mutual recognition of the CA was possible in principle, or engaging in a mutual process of reception involving all levels of church life.  

Kasper's work in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue proceeded into his new career as bishop on these two tracks: theological reflection over the Church and its structures and practical suggestions for mutual action and cooperation as churches. In “Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend? Überlegungen zu der Studie des Ökumenischen Arbeitskreises,” Kasper commented on the work of a panel of German scholars who had determined that the condemnations issued by the Council of Trent and the Lutheran confessions no longer applied to the teachings of each church in the present. Because this report focused on the topics of justification and the eucharist while setting aside the implications of justification as criterion for such questions as the status of dogma, that of the sacrament of penance and that of ecclesiastical offices, it represented for Kasper only an incremental advance within the current situation of ecumenical dialogue. The significance of such a result for church unity could only remain a question mark apart from a more penetrating analysis that brought much-needed clarity to the

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now central question of the Church. Nevertheless, since Kasper thought the historical and theological work of the commission was basically sound, though of limited value, he considered it warrant enough for a formal, public act of recognition by the churches. Such an act would for Kasper have to be one in which both churches could participate in good conscience; one could neither demand that the Lutheran churches issue a binding doctrinal decision on the work of the commission nor require that the Catholic Church admit Lutherans to communion as a result of this agreement. A public, mutual act of the churches withdrawing these condemnations would not create full ecclesial communion between them, but it would bring about a qualitative change in their relationship, as the 1965 withdrawal of the mutual excommunications of 1054 had for the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

As Kasper continued to pursue Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the twofold mode described above, he began looking more and more toward the churches of the East for inspiration. During the 1990s, Kasper published, revised, and republished a paper that revisited a topic he had examined in the early 1970s: the relationship between ecclesial ministry and apostolic succession. Setting his earlier position in historical context, Kasper observed that for the Bible and the Church Fathers, one's incorporation into the apostolic college through the laying on of hands (*successio, communio*) and one's transmission of the Church's apostolic heritage through one's personal witness, including a holy life as well as authentic teaching (*traditio*) formed a unity, even if this unity was broken in extreme cases (the flagrant heresy of a

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294 On the question of a formal act recognizing that the condemnations in question no longer divided the churches, see Kasper, “Lehrverurteilungen,” 199-203.


bishop, for example).\textsuperscript{297} The dissolution in the Middle Ages of this sacramental vision of the Church and its ministers in apostolic succession formed the background for the Reformation divide: the Reformers, whose intention to reform ministry in the church on the basis of the Gospel had been frustrated, constructed a new form of ministry by elevating the element of \textit{traditio} over \textit{successio} and \textit{communio}; in the meantime, Trent reaffirmed that the episcopally-structured Church is the concrete sign and instrument of the Gospel, but it did so within the categories of a one-sided, juridical, institution-centered ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{298}

The renewal of the sacramental ecclesiology of the early Church at Vatican II meant for Kasper a new opportunity for rapprochement between the 'catholic' attention to the visible signs of apostolic succession and the 'evangelical' emphasis on its authentic content.\textsuperscript{299} In his view, a common theological account of the relationship between evangelical freedom in the Spirit and the self-commitment of God and his Spirit to the institutions and structures of the Church would be essential to a future consensus over ministry.\textsuperscript{300} Kasper suggested in this vein that a pneumatological understanding of ecclesiastical structures like that found in Eastern Orthodox theology could perhaps best account for the possibility that the reality of office has been preserved in Reformation churches through a special grace.\textsuperscript{301} A vision such as this, which also


\textsuperscript{299} On the new situation brought about by the Second Vatican Council, see Kasper, “Apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem,” 343-46; “Das Zweite Vatikanum weiterdenken,” 215-16.


affirmed the significance of the visible signs of apostolicity, might perhaps serve to rehabilitate Kasper’s 1971 proposal that the churches consider mutually recognizing one another’s ministries.\textsuperscript{302}

Kasper’s essays contributed to a fourth phase of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, which dealt with the topic of the apostolicity of the Church. He served as the Catholic co-chair over this dialogue until his appointment as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 2001. In the meantime, however, Lutherans and Catholics together were also pursuing the question of an official and mutual reception of the fruits of their national and international dialogues by their respective churches.\textsuperscript{303} Motivated in part by the above-mentioned study on the Reformation-era condemnations, while cognizant of similar results from dialogues in other contexts, the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (representing the Catholic Church) began in 1988 to take steps toward some form of joint recognition of the convergence that had taken place in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on justification as well as on other topics, such as ecclesiology. In 1993, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America elected to pursue an official recognition by the year 1997 of the growing consensus between Catholics and Lutherans, focusing specifically on the doctrine of justification.\textsuperscript{304} They were soon joined in this project by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. A task force was formed in 1993 that produced in 1994 a first draft of what would become the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

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\textsuperscript{302} See Kasper, “Apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem,” 348-49.

\textsuperscript{303} On the initial efforts of Catholics and Lutherans to foster official reception of the results of their dialogues by their respective churches, see Radano, Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification, 113-30.

\textsuperscript{304} On the bilateral ecclesial process leading to the production of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, see Radano, Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification, 131-45.
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The draft received numerous comments from both sides and went through several revisions before an expanded drafting committee produced the final version of the declaration in 1997.

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) employed the method of differentiated consensus, declaring that the churches had reached a consensus over basic truths with respect to justification that did not, however, eliminate all differences in the particular ways each side explained its understanding of these basic truths.\(^{305}\) The continued existence of these differences was the occasion for a certain amount of drama in the months leading up to the solemn signing ceremony in Augsburg on October 31, 1999.\(^{306}\) On the Lutheran side, the Lutheran World Federation Council moved on June 16, 1998 to approve the JDDJ and its assertion (no. 41) that the doctrinal condemnations of the Lutheran confessional writings did not apply to the teachings of the Catholic Church as presented in the JDDJ. It did so, however, over the protests of more than 140 Protestant professors in Germany, who denied that Catholics and Lutherans had reached the claimed basic consensus. On the Catholic side, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released a statement on June 25, 1998 that affirmed that Lutherans and Catholics had reached “a high degree of agreement” and “a consensus in basic truths on the doctrine of justification,” while seeking additional explanation of some of the specifically Lutheran ways of expressing this doctrine in order to clarify the degree of that consensus.\(^{307}\) This declaration, however, suggested


\(^{306}\) On obstacles to a joint signing of the JDDJ, see Radano, *Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification*, 146-55.

to many Lutherans that their Catholic counterparts did not accept the JDDJ, particularly no. 41, in the same sense as their own church did.

This sort of drama, however, was nothing new to the history of the churches and their traditions. Still, the fact that the dialogue continued at all was a fruit of the healing that had already taken place in Catholic-Lutheran relations over the previous decades. As Cardinals Cassidy and Ratzinger assured their dialogue-partners that the Catholic side had in fact accepted the consensus articulated in the JDDJ, it was proposed that two additional documents be produced to clarify the agreement between the churches: an “Official Common Statement,” which stated unambiguously the content of the agreement, namely, that the relevant doctrinal condemnations did not apply to the teaching of either dialogue-partner as expressed in the JDDJ, and an “Annex,” which clarified certain points brought up by the June 25, 1998 Catholic response to the JDDJ. Bishop Kasper, for his part, was closely involved in the production of the “Official Common Statement,” and, having been appointed as secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in March of 1999, he was one of the Catholic co-signers of that same “Statement,” by which the churches declared their agreement over justification.

Using Kasperean categories, one could describe what took place between Lutherans and Catholics in the official joint reception and promulgation of the JDDJ as an act of traditioning together as churches. Kasper himself understood it as an event in the living tradition of the church. In “Meilenstein auf dem Weg der Ökumene,” published in the year of the signing, Kasper contextualized the JDDJ against the backdrop of the historical sojourn of the “ecclesia

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308 On the drama that has often accrued to the process of reception in the Catholic tradition, see DW 131-32.

309 On the final steps that led to the joint signing of the JDDJ, see Radano, Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification, 156-66.
There is a sense in which this church does not change, since the Holy Spirit perpetually maintains it in the truth of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. At the same time, Kasper noted, it is constantly reminded by the same Spirit of the inexhaustible richness and liveliness of divine truth, and so brings this truth to expression in ever new ways. In other words, the JDDJ represented for Kasper “a Spirit-guided development of dogma and understanding of dogma.” It was not a “revolution” so much as an “evolution” of the ability of Christians to express in common the one truth of the Gospel. The JDDJ empowered Lutherans and Catholics to witness together to the justifying grace of God that each believer receives at baptism, which renders the baptized a new creation in Christ. Moreover, on the basis of this common confession, the remaining differences between the ways the two churches explain this doctrine have lost their church-dividing character. Kasper therefore agreed with Pope John Paul II, who called the JDDJ a “milestone”: it was a momentous event, a monument of ecumenical progress and a foundation for future work.

In making this common declaration over justification, the churches took their bearings from a fresh inquiry into the one Gospel of Jesus Christ as normed by the classic Christological and trinitarian creeds. Kasper highlighted the importance for a united (Lutheran and Catholic) witness to the Gospel of the fact that the JDDJ stood on this common creedal foundation.

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310 On what follows, see Kasper, “Meilenstein auf dem Weg der Ökumene” (see p. 443n24, above), 736-39.


312 Kasper, “Meilenstein auf dem Weg der Ökumene,” 736.


“Meilenstein,” when Kasper described the 'center of the Gospel' as it was presented in the JDDJ, he pointed to the baptismal and trinitarian language of JDDJ no. 11: through faith in the Gospel, Christians enter into communion with God and become a new creation in Christ when they receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of baptism. For Kasper, the language of 'new creation' meant a real, effective, and permanent renewal of the Christian, which, however, does not totally banish temptations to sin from her or his life. In later writings, Kasper shifted his focus from no. 11 to nos. 14-17, in which the JDDJ articulated its “consensus in the basic truths.” Once again, the salient point for Kasper was the integration of the doctrine of justification into the Christological and trinitarian foundations laid by the ecumenical councils of the church of the first millennium. This meant for Kasper a reconciliation between two readings of the Gospel that Catholics and Lutherans had once opposed to one another: between an 'objective' or ontological Christology and justification as Christology's 'subjective' dimension, between Luther's existential concern for the sovereignty of grace and a Catholic sapiential perspective that attends to grace's effective power, which bears fruit in the good works of the justified person.

Kasper considered this a broad consensus and thus an important rapprochement between the churches. As with so many other official expressions of the faith of the Church, however, the JDDJ was for Kasper in need of translation. According to Kasper, the average Christian can no longer identify with the experiences that prompted Luther to formulate the doctrine of


justification. Kasper thus considered a translation of the message of justification into the experiential categories of the modern world to be an urgent task facing the churches.

Kasper himself proposed to translate justification into the language of God's loving acceptance, mercy, effective presence and accompaniment, language he had elsewhere linked to divine fidelity. In “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” he wrote:

[T]he doctrine of justification wants to say that we neither can nor should 'make' our own life or its fulfilment: we cannot accomplish this by our own efforts. Our value as persons does not depend on our good or bad achievements. Before we ourselves do anything, we have been accepted and affirmed. Our life stands under the horizon of mercy and is ruled by a merciful God, who through everything and despite everything holds us in his kind hands. This frees us from fear, gives us hope and courage and fills us with the joy of the children of God.

