

“Walter Kasper is a gentle giant within the Catholic community, within ecumenical circles, and within the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. What is unique about this *Festschrift* is the ordering of the essays, the consistently high standard of contributions, and the constructive engagement with the work of Kasper over a period of fifty years. This collection reads like a mini-summa of what is best in Catholic theology. We are indebted to the careful work of the editors in putting together this handsome volume.”

Dermot A. Lane
Mater Dei Institute of Education
Dublin City University, Ireland

“The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper is an exceptional volume from a remarkable range of leading scholars. As an introduction to a man who has served the church in so many capacities, this overview offers a unique vista on Catholicism over the span of Kasper’s career through his writing in diverse areas of systematic theology. We see the mastery of Kasper through the lens of his scholarly admirers who together make a compelling case for the significance of the cardinal for his church and for its future.”

Jeannine Hill Fletcher
Fordham University

“Cardinal Walter Kasper is undoubtedly a major figure in the church today, standing tall among contemporary theologians, epitomizing the theologian’s task of mediating between the Christian tradition and contemporary culture. This book, which includes insightful surveys of Kasper’s work by a stellar array of leading North American theologians as well as personal and pastoral statements by Cardinal Kasper, presents an excellent account of Kasper’s theology—as consistently pastoral and insistent ecclesial—and his vision of the church in dialogue with the world. In all, it attests to Kasper’s unswerving commitment to ‘speak truth in love,’ in service of God and of Christian faith, both within the Catholic communion and beyond it, through his remarkable contribution to the cause of Christian unity and in the promotion of Christian-Jewish relations. With its origins in a 2013 conference held at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, this most welcome book will surely serve as a useful reference for evaluating Cardinal Kasper’s extraordinary contribution as churchman, theologian, and pastor to the church, academy, and society.”

Anne Hunt
Executive Dean, Faculty of Theology
and Philosophy
Australian Catholic University

“Warm thanks to Krieg and Colberg for editing these fifteen brilliant essays, describing the insights of the acclaimed cardinal-theologian Walter Kasper, shared at the University of Notre Dame colloquium (which I happily attended!) to celebrate his eightieth birthday. These North American professors provide a trusty GPS to navigate his doctrinal, ecumenical avenues while suggesting some still-unexplored lanes.”

Michael A. Fahey, SJ
Scholar in Residence
Fairfield University, CT

“For much of the twentieth century Walter Kasper was overshadowed by theological greats such as Rahner, Schillebeeckx, von Balthasar, and Lonergan. Now is his time to emerge from the shadows to be revealed as a first-class theologian and exemplary churchman. This volume of contributions from leading Christian and Jewish theologians, and recent essays by Kasper himself, reveals the depth of his contribution both to theology and to the life of the church in the modern age.”

Neil Ormerod
Professor of Theology
Australian Catholic University

“In this remarkable Festschrift, some of today’s most distinguished theologians explore the achievements of Cardinal Walter Kasper as a systematician, a contributor to the ecumenical movement, and a leader in Jewish-Christian relations. Lucid and readily accessible, these essays will benefit both students and professional scholars. Personal anecdotes from Kasper’s former students, colleagues, and dialogue partners complement the volume’s general introduction to his life and career. The volume ends with three contributions from Kasper himself, so that its dialogue about Kasper becomes a dialogue with Kasper. This book deserves a place in every theological library.”

Julia Fleming, Professor of Theology
Creighton University

“There is no comparable presentation and recent analysis of the theology of Walter Kasper in German.”

Dr. Hermann Josef Pottmeyer
Professor Emeritus, Fundamental Theology
Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany

The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper

Speaking Truth in Love

Edited by

Kristin M. Colberg and Robert A. Krieg

Foreword by

Cardinal Walter Kasper



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Gratitude for an Unforgettable, Stimulating Symposium

Cardinal Walter Kasper

May 14, 2014

With the best of memories and deep gratitude, I recall the symposium, titled “The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper: Speaking Truth in Love,” at the University of Notre Dame from April 25 to April 27, 2013.

This three-day assembly was an academic conference at which theologians presented and discussed scholarly essays of the highest quality. Revised versions of these essays are the chapters of this *Festschrift*.

Yet this assembly was much more a symposium that realized the original meaning of the term “symposium.” It was an exchange of ideas in the context of an enjoyable, lively encounter of long-time friends and colleagues from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. This gathering was akin to what St. Augustine described in his early writings as a dialogue among friends in the country home at Cassiacum. Our symposium too occurred at a lovely place: the beautiful campus of the University of Notre Dame, with its warm, generous hospitality, which included a grand banquet and the joyous celebration of the Eucharist in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart.

This event accentuated an important element in my symposium essay, titled “How to Do Theology Today,” which is this *Festschrift*’s chapter 16. To be sure, theology needs hard work at the desk, in libraries, and in classrooms. At the same time, it involves more than

a discussion of scholarly papers, as useful and important are as they are. Theology matures by means of a vigorous, mutual giving and receiving of questions, insights, and lived convictions among friends and associates who often come from varied life experiences, different cultural backgrounds, and diverse academic orientations. Theology requires a sharing of a common faith, of a genuine willingness to participate in the one church whose unity embraces an enriching plurality, and of a commitment to speak to students and inquirers as they seek their way in faith, love, and hope within our global church and our complex world.

In sum, our symposium in April 2013 reminded me that theology flourishes only in an ongoing, never-ending dialogue that includes a challenging exchange of ideas, issues, and life. So I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the symposium's participants and, in particular, to the two people who initiated and organized this stimulating, fruitful event and who subsequently prepared this work for publication: Kristin M. Colberg and Robert A. Krieg.

Finally, my thanks also go to the people who generously sponsored the symposium and to the people who expertly published this *Festschrift*; the names of many of these men and women are acknowledged with gratitude in the introduction. In the symposium and this *Festschrift*, I have received a birthday gift that I will never forget. May the essays herein inspire their readers and convince them that it's worthwhile and invigorating to do theology today.

Tributes to Cardinal Kasper

From Gustavo A. Gutiérrez, OP

April 27, 2013

Dear Cardinal Kasper:
I greatly lament that health reasons prevent me from participating in the well-deserved honor the University of Notre Dame is offering to your theological work and to your personal testimony as a pastor and as a theologian.

We have much to thank you for your contribution to contemporary theology, though I only have time to mention your impact on the practice and thinking about ecumenical dialogue. I applaud you not only for the interest you have shown in personal encounters with representatives of different Christian confessions but also for the efforts to advance theologically the conditions for a truly fruitful dialogue. For example, your lucid and opportune works about collegiality in the church and the relation between the church universal and the local churches reflect the pastoral experience of a bishop.

