JACQUES DUPUIS’ TRINITARIAN CHRISTOLOGY
AND PAUL F. KNITTER’S SOTERIOCENTRISM
AS RESPONSES TO THE TENSION
BETWEEN MISSION AND DIALOGUE IN ASIA

by

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Jacques Dupuis’ Trinitarian Christology and Paul F. Knitter’s Soteriocentrism as Responses to the Tension Between Mission and Dialogue in Asia

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Abstract

The underlying cause of the tension between mission and dialogue in religiously plural Asia is the Christian claim that Christ is the only saviour. The thesis analyzes official post-Vatican II responses to this claim as well as the responses of Dupuis and Knitter aimed at promoting interreligious dialogue. Dupuis acknowledges that salvation is not through Christ alone but through Christ and the Spirit at work in non-Christian religions, while still professing that salvation is through Christ alone. In contrast to Dupuis’ christocentric claim from above, Knitter argues for a soteriocentric approach from below directed at building the Reign of God on earth in which all religions can play a part. The thesis concludes that the way to the future calls for dialogue between advocates of an approach from above and from below.
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Introduction

1. Introduction

Asia is a continent made up of various nations. It possesses a rich mosaic of cultures and has a wealth of spiritual heritages. 85 per cent of all the world’s non-Christians live in Asia. In 2010 Catholics numbered only 3.3 per cent of nearly 3.6 billion Asians who form 60 per cent of the world’s population. Significantly, well over 50 per cent of all Asian Catholics are found in one country alone – the Philippines; thus Catholics in many Asian nations are few in number. These statistics have large implications; they demonstrate the magnitude of the challenges that the Asian continent poses to the mission of the Church as it enters the third millennium.

For the most part, Christianity came to Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as European colonialism took hold. When the early missionaries came, with few exceptions, they rejected the religious customs and beliefs of the people as superstition and understood their mission as the proclamation of Christ as the one and only saviour. This model of mission remained the dominant model of the Church in Asia until the Second Vatican Council. In the

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1 Asia is a huge continent made up not only of diverse nations, but of diverse worlds. Truly, there are many Asias, extending from Lebanon in the East to the Philippines in the West, from Siberia in the North to Indonesia in the South. Asia, a conglomerate of worlds, possesses a rich mosaic of cultures, traditions, ethnicities, and religions. M. Thomas Thangaraj notes that unlike religious diversity in Europe and North America which is a recent phenomenon through migration, religious plurality in Asia has existed for centuries. This means that the question of religious pluralism is not something new to Asian Christians. From their historical beginnings, Asian Christians have lived with religious plurality around them and had to encounter questions theological or otherwise with regard to their role and place within such religiously pluralistic settings. See M. Thomas Thangaraj, “Religious Pluralism, Dialogue and Asian Christian Responses,” in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed., Sebastian C.H. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 158. Catholics in Asia form only a small minority of the total population. To use a phrase dear to Benedict XVI, Christians in Asia are a “creative minority.” See Pontificium Consilium Pro Laicis, *Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today: Congress of Asian Catholic Laity*, August 31-September 5, 2010, Seoul, Korea (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), 10. For a brief overview of the various situations and issues faced by Christians in different Asian countries, see Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
multi-religious context of Asia, one can easily understand why conversions from other religions to Christianity are not common.

Facing the continued pressures of the post-colonial period after World War II, Vatican II and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) began to recognize the need for dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with other religions if the Church is to have any impact on non-Christians. These dialogues are not separate activities, but activities mutually intertwined.

The tension between mission and dialogue comes about because of the conflicting goals of mission, aimed at converting non-Christians to the Church, and dialogue, aimed at promoting mutual understanding and collaboration. To reduce the tension, Catholic theologians have been trying to find a way of maintaining the uniqueness of Christ as saviour while acknowledging that religions other than Christianity have a positive role to play in the salvation of their adherents. Jacques Dupuis and Paul F. Knitter are two such theologians.

1.1 Thesis Statement

This thesis will critically explore the responses to the tension between mission and dialogue in Asia in Dupuis’ trinitarian and pneumatic christology and Knitter’s soteriocentrism. I have chosen Dupuis and Knitter as examples of “above” and “below” approaches to dialogue that are viable because these two authors have not been previously explored in relation to Asia. I hope that a combination of the elements of their thought may open up new pathways for conceiving interfaith relations.

1.2 Significance of the Thesis Topic

There is a significant amount of literature on the Roman Catholic Church’s official documents on mission and dialogue, the theology of the Spirit, the relation of the Church to the
Kingdom of God, and the necessity of the Church for salvation. However, a search of the University of Toronto catalogue, and the ATLA Religion Database did not produce any study that compares the theology of Dupuis with that of Knitter for addressing the tension between mission and dialogue in Asia. This thesis is an attempt to do so.