For Kasper, the implications of this vision transcended the individual Christian. Preaching on a passage from the prophet Ezekiel at an ecumenical vespers service held the day before the signing of the JDDJ, Kasper applied the message of justification to the ecumenical event of the JDDJ itself. He explained that the divisions among Christians are a result of sin, the hardness of Christian hearts, a state of affairs that the churches are incapable of reversing on their own. The re-creation and gathering of this divided people could therefore only be a free and gracious

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319 On the contemporary dissolution of the presuppositions that conditioned the experience of Christians during the Middle Ages (as well as the Reformation), see Erfahrung, as well as pp. 105-9, above.


323 On what follows, see Kasper, “Catholics and Lutherans Sign Joint Declaration,” 345-46.
gift of God, *sola gratia*. For Kasper, however, the ongoing restoration of unity that could be seen in the ecumenical movement did not preclude human exertion but rather included the activity of Christians. Gathered by the gracious and merciful God, Catholics and Lutherans are called to be merciful and gracious, proclaiming in common the Gospel of God's graciousness and love with their lives as well as their words.\(^{324}\) In this way, said Kasper, we—Lutherans and Catholics together—“will be the people of God, and God will be our God. He will be with us.”\(^{325}\)

The significance of this insight should not be overlooked. As an act of the faithful God as well as an act of the churches, the JDDJ was for Kasper pregnant with ecclesiological and anthropological meaning. As he made the transition from his office as bishop and secretary of the PCPCU to that of cardinal and PCPCU president, Kasper’s reflections began to give this ecclesiological dimension greater emphasis. In his report on the activities of the Pontifical Council during the year 1999, Kasper observed that the signing of the JDDJ constituted an official common endorsement of differentiated consensus as a model for unity.\(^{326}\) Admitting that different understandings of “differentiated consensus” and “reconciled diversity” existed, he interpreted this as convergence toward a *communio*-ecclesiology understood as unity in diversity or, in the language of Möhler, as a creative tension between opposite poles, which is not something inimical to but constitutive of a living church.\(^{327}\) Its endorsement by the churches represented a significant development for Kasper, since, according to his 1987 analysis of the

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\(^{326}\) On the status of differentiated consensus in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue since the JDDJ, see Kasper, “Der päpstliche Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen im Jahre 1999,” 82.

idea of a fundamental consensus, it is at least questionable whether the Reformers would have been able to accept a church unity grounded in a differentiated consensus.  

Additionally, Kasper took note of the fact that the JDDJ had led to an intensification of relations between Catholics and Lutherans. Writing again four years later, Kasper assessed this renewal of Lutheran-Catholic relations in ecclesiological terms: “We held out our hands to each other as churches and we do not wish to let go ever again.” He justified this claim on the grounds of the status of the JDDJ as an official agreed statement: “The crucial thing is that through the Joint Declaration the churches themselves, rather than just theologians or even groups of theologians, have reached a substantial and fundamental consensus. It is this that makes the Joint Declaration something new. It is a document of the churches and, even more, a church event.” As a mutual act within the dialogue between two churches, the JDDJ was a shared experience of church reality, which could now serve as a point of reference for common reflection over the church and its life.

This raises the question of unresolved issues and future tasks facing the dialogue-partners in the aftermath of the Joint Declaration. As a consensus over fundamental truths—but not all fundamental truths, as Kasper made clear—the JDDJ represented a milestone rather than the final ecumenical goal. The fact that the JDDJ encountered mixed reactions, albeit mostly

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328 See Kasper, “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft,” 169.

329 See Kasper, “Der päpstliche Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen im Jahre 1999,” 82, 90.

330 Kasper, “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” 127; compare “Der päpstliche Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen im Jahre 1999,” 82. In both cases Kasper was paraphrasing Pope John Paul II; see “Der päpstliche Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen im Jahre 1999,” 90.


positive, confirmed for Kasper both the significance and the limitations of the declaration, pointing to the need for further work.\(^{334}\) Accordingly, the JDDJ itself laid out a program for further ecumenical progress.\(^{335}\) In “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” Kasper presented this program schematically as a series of four tasks, all of which correspond to different dimensions of his theology of tradition.\(^{336}\) One of these has already been mentioned: to translate the doctrine of justification, as common expression of the heart of the Gospel, into a language that speaks to the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the contemporary world, the language of preaching and catechesis. Even the most eloquent of homilies is useless, however, if it does not lead to practical consequences. This leads to a second task: to foster reception of this agreement within every dimension of the lives of both churches, not only on the universal but especially on the local level, in practical cooperation between the churches as well as within the catechesis and practice of each church. Of course, for Kasper, the life and teaching of the church must always be rooted in scripture and tradition. This calls for a third task: to deepen the existing consensus through continued study of the scriptural and traditional roots of justification. Kasper was particularly interested in reinforcing the connections between justification and the Christological and trinitarian foundations of Christian faith found in the early creeds, a task that he has elsewhere labeled “basic ecumenism.”\(^{337}\) Only a consensus of faith based on a return to the sources could hope to provide a firm foundation for the final task: to address the remaining disputed questions, including those more immediately related to justification (for example, the

\(^{334}\) See Kasper, “Der päpstliche Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen im Jahre 1999,” 82-84; “Situation und Zukunft der Ökumene,” 184-86.

\(^{335}\) See “Meilenstein auf dem Weg der Ökumene,” 738-39.

\(^{336}\) On further tasks facing Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, see Kasper, “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” 130-34.

\(^{337}\) Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*, 29. For a summary of agreements between the Catholic Church and four of its dialogue-partners over fundamental aspects of Christian faith, see ibid., 10-30.
meaning of *simul iustus et peccator* as well as those at the heart of current ecumenical disagreement, namely, the church, sacraments, and ecclesial ministry. One could also mention here the questions of fundamental theology that repeatedly recurred in the dialogue over justification: theological anthropology, the relationship between God and human beings, theological hermeneutics, and the role of justification as criterion of all ecclesial traditions.

The JDDJ expanded the basis of hope for a reconciliation of the divisions between Catholics and Lutherans. Kasper's own hopefulness for Lutheran-Catholic dialogue was in evidence in “Ökumenisch von Gott sprechen?,” his 2004 response to certain German Lutheran critics of the Joint Declaration.\(^{338}\) In the face of this historic agreement, Eberhard Jüngel and Gerhard Ebeling revived an idea that Kasper had discussed in “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft” in 1987, namely, that the doctrine of justification points to basic differences between the Lutheran and Catholic traditions.\(^{339}\) Ebeling for his part expanded this critique, claiming that these differences penetrated down to the level of speech-acts: while a Catholic “professes” objectified, metaphysical truths, a Lutheran “confesses” that God justifies “me” in the here and now of my present circumstances.\(^{340}\) If this disjunction held true, then a differentiated consensus like that proposed by the JDDJ would in fact be no consensus at all but a superficial measure masking a fundamental dissent between the two partners. Kasper's response appealed to Aquinas's notion of *sacra doctrina* to show that, at least from a Catholic perspective, one need not decide between a relational or existential act of faith and the objective

\(^{338}\) Kasper, “Ökumenisch von Gott sprechen.”

\(^{339}\) On the critique leveled against the JDDJ by Jüngel and Ebeling, see Kasper, “Ökumenisch von Gott sprechen,” 294-98.

content of that act.\textsuperscript{341} Furthermore, because for Aquinas the articles of faith in their multiplicity all point to the First Truth, who is God, they correspond in their diversity both to the unity of God and the unity of the Church through which revealed truth is mediated. Thus, according to Kasper, Aquinas provided foundations for a unity of the Church through a differentiated consensus in the one truth of faith. Of course, only Lutherans can decide whether they can affirm on the basis of their own tradition the value of a differentiated consensus of faith.\textsuperscript{342} In this regard, however, the widespread positive response to the JDDJ within the Lutheran community presented a hopeful sign.

Kasper's more optimistic tone in this essay corresponded to his understanding of the signing of the JDDJ as a spiritual event in the life of the churches, which has bestowed a new quality on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation. It was for Kasper a profound encouragement for ecumenical hope, the hope shared by all the churches engaged in the ecumenical movement that the Spirit will in his faithfulness bring to completion the work he has begun.\textsuperscript{343}

III. Summary and Conclusion

The foregoing chapter has narrated the stories of two dialogues—between Catholics and Jews and between Lutherans and Catholics—from the vantage point of Cardinal Kasper’s contributions to these dialogues. The two stories differ in a variety of respects. They differ in

\textsuperscript{341} On the unity between the existential act and metaphysical content of faith according to Thomas Aquinas, see Kasper, “Ökumenisch von Gott sprechen,” 298-301.

\textsuperscript{342} On what follows, see Kasper, “Ökumenisch von Gott sprechen,” 301-2.

\textsuperscript{343} See KK 439.
principle, since ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans has different goals and so proceeds by different methodologies than Jewish-Christian or Jewish-Catholic dialogue. They also differ in their concrete unfolding, since Kasper's involvement in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue began earlier and was more intense than his participation in the dialogue between Christians and Jews. At the same time, these stories share many common elements. Each began with a rupture between two communities that took place long before the present time: the *Urriss* between Christianity and rabbinic Judaism at the very origin of the Church, the division between Lutherans and Catholics in the sixteenth century. Each witnesses to important historical experiences—the worldwide expansion of Christian missions, the tragedy of the Shoah—that provoked a call to conscience on the part of Christians as well as a new investigation into history and theology. In each case, the Second Vatican Council signaled a decisive shift and a new openness of the Catholic Church to dialogue with these communities. Kasper's participation in each dialogue involved venturing into new territory: forging new relationships, getting to know one another, developing new ideas, making mistakes, clarifying boundaries, reaching breakthroughs, descending into lulls. His role in both dialogues shifted in 2001 when he became both president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the head of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. In each case, however, he continued to bring his own distinctive style of theology to the dialogue-table.

How does the notion of divine faithfulness discussed in the previous chapters of this study shed light on Kasper's career as 'dialoguer'? Chapter five showed that Kasper closely connected his understanding of theological truth with divine fidelity. This concept of truth was central to his understanding of the historical transmission of the faith (tradition). The introduction to the present chapter, however, argued that according to Kasper's view, the acts that
constitute the reality of tradition are nothing other than acts of communication or dialogue. This point correlates with the prominence of ecumenical concerns in the development of his idea of tradition. Putting these two insights together, one may state that dialogue is the praxis that corresponds to Kasper's understanding of the faithfulness of God. This coheres with the ecclesiological vision of *Katholische Kirche* presented in chapter four, where it was shown that the Church as the sacrament of God's faithfulness carried out its mission through dialogue.\(^{344}\) If dialogue is the praxis of fidelity, however, then Kasper's concrete praxis of dialogue represents a historical exegesis of his notion of divine fidelity. The remainder of the present chapter will flesh out this thesis by contextualizing Kasper's dialogical career within a narrative account of the faithfulness of God suggested by chapter four.