At a more personal level I thank you for one of your earlier works about pluralism in theology, which inspired many of us in the beginnings of our theological efforts in Latin America. And also through your beautiful recent book, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (2012), which I am currently reading. You teach us the mercy of God that is manifest in the daily actions of Jesus and that is directed to all people and in the first instance to the poor and the socially insignificant.

I deeply regret that I am not able to be present in today's panel to which the conference organizers had the goodness to invite me, but I would like to reiterate my fraternal friendship and my solidarity with this tribute to your theological work.¹



From Rabbi A. James Rudin, DD²

December 31, 2013

Cardinal Walter Kasper is a unique combination of a world-class theologian and an empathetic pastor. I was privileged to witness both attributes when he served as the Holy See's global leader in strengthening Catholic-Jewish relations between 2001 and 2010.

Cardinal Kasper's leadership came at a critical time. Three dozen years had passed since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council when the world's Catholic bishops overwhelmingly adopted *Nostra aetate* with its declaration on Jews and Judaism. By 2001, some Catholics and Jews believed the task of building a new constructive relationship between the church and the Jewish people had been completed.

Because Cardinal Kasper knew this was not so, he devoted his academic head and his compassionate heart to make clear the council's historic achievement was not the "end" but rather the "beginning." He brought both intellectual and spiritual energy to that sacred task.

In a 2002 address at Boston College, he declared that "God's covenant with Israel by God's faithfulness is not broken (cf. Rom 11:29). . . . This is not a merely abstract theological affirmation, but an affirmation that has concrete and tangible consequences such as the fact that there is no organized Catholic missionary activity towards Jews."

A year later, the cardinal wrote: "Especially with regard to anti-Semitism and to the Shoah, we can justifiably speak of the need to embark on acts of repentance (*teshuvà*) . . . not limited merely to a few authoritative, meaningful gestures or even high-level documents. . . . In this spirit of rediscovered brotherhood a new spring-time for the Church and for the world can bloom once more, with the heart turned from Rome to Jerusalem and to the land of the Fathers" (*L'Osservatore Romano English Weekly Edition*, n. 40 [January 10, 2003], p. 6).

Cardinal Kasper has helped free our two faith communities from the tight chains of the past, moved us to higher ground, and given all of us a mandate for further positive change.

Endnotes

1. This tribute was translated into English by Dr. Timothy Matovina.
2. Rabbi Rudin had prepared an invited presentation for the conference in honor of Cardinal Kasper, but he was unable to attend the conference because of a sudden health crisis from which he has fortunately recuperated. At our request he has crafted this statement.

Introduction

Kristin M. Colberg and Robert A. Krieg



large crowd gathered in the University of Notre Dame's McKenna Hall for Continuing Education on the evening of Friday, April 26, 2013. The people broke into applause as Cardinal Walter Kasper entered the large atrium, accompanied by his sister Dr. Hildegard Kasper, who is emerita professor of philosophy, and walked to the table with the Bavarian chocolate cake in honor of the cardinal's eightieth birthday. Everyone joined in singing "Happy Birthday" to Cardinal Kasper and then cheered as he blew out the birthday candles, looked up with a large smile, and said, "Thank you!"

This birthday celebration was a high point of the conference in honor of Cardinal Kasper that was held at the university from April 25 to April 27, 2013. The cardinal's visit to campus generated all the chapters (except one) in this book. After recalling Cardinal Kasper's life and work, we give an overview of the nineteen chapters. In conclusion, we acknowledge the people and funding sources that made possible this *Festschrift* in honor of Cardinal Kasper.

Cardinal Walter Kasper's Life

Walter Kasper was consecrated the bishop of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart on June 17, 1989. In accepting the church's call to ecclesial leadership, he chose as his episcopal motto, "Truth in Love," derived from Ephesians 4:15, "Speaking the truth in love, we

must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." With these words, Kasper expressed the profound intention that has shaped his entire life.

Walter Kasper grew up in Swabia, Germany. He was born in Heidenheim an der Brenz on March 5, 1933, the day on which Adolf Hitler was "elected" Germany's national leader. Two years later his father, a schoolteacher, and his mother gave birth to Walter's sister Hildegard and after three more years to his sister Inge. During the war (1939–45), while Walter's father fulfilled mandatory military duty in national defense, the Kasper family resided in Wäschenbeuren, not far from Stuttgart. After the war when the father returned, the family moved to Wangen in the Allgäu Alps.

Beginning at an early age, Walter Kasper desired to become a priest and pastor. Thus, while studying at the University of Tübingen from 1952 to 1956, he resided at the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart's house of studies for seminarians, the Wilhelmstift. On April 16, 1957, after a year of diaconate studies in Rottenburg, Kasper was ordained a priest by the diocese's bishop, Karl Leiprecht. During 1957 and 1958, he engaged in parish ministry in Stuttgart, and in 1958 he commenced—at the bishop's request—his doctoral studies in theology at the University of Tübingen. In 1961, under the direction of Josef Rupert Geiselmann, he finished his doctoral dissertation, *Die Lehre der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*, "The Doctrine of Tradition in the Roman School." Soon after its completion, he embarked on the study, as suggested by the Dominican theologian Yves Congar, of the late philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling. In 1964, under the direction of Leo Scheffczyk, Kasper finished his Habilitation (the dissertation required in Germany for a university professorship), titled *Das Absolute in der Geschichte*, "The Absolute in History."

Walter Kasper was appointed professor of theology at the University of Münster in 1964 and remained there until 1970, when he accepted a professorship in theology at the University of Tübingen. Among his noteworthy publications while at Münster is his scholarly study "Verständnis der Theologie Damals und Heute" ("The Understanding of Theology Previously and Today," 1967) on the major shift occurring in Catholic theology during the mid-twentieth century. In 1967, Kasper became a member of the Study Commission of the Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation.

At the University of Tübingen, Kasper wrote texts that brought him international recognition: *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (1972),

Jesus the Christ (1974), *The God of Jesus Christ* (1982), and “Die Kirche als universales Sakrament des Heils” (“The Church as Universal Sacrament of Salvation,” 1984). At the request of the German bishops, Kasper was the primary writer and editor of a Catholic catechism for adults, titled the *Katholischer Erwachsenen-Katechismus*, which the German bishops’ conference published in 1985. In that same year, Kasper served, at the request of Pope John Paul II, as the theological secretary of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome. In this capacity, he proposed to the assembly of bishops that the Second Vatican Council’s unifying theology of the church is *communio* ecclesiology. This proposal received an enthusiastic, positive response at the synod and subsequently among theologians around the world.