2. Methodology

Before examining the theologies of Dupuis and Knitter, Chapter One will elucidate the current understanding of mission, dialogue, and proclamation in the Roman Catholic Church, and how since Vatican II, there is a paradigm shift from mission as proclamation for converting others to the Church to mission as dialogue. In examining this shift, the chapter relies mainly on Church documents. It will then describe the concrete tensions that exist between mission and dialogue in Asia, especially as manifested in the events surrounding the momentous Synod of Asia held in 1998.

Chapter Two will investigate how Dupuis recognizes the Spirit at work in other religions and cultures, while at the same time professing and claiming that Jesus Christ is the one and only saviour of the world. In developing his theology, Dupuis asks, if the mission of the Son and Spirit differ, how can we explain the mission of God’s saving love in the plurality of religions? To find his answer to this question, the chapter will examine his trinitarian and pneumatic

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2 The original Greek word is basileia. I will use the term “Kingdom of God” alternatively with “Reign of God.” While the word “kingdom” is more gender-biased and monarchial, it has two syllable, which is a nice pair with the two-syllable word “spirit”. Moreover its pronunciation is also more aesthetic. The word “reign” is more neutral, but less poetic.
3 Even in the 1980s, Karl Rahner was already of the opinion that an “Eastern theology,” or Asian theology, may adopt a pneumatology that is based on the universal salvific will of God and the presence of grace for all human beings as the fundamental point of departure for a Christian theology of religions, and then attempt from this point to gain a real and radical understanding of Christology. Karl Rahner, "Aspects of European Theology," in Theological Investigations Vol 21 Chapter 5 (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 97-98.
4 The trinitarian approach helps to understand the plurality of religions as an expression of plurality within the unity of God. S. Mark Heim argues theologically that the framework for different attainable religious fulfillsments is found
christology as found principally in his *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.

Chapter Two will also examine his concept of inclusive pluralism which aims at moving beyond the fulfillment paradigm of Vatican II.

In contrast to Dupuis, who makes a dogmatic claim from above for the superiority of Christianity over other religions, Knitter takes a soteriocentric or liberation theology approach from below by focusing on human suffering and the well-being of the earth. For him, suffering and the well-being of the earth can provide common ground and a viable starting point for interreligious dialogue. His Kingdom-centred dialogical approach from below is practical and respectful of the faith of others. Chapter Three will examine Knitter’s approach, offer a critique of it, and reflect on its relevance to the context of Asia.

Chapter Four will be the conclusion to the thesis. It will compare and highlight the contribution of Dupuis and Knitter for reducing the tension between mission and dialogue in the current Asian context. The comparison hopes to show that a Christian theology of religions (from above), which responds to the challenge of religious pluralism, and a liberation theology (from below), which responds to the problem of suffering and injustice, need each other for a productive interreligious dialogue. In view of the massive poverty in Asia, the starting point for dialogue should be from below, not from above. The classicist view of truth common to dogmatic theologies from above should give way to the empiricist view from below which

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5 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is of the opinion that pneumatological approaches in themselves suffer from an inadequate trinitarian framework, which results in a disconnection between the Spirit and Christ, which in turn leads to the separation between the Spirit and the Church, and the Spirit and the Kingdom. He prefers a healthy trinitarian theology as the best safeguard against lacunae such as those. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “‘How to Speak of the Spirit among Religions’: Trinitarian Prolegomena for a Pneumatological Theology of Religions,” in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, ed., Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 48.

recognizes that truth-claims must constantly be revised and clarified as dialogue proceeds. The future of Christianity in Asia calls for a triple dialogue: with the poor (through liberative integral development), with cultures (inculturation), and with other religions (interreligious dialogue). These dialogues are not separate activities, but activities mutually intertwined. Gospel values cannot really transform a culture in a multi-religious situation without entering into dialogue with other religions which also animate that culture, and without challenging the unjust structures to which the culture gives rise. One cannot liberate the poor from all that oppresses them if one does not succeed in transforming the worldview and value system of the population with the help of other religions. Interreligious dialogue must lead to a mutual collaboration toward the transformation of culture and the liberation of the poor. Thus liberation, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue converge to liberate persons in community.
Chapter One
“Go Forth to Dialogue”:
The Contemporary Understanding of Mission as Dialogue in Asia, and the Tension Between Them