This narrative begins with the faithfulness of God to God's own inmost reality as love: as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Out of love, the Father creates human beings and wills that they, and all of creation with them, should be united in communion with himself. Through sin, however, human beings have broken away from communion with God, and have in so doing distorted their relationships with one another, bringing about every kind of injustice, enmity, violence and strife. Every ruptured relationship between human beings opposes the will of God. In spite of human unfaithfulness, however, God remains faithful to himself and to his loving will for the well-being of creation. Hence God took Abraham and his descendants into partnership with himself to be a sign and instrument of peace and reconciliation for the world. In the history of Israel the divine 'address' encountered a positive human 'response,' although the fidelity of this people was marred by acts of infidelity, which one finds scattered over the pages of the Old Testament. According to Kasper, it is only in Jesus Christ, in his obedience unto death, that the

\(^{344}\) See above, pp. 294-97.
faithfulness of the Father received its perfect “Amen” (see Rev. 3:14; 2 Cor. 1:19-20). As the incarnate Son of the Father, Jesus is also the fulfillment of the whole of the Law. Moreover, the eschatological fulfillment of creation becomes present in history in his resurrection; Jesus Christ is therefore the fullness of time, the definitive sign of divine faithfulness for the world. Nor did Jesus abandon the world with the end of his historical life; on the contrary, he gathered a community and bestowed his Spirit upon them so that they might witness with authority to his victory over every kind of alienation and unfreedom. Through the Holy Spirit, this Church shares in the definitiveness of Christ’s eschatological victory. The permanence of the Church, however, is both gift and task, since the Church is perpetually called to a more perfect fidelity to its origin—an ever-deeper relationship with Christ—in order that its mystery and essence as the universal sacrament of *communio* might shine more clearly through its preaching, liturgical celebrations, and loving service.

An honest examination of church history, however, gives one a sense of just how often the Church has failed in this task, obscuring its own sublime mystery. One sees reflected here the ups and downs that characterized the history of Israel, to which the Church has been grafted through its union with Christ. Not least among the infidelities of Christianity was the long and shameful history of persecution and violence that Jewish people suffered at the hands of Christians, abetted by the propagation of a “teaching of contempt” by many of those charged to proclaim the Good News of reconciliation and peace between Jew and Greek. For Kasper, this distorted relationship with Israel diminished the very being of the Church and obfuscated the truth of the Gospel. Something analogous could be said about the ecclesial divisions stemming from the Reformation. Theologically, the juridical and authoritarian vision of the Church that developed within the second millennium—which itself was in part a consequence of the
estrangement between East and West, according to Kasper—left little room for a patient process of discernment to determine whether the Reformation represented an authentic initiative of the Spirit for the renewal of the Church. Practically, a dearth of charity on both sides led to a lack of mutual understanding and eventually to mutual doctrinal condemnations, in spite of the mediatory efforts of a few extraordinary individuals like Philip Melanchthon. The bitter polemics of controversial theology hardened these confessional divisions while presenting the faith in a one-sided fashion, effectively splitting the Gospel in two. The Reformation thus dealt a serious blow to the catholicity of the Church.

The experiences of the twentieth century laid bare the truth that these estrangements contradicted the will of God. This in turn led, on the spiritual plane, to an examination of conscience on the part of the Church, and on the theological plane, to a new investigation into scripture, tradition, and the history of the Church, aided by the methods of critical historians. From a Kasperean perspective, one can count among the fruits of this new investigation a rediscovery of the depth and breadth of the faithfulness of God. This is most apparent in the case of Jewish-Christian dialogue, where a new exegesis of Romans 9-11, among other considerations, has led many Christian theologians, including Kasper, to conclude that God in his fidelity continues to honor the covenant he struck with Israel and has not rejected the Jews. Within the ecumenical realm, the Second Vatican Council's assertion that the Holy Spirit has continued to use ecclesial communities apart from the Catholic Church as instruments of salvation means, in Kasperean language, that these communities, too, are signs of divine fidelity for the world. In particular, Kasper's writings on the doctrine of justification suggested that the Lutheran tradition was in some instances able to express the existential, liberating reality of God's faithful love and mercy and its critical potential more effectively than post-Tridentine
Catholic theology. All of this implies that an ecclesiology that would so emphasize the Church's permanence and infallibility that it made the Church appear self-sufficient would constitute a truncation of the reality of divine fidelity.

The opposite extreme, however, which would place the Catholic Church on a par with all other church communities and religions, Kasper has also rejected as a surrendering of Catholic identity and its claim to uniqueness. Kasper's notion of God's faithfulness does not require one to abandon the Catholic Church's claims about itself. It does require that these claims be placed within a broader perspective. Such a contextualization took place in Kasper's retrieval of the sacramental ecclesiology of the early Church. As the universal sacrament of salvation, the Church is a sign- or symbol-quantity that must be interpreted not on its own terms but solely in terms of the Sache to which it points, the reality of salvation in Christ. As the Holy Spirit leads the Church ever deeper into this mystery of God's salvific will, it must continually be purified and renewed in light of this ever-greater mystery.

Into this sacramental framework Kasper incorporated his notion of representation, which he developed at length in Jesus der Christus, to mediate between the Church's unique identity and its call to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. For Kasper, the Church re-presents the unique authority of Christ precisely to the extent that it 'represents,' dedicates itself to and promotes the unique gifts of others. Thus, the Church's claim to be the unique sign of God's faithfulness for the world is never simply exclusive; it is inclusive precisely in its exclusivity. As the sacrament of divine fidelity, the Church fosters every new outbreak of the Spirit among the faithful; it is charged to discern and promote such spiritual initiatives among other Christians as well. Nor does the uniqueness of Christ exclude God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel;
rather, this covenant-relationship endures precisely because Christ is the great “Amen” to all God's promises.

As with the concept of representation in his earlier theology, so in his later ecclesiological writings Kasper tended to use the *subsistit in* of *Lumen gentium* 8 to express the unique role of the Church against the universal backdrop of divine fidelity. According to the Council, the Catholic Church is the unique community in which the fullness of the one Church of Christ is concretely present (subsists) in history. At the same time, however—and Kasper has pointed out that the Council expressed this in the very same sentence—many elements of sanctification and truth are to be found outside the walls of the Catholic Church. The Holy Spirit is also active in ecclesial communions other than the Catholic Church, inspiring faith, hope and charity, bringing about the eschatological *communio*. This impels the Catholic Church into ecumenical dialogue, since the Church has need of the gifts of these communities, signs of divine faithfulness for the world, in order to carry out its mission more perfectly; they belong to the catholicity of the Church.

Neither the *subsistit in* nor the concept of representation means that ecumenical or Jewish-Christian dialogue 'begins and ends with' the Catholic Church. Rather, these concepts set the Church within a sacramental and eschatological perspective in which the Church is constantly becoming itself through ever greater faithfulness to its divine origin and goal. They also point out that dialogue is an indispensable element of this faithfulness of the Church.

With this, the present chapter has returned to its starting point, namely, that dialogue is the appropriate praxis in response to divine fidelity. But it has not yet fully answered the question of what Kasper's concrete experience of Jewish-Catholic and ecumenical dialogue reveals about the dynamics of God's fidelity in history. The pattern of these dialogues begins with an
acknowledgment of the sins of individual Catholics and of the existence within the Catholic Church of what Saint John Paul II called “social sin.” Fidelity thus involves conversion and repentance. Such a process of conversion seems to have taken place in Kasper's gradual entry into the realm of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Recognizing a broken state of relationship suggests the need for acts of goodwill to 'break the ice' and set a new tone and new foundations for these relationships as they go forward. As the Second Vatican Council did this on behalf of the whole Church, especially through *Unitatis redintegratio* and *Nostra aetate* 4, so Kasper himself did this in the ecumenical realm by developing his theology of tradition as an “open system” and his sacramental ecclesiology, and in Christian-Jewish dialogue through his theology of covenant.

A dialogue, however, cannot be reduced to its beginning. A good dose of irenicism may be necessary at the start of a relationship, but if overused, it can lead to superficiality. Kasper's contributions to ecumenical dialogue presented a kind of balancing-act that continually mediated between a recognition of the gifts offered by his dialogue-partners and an affirmation of the uniqueness of Catholic identity, which, however, sometimes drooped to one side or the other. Central to Kasper's *via media* was his commitment to the Catholic tradition as 'the' theological principle of knowledge, in which the fullness of revelation is authentically transmitted to the present. At the same time, for Kasper, every new investigation into the tradition is motivated by some present concern: for the Church's mission in the modern world, for the healing of rifts between Jews and Christians, for the promotion of human dignity within a culture losing its sense of moral responsibility and of hope amid profound experiences of the futility of human efforts. Dialogue over the pressing needs of the present time is thus a crucial step in the tradition process. The next step, answering the questions generated by such a dialogue, requires a creative

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345 On social sin or sinful structures within the Church, see John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984), no. 16; *Ut unum sint* (1995), no. 34; KK 249-52.
retrieval of the resources available in the tradition. Not all the retrievals so attempted are equally successful; they must therefore move beyond the dialogue of experts and be subjected to a broader process of criticism and reception. In the ecumenical context, Kasper has spoken of a dialogue among churches, under the guidance of church authorities, but involving both communions on every level of the lives of the respective churches. Its goal is a mutual discernment of spirits: to contemplate together the mystery of God's saving will through a theoretical, practical, and spiritual testing of the fruits of dialogue against the lived truth of faith.

This is anything but an easy process. In both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the dialogue-partners are sooner or later guaranteed to brush up against one another's differences and sometimes to step on one another's toes, as Kasper's experience has shown time and again. At such times, the continuation of dialogue depends on an acknowledgment of such differences, a commitment to persevere in dialogue in spite of them, a reaffirmation of common grounds and new initiatives that proceed on this common basis. Yet not even this is sufficient, although it is necessary. Working through the challenge of difference, holding fast to one's own identity while respecting the identity of the other, means subjecting oneself to a process of unknown duration with many risks and pitfalls. Such a process not only requires that one be true to oneself, charitable to one's partner, and creative in resolving differences; it also demands patience and hope. The adventure of dialogue can only hope to succeed if it is an initiative of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is therefore an essential component. This is why Kasper so emphasized the spiritual aspect of ecumenism, particularly in the latter part of his career as head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Dialogue itself ultimately depends on the faithfulness of God, who can be trusted to bring to completion what he started.
Conclusion

I. Divine Fidelity and the Structure of Kasper's Theology

A. Summary of the Present Study

The theology of Walter Kasper presents a distinctive theological pattern. The foregoing study has attempted to contribute to a more precise description of the nature of Kasper's theological option. Although Kasper has been interpreted in view of certain basic categories in his thought such as history, historicity and freedom, these terms admit of various meanings whose content is initially indeterminate. Kasper himself made it clear that he intended for his theology to be determined in its method as well as its content by the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, which at its core is the message of God's faithfulness. This study has argued that divine faithfulness represents an important modifier to Kasper's understanding of divine freedom and thus to the historical analogy of freedom that formed the “grammar” of his theological project.