In light of these significant contributions to the church and theology, Pope John Paul II singled out Kasper for ecclesial leadership. During the spring of 1989, at the pope’s request, Walter Kasper relinquished his professorship at the University of Tübingen, and on June 17, 1989, he was consecrated the bishop of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. At the helm of Germany’s fourth-largest Catholic diocese, Kasper devoted himself to pastoral leadership and ministry, visiting on every weekend a different parish, where he presided and preached at the Sunday Masses. At the same time, he continued to participate in the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, which produced the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” on October 31, 1999.

After ten years leading the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, Bishop Kasper was asked by John Paul II to move to Rome. On March 3, 1999, the pope appointed Kasper to serve as the secretary of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and of its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. On February 21, 2001, the pope named Kasper a cardinal and two weeks later appointed him president of the Pontifical Council and its Commission. In this position, Kasper assumed international leadership in ecumenism and also in Christian-Jewish dialogue. His publications during this time include his books *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church* (2005) and *Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (2006).

On July 1, 2010, Cardinal Kasper retired from his ecclesial office. Since then, he has continued to contribute to the church, ecumenism, and Christian-Jewish dialogue. In particular, he has published *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (2011) and *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (2012). Translated into

Spanish, *Mercy* was read during the papal conclave by Argentina's Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who became Pope Francis on March 13, 2013. Much to Cardinal Kasper's surprise, the new pontiff publicly praised and quoted *Mercy* on March 17—twelve days after the cardinal's eightieth birthday! Moreover, Pope Francis has continued to accentuate in his words and deeds that God is mercy.

This Book's Content

This book's essays are arranged in three sections. Section 1's seven chapters discuss important aspects of Cardinal Kasper's major theological writings from 1964 to 1989 when Kasper was professor of theology. Section 2's nine chapters present Kasper's vision of the church and his contributions to ecumenism and Christian-Jewish relations from 1989 to the present. Section 3 contains three texts by Kasper himself.

Section 1: God, Freedom, and History

In chapter 1, "The Task of Theology," Kristin M. Colberg explains that Kasper has persistently sought to translate or interpret the church's Gospel into a language accessible to contemporary people, and in chapter 2, "A Distinctive Theological Approach," Francis Schüssler Fiorenza highlights how Kasper understands divine revelation, freedom, and history and unites these key notions in a theology distinct from the theologies of Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger.

Anthony J. Godzieba elucidates in chapter 3, "The Promise and the Burden of Natural Theology," that Kasper acknowledges human beings' potential in the Holy Spirit of discerning God's presence and action in limited experience, and he has crafted a personalist language concerning God that is readily accessible to men and women in today's secular, consumer society. In chapter 4, "The Mystery of Being Human," Mary Catherine Hilker develops Kasper's theological understanding of becoming a human person in relation to the mystery of Jesus Christ as "the key" to hope, freedom, and identity.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 treat Kasper's Christology, pneumatology, and trinitarian theology, respectively. In "*Jesus the Christ* in Retrospect and Prospect," William P. Loewe illumines the creativity and continuing validity of Kasper's critical inquiry into Jesus' life, death, and

resurrection. In “Pneumatology and Beyond: ‘Wherever,’” Elizabeth A. Johnson highlights Kasper’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit in relation to the church’s understanding of the triune God, the historicity and humanity of Jesus Christ, and the Nicene Creed, and she asks that Cardinal Kasper develop his pneumatology in relation to an ecological theology of creation. In “*The God of Jesus Christ in Continuity and Discontinuity*,” Cyril J. O’Regan clarifies, on the one hand, Kasper’s adoption of the theological paradigm at work in Karl Rahner’s *The Trinity*, and, on the other hand, Kasper’s development and correction of important elements of Rahner’s work.

Section 2: The Church, Ecumenism, and Christian-Jewish Relations

In chapter 8, “A Theology of Church and Ministry,” Thomas F. O’Meara sketches the emergence of Kasper’s ecclesiology, culminating in *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, with its attentiveness to history, ecclesial forms, and the Holy Spirit.

The next five chapters study Kasper’s efforts toward Christian unity. In chapter 9, “Dialogue, Communion, and Unity,” Brian E. Daley locates the cardinal’s ecumenical achievements in relation to the ecumenical movement beginning in the early 1900s. Catherine E. Clifford uncovers the theological roots of Kasper’s vision of Christian unity in chapter 10, “The Catholic Tübingen School and Ecumenism,” in which she reviews the ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler and its influence on Kasper’s *The Catholic Church*. In chapter 11, “Catholicism in a New Key,” John R. Sachs sheds further light on Kasper’s vision of Christian unity as he discusses how Johann Sebastian Drey’s theology of the church shaped Kasper’s emphasis on the Spirit in the church. Susan K. Wood demonstrates in chapter 12, “Unity at the Table,” how Kasper has advanced ecumenism as he has worked for new theological agreements concerning the Eucharist in his dialogues with the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Methodist churches.

Chapters 13 and 14 examine Kasper’s leadership of the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. In “New Paths of Shalom in Christian-Jewish Relations,” Elizabeth T. Groppe highlights five major contributions to understanding, respect, and collaboration between Catholics and Jews. Moreover, she includes tributes to Cardinal Kasper by Susannah Heschel, Adam Gregermann, Shire Lander, Ruth Langer, and David Rosen. In “Celebrating Judaism as a ‘Sacrament of Every Otherness,’” Philip A. Cunningham describes

how Kasper turned ecclesiastical “problems” into fresh opportunities for improved communications, insight, and respect between Catholics and Jews.

In chapter 15, “Faith Seeking Understanding,” John C. Cavadini lauds Kasper’s achievement—on which Kristin M. Colberg focuses in chapter 1—of “translating” the Gospel in ways that express discovery and intelligibility. In chapter 16, Cardinal Kasper concludes the book’s first and second sections by reflecting on “How to Do Theology Today.”

Section 3: Reflections on Forgiveness, Vatican II, and Hope

Chapter 17, “Forgiveness and the Purification of Memory,” was a public lecture by Cardinal Kasper at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem, on May 25, 2004, when he participated in a conference sponsored by the University of Notre Dame’s Office of the President, Theology Department, and Institute for Church Life. In this lecture, Kasper gives a theological reflection on Pope John Paul II’s public request in March 2000 for forgiveness for the sins committed by the church’s members throughout history, especially in the Shoah.

Chapter 18, “Renewal from the Source: The Interpretation and Reception of the Second Vatican Council,” is Kasper’s Keeley Vatican Lecture, sponsored by the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, at the University of Notre Dame on April 24, 2013. It highlights three phases in the church’s reception of Vatican II and its teachings, and it envisions the path ahead during the pontificate of Pope Francis.

Chapter 19, “Be Joyful in Hope: A Homily,” is Cardinal Kasper’s homily at the University of Notre Dame’s Basilica of the Sacred Heart on Saturday evening, April 27, 2013.

Acknowledgments

The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper has come to fruition thanks to the efforts of many people, not all of whom can be thanked here.