1. Introduction

In the past, Christian mission was aimed at displacing the faith of others, because Christianity was understood to be the one religion which had a divine right to exist. Catholics claimed that “outside the Church no salvation”, and Protestants that “outside the Word, no salvation”. In this claim, it was unthinkable that people should be allowed to believe whatever they chose. In the face of religious pluralism today, the turn is toward mission as dialogue, which consists of weaving a web of relationship and togetherness among religions. Using the terms of Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran, the shift from classicist theology to empirical theology has moved the Church’s self-understanding in relation to other faiths from self-mediation to mutual self-mediation, that is, the recognition that all religions can be enriched through interreligious dialogue.\(^7\) For Leonard Swidler, the present shift is from the age of monologue to the age of dialogue.\(^8\) According to David Bosch, the emerging ecumenical paradigm that underlies today’s missionary praxis is determined by the pluricentric, rather than the western-dominated world we once lived in, where societies everywhere now seek their own local cultural identities and reject slavish imitation of western models; and where freedom of religion and greater awareness of other faiths force Christians to reevaluate their own earlier attitudes toward other faiths.\(^9\)


However, the current understanding of mission as dialogue inadvertently causes some tensions between the traditional idea of mission and the need to dialogue with the followers of other religions. The underlying problem is that Christian mission holds on to the claim that Jesus Christ is the one and universal saviour who is necessary for salvation; but with dialogue, it would seem that there is no more need to evangelize people of other faiths. To what extent is dialogue compatible with mission and proclamation? Is proclamation weakened or replaced by dialogue? To what extent is dialogue congruent with proclamation?

Before going further into the tension between mission and dialogue, I will first elucidate the current understanding of mission, dialogue and proclamation, and how there is a paradigm shift from mission as proclamation and conversion to mission as dialogue. In examining this shift, I will employ mainly church documents. I will then describe the concrete tension that exists between mission and dialogue in the context of Asia, especially in the events leading up to the momentous Synod of Asia held in 1998.

2. Mission, Dialogue, and Proclamation

2.1 The Shift in the Understanding of Mission

Before Vatican II, Roman Catholic thought on missionary activity was defined by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fidei), and in the twentieth century, by a number of mission encyclicals, for example, Benedict XV’s *Maximum Illud* (1919), Pius XII’s *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) and *Fidei Donum* (1957), and John XXIII’s *Princeps Pastorum* (1959). In these documents, according to Peter C. Phan, mission was 1) the Church’s work for the salvation of souls, 2) carried out for the benefit of the pagans abroad, 3) mainly by priests, religious brothers, nuns, and specially commissioned
layfolk, mostly from Europe and North America, 4) with the financial and spiritual support of the laity back home, and 5) by planting the Church in these mission fields.\textsuperscript{10}

That was how mission was understood and practiced up to the Second Vatican Council.

At Vatican II, Catholic missiological thought is expressed primarily in \textit{Ad Gentes} (1965), but references are made to mission in \textit{Lumen Gentium} (1964), \textit{Gaudium et Spes} (1965), \textit{Nostra Aetate} (1965), and \textit{Dignitatis Humanae} (1965). Since Vatican II, missiological thinking has been officially developed in papal documents; for example, in \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} (1975) and \textit{Redemptoris Missio} (1990). Other Roman Congregations and Commissions, for instance, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the International Theological Commission, and Bishops Conferences and pastoral letters have added to this development.\textsuperscript{11}

Since Vatican II, the understanding is that there is only one mission, the mission of God, not two, the mission of God and the Church. The mission of God is shared by the Church. The mission of God has two directions, to the Church itself (\textit{ad intra}) and to the world (\textit{ad extra}). Mission to the Church itself is necessary so that the Church can shine forth in the world for what it is, a community that shares in the identity of Christ as his body. Mission to the world points to the fact that the Church is called to continue Jesus’ mission of proclamation, service, and witness to God’s Reign.

\textsuperscript{10} Peter C. Phan, \textit{In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 32.

\textsuperscript{11} An encyclical is a document of very high authority written by the pope and possesses magisterial authority, but is not in itself considered infallible, because only decrees of ecumenical councils and solemn papal teachings which pertain to faith and morals are said to be infallible. From Paul VI onwards, another form of papal document comes into prominence: the Apostolic Exhortation. Though less formal than an encyclical, it also carries a great deal of weight. A number of Vatican offices regularly publish official documents as well, and these are often given express approval by the pope. As Roman magisterial documents, they call for high respect, but their authority is considerably less than one issued by the pope himself. There are also a number of quasi-magisterial commissions, for example, the International Theological Commission, that issue documents of which their authority is lesser than the magisterial offices. Documents are also issued by Bishops’ Conferences, both at the regional and national levels, that may have some impact on the universal Church.
Christian communities in the past used to be divided into mission-sending churches and mission-receiving churches (also called foreign missions or young churches). Churches in Asia, still often referred to as young churches, are ever more conscious of themselves being sister churches to the churches of the West. They have awakened to an ever-growing creativity in mission at a level equal to that of all other churches. In other words, all Christian communities are equally mission-sending and mission-receiving. Every local church is sent by Christ to bring the gospel to its surrounding milieu, and to bear it also into all the world. And at the same time, it is a receiving church, because every local church on earth is not yet a total realization of the Church. In the light of this new theology of mission, Phan states in parallel to the past notions of mission, that mission is now 1) for the Reign of God, 2) primarily to the world, 3) by the whole community of believers, 4) carried out with all Christians, 5) as dialogue.