Chapter two introduced two basic categories in Kasper's thought, history and freedom, and discussed their foundational significance within his theology. Both categories converge within Kasper's theological notion of analogy. This chapter argued against William Loewe's thesis (which was based on Kasper's work up until the 1970s) that Kasper's fundamental option represented a rejection of the doctrine of analogy in favor of a Lutheran law-gospel dialectic. It instead maintained that Kasper made use of Schelling's transition from his early to his late philosophy as a pattern for a critical retrieval of the Catholic doctrine of analogy. On the one hand, Kasper learned from Schelling the futility of theologizing from within a closed metaphysical schema like the Idealist “system”; this decision implied an option for a pluralism of philosophical approaches or analogies within theology. On the other hand, Kasper found the
categories of Schelling's “negative philosophy,” especially history and freedom, to be more congenial than other approaches (such as “cosmological” and “anthropological” patterns) for bringing to speech the living God of the Bible while preserving the legitimate concerns of substance-metaphysics. As such, these categories also showed promise for mediating between the essential concerns of the Catholic theological tradition and those of figures like Luther and Barth.

By reformulating the doctrine of analogy in terms of freedom, Kasper disclosed a historical, dialectical, eschatological moment within analogy. To wit: while Christian witness demands concrete assertions about God (via positiva), all such assertions must be qualified and refined in view of the ever-greater God (via negativa); this process of assertion and refinement can only reach its terminus in the eschatological glorification of God at the end of history (via eminentiae). The dynamic, self-transcending character of the analogy process requires that any philosophical framework used by theology to communicate the Gospel allow itself to be criticized wherever it presents itself as a comprehensive account of reality, wherever it closes itself off from the disclosure of something “new” within history, that is, from the concrete history of salvation and from the unsurpassable high point of this history, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Chapter three presented a preliminary study of the language of faithfulness (Treue) as analogical language. It began with an analysis of the ways Kasper used the words treu, Treue, and their cognates to describe creaturely realities. While faithfulness generally denotes stability, constancy, and reliability, within Kasper's writings it carried a range of connotations: it could describe a relationship between persons or a correspondence between things; it could refer to a mechanical and inflexible attitude or an open, active, creative posture. This range of meaning
evokes two basic human longings: for stability in the midst of change, including freedom from human caprice, and for the affirmation of one's unique act of freedom in the love and acceptance of another. Against this background, Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness represented an affirmation, criticism, and elevation of creaturely faithfulness. God is perfectly reliable and stable, yet free and creative in his loving acceptance of each human person. Both aspects of the faithfulness of God become particularly clear when human beings reject God's act of love, since even in the face of human infidelity God remains faithful. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ constituted for Kasper the unsurpassable sign of this faithfulness in history. Kasper even described divine fidelity as “the” soteriological reality, a symbol of the center of the Gospel, since for him, fidelity is God's answer to the deepest longings expressed by human beings in a historically-conscious world. The presence of God's faithfulness in the world takes a variety of forms: the re-presentation of the paschal mystery in the sacramental life of the Church, above all in the Eucharist; the mutual love and commitment of two spouses in sacramental marriage; the “elements” of this present in natural marriage; the nuptial character of religious life; the mercy of God exercised in the penitential order; authentic acts of love toward one's neighbor. This account suggests that the faithfulness of God makes explicit the stable and relational or dialogical dimension implicitly contained in Kasper's understanding of divine freedom. Divine fidelity thus constituted an important modifier or clarification to Kasper's analogy of freedom.

Chapter four tested a claim that had been advanced in a preliminary way in chapter three, namely, that Kasper's notion of divine fidelity expressed for him the central contents of the Gospel. It argued that the theme of God's faithfulness ran through all three of Kasper's major works of systematic theology, *Jesus der Christus*, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, and *Katholische Kirche*. Divine faithfulness thus played a unifying function among these three books, which differ
significantly from one another in their content, their methodology, and the historical circumstances they address. For this reason, it may be regarded as the material principle or material criterion of Kasper's theology.

Chapter four began by showing that Kasper, in describing the resurrection of Christ as the unsurpassable eschatological sign of divine faithfulness to the world, had situated this faithfulness at the very center of Jesus der Christus. From this perspective, the historical analogy of freedom Kasper articulated (albeit in a less developed form than in Der Gott Jesu Christi) in part one of Jesus der Christus functioned to transform human history as a whole into an open question about the integrity of human existence and to link this with the question of God's faithfulness to creation, the active presence of God within history. For Kasper, the concrete history of Jesus raised this question in a pointed way: Jesus presented himself as the eschatological prophet yet burst the categories of Jewish expectation and so appeared as a scandal, a scandal that was only heightened by the contrast between his implicit claim about himself and his rejection and death. As the answer to the question about Jesus—Jesus is the Christ, the Crucified is the Risen—the message of the resurrection was also the long-awaited answer both to the question about God (the eschatological revelation of God's glory) and to that raised by history as a whole (the salvation of the world). That is, precisely by pointing to Jesus's obedience to the Father unto death as the locus of God's self-revelation, the apostolic kerygma disclosed God's unbreakable faithfulness to the world.

For Kasper, however, what ultimately justified the message of the resurrection was not the apostles' faith as such nor even the history of Jesus but only a divine act of revelation, the faithfulness of God impressing itself upon the apostles. Only God's own faithfulness, disclosed in a new way in the resurrection, could account for the continuity-in-difference between the
crucified Jesus and the risen Christ. In Trinitarian language this thesis reads: only the Holy Spirit, the surplus of freedom in the love between Father and Son, could ultimately account for the profound and indeed unsurpassable unity between God and humanity that took place in Jesus, such that precisely Jesus's identity as God's self-communication-in-Person enabled Jesus's act of obedience to the Father to be a fully human and personal act that presupposed a human will and intellect. It is thus God's faithfulness to Godself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit that formed for Kasper the ultimate grounds for God's faithfulness to creation. Both in turn became manifest in history in an unsurpassable way in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Some aspects of Der Gott Jesu Christi suggested that Kasper's Christological position had developed since he wrote Jesus der Christus. All the same, chapter four argued that the faithfulness of God also played a central role in Der Gott Jesu Christi as the key to Kasper's understanding of monotheistic faith. In other words, chapter four paraphrased the book's fundamental thesis, that the doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian form of monotheism and thus the Church's answer to the question about God and human beings, with the formula: the triune God is the faithful God. According to Kasper, modern atheism advanced the claim that belief in God contradicts human autonomy and so constitutes a betrayal of the world. This accusation called into question the very possibility of speaking about a faithful God. By reformulating his analogy of freedom, Kasper proposed to reconstruct the possibility of rational discourse about the living God of history. He predicated this reconstruction, however, on a relinquishing of natural theology's ambition to prove the existence of God in an airtight fashion. According to Kasper, nothing can ultimately justify knowledge of the faithful God save divine authority, that is, God revealing God's own faithfulness.
Kasper then applied this doctrine of analogy to the revelation of God attested in scripture and tradition. He located the essence of the Christian message about God the Father in the experience of God as the one source of all reality, both the order of creation and that of salvation. As “absolute Person,” the Father not only created human beings and the world but wills their integrity and flourishing and so manifested the superabundant freedom of his love and faithfulness toward creation. Now this claim, considered in the abstract, loses credibility in light of the reality of evil in the world. The doctrine of the Trinity, however, has concretely specified the historical and theological basis of this claim. It says, first, that the Father has proven to be faithful to the world precisely through fidelity to his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the Crucified, and second, that by the free bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the world, this faithful love is becoming a living reality within the hearts of human beings and throughout the whole of creation. It is in the Son and through the Holy Spirit that God proves to be a humane God, not a threat to but the ultimate condition for human dignity and freedom. The glorification of the faithful God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is therefore also the humanization of humanity and the highest expression of faithfulness to the earth.

While Katholische Kirche depended at many points upon the vision of God articulated in Der Gott Jesu Christi, it also displayed important differences from this book and Jesus der Christus, such as its use of an analogy of communio rather than the analogy of freedom. Moreover, in Katholische Kirche Kasper illuminated the essence, reality, and mission of the church from a multitude of complementary ecclesiological perspectives. Nevertheless, chapter five argued that throughout this book, Kasper developed from these different perspectives a basic concept of the Church as the communal sacrament of divine faithfulness in the world. Fundamental to Kasper’s synthesis was the idea that the Church is a mystery or sacrament, the
sacrament of the renewal and fulfillment of the structures of *communio* inherent in creation, which takes place in its participation or communion in the life of the Trinity. Kasper, however, qualified the Church's sacramental character within the context of salvation history: the Church is not the sacrament of God's faithfulness to creation as the definitive realization of the divinely-ordained *communio* (the eschatological Reign of God) nor as the unsurpassable historical sign of this coming salvation (Jesus Christ), but as an intermediary reality, an anticipation and foretaste of the coming Reign through a communion with Christ mediated by the apostolic community.

For Kasper, then, divine faithfulness is constitutive of the divine-human reality of the Church and comes to expression, however imperfectly, in the institutional structures it uses to carry out its mission. According to Kasper, Vatican II's “definition” of the Church's essence as the People of God, the Bride of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit expressed both the Church's unique experience of divine faithfulness and its responsibility as sign of this faithfulness for the world. Since Kasper found in Mary the typological realization of this essence of the Church, he also described her as a powerful sign for the world of God's faithfulness to creation. Kasper expanded his account of divine faithfulness in the Church as both gift and task in his treatment of the marks of the Church, especially the Church's holiness: God's faithfulness subsists in the Church in the form of mercy, a reality that pervades the Church in its essence, yet must constantly be realized anew in the renewal of its structures. The present differentiation between “official” and “free” charisms in the Church—the development of the threefold ordained ministry and the papacy—was in part a result of innovative continuity with the Church's origins, but has endured the test of time precisely because it has proven its indispensability to the carrying out of the Church's mission. The papacy in particular has proved to be an important safeguard for the Church's holding to the Faithfulness-Truth of God. Still, the
structures of the Church could do more to promote dialogue among the faithful and so manifest more clearly God's faithfulness to human hope for authentic communion. Dialogue, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*—in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue—proved to be for Kasper an important dimension of the Church's mission of proclaiming the faithfulness of God to the nations.

In sum, a common thread ran through *Jesus der Christus, Der Gott Jesu Christi*, and *Katholische Kirche*, namely, that the Good News of human salvation has its roots in the reality of God's own faithfulness to the whole of creation, to the chosen people, to the divine word of revelation, and finally to Godself. In other words, the message of the Gospel finds its ultimate ground and source in the inner life of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which comes to expression throughout the history of salvation. This, however, raised the question: by what means does one come to a right apprehension and understanding of this central truth of the Gospel?

In chapter five, the present study turned its attention from the material criterion of the Gospel to its formal criteria. The chapter discussed the theology of tradition in which Kasper attempted to mediate between the definitiveness and irreversibility of the doctrines by which the Church has bound itself to the truth of revelation and a concern for the transcendent character of divine truth in view of which a critique of the Church's expressions of this truth is both legitimate and necessary. Kasper's distinction between the tradition as transcendent and the tradition as transcendable or transcended came to concrete expression in his doctrine of the *loci theologici*. For Kasper, the Bible itself, its interpretative tradition, the authoritative teachers of the Church, and the sense of the faith common to the entire people of God each re-presents in a quasi-sacramental way the truth of divine revelation. Each, however, can authentically re-present this transcendent truth only insofar as it is heard and understood in tandem with the others, in accord
with the analogy of faith. Kasper's main point of reference here was the living event in which theological truth is communicated. Only where the loci stand in a communicative or dialogical unity with one another can they make known the faithfulness and truth of God that is the central message of the Gospel. Kasper presented the Treue-Wahrheit or Fidelity-Truth of God as the conceptual core of his theory of the loci of tradition. In this sense, he regarded divine fidelity not only as the material principle of Christian faith but also as its formal principle.