As already noted, the essays here, except one, are the fruit of Cardinal Kasper’s visit to the University of Notre Dame in April 2013. This sojourn, including the Keeley Vatican Lecture, the conference in honor of Cardinal Kasper, and the homily in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, was made possible through grants at the University of Notre

Dame from the Reverend John J. Jenkins, CSC, the Office of the President; the Institute for Church Life; the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts' Henkels Lectures; the Nanovic Institute for European Studies; and the Theology Department's Berner Lecture Series and Crown-Minnow Lecture Fund for Christian-Jewish Relations.

Over three years of collaboration, the editors drew on the wise counsel of J. Matthew Ashley, George Augustin, John C. Cavadini, Shawn M. Colberg, Michael A. Fahey, Mary Catherine Hilker, A. James McAdams, and Thomas F. O'Meara. They received invaluable assistance from Harriet Baldwin and Lauri Roberts in the University of Notre Dame's Office of Academic Conferences; Monica Caro, Sharon Konopka, and Melanie Webb in the Nanovic Institute for European Studies; and Emily Hammock Mosby in the Theology Department. Moreover, the editors benefitted during the conference from the generous collaboration of Reverend William M. Lies, CSC, university vice president for mission engagement and church affairs, and Peter D. Rocca, CSC, director of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. Finally, in April 2013, they relied on Mr. and Mrs. Harald and Patricia Bellm who helped in hosting Cardinal Walter Kasper and Dr. Hildegard Kasper during their stay at the University of Notre Dame.

The book's essays were initially prepared for publication with the assistance of the theology graduate students Michael Anthony Abril and Brandon R. Peterson. The essays rapidly changed into a publishable manuscript through the enthusiasm, expertise, and diligence of Hans Christoffersen, publisher; Lauren L. Murphy, managing editor; and the production team at Liturgical Press.

The book's editors remain grateful to the people and funds named above and also to the many other people who generously gave assistance so that this book could reach publication. Finally, the editors owe a debt of gratitude to Cardinal Kasper himself. Beginning in March 2011, he assisted the editors as they planned the conference and this volume. Most important, he graciously participated in five intense days at the University of Notre Dame that reached highpoints in the eightieth birthday celebration on April 26 and in the Eucharist on April 27, 2013. As an expression of gratitude for his extraordinary contributions to the church, the academy, and society, we dedicate this *Festschrift* to Cardinal Walter Kasper.

SECTION ONE

God, Freedom, and History

The Task of Theology

Kristin M. Colberg

Few Catholic theologians or church leaders have done more than Walter Kasper to translate effectively the Christian message into the language and practice of our times. The scope of his efforts stretches from his work as a university professor at Münster and Tübingen to his service as bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart and ultimately to his leadership of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. Throughout that span, he has worked tirelessly to find expressions of the Gospel that best present its truth, hope, and joy. When he was asked in anticipation of his eightieth birthday (March 5, 2013) about how he would want scholars to celebrate his achievements, he responded that he prefers not to think of himself strictly as a church diplomat, an ecumenist, or an academic. Instead of being identified with any of these roles, he has always seen himself primarily as a pastor. Commenting on his career of more than five decades, he observed that he has pursued a single aim: “My question is, and was always, how to translate the Christian tradition in the present context and the present context in the Christian tradition.”¹

Kasper’s view of himself as a pastor and his goal of communicating successfully the “good news” to our contemporaries go hand in hand. Agreeing with the Tübingen theologian Johann Sebastian Drey, Kasper holds that “it is the fundamental task of pastoral work to keep the Church alive into the future” and to perpetuate the “transmission of the faith to a continuous present.”² This task faces serious challenges,

however, in the contemporary context in which Christian hope often appears unintelligible or unimportant to people with modern and postmodern sensibilities. Therefore, Kasper's commitment "to translate the Christian tradition in the present context and the present context in the Christian tradition" requires ongoing attempts to interpret Christian belief in ways that respond to today's urgent, existential questions.

This commitment to mediate between the Christian tradition and the world determines Kasper's way of doing theology and illumines the divine mystery on which this theology reflects. For Kasper, the interpretation of the Gospel for people today is not solely a strategy for advancing the "good news." The act of transmission is much more than a technique applied exteriorly to a neutral content. Rather, it corresponds interiorly to the message itself.³ The inherent translatability of Christian belief discloses the character of Christ's revelation and its significance. Being attentive to this reality, Kasper consistently identifies questions of proper interpretation with questions about the Gospel's content.

This essay elucidates Kasper's understanding of the task of theology and traces its influence on his constructive dialogue between the church and the world. It proceeds in three steps. First, it sheds light on Kasper's thought concerning theology's task in relation to the Christian message itself. Second, it recalls his analysis of modernity's unique challenges, which can convey a sense of Christian incoherence. Third and finally, it reviews Kasper's recent proposals for improving the transmission of the Gospel to today's world.

1. Theology's Task and Challenges

According to Walter Kasper, theology's task is to render "an account of the Christian hope to every human being."⁴ This endeavor is inspired by 1 Peter 3:15-16: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence." This seemingly straightforward aspiration is not, however, easily realized. It faces a number of challenges. In every age, theology—that is, critical, systematic reflection on the Christian faith—should unfold, Kasper observes, in relation to its "subject," its audience or recipients, and its two foci: God's Word and a specific society. The nature of theology's task introduces at least three distinct challenges.

First, Christian discourse seeks to give expression to a reality that is fundamentally ineffable or transcendent. It strives to proclaim the ultimate mystery that, as such, exceeds our full comprehension and eludes complete articulation in human words and forms. Employing the distinction between a problem and a mystery highlighted by Gabriel Marcel, Kasper asserts that theology is concerned not with resolving a problem but with attempting to “grasp mystery as mystery.”⁵ Efforts to express the subject matter or content of the Christian faith in concepts risk misrepresenting this limitless, complex reality. Hence, theologians must adopt theological methods that are appropriate to the “subject” or “subject matter” of their critical, systematic reflection.⁶ Despite good intentions, a theologian may speak of God in ways that reduce the divine mystery to the linguistic and conceptual economy of this world. Kasper writes: “A theology that has managed to conceive God has in fact misconceived him. . . . [F]or the theological mind, God is not a problem comparable to the many other problems which a person can, at least in principle, solve one after the other. God is an abiding problem; he is the problem par excellence which we describe as mystery.”⁷

Second, if it is to be effective, theology must employ a discourse that is meaningful for the communities and individuals to which it is addressed. Christian belief was not intended for monolithic transplantation from one culture to another.⁸ An intelligible presentation of Christian hope to a specific society rests on difficult decisions concerning the form of presentation. It must articulate the mystery of Jesus Christ so as to relate to people’s experiences and to engage their questions about life’s meaning and purpose. For this reason, there is no one account of Christian hope that suffices for all people in all times and places. Thus, in Kasper’s judgment, theologians must think about the method of their critical, systematic reflection on the Christian faith; they must ask themselves, “Is it still possible for theology to speak about God? How can it do so?”⁹

Third, theology must hold together two foci: God’s revelation and a specific people’s questions and ideals. If it is to unite these two realities, it must engage in interpretation. Kasper writes: “Understood in this way dogmatic theology is a hermeneutic activity, a process of translation. It stands midway between two poles: The Word of revelation in Scripture and the present-day realities of Christian proclamation.”¹⁰ On the one hand, theology must retrieve the Gospel as expressed in the Bible and the Christian tradition. Yet, on the other

hand, it must communicate this “good news” in a way that is intelligible to the people of a specific time and place. A theologian’s method, Kasper holds, must “show that this Word can be understood, made operative, and brought to fulfillment today. To state it in methodological terms: Dogma has exegesis as its starting point and missionary proclamation as its goal.”¹¹ In this vein, Kasper’s theological method embraces what Aidan Nichols has called a “twin stress” on the Christian tradition and philosophical intelligibility in a given historical moment.¹²

Referring to theology’s two foci, Kasper stresses that theologians face the challenge of keeping a proper balance between the Gospel’s “identity” and its “relevance.”¹³ That is, they uphold the identity of the Christian tradition as they maintain an authentic witness to Jesus Christ, and they advance the relevance of the “good news” when they highlight its intelligibility, importance, and relation to the needs, questions, and values of a particular audience. On the one hand, the identity or continuity of Christian belief is rooted in efforts “to represent the person, work and word of Jesus Christ” so that, even if Christians produce a variety of articulations, “they have one starting point and one center.”¹⁴ It is comprised by fidelity over two thousand years to the Word expressed in scripture and the Christian tradition. It is this common faith in the unity of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ that unites Christians amid vast geographic and cultural differences as well as throughout expansive periods in history. On the other hand, the relevance or significance of the Christian message derives from the fact that the Gospel should ultimately reveal to us both God and ourselves in God’s presence. The Gospel’s inherent relevance ensures that while Christians are bound together in a common identity, they respect and value a diversity of legitimate expressions of belief in Jesus Christ.¹⁵

As Kasper points out, the church sometimes errs by one-sidedly emphasizing either the identity or the relevance of the Gospel. Why does this imbalance occur? It results from the church’s unwillingness or inability to abide the tensions inherent to witnessing to the divine mystery, to the transcendent reality that—as we noted above—is beyond our full understanding. Attempts to eliminate this tension only intensify the church’s struggle with incoherence by forfeiting God as the ultimate mystery and also the church itself as mystery. Highlighting the difficulty of keeping the balance between continuity

and significance, Kasper states that “when the Church tries to be relevant, it runs the risk of surrendering its unambiguousness for the sake of openness. Yet, whenever it tries to speak straightforwardly and clearly it risks losing sight of men and their actual problems. If the church worries about identity, it risks a loss of relevance; if on the other hand it struggles for relevance, it may forfeit its identity.”¹⁶

Theology in particular faces the challenge of holding together the Gospel’s identity and relevance. Giving voice to this issue, Kasper asks:

How can theology escape from the identity-relevance dilemma in which it finds itself? How can it escape the deadly logic of preserving its relevance at the cost of identity, or keeping its identity at the cost of relevance—and at the price of retreat into the ghetto? Without a clear, unequivocal individual identity there is no relevance; but of course without relevance there is no identity.¹⁷

If theology is to give an intelligible account of Christian hope, it must show that Christian belief’s continuity and significance are inseparable from one another. As Kasper points out, the Gospel’s identity is inherently relational; it always emerges in relation to a people’s particular questions and aspirations. Conversely, the Gospel’s relevance is vacuous without a substantive and definitive contribution to offer. Thus, when theology witnesses appropriately to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, it communicates the identity of Christian belief as it discloses that which is absolutely relevant: the truth of human existence. It reflects on the Word that is always new and yet always at the heart of human life. “If this newness is abandoned,” Kasper states, “the relevance of Christianity is destroyed.” But this “newness” remains anchored in continuity, in identity. “Once identity is lost, relevance is lost as well. Only the one who has identity can have relevance.”¹⁸ In sum, if theology is to give an authentic translation or interpretation of God’s revelation in scripture and tradition, it must maintain the balance between the identity and the relevance of the Gospel.

2. Contemporary Challenges to Theology

Since its inception, the church has continually sought to balance the Christian tradition’s identity and its relevance. While this endeavor

is inherently difficult, it is especially formidable, Kasper observes, in our contemporary context. Today, the Christian community's ability to present the Gospel effectively has been strained by the apparent abyss between the experience of Christian faith and the experience of the modern/postmodern world. In light of this separation, the church's teachings may seem irrelevant and incoherent to many people. Reflecting on this dilemma, Kasper writes:

The real question is: How does this central concept of the Christian faith (the relationship between nature, grace and culture) relate to our modern and frightfully secular culture? How does it relate to our everyday experiences and those social, economic and political issues which confront us on a daily basis? How can we keep the message of salvation alive in a world that is characterized by the experience of destructive forces? How can we speak of reconciliation in a world that is not reconciled but is deeply alienated? What is the meaning of the message of grace for the Church and our culture on our way into the third millennium?¹⁹

In response to these questions, Kasper has explained (1) what he perceives to be the central issue, (2) the post-Enlightenment notion of autonomy, and (3) the Christian notion of freedom.

(1) *The Central Issue: The Notion of Freedom*

In Kasper's judgment, the apparent separation between the church and the modern world is inauthentic and artificially compartmentalizes that which should be understood as one reality.²⁰ Fresh answers to the question of the relationship between the church and the world require that we shed light on the seeming dissonance. As Kasper notes, "No answer is intelligible unless people can first grasp the question to which it is the answer."²¹ As the issue comes into sharper focus, then it must be shown that the church has something meaningful to say to the world, something that human beings cannot say by themselves and to which they are unconditionally related. Yet, to achieve this aim the church must acknowledge its actual discomfort with the secular world and deliberately become more engaged in it. As the church does so, it will find that contemporary thought could provide the church with resources for successfully conveying its

message of hope. Keeping the balance between identity and relevance, church leaders and theologians could translate the Christian tradition into the modern/postmodern idiom.