Chapter five went on to appraise the value of this principle for illuminating the relationship between history and revelation. It found that Kasper in his early thought emphasized the eschatological, not-yet-realized dimension of theological truth while minimizing the role of a reflection on the believing subject in working out an adequate account of truth. His relative inattention to the already-realized element in the truth of revelation provided some justification for Reinhard Hütter's suspicion that the supernatural habitus of faith played no methodological role in Kasper's theology. Subsequent publications demonstrated Kasper's increasing awareness of the problem. Retrieving the methods of transcendental theology, Kasper proposed a new synthesis between philosophical and theological truth, drawing on insights from Thomas Aquinas, Karl Rahner, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. He was able in this way to recognize that while the certainty of faith rested ultimately on the Faithfulness-Truth of God, this basis did not exclude but included the human subject graciously illuminated by the light of divine truth. By taking into account the human as well as the divine element in theological truth, Kasper underlined the dialogical structure of his theology, buttressing at its weak points the philosophical and theological foundation he laid in the early 1960s.

Building upon the dialogical notion of divine fidelity that stood at the center of his theory of the loci theologici, chapter six argued that Kasper's understanding of tradition justified an
extension of some aspects of the intra-ecclesial dialogue of tradition beyond the walls of the Catholic Church to other Christian communions and the Jewish community. Such an extension would provide theological grounds for Catholics to engage in an exchange of spiritual gifts with Jews and with other Christians, not a monologue aimed at proselytizing its dialogue-partners but a true exchange with the potential to call Catholics to a deeper level of conversion, to build up the Catholic Church, and to contribute to the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to the Church for the salvation of the world. This chapter argued that Kasper's ministry as “dialoguer” constituted a practical generalization of his theology of tradition, which extended certain aspects of the process of tradition to include Jewish-Christian and ecumenical dialogue.

Kasper's contributions to Jewish-Christian dialogue, owing to their relatively small number and to the absence of the complex question (essential to ecumenical dialogue) of a future church union, provided a convenient test case for the thesis of chapter six. Especially as head of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Kasper made clear his view that God, on account of divine faithfulness, has never revoked his covenant with the people of Israel. Consequently, Jews and Catholics are able to participate in common acts of memory, to give common witness to the love and faithfulness of the one God and the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God, to prophetically denounce every ideology that would enslave human beings in the name of finite goods, and finally to witness the truth to one another: Catholics to the universal significance of faith in God and to its definitive confirmation “already” in Jesus Christ, Jews to the concreteness of history and to the truth that this history has “not yet” reached the final consummation promised by God.

In a similar way, Kasper extended the praxis of tradition to Lutheran churches through his participation in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. Kasper's involvement in this dialogue, unlike his
involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogue, dated back to the early years of his academic career, in which he himself drew from a tradition extending beyond the walls of the Catholic Church, appealing to such figures as Luther and Schelling in formulating his own understanding of tradition, analogy, and theological truth. This proved ample preparation for his role in the first round of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, which produced the ground-breaking Malta Report under his co-chairmanship. In spite of some not inconsiderable differences that emerged between Catholics and Lutherans over the essential structure and function of ecclesial tradition in Christian life, Kasper remained convinced that a dialogue of truth and of love with the goal of visible ecclesial union was still possible between these churches. The foundation for his conviction was Vatican II's assertion that, although the one Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, the Holy Spirit has also used the ecclesial communions stemming from the Reformation as instruments of salvation. Kasper's conviction was strengthened by the rediscovery of a consensus over basic truths that exists between Catholics and Lutherans as well as convergence between the two in many aspects of the concrete practice of church life. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue reached a high point with the promulgation of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999, in which the churches officially and publicly testified to their common faith that, by grace alone and apart from any merit on the part of human beings, God has definitively accepted and affirmed humanity in Jesus Christ, empowering the baptized in the freedom of the Spirit to practice the works of love in the world (no. 15). For Kasper, this mutual, ecclesial act of witness lent credence to the hope that Lutherans and Catholics would someday come to a common understanding of the role of institutional structures for the life of faith and the execution of the Church's mission to the world. Such growth in agreement between Catholics and Lutherans has thus become a sign for faith, inspiring hope that the Holy Spirit will
bring to fruition the movement toward Christian unity that it has begun, so confirming the faithfulness of God to those who believe.

On the basis of the foregoing, it may be stated that the analogy of faithfulness sheds light on the basic structure of Kasper's theological project. It recapitulates his historical analogy of freedom while emphasizing its personal or dialogical dimension as well as its stability in the midst of historical change. It indicates the eschatological horizon and thus the hope-structure of all God-talk while maintaining that the Fullness of Time has already become present within history in an unsurpassable way in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It points to the Christian confession of the triune God—God's faithfulness to himself as Love—as the center of the Gospel of the freedom of the children of God, the Christian foundation for an authentic humanism. It highlights the sacramental character of the Church, proclaiming the loftiness of its mission of salvation while reminding the Church of its intermediary character and its need for self-transcendence in conversion, renewal, and dialogue. It also corresponds to the sacramental, doxological, self-transcendent structure of the Church's testimony to the truth of the faith. Because Kasper affirms the tension between sign and signified, between the sovereign Word of God and the words of the Church, such an account incorporates a “Protestant” critical principle into the “Catholic” principle of tradition. At the same time, the inseparability of divine address and human response in the sacramental tradition-act suggests the openness of Kasper's account of truth to a more explicit reflection on the subjective conditions that make such acts possible. The analogy of faithfulness finally shows how ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue can be understood as part and parcel of the praxis of the tradition and an important means for carrying out the Church's mission. It therefore links the central themes of Kasper's theological project with the dialogical ministry of his later career.
B. Continuity and Change in Kasper's Theology

The study summarized here has attempted to place Kasper's theology, and in particular his reflections on the faithfulness of God, in a developmental perspective. It has shown that Kasper's thinking went through a number of shifts between his early academic career (in the early 1960s) and his ministry to the universal Church as head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Particular attention was drawn to the early and mid-1970s as a turning point in his thought that influenced his understanding of analogy, his Christology, his theory of truth, and his posture toward his dialogue-partners in the Lutheran tradition. At the same time, the present study also disclosed important continuities that bind together his whole body of work. It seems appropriate at this point to review where the foregoing study has found important changes taking place in Kasper's thought and where it has located continuities therein.

1. General categories: history and freedom

One invariant feature of Kasper's theology has been to express the truth of the Gospel in terms of history and freedom. These two general categories were central to the thinking of the German Idealists, particularly to the philosophy of Schelling, and they belong to the legacy Kasper inherited from the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School. Kasper formulated his doctrine of analogy as an *analogia libertatis* or analogy of freedom with the result that the notion of analogy gained a self-transcendent, historical dynamism, propelling it beyond itself in the direction of the eschaton. The analogy of faithfulness described in chapter three cannot be understood apart from the categories of history and freedom. For Kasper, the central affirmation of the Gospel is that the sovereignly free God has revealed Godself in history to be supremely loving and irrevocably faithful to human beings and the world in Jesus Christ and through the
Holy Spirit. This truth liberates human beings from the anxiety to secure the conditions of their own existence and to give themselves away totally to their neighbor in self-surrendering love. It constitutes the basis on which a free, rightly guided human existence depends, the transcendental condition for the possibility of absolute, unconditional claims to truth amidst the ephemerality of history. Kasper's notion of divine faithfulness embraces both the human drive to attain ultimate truth and an ethic of self-surrender on behalf of the other. These two elements converge in the notion of dialogue that determined Kasper's understanding of the historic tradition of the Catholic Church as well as his praxis of ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Thus, the categories of history and freedom have rightly been regarded as defining features of Kasper's theology. At the same time, the way in which Kasper deployed these categories changed as his thinking developed. In particular, while the category of history formed the overarching horizon of his early thought, in his later writings it did not carry quite this much weight. This may be seen when one compares the early Kasper's analysis of the situation facing theology in the period immediately following the council to the analysis he rendered in the early 1980s. Whereas in the 1960s Kasper spoke of a situation of crisis in the Church and the world provoked by the “problem of history,” in the latter half of his academic career he was far more troubled by the problem of secularization and the atheism of the masses. Over the same period, Kasper became less interested in defending the right of theologians to utilize historical research in their reflections and more concerned about determining the proper limits of historical research in the interpretation of scripture and tradition. Finally, while the early Kasper spoke of truth itself as a historical quantity, he later treated the historicity of truth as but one aspect of truth among others. These factors led Kasper to place greater emphasis on freedom and the question of the transcendental conditions of its possibility than on the notion of history. To be sure, history
remained an important category for the later Kasper, but it lost its former priority over other categories like freedom and communion.

2. Kasper’s notion of the faithfulness of God

It has been the contention of the present study that the faithfulness of God (die Treue Gottes) was a key idea within Kasper’s theology. In writings spanning his theological career, Kasper used this concept to designate the central truth of the Gospel, the material criterion of Christian faith. Divine faithfulness was also an integral aspect of Kasper’s understanding of theological truth, the reality transmitted through divine tradition, the formal criterion of Christian faith. In both of these senses, divine fidelity proved to be an abiding feature of Kasper’s thought.

It was not, however, a static feature. In particular, Kasper’s understanding of the formal criterion or principle of Christian faith, the Faithfulness-Truth of God, underwent critical changes between the beginning and the end of his academic career. In his 1965 book Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes, Kasper placed overwhelming emphasis on the eschatological character of theological truth. As was argued in chapter five, this resulted in his rejection of the notion of truth present in the Western metaphysical tradition—the correspondence theory of truth—along with those theological approaches that depended on this notion of truth. However, when Kasper came to recognize in his theological concept of truth the danger of a purely functionalist interpretation of dogma, he came to a new appreciation for some of the philosophical theories of truth he had rejected in 1965. While he continued to claim an abiding difference and even tension between the philosophical and theological notions of truth, he began to speak of their inner unity. He found in the theological tradition and particularly in Thomas Aquinas a compelling and theologically fruitful synthesis between the two, which safeguarded the universal

1 See above, pp. 360-64.
communicability of the Gospel while continuing to affirm a provisional, “not yet” element in the believer’s apprehension of the truth of faith.

3. Relationship to other theological options

   a. Transcendental theology

      There is a certain constancy in the relationship between Kasper’s theology and the family of theologies united by transcendental method. As Karl Rahner had a pervasive influence on 20th century Roman Catholic theology, he has likewise influenced Kasper’s thought. More specifically, Kasper has utilized transcendental methods throughout his theological corpus, although he has not always explicitly acknowledged this fact. On the other hand, criticism of Rahner’s transcendental theology also pervaded Kasper’s work.

      One factor that did change was the severity of Kasper’s critique of Rahner. In his earliest writings Kasper accused Rahner of presupposing an identity between being and thought. The implication was that Rahner’s theology did not adequately take into account the post-Idealist critique of German Idealist philosophy (which will be discussed in a moment) and therefore had to be rejected as insufficiently conscious of history. In 1975 Kasper narrowed the scope of this critique: the problem was no longer the identity between being and thought as such, but an insufficient recognition of the tension between transcendentality and history. Finally, Kasper decided that the problem did not reside in Rahner’s methodology but in certain concrete applications of this method to specific theological problems.

      This development signaled a change in Kasper’s relationship to transcendental method, and more generally to the ‘turn to the subject’ within contemporary theology. Whereas in 1965 Kasper rejected transcendental analysis as grounded in a concept of truth ill-suited to the work of theology, in the late 1970s he became quite disturbed that professional theologians were calling
into question the absolute claims to truth made by Christian faith. In order to defend the reasonableness of these claims, he took refuge in transcendental deduction. To a certain extent, this signified a rapprochement between Kasper and Rahner, but it also indicated a development in Kasper’s understanding of Hans Urs von Balthasar and the major representatives of the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School, all of whom Kasper began to regard as practitioners of a kind of transcendental method. Moving into the 1980s, Kasper emphasized more and more the indispensability of the theologian’s personal act of faith to her or his theological work. Although his descriptions of this act of faith continued to affirm the essential connection between faith and the believer’s relationship to the church, he began to place more emphasis on the attitudes and disposition of the believing subject. He also began to recognize a legitimate concern in the neo-Scholastic reflections known as the ‘analysis of faith.’ This led him to affirm that a certain disposition was needed for the subject to apprehend the truth of faith. As a consequence, he adopted von Balthasar’s account of the illumination of the subjectivity of the believer by the light of divine truth.

b. Theologies of liberation

Kasper’s relationship to political theology and liberation theology in its various forms is a more complex matter. On the one hand, his attention to freedom and to the concreteness of salvation placed him in a posture of openness toward these theological ventures. One finds this at work in Kasper’s appropriation of various themes from Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* and of Johann Baptist Metz’s idea of biblical narrative as “dangerous memory” within his theology of tradition.² A certain openness may also be seen in Kasper’s attitude toward some representatives

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² For references to Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*, see DW 79, 80, 103, 141; “Evangelium und Dogma,” in GG 206; “Schrift – Tradition – Verkündigung,” in GG 166; “Revolution im Gottesverständnis” (see p. 152n109, above), 10; JC 182. For references to Metz’s notion of “dangerous memory,” see Problem 46; “Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip” (see p. 171n11, above), 201; “Systematisch-theologische Neuansätze,” ThQ 156 (1976): 59;
of liberation theology. One might recall the words of esteem Cardinal Kasper extended to Gustavo Gutierrez as Kasper approached retirement from his office as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. On the other hand, at one time or another Kasper questioned the epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions of all the thinkers here mentioned. The theologies of liberation in particular were the target of many a criticism from Kasper's pen. He approached them with the suspicion that they depended on a comprehensive Marxist worldview, which he regarded as an inadequate account of human existence because of its materialism and atheism. For Kasper, liberation theology emphasized human responsibility for history to the point that it practically denied the sovereignty of God over history. Consequently, Kasper eventually admitted that he was unable to identify himself with the proponents of the theologies of liberation. He also echoed Saint John Paul II’s view that the Church needed a liberation theology without Marxism.

The complexity of Kasper’s relationship to political and especially liberation theology comes into focus when one considers the development of his understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis. In his early writings Kasper stressed the praxis-orientation of theology as a corrective to a neo-Scholastic theology that he considered too abstract and distant from the concerns of the modern world. This affinity toward the priority of praxis was itself a

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3 WH 56-57; compare KK 42.
5 KK 42.
6 WH 57.
result of Jürgen Moltmann's influence on Kasper's thought; it also linked the early Kasper to the concerns of the theologies of liberation. As Kasper grew more troubled by what he regarded as a widespread loss of a sense of the pre-givenness of truth, however, he began to emphasize the priority of theory over praxis. His point was that there is in truth as such, and in theological truth in particular, an absolute element that is not the product of human activity but that precedes human beings and lays a claim on them in their responsibility. By contrast, he saw in the Marxist idea of the priority of praxis over theory, which he detected behind some forms of Latin American liberation theology, an exaltation of human activity above all preexisting norms. At the same time, Kasper continued to affirm that the authentic praxis of faith was the goal of all theory and was in this sense prior to theory. He acknowledged that this was a legitimate motivation for the priority of praxis over theory proposed by liberation theology and accepted it as a salutary corrective to the typical practice of theology in the European academy.

c. Idealism

Behind Kasper's changing attitudes toward transcendental and liberation theologies was his developing relationship with Idealist philosophy. Beginning with Das Absolute in der Geschichte, Kasper understood his theology as a response to the problems posed by German Idealism. Building on the trajectory visible in the later philosophy of Schelling, Kasper appropriated some of Idealism’s major themes, particularly history and freedom, but rejected the basic project of Idealism, which he saw as the attempt to reduce the whole of reality to a system deducible from a single reality, namely, the Absolute as immanent in thought. In its place, Kasper opted for a historical and dialogical thought-form that rested on an irreducible plurality of basic principles, most fundamentally the duality of divine sovereignty and human freedom. The early

Kasper found variations on the idealism he rejected in the most disparate places. Though the Protestant *sola scriptura* and the neo-Scholastic dogmatic thought-form sharply oppose one another, Kasper pointed out that each depends in idealist fashion on a single ultimate principle. For a time Kasper also saw in transcendental theology a kind of idealism rooted in an absolutization of the thinking subject. Though he eventually scaled back this particular critique, Kasper never rescinded his rejection of idealism as such.

The early Kasper, however, pushed his critique of idealism to the extreme. This may be seen, first of all, in the way he initially articulated his principle of divine fidelity. In *Einführung in den Glauben*, he wrote that no reality other than the Faithfulness-Truth of God could be regarded as the basis of the certainty of faith. In the same vein, Kasper asserted in *Jesus der Christus* that no correlation or analogy could be drawn between the revelation of God’s faithfulness in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and any other event in history. This position stood in tension with his insistence that the faith of the first witnesses to the resurrection was a fully human act, that they acquired a real understanding of the resurrection with the assistance of ideas and categories they inherited from the Jewish tradition. In spite of his conviction of the inadequacy of Karl Barth’s understanding of the resurrection, Kasper came quite close to reproducing it. That is, in the forcefulness of his rejection of an idealism grounded in the thinking subject, he tended toward its mirror image, a Barthian idealism rooted in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, which von Balthasar termed a “narrowing” of all theology to Jesus Christ as its central point.⁸

A shift away from Barth was visible in *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. In articulating his doctrine of analogy, Kasper made it clear that revealed knowledge of God presupposed a transcendental

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dimension in human knowledge, experience, and language through which human beings in the present were open to divine revelation. The transcendent Fidelity-Truth of God remained for Kasper the “ultimate” source of the convincing power of faith, but he no longer construed it as the exclusive ground of this power. This development opened the door to his option for von Balthasar's view that the graciously elevated subjectivity of the believer constituted an essential, if secondary, ground for the certitude of faith.

In spite of these developments, a significant ambiguity remains in Kasper's thinking. Early in his career Kasper expressed the view that salvific grace had the character of a transient event. This seemed to exclude an understanding of grace as a supernaturally infused habitus, a stable disposition of a human subject. But if the light of faith is necessary to grasp divine truth, then the credibility of Kasper's claim that the truth of Jesus Christ abides in history would seem to depend at least in part on the endurance of the light of faith over time in the form of an infused habitus. The alternative would seem to weaken the human element in theological truth, which would represent a step backward from the dialogical thought-form Kasper intended and a step in the direction of a Barthian idealism.

II. Evaluation of Kasper's Theological Option

A. Strengths and Weaknesses

The present exposition of Kasper's theology has demonstrated that the faithfulness of God plays a constitutive role in his thought. It has also shown that changes in Kasper’s understanding of divine fidelity that took place over the course of his career correlated with other significant developments in his thinking. This study has thereby provided a fresh perspective
from which it is now possible to evaluate his theological option in its strengths and weaknesses and so to contribute to the interpretation, criticism, and development of his theology.

A first strength of Kasper's theological project that is highlighted by the analogy of faithfulness is that it confirms the doctrine of analogy as a venerable and functional part of the Catholic tradition. This is because speaking of God as faithful depends on the possibility of speaking of God in personal terms, the analogy of freedom and person. Speaking of the Father as “absolute Person” preserves the legitimate concern of metaphysically-formulated natural theologies to articulate a natural theology of God as the source of all being. Yet it joins to these the concern to preserve divine freedom, which is essential to the biblical view of God as rich in faithfulness and mercy (see Exod. 34:6), as personal, steadfast Love. It therefore criticizes some of the conclusions drawn by natural theology. Instead of asserting that God is unchangeable and incapable of suffering, it affirms that God in the freedom of divine love is capable of history, of humanity, of fathoming the profoundest depths of human suffering, all while remaining utterly faithful to his divinity. One can credibly affirm that love is the meaning of all reality, one can hope that the promotion of justice and peace will not turn out to be futile, precisely because the inmost reality of God is love, because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Kasper's analogy of freedom in faithfulness thus stands in continuity with the analogy of being and hence with the broad metaphysical tradition of Catholic theology.

As the foregoing makes clear, however, the analogy of faithfulness also amends this tradition in order to clarify its significance for human hope in the face of the many inhumanities of the present age. This leads to a second point: Kasper's theological program models a kind of adherence to the Catholic tradition that is also able to accommodate a certain reading of the material and formal principles of Protestantism. He has made room in the Catholic tradition for
the “existential” concern championed by Martin Luther: because God in Jesus Christ has proven his faithfulness and mercy to creation, has accepted and affirmed me in my finitude and in spite of my sinfulness, and continues to abide in human history in the Holy Spirit, I am released from a (paralyzing or restless) anxiety to save myself from the crushing violence and inhumanity of the world and am freed for self-sacrificing love and service. The language of faithfulness is meanwhile a token of Kasper's intention that his theology should sink deep roots in the scriptures, taking its bearings from the center of the Gospel—the message of divine fidelity—and finding in the interconnectedness of the biblical books the proper proportions for a balanced theological reflection. This intention presupposes that the theological tradition can become imbalanced or even lose sight of what is central. Kasper's theology has therefore always sought to preserve a “Protestant critical principle” to permit the correction of such missteps. Such course corrections are only possible because the Faithfulness-Truth of God is not identical to the Church's sacramental re-presentations of divine faithfulness in history. Kasper has thus maintained the sovereignty of God in Word and Spirit over the Church and its institutions.