Analysis reveals, Kasper argues, that while the estrangement between the church and today's world appears to be the result of the collision of two mutually exclusive worldviews, it actually occurs because of the intersection of the church's internal weaknesses and also of modernity's internal weaknesses. Given their respective weaknesses and crises, the Christian community and the secular society perceive the other as a threat.²² In other words, the underlying issue is that the two meet at a moment when each is too weak to interact constructively with the other. As a consequence, they fail to recognize their authentic relationship and common goals.²³ Unable to consider appropriately the challenges presented by the other, both respond to the encounter with a resounding no. In this way, the rupture between the church and the modern/postmodern world stems from a lack of authentic engagement between the two rather than their fundamental incompatibility. What they encounter is a distorted version of the other, and thus what they reject are not the principles of modernity or Christianity but unrealized caricatures of them.²⁴

According to Kasper, the locus for the apparent collision between Christian and modern/postmodern sensibilities is the issue of human freedom. At the center of people's self-understanding is a strong sense of personal authority that stands side by side with an inchoate yearning for a transcendent source of life and values. The challenge of construing the relationship between personal autonomy, that is, self-determination, and theonomy, that is, faithfulness of God, frustrates both the cohesion of the church and contemporary society and also the ability of each to communicate with the other.²⁵ The Christian community and the secular society must attain a coherent, intelligible view of the relationship between personal autonomy and theonomy if each is to engage contemporary men and women who are demanding an account of how to reconcile human freedom and God's grace. As things stand, neither the church nor the contemporary world has so far succeeded in speaking meaningfully about the relationship between human freedom and divine freedom. The inability of each to offer an inclusive account of freedom or liberation leads both the church and society to a lack of intellectual cohesion and hence to a defensive stance in relation to the other.

Nevertheless, the point of apparent difference and defensiveness has the potential, Kasper proposes, to be the point of rapprochement between the church and society. The issue of freedom can become the source of the interdependence between the Christian community and today's world. For this shift to happen, each must consider anew its understanding of the relationship between personal autonomy and divine presence and action.²⁶

(2) Clarifying the Secular Notion of Personal Autonomy

The underlying crisis in the contemporary world, Kasper avers, is secular society's inability to answer the very question it has proposed concerning human freedom. Having highlighted the human potential for personal autonomy, it has not made available the primary resource that would enable people to realize their liberation. Society has ignored this resource because it has denied the roots of its notion of personal autonomy and, given this denial, it cannot respond effectively to questions of how we as individuals and communities can realize our full selves. The notion of human freedom, which is the starting point and centerpiece of the modern/postmodern worldview, has its origins in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But secular society rejects that foundation and thereby separates itself from the well-spring that nourishes authentic self-realization.

Kasper argues that the concept of human freedom is born "on the very first page" of the Judeo-Christian scriptures with their witness to the fundamental distinction between God and the world.²⁷ The notion of a transcendent Source outside the cosmos who freely creates a world that otherwise could not have existed inaugurates "an epoch-making revolution" by establishing both the ontological difference between God and creation and also creation's absolute reliance on God, who respects creation as "the other."²⁸ The understanding of the world as a relative reality ruptures the univocal view of the relation between God and creation that dominated the ancient and medieval worldviews, and it serves as the basis for the idea of the relative independence of men and women in relation to God. Kasper writes:

It is precisely when God's divinity was taken seriously that the world could be demythologized and dehumanized. And the logical result was that the worldliness of the world could be

taken seriously too. It is precisely the world's radical dependence on God which makes the general independence before God possible: this is the special character of the Bible's definition of the relation between God and the world. As what is radically dependent, the world is what is not divine. It therefore stands over against God in relative independence.²⁹

The Bible's acknowledgment of the ontological distinction between God and the world democratizes the *imago Dei* and establishes the equality of all men and women in their relationship with God. Because every person equally bears the divine image, he or she has an innate sacred dignity and should be free from domination or manipulation by other human beings.³⁰ Further, since all men and women are unconditionally oriented to God, they do not experience fulfillment in the things of this world and should be free in relation to them. According to Kasper, it is the idea of a relative world, rooted in the notion of an ontological distinction, that serves as the ultimate ground for asserting the fundamental equality and dignity of every human being.

The crisis of our modern/postmodern era has resulted from the idea of a "worldly world," a world that is detached from its transcendent source and *telos*. With its turn to the knowing subject, contemporary thought often eliminates God as the ontological reference point that defines and determines reality, including personal autonomy. It consequently offers an account of freedom that regards self-determination as an independent starting point in human life. As such, the ideal for men and women is no longer deification but rather humanization. Accordingly, human freedom is understood no longer in relation to its goal or *telos* but as a goal in itself, as wholly autonomous and self-legislating. As a result, there emerges the view of human persons as self-contained and "liberated" from an ultimate source of truth and meaning; in short, there is only a "self-sufficient humanism."³¹ But with the assertions of the world as the totality of reality and of each human subject as the determinant of its own reality, men and women lose the "all-embracing unity of reality" and become wanderers, "homeless" in the world.³² Without a clear sense of its relation to theonomy, the sense of personal autonomy loses its ability to engage the crucial questions of human existence, and the world becomes fragmented by competing claims of authority. Thus, the desire for human freedom awakened in modern/postmodern

thought cannot be realized in post-Enlightenment categories, and the secular system of thought dissolves into incoherence. In effect, the modern/postmodern era loses the capacity to function as the organizing principle of reality.

(3) *Clarifying the Christian Notion of Freedom*

In Kasper's judgment, the church currently suffers in its encounter with secular society because of its inability to articulate effectively the relationship between nature and grace that is the basis of the relationship between personal autonomy and theonomy. Christian theology has struggled in every era to give an intelligible account of the unity-in-difference between creation and God. It has time and again sought to clarify the bond between God's immanence and God's transcendence; the former is expressed in Genesis 2:4b-25 and the latter in Genesis 1:1-2:4b. Although the book of Genesis attests to the union and yet ontological distinction between the natural and the supernatural realms, theologians have had difficulty, especially since the Enlightenment, in speaking in readily understandable terms about the ultimate mystery. They tend to give an insufficient exposition concerning divine immanence, divine transcendence, and their paradoxical unity. As a result, today's church is unable to communicate well its claims about the transcendent God's presence and action in human affairs. It lacks coherent statements concerning the God who is both wholly other and yet intimately related with humankind and creation. Given this inability, the Christian community has not realized its synthetic or unifying role in contemporary society; it appears to be one social sector or mode of reality amid others instead of being the primary interpreter of reality.