It should be added immediately, however, that Kasper has not uncritically taken over these “Protestant” concerns but truly incorporated them into a Catholic theology. Kasper indeed intended a recovery of the existential dimension of faith, but not at the expense of its ontological implications. For Kasper, who God is pro me is grounded in who God is in se: God is faithful to creation because God is faithful to Godself as Love. Consequently, although Kasper took up the language and images of the Bible, he claimed the freedom also to use the language of philosophy, metaphysics, and common sense in translating the biblical idiom to clarify its ontological as well as practical implications for modern ears. In doing so, Kasper was simply claiming the theologian's share in the prerogative belonging to the whole Church. For Kasper, the
mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel to all nations demands that it testify to the truth of the faith clearly and decisively. In addition, the commission of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit have empowered the Church not only to proclaim the Gospel in a language understandable to its own age but even to do so in a binding way. That such a binding act of the Church is “infallible,” that it shares in the definitiveness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, does not for Kasper contradict but in fact makes present God's sovereign faithfulness “in” as well as “over” the Church. The binding teaching of the Church, in the meantime, does not take the place of the divine Word but subjects itself to the process of reception and integration into the whole witness of the tradition. Because Kasper formulated the Catholic principle of tradition in terms of divine faithfulness, he was able to incorporate into it a rightly-understood Protestant critical principle.

It is not implied here that Kasper’s nuanced understanding of the principle of tradition was merely a politic compromise meant to appease his Protestant interlocutors. On the contrary, it proved abundantly fruitful within his theological writings. This fact points to a third strength of Kasper’s theology: he has consistently produced vivid and compelling accounts of the history of theology. One typically finds in Kasper’s theological essays and books one or more detailed expositions of how the Old and New Testaments, the Fathers of the Church and other early Christian writers, medieval, baroque, and neo-Scholastic theologians, the Reformers, and modern thinkers dealt with a certain theological topic. Nor was it unusual for Kasper to cite the testimony of pagan antiquity, secular philosophy, Judaism, or even the general history of religions in these accounts. These narratives give the reader a palpable sense for the drama of the history of theology. They unlock the meaning of the Church’s dogmatic statements, which are often difficult to approach not only because they were formulated in technical language but also
because the situation they addressed no longer exists today. They disclose the profound continuity and the inner logic of the theological tradition, while candidly pointing out its consequential missteps and strokes of genius that subsequently went ignored. They finally allowed Kasper to sink deep roots into the tradition when he formulated his systematic reflections.

Patricia Plovanich summed up this aspect of Kasper’s theology by speaking of Kasper’s lively sense for the tradition of the Church.\(^9\) It seems appropriate to amplify Plovanich’s assessment in the following way: Kasper may be regarded as an exemplary practitioner of what Bernard Lonergan called dialectics.\(^10\) Dialectics is something other than history in the modern sense of the term. It involves taking a responsible stand on a history, assessing that history in the light of authentic values.\(^11\) Applied to the history of theology, dialectics not only demands an accurate representation of the witnesses to the tradition but promotes an encounter with those witnesses and their values. It bridges the gap between past and present and effects a dialogue. To produce such an account of the history of the tradition requires a scholar with a supple sense for the Church, that is, an ability to perceive the one Gospel in the pluriformity of authentic testimonies to Christian faith and to distinguish these testimonies from other expressions of the life of the Church that, while verbally orthodox, reflect degenerate forms of faith. Kasper’s

\(^9\) See Plov 296.

\(^10\) On the theological functional specialty, dialectics, see Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (see p. 75n75, above), 235-66.

\(^11\) Admittedly, in Lonergan’s terminology, the procedure here described would be more aptly named the assembly of the materials to be operated upon by dialectics. See Lonergan, Method in Theology, 249-50. Examples of dialectics proper may be found among Kasper’s essays on ecumenism and in his debates with theological contemporaries. See Kasper, “Revolution im Gottesverständnis”; “Zur Sachfrage” (see p. 132n30, above); “Grundkonsens und Kirchengemeinschaft” (see p. 170n6, above); “Ökumenisch von Gott sprechen” (see p. 545n316, above).
narratives of the theological tradition amply demonstrate that he possesses such a sensus ecclesiae.

Kasper, however, did not always acknowledge with clarity this correspondence between the subjectivity of the authentic theologian and the content of faith conveyed by the tradition. It is with the question about the truth conveyed by this tradition that Kasper's theology continues to face critical questions. In his reflections on truth, Kasper developed what amounts to a sacramental theology of truth: the Faithfulness-Truth of God, God as First Truth, becomes present in history in an unsurpassable way in Jesus Christ, and is re-presented throughout history by the working of the Holy Spirit in each event in which the Gospel is communicated authentically. What philosophy of truth, however, represented for Kasper the most fitting analogue to his theological reflections? And how does it relate to the spectrum of philosophical positions on the question of truth? In initially articulating his position, Kasper appealed to Heidegger in such a way that he placed himself at a critical distance not only from a propositional theory of truth that he regarded as rationalistic but from the mainstream of Western philosophy and theology in its reflections on truth. This made it difficult for the early Kasper to explain how the believer gains access to transcendent truth within the vicissitudes of history. When he later made peace with the metaphysical tradition and began to pursue a rapprochement with transcendental theology, he came to acknowledge, using the categories of von Balthasar, the role of the believing subject as criterion of theological truth. It remained unclear, however, whether the role of the subject was something more than a fleeting event in an occasionalistic sense. Kasper's theology thus remained susceptible to a quasi-Barthian interpretation whereby

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12 Plovanich expressed a similar concern about Kasper's understanding of truth. See Plov 294.
the participation of the human person in the sacramental event of truth is overwhelmed by the self-verifying certainty of the faithfulness of God.

This leads to a broader point. Kasper's sympathy for the idea of truth developed by the Western tradition grew over the course of his career in direct proportion to his desire to draw upon and contribute to the metaphysical reflections of the same tradition. This desire was already apparent in *Jesus der Christus* and became even more so in *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. Yet for all his talk of the importance of metaphysics and the need to develop an ontology of person and freedom, he never actually did so himself. Admittedly, he came closest to doing so in the two aforementioned books. In *Jesus der Christus*, Kasper outlined an ontology of person by sketching a personalistic theology of the Trinity (with some help from Hegel), piecing together a Schellingian anthropology whose keynote was solidarity in freedom, and attempting to clarify both through a Logos Christology grounded in a Spirit Christology. In *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Kasper brought his project into dialogue with the metaphysical theology of Thomas Aquinas. Starting from a reading of the history of salvation and an amended version of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* for the theology of the Trinity, Kasper retrieved Aquinas's Trinitarian concepts while attending to the meaning of the term “person” in light of contemporary notions from psychology and philosophies of subjectivity. This procedure allowed Kasper to opt for Richard of St. Victor's understanding of the Trinity in terms of love while also accommodating Aquinas's natural theology of God as *ipsa esse subsistens* by grounding it in the person of the Father conceived as “absolute person.” This modification of Aquinas's metaphysics at its central point implied a project of recasting the entire framework in terms of person rather than being or substance. Kasper gestured toward such a revision, but did not reach much further than this.
There is more than one reason for this deficiency. The prospect of a revision of the metaphysical theology of Aquinas is a massive one, perhaps even an impossible task for any one scholar, given the massive expansion of human knowledge in all subject areas since Aquinas’s time. In Kasper's case, his election to the see of Rottenburg-Stuttgart followed by his appointment as secretary, then as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity necessitated a shift in focus from academia to the pastoral duties of each respective post. Even during his academic career, however, it is likely that Kasper did not consider the full development of a metaphysics a particularly pressing task in view of the excitement and disorder he encountered in Catholic theology following the Second Vatican Council: the collapse of the neo-Scholastic paradigm and the need to develop new theological methods in light of the challenge of historico-critical scholarship; the clashes between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and major figures (such as Hans Küng) and movements (such as liberation theology) within Catholic academia; the heady beginning and tumultuous course of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue; the crisis of the principle of tradition and the need to reconsider the significance of hermeneutical methods within theology; the challenge of renewing the theology of God in light of the humanistic objections of modern atheism. The issue finally boils down to a question of priorities. Kasper was first and foremost a theologian, and only secondarily a philosopher. He developed philosophical foundations only to the extent that he found it helpful in translating the faith for a modern audience. Picking and choosing what he regarded as the urgent questions facing his culture and era, Kasper could only propose sketchy and incomplete answers to a number of philosophical questions, including the question of truth. These choices unfortunately led to ambiguities in the solutions he proposed to the problems raised by modern consciousness of history.
In spite of the strengths of Kasper’s proposal, then, there remain lacunae in its foundations and its development. For Patricia Plovanich, Kasper’s theology of revelation, in all its insistence on the faithfulness of God to the divine Word, did not adequately attend to that which enables human beings to be recipients of this word; in effect, Kasper proposed only half of a theological anthropology.\(^{13}\) According to Thomas Petriano, Kasper aborted his pursuit of a Christological approach that could have led to a more adequate theological account of the humanity of Jesus;\(^{14}\) his Christology resembled an unfulfilled promise.\(^{15}\) José Vidal Taléns, for his part, expressed his wish for a new, multi-volume dogmatic theology from Kasper’s pen, one which would bring together the accumulated insights of his academic career while shedding the polemics against anthropological approaches to theology that were all too common in his early writings.\(^{16}\) Kasper’s election to the episcopate, however, precluded the fulfillment of this wish. In its present state, Kasper’s theological project stands open to certain additions and modifications.

B. Extension of Kasper’s Theological Categories

One specific extension to Kasper’s theological foundations that could remedy some of the weaknesses pointed out in the foregoing may now be suggested. This suggestion builds on a proposal advanced by William Loewe in his 2013 analysis of Kasper’s *Jesus der Christus*.\(^{17}\) According to Loewe, Kasper managed to avoid an uncritical dependence on the reconstruction of the historical Jesus proposed by the “new quest” by implicitly taking the authentic faith of present-day Christians as the starting point for his Christology. He went on to suggest that

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\(^{13}\) Plov 293-95.

\(^{14}\) The approach in question here is Kasper’s Spirit Christology. See Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology” (see p. 214n172), 256-65.

\(^{15}\) Petriano, “Spirit Christology or Son Christology,” 4, 293.

\(^{16}\) Taléns, *El Mediador y La Mediación* (see p. 298n397, above), 462-63.

\(^{17}\) On what follows, see Loewe, “*Jesus the Christ* in Retrospect and Prospect,” in CK 88-91.
Kasper’s account of the mystery of divine love revealed in Jesus Christ could be enhanced by making explicit what lay implicit in this account, namely, the activity of the believing subject in the apprehension of the truth of revelation. To facilitate this, he proposed to extend the set of general categories informing Kasper’s theology with “such notions as conversion, symbol, and the imagination.”

The concluding pages of the present study will briefly explore to what extent the horizon of Kasper’s theology is open to the addition of the Lonerganian category of conversion and how profitable this addition might be. It may be recalled that in the early 1980s, a shift took place in Kasper’s thought affecting his regard for the theological significance of the believing subject. Chapter five highlighted in this connection Kasper’s account of the truth of faith in Was alles Erkennen übersteigt. As he had in his 1972 book Einführung in den Glauben, here Kasper asserted that only God’s own Faithfulness-Truth could be regarded as an adequate foundation for the certainty of faith. However, in Was alles Erkennen übersteigt, Kasper followed von Balthasar’s account of the light of divine truth. This light not only emanates from the “objective evidence” or external symbols of revelation, but also inwardly illuminates the subject who receives that revelation. By so modifying his understanding of the Faithfulness-Truth of God, Kasper seemed to be demonstrating his openness to a more detailed reflection on the activity of the believing subject in the event of the transmission of revelation.