A devastating consequence of the nature-grace issue is, Kasper holds, that the church remains unable to articulate a noncompetitive relationship between personal autonomy and theonomy. This inability gives rise to society's perception that post-Enlightenment notions of freedom are incompatible with Christian conceptions of freedom. Moreover, the church's claim to present the truth of human existence seemingly stands in fundamental tension with contemporary society's view of personal autonomy, leaving little or no common ground for meaningful dialogue. Gaining the attention, interest, and respect of an audience today depends on the church's ability to show

that its notions of an omnipotent God and an institutional church are not incompatible with a dynamic concept of personal freedom. According to Kasper, the church must give evidence that “freedom and institution are not antithetical terms”; it must demonstrate and explain institutionalized freedom.³³ Further, ecclesial officials, pastoral leaders, and theologians must show that “being bound to the church does not mean being bound to an abstract system of doctrine. It means being woven into a living process of tradition and communication in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is interpreted and actualized.”³⁴ In sum, meaningful translations of the Gospel for our world rely on the church clarifying how the modern/postmodern notion of freedom and the Christian life are not contradictory. Without a clear articulation of the relationship between personal autonomy and theonomy the church’s interpretations of its scripture and tradition will suffer from a lack of intelligibility and import.

Given its current dilemma, the church must turn not only outward, *ad extra*, to comprehend our modern/postmodern society world but also inward, *ad intra*, to understand some central elements of its identity. While it asks about its relevance, that is, about *how* it might effectively address today’s society, it must develop a deeper grasp of *what* it has to say. Regarding this ecclesial self-examination, Kasper writes:

The present crisis facing Christianity in the West does not touch merely on peripheral concerns; rather, it specifically addresses this very question. We are dealing here primarily with a crisis of relevance. We hear daily dogmatic teachings and, even more, moral rules of the Church no longer reach a large segment of believers. They appear to offer answers to questions that are no longer asked. Nonetheless, the crisis of relevance represents the merely superficial side of the problem. It has long since led to a much deeper crisis within Christian churches. The question is no longer *how* the Church will be able to reach out to the modern, secularized world; rather the question is *what* constitutes Christianity as such. What can, *must* Christianity say to the modern world? Does it have something of its own to say, something unmistakable?³⁵

In Kasper’s judgment, the church is currently struggling to articulate more accurately and intelligibly two key aspects of its identity:

the complementarity between nature and grace and also the compatibility between personal autonomy and theonomy. It must advance its insight into and expression of these two crucial relationships if it is to engage in a more fruitful dialogue with our modern/postmodern society. In short, it must undertake a scrutiny *ad intra* in order to communicate more effectively *ad extra*. Until it knows its own identity more fully, the Christian community will not succeed in its relevance, that is, in translating the Gospel into the contemporary world.³⁶

3. Communicating the Christian Hope Today

The primary task of theologians, Walter Kasper insists, is to communicate the Christian view of God's presence and action in human life. As mentioned at the outset, it is to give "an accounting of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15-16). Achieving this goal today, however, is, as Kasper readily acknowledges, no easy endeavor.

From the mid-1800s into the mid-1900s, most Catholic theologians aimed at imparting what was perceived to be the church's unchanging or timeless theology, its *theologia perennis*. But over that century, they increasingly realized that their message was not making sense to more and more people, even to Catholics. In light of the unintelligibility of their neoscholastic teaching, they realized and the Second Vatican Council affirmed that the church and its theologians must continually interpret the Gospel anew for its specific time and place. Commenting on this new approach to theology, Kasper writes: "Theology cannot choose its time. It has to convey the Christian message to men and women of its own era, and has to give an account of the Christian hope. A *theologia perennis*—a theology that is in principle timeless—is of no use to anyone. This commits theology today to a critical and creative reception of modern thought."³⁷

What is involved in undertaking "a critical and creative reception of modern thought"? According to Kasper, theologians today must clarify the Christian notion of freedom. In particular, they must show how it reconciles the best elements of the contemporary concept of personal autonomy and the church's concept of theonomy. They must explain the Christian insight that true freedom is liberation *for* God and not freedom *from* limitations. This idea gives direction and meaning to the otherwise vacuous secular notion of personal autonomy. In Kasper's words, Christianity "gives human freedom, which by

itself is empty, the content which is alone adequate for it: that which completes freedom cannot be something else than freedom; that which fulfills freedom can only be freedom itself."³⁸ The post-Enlightenment notion of personal autonomy that has collapsed amid competing claims of various authorities attains content when it is associated with the Christian notion of the ultimate mystery or "the Absolute," God, who transcends the world and yet moves within it seeking both to emancipate all men and women from the innate tendency to absolutize or deify temporal realities and also to empower them for their full personal existence. In sum, theologians must explain that "Christian freedom presupposes human freedom, [and] gives it its final determination and provides it with its final fulfillment."³⁹

As Kasper reiterates in numerous places, the "final determination" of personal autonomy is not an abstract principle but Jesus Christ, alive in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the strength to attain our "final fulfillment" comes not solely from within human beings or from an idea but from the living Christ and the Spirit whom Christ has released within creation. In other words, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit now liberate our constricted human freedom so that human persons might realize their authentic selves in union with God. Kasper explains: "In the life of Jesus we are given the definition that could come to us through no other means—a lived, acted out model which defines and fulfills the nature of human freedom. Christ reveals that the self-emptying love which appears as 'foolishness' in the 'light of reason' is, in fact, the pattern which makes sense of our lives."⁴⁰

To be sure, these reflections could move at this point into rich themes in Kasper's theology, themes that this book's other chapters pursue. It suffices here to conclude with Kasper's three proposals for improving the church's translation or interpretation of the Gospel in our modern/postmodern world. These proposals appear in Walter Kasper's recently published *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (2011).

First, the church must prove itself to be a symbol and a safeguard of the dignity and freedom of every human person. As it does so, it must admit that in today's society "the religious-transcendent orientation is no longer seen as normal. . . . Where once transcendence pointed towards a different, mysterious, mysteriously divine world, this place has been taken by a big yawning void and where the gods

once were, there now reigns the fear of constantly new ghosts.”⁴¹ Given the secular mentality, the church must deliberately witness to God as the transcendent ground or Source of all reality. As Kasper notes, what is needed today is “new joy in God and new enthusiasm for him. In a largely secularized world we need a theocentric turn.” Theologians must speak again of God as the source and goal of all reality, indeed as the fulfillment of our human longing. “In our situation the Church becomes a prophetic-critical sign against the inner-worldly secularism that thinks it can cope with life out of personal insights and achievements and that believes it can plan and forge the fortune of life on its own.”⁴²

Second, the church’s theocentric turn must lead to a Christological concentration.⁴³ Jesus Christ—the one person who is fully divine and fully human—is the key for interpreting the relationship between personal autonomy and theonomy as well as between nature and grace. The Word made flesh (John 1:14) reveals that divine agency does not compete with human agency. Rather, Jesus Christ manifests that the unity and the difference between nature and grace, between personal autonomy and theonomy increase *not in inverse proportion but in direct relation*. This perfect union of God and humanity, where nothing is truncated or excluded, is represented in the Council of Chalcedon’s formula concerning Jesus Christ in whom the human nature and the divine nature remain “unmixed and undivided” in one person. This ancient doctrine is the lens through which men and women can make sense of their lives as part of a larger transcendent experience of God.⁴⁴ In this reality, men and women can see that opening oneself to the divine is not self-destructive; on the contrary, it is the condition for the possibility of gaining one’s authentic personal identity.

Third and finally, the church must continue to undergo a spiritual renewal in relation to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Kasper writes: “Jesus Christ did not simply live two thousand years ago and then depart from us. He lives and continues to work through the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world. So the Church is more than an institution; it is, as an institution, time and again a new event in the Holy Spirit.” Although it may seem contradictory, the church must adopt forms of life that manifest its ability to institutionalize freedom as it lives in faithfulness to Jesus Christ in the Spirit. “In this way, the theocentric turn and the Christological concentration should become fruitful in a spiritual deepening.”

More than fifty years ago, Walter Kasper set out “to translate the Christian tradition into the present context and the present context into the Christian tradition.” As he has pursued this goal, he has realized that theologians need to find ways to overcome the gap between the church and secular society. For his part, he saw that while their respective notions of freedom had brought about their estrangement from each other, these differing notions shared a common wellspring and could mutually enrich each other. In his judgment, the question of freedom that served as the point of impact in the collision between the church and contemporary society could become the point at which they could speak meaningfully to each. He writes: “The proclamation of the Gospel of Christian freedom is the primary service the Church can offer the world.”⁴⁵ For this reason, running as a dominant thread through many of Kasper’s writings is the theme of Christian freedom, the freedom or liberation that Jesus Christ has accomplished and now offers to all people in the Holy Spirit through the church. As Walter Kasper has developed key aspects of Christian freedom, he has pursued the primary task of theology today; namely, he has rendered “an account of the Christian hope to every human being.”⁴⁶

Kasper’s ability to bring together the issues of the church and the world in a truly synthetic way illumines a fundamentally hopeful path for theology in the twenty-first century. If the church seeks a renewed understanding of its own identity as meaningful and relevant to contemporary men and women, then it must engage the secular world in earnest. A reception of modernity and a quest for greater self-understanding that is mutually critical, creative, and ongoing means that there are no once-for-all translations of the Gospel. The work of translating is never complete, for even the most successful interpretations of the good news are always incomplete relative to the reality they seek to express. This theological commitment has led Kasper to insist on dialogue throughout his career, and, as a result, his work of translation has made invaluable contributions to our efforts to render an “account of the hope that is within us.”

Endnotes

1. Walter Kasper, e-mail message to author, March 18, 2011.
2. Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, trans. Thomas Hoebel (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 9.
3. On Walter Kasper's theological method and the mystery it seeks to express, see his *Die Methoden der Dogmatik—Einheit und Vielheit* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1967).
4. Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 32.
5. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, trans. V. Green (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 14. On Marcel's distinction and its significance, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2000), 27–39.
6. Kasper, *Die Methoden der Dogmatik*, 6.
7. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 13. According to Kasper, "to preserve the transcendence of God is also to preserve the transcendence of the human person and therefore the freedom and inalienable rights of humanity" (p. 15).
8. See Walter Kasper, *Faith and the Future*, trans. Robert Nowell (New York: Crossroad, 1982). On Christianity's inherent translatability, see Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989).
9. Kasper, *Die Methoden der Dogmatik*, 1.
10. *Ibid.*, 25.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Aidan Nichols, "Walter Kasper and His Theological Programme" (1986), in *Scribe of the Kingdom: Essays on Theology and Culture*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 44–53, 50.
13. On the contemporary "dilemma" of relevance and identity, see Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 15–25; *idem*, *Theology and Church*, 1–16, 73–79; *idem*, "Nature, Grace and Culture: On the Meaning of Secularization," in *Catholicism and Secularization in America*, ed. David L. Schindler (Notre Dame, IN: Communio Books, 1994), 31–51. When I spoke with Kasper regarding his use of the concepts of relevance and identity, he commented that "this is the center of it all and not enough has been done to explore it." In *Jesus the Christ*, Kasper cites Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
14. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 15.
15. Kasper's understanding of translation is a form of critical correlation whereby he attempts to reconceive of truths of Christian faith in terms assessable to contemporary readers. On the development of critical correlation as a theological method, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 3–77, esp. 41–47;

David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 56 (1989): 548–70.

16. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 15.

17. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 4.

18. Kasper, "Nature, Grace and Culture," 44.

19. *Ibid.*, 31.

20. See Walter Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom and the History of Freedom in the Modern Era: The Meeting and Confrontation between Christianity and the Modern Era in a Postmodern Situation*, trans. Joseph A. Murphy (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1988); *idem*, "Nature, Grace and Culture," esp. 36–44.

21. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 12.

22. *Ibid.*, 41–45.

23. See Walter Kasper, "Autonomy and Theonomy: The Place of Christianity in the Modern World," in *Theology and Church*, 32–53.

24. See Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom*, 18–29.

25. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 32–45.

26. Here Kasper is drawing on the later work of F. W. J. Schelling, in particular, his ideas that human freedom needs to be freed by God's freedom and that Jesus Christ fulfills the need for a "new beginning in history." See Walter Kasper, *Das Absolute in Geschichte* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1965). Concerning Schelling's influence on Kasper's Christology, see Robert A. Krieg, *Story Shaped Christology: The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 34–64, esp. 38–40.

27. Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom*, 6.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 35.

30. Concerning Genesis 1:26–27, Kasper writes: "The idea of the image of God is now transferred to every human being; the result of this democratization is that everyone, irrespective of his ethnic, racial, or religious affiliation, is God's direct partner, and as such enjoys an unconditional dignity that no one can dispose" (see Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 36).

31. Kasper, *The Catholic Church*, 33.

32. Kasper, "Nature, Grace and Culture," 38.

33. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 70.

34. *Ibid.*, 6.

35. Kasper, "Nature, Grace and Culture," 32; Kasper's emphasis.

36. It is important to be clear that Kasper's call for greater *ad intra* clarity for the sake of more effective *ad extra* dialogue does not exclude or diminish the value of pursuing dialogue and self-understanding from the other direction, that is, moving from *ad extra* to *ad intra*. Kasper often affirms that engagement with the world is an essential element of developing awareness of the church's own identity and mission. For him, these two impulses always work together and inform one another.

37. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 80.

38. Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom*, 41.
39. *Ibid.*, 37.
40. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 67.
41. Kasper, *The Catholic Church*, 333.
42. *Ibid.*, 334.
43. *Ibid.*, 336.
44. On Kasper's use of Chalcedon's teaching, see his *Theology and Church*, 94–108; *idem*, "Neuansätze gegenwärtiger Christologie," in *Wer ist Jesus Christus?*, ed. J. Sauer (Freiburg: Herder, 1977).
45. Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom*, 40.
46. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 32.