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18 Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” 91.
19 BG. For discussion, see pp. 424-29, above.
20 EG; EG7.
21 BG 208; compare EG 64-65.
22 On what follows, see BG 213.
To accurately measure Kasper’s openness to the category of conversion within his own theology, however, one must consider not only his understanding of the Faithfulness-Truth of God but also the account of tradition of which divine truth formed the central part, the same account of tradition on which his praxis of theology and of ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogue so heavily depended. Kasper formulated his understanding of tradition early in his career, around the same time he explicated the account of theological truth from which he later distanced himself in the 1980s. His understanding of tradition survived Kasper’s modifications of his theological foundations relatively unscathed. In particular, he continued to affirm that no solitary locus theologicus—neither scripture, nor its interpretative tradition, nor the authoritative teaching of the magisterium, nor the sense of the faith belonging to the whole people of God—was by itself a comprehensive principle of truth from which the whole of the truth of revelation could be derived. This is the meaning of what Kasper once called “the principle of the analogy of faith”: “each witness to the faith possesses its truth only inasmuch as it is heard along with the other witnesses.”

This principle is the reason Kasper later designated his theory of tradition as “postmodern.” It is closely connected to Kasper’s rejection of Idealist thinking, which in its various forms tried to establish a systematic understanding of all reality on the basis of a single principle. These facts raise the question: is Lonergan’s notion of conversion yet another example of a principle that Kasper would have to reject as fundamentally Idealist?

Now it is true that Lonergan understood conversion as the foundational reality governing theological method. The early Kasper, had he been familiar with Lonergan’s work, might have regarded this fact with suspicion. It may be noted, however, that Lonergan formulated his

23 DW 118.

24 See Kasper, “Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition” (see p. 143n80, above), 182.

concept of conversion as a principle of dialogue, and in this way protected himself from the charge of Idealism. For Lonergan, religious conversion meant “God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us” (see Rom. 5:5). Having fallen in love in an unrestricted fashion, the religious convert is transformed. One no longer values the realities of the world as one once did, but one regards everything in the light of the love that embraces the whole of one’s reality. In this state of love, one recognizes the value of religious belief, among other things. The inner word of religious conversion needs the outer word of religious tradition to nourish it, to enter into fellowship with the community of believers, to learn from the wisdom of the saints and scholars of that community. The constitutive function of tradition for religious conversion manifests itself within Lonergan’s theological method in the priority of the receptive moment (the first four functional specialties) over the constructive moment (the last four functional specialties). Religious conversion is not a static intellectual principle but an inner dynamism that points the convert beyond herself or himself, placing her or him on the road of personal transformation. It makes the subject teachable, motivating her or him to seek out and learn from the word of tradition.

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26 Fred Lawrence also distinguished Lonergan’s thought from that of German Idealism in “On the Relationship between Transcendental and Hermeneutical Approaches to Theology,” *Horizons* 16 (1989): 342-45.

27 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241 (translation Lonergan’s). For the moment, attention will be restricted to Lonergan’s notion of religious conversion as distinct from intellectual and moral conversion. This may be justified on the grounds that, for Lonergan, religious conversion sublates the other two forms. See ibid., 241-43.


29 On the connection between religious conversion and the beliefs of the religious community, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 118-19.


31 On the place of conversion within Lonergan’s eightfold division of theological method, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 135.

32 On the relationship between religious conversion and self-transcendence, see Lonergan, *Method in
The converted theologian nevertheless exercises her or his own proper competency within the traditioning process. On the basis of her or his conversion, the theologian reconstructs the authentic tradition of faith (the functional specialty, doctrines).\textsuperscript{33} She or he is empowered by the eyes of love to render an interpretation of this tradition in the spirit in which it was produced (the functional specialty, systematics).\textsuperscript{34} She or he receives the gift of prophecy and proclaims the rightly-understood tradition as a word of judgment and of grace for today (the functional specialty, communications).\textsuperscript{35} In this way, the theologian makes a unique and valuable contribution to the ongoing dialogue of the tradition of the Church in accord with the charisms proper to her or his vocation. By submitting to the dynamism of conversion, the theologian claims her or his rightful authority within tradition while subjecting herself or himself to the sovereignty of the Spirit, who directs the Church and guides it into all truth.

In short, there is a convergence between the Balthasarian-Kasperian notion of the light of divine truth and Lonergan’s idea of religious conversion. In the order of being, both are ultimately grounded in the unfathomable mystery of divine love. In the order of knowledge, however, both must be traced back to a transformation of consciousness that takes place in a believing subject. Finally, both place the believer in a dialogical relationship with the Church and its tradition. The remaining difference between the two seems to be a matter of emphasis. Kasper and Balthasar placed the accent on the priority of God’s Faithfulness-Truth in the order of being, while Lonergan emphasized the priority of conversion in the order of knowledge.

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Theology}, 104-5.
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\textsuperscript{33} On doctrines, see Lonergan, \textit{Method in Theology}, 295-333. On the relationship between conversion and doctrines, see ibid., 289-99.

\textsuperscript{34} On systematics, see Lonergan, \textit{Method in Theology}, 335-53.

\textsuperscript{35} On communications, see Lonergan, \textit{Method in Theology}, 355-68.
What are the advantages of adding this concept of conversion to Kasper’s theological lexicon? Firstly, the category of conversion facilitates a solution to the vexing problem of historical continuity within the tradition. In his accounts of tradition and theological method, Kasper has charged theologians with the task of working through the cloudy waters of church history in order to reconstruct the authentic tradition of faith. Such work presupposed a demolition of the ahistorical foundations on which the neo-Scholastic theological regime once stood. What, however, could suffice to replace these foundations? Does historical consciousness condemn Christians to depend on church historians to construct an indubitable historical basis for the certainty of their faith? If so, which historians? Lonergan’s concept of conversion can help one avoid this problem. Because the convert can access the authentic content of faith through the mediation of the traditional symbols of faith, she or he need not depend on this or that scholarly reconstruction to provide the certainty of faith. The church historian and the theologian need no longer bear the burden of having to generate this certainty through historical proofs. They are liberated by the light of faith for the pursuit of a deeper understanding of this faith through a fresh inquiry into the tradition, assisted by modern historical methods.

Secondly, the notion of conversion reinforces the unity Kasper has consistently maintained between the Catholic sacramental principle and the Protestant critical principle within his theology of tradition. In general, Kasper has expressed this unity in terms of the dialectical tension between scripture and tradition and that between the magisterium and the sense of the faith belonging to the whole people of God. He has argued that these distinct

36 So Loewe, “Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect,” 90-91.
37 See MD 47-60; “Dogmatik als Wissenschaft” (see p. 136n45, above), 198.
38 It is worth noting that from the very beginnings of his career, Kasper regarded historical theology not as the source of certitude about the truth of the faith but as a means to foster a deeper understanding of the faith. See LT 380-81.
elements are united to one another by the analogy of faith. It would be easy, however, to regard this dialectical formulation as an abstract and even gratuitous assertion apart from the reality of religious conversion that gives the analogy of faith its substance. It is when the loci theologici are illumined by the light of faith that one can find in them authentic testimony to the faith of the Church. The religious convert can thus recognize the truth in the Protestant idea that the Word of God authenticates itself, since the Spirit who opens the ears of the convert to hear the biblical testimony is the very Spirit in Whom the Bible was written. That Spirit, however, is not a spirit of discord but of peace and unity, Who draws the believer into the tradition that includes all who have responded authentically to the call of God’s Word. The religious convert recognizes the value of standing in communion with the Church and its legitimate leadership, since she or he can only follow the path of conversion in dialogue with the whole Church. Since, however, this dialogical pilgrimage is fueled by the conversion of each member of the Church, it must involve an institutional process of conversion that promotes progress and repairs decline. Hence it is clear that an authentically ecclesial faith does not exclude but includes a principle of criticism.

Lonergan’s notion of conversion offers a third advantage inasmuch as it removes an element of ambiguity from Kasper’s critique of Idealism. From the beginning of his academic career, Kasper formulated his theology as a response to the ambition of the German Idealists to explain the whole of reality in terms of a single principle, the Absolute immanent in the human subject. In his rejection of the Idealist principle of subjectivity, however, the early Kasper tended toward the opposite extreme, namely, a Barthian idealism centered on the person of Jesus Christ. Conversion presents a promising antidote to this dialectic of idealisms. Lonergan’s convert is not

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39 Reinhard Hütter made a similar point in arguing for the restoration of a theological methodology grounded in supernatural faith, namely, a renewed Thomistic theology. See Hüt 403-4.

40 On religious conversion and institutional reform, see Lonergan, Method in Theology, 117-18.
the self-absolutizing subject of the Idealists but an authentic subject who sets herself or himself in a dialogical relationship with other subjects and the whole of reality. It is because the convert sees reality for what it is that she or he finally encounters God through the mediation of God’s creatures and above all in God’s eschatological act of self-communication in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, which continues to abide in history by means of the Church and its tradition. Conversion fills out the dialogical thought-form that Kasper has been working to articulate since he wrote *Das Absolute in der Geschichte*.\(^{41}\) The ‘turn to the subject’ thereby facilitates a theology conceived in the horizon of history and freedom.

A fourth and final advantage of the proposed extension of Kasper’s theological categories is that it would strengthen the basis for dialogue between Kasper and theologians operating out of different theological foundations. In the first place, if the category of conversion were incorporated into Kasperean thought, it would reinforce the already existing convergences between his thinking and a major representative of transcendental theology, namely, Bernard Lonergan. Somewhat less directly, this would also bolster the relationship between Kasperean and Rahnerian thought, since it would represent a further convergence between the two over the place of the human subject in theology. In the second place, this modification would enhance Kasper’s ability to speak about the supernaturally infused *habitus* of faith and its theological significance. In this way, a convergence between Kasper and the transcendental Thomists would lead to a further convergence between Kasper and Thomistic thought in general, as represented, for example, by Reinhard Hütter. In the third place, it could help Kasper overcome one of the obstacles that stood in the way of his willingness to recognize the authentic concerns of liberation theology. Instead of focusing on the ambiguous significance of the relationship

\(^{41}\) See DA 151-52, 176n163, 178, 282.
between theory and praxis, Kasper could instead enter into a dialogue with liberation theologians over the question: how can one distinguish appropriately between an authentic and an inauthentic praxis of faith? Such a line of questioning could help Kasper move past an abstract suspicion that liberation theology depends on a Marxist ideology.

This point hearkens back to the starting point of the present dissertation. Contemporary theology is characterized by a pluralism of theological options, and Kasper's theology represents one distinct option among many. His approach, nevertheless, presents a number of distinctive strengths, as was noted above. The present study of Kasper's notion of the analogy of faithfulness has tried to highlight one strength in particular: the logic of Kasper's theology propels him into dialogue with the best representatives of the theological tradition, ancient, medieval, and modern. His is a theology that recognizes the limitations of a single theologian and so is ready—in principle, if not always in practice—to transcend itself in dialogue and in so doing to integrate itself into the broader theological and philosophical conversation. This is why Kasper's framework remains open to dialogue with those theologians who espouse the ‘turn to the subject,’ in spite of the numerous criticisms of the most important twentieth-century European representative of this group, Karl Rahner, that peppered his early work. It is to be hoped that the present reflections should contribute to this ongoing conversation.
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