2.2 Mission and Dialogue

Christianity today has to compete for allegiance in the open market of religions and ideologies. The awareness of the plurality of religions is ever more present today, and with this comes the shift to dialogue. Even though the word interreligious dialogue is not specifically mentioned, Vatican II’s call for dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions is found in Nostra Aetate (NA):

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the

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13 See Phan, In Our Own Tongues, 42-43.
good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men (NA 2).

Wayne Teasdale calls *Nostra Aetate* a sort of charter for dialogue. The enduring inspiration for openness and sensitivity to other religions from *Nostra Aetate* paves the way for the general understanding of dialogue with others. The same call is repeated in *Ad Gentes (AG)*, where Christians are told to “learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth” (AG 11). It is found once more and further developed in *Gaudium et Spes (GS)* where this particular thought was influenced by Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam (ES)* which was written at about the same time:

> The Church stands forth as a sign of that brotherhood (sic) which allows honest dialogue and gives it vigour…. Thus all those who constitute the one People of God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness… Dialogue excludes no one (GS 92).

Paul VI has been called the pope of dialogue, because of his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), in which he depicts the history of salvation as a dialogue of God with humankind and prayer as dialogue (ES 70). He visualizes the Church as holding a privileged position for entering into dialogue with the entire world when he says, “the Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make” (ES 65). In *Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI did not assign interreligious dialogue a place in the Church’s evangelizing mission, and in *Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN)*, even though Paul VI reaffirms

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the respect and esteem of the Church for other religions, Christianity is the complete religion for effectively establishing an authentic and living relationship with God. Other religions are incomplete (EN 53). Evangelii Nuntiandi does not speak of dialogue with the followers of other religions, but it does speak of evangelization.

A clear step beyond this attitude was taken with Dialogue and Mission, “The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission” (1984) (DM), issued by the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians\(^\text{15}\) to celebrate its twentieth anniversary. Here, for the first time in an official Church document, dialogue “with the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern” was listed among five principal elements of the Church’s mission (DM 13). The totality of Christian mission embraces all these elements, but the document acknowledges that the list is not complete. The five principal elements are: 1) simple presence and living witness of Christian life; 2) service of humankind for social development; 3) sacramental and liturgical life and prayer; 4) dialogue with other religions; and 5) proclamation through announcement (kèrygma) and catechesis (didachè).\(^\text{16}\) Here the question can be asked: Is dialogue merely an element within mission or is dialogue mission itself?

Jacques Dupuis agrees that proclamation of the gospel is listed last in the document because mission is seen as a dynamic process which culminates in proclamation. But Dupuis would like to list the elements of the Church’s mission as 1) presence, 2) service, 3) dialogue, 4)...

\(^{15}\) The Secretariat for Non-Christians was formed in 1964, and renamed in 1988 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

\(^{16}\) James H. Kroeger elucidates these elements in James H. Kroeger, Becoming Local Church: Historical, Theological and Missiological Essays (Quezon City: Claretian, 2003), 78-80. Thomas Ryan gives concrete examples on how these elements have been effective in mission. See Thomas Ryan, “Interreligious Implications for Catholic Evangelization,” in Catholic Evangelization in an Ecumenical and Interreligious Society, Secretariat for Evangelization, USCCB (Washington, DC: USSCB, 2004), 54-59.
proclamation, 5) sacramentalization – the last two corresponding to those Church activities which traditionally made up evangelization.\textsuperscript{17} For Dupuis, sacramental life at the end of the sequence, following after proclamation, is the natural outcome of those who accept the proclamation and then practice their faith in the sacraments. This means that, while all the elements making up the process are authentic forms of evangelization, not all have either the same place or the same value in the mission of the Church. Thus, in this case, interreligious dialogue precedes proclamation. Proclamation may or may not be followed by it; yet only if it is, will the process of evangelization come to completion.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, \textit{Dialogue and Mission} speaks of dialogue not only as a distinct element in evangelization, but also as an attitude and a spirit, and is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission (\textit{DM 29}).\textsuperscript{19}

For Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, there are six elements in mission, namely: 1) witness and proclamation;\textsuperscript{20} 2) liturgy, prayer, and contemplation; 3) commitment to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; 4) dialogue with women and men of other faiths and ideologies; 5) efforts of inculturation; and 6) the ministry of reconciliation.\textsuperscript{21} In a world of increasing violence and tensions among religions, the Church’s witness and effort at

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} According to Bevans and Schroeder, the terms \textit{witness} and \textit{proclamation} mean the same as what Bosch and other Protestant thinkers mean by \textit{evangelism}. See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, \textit{Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 353.
reconciliation may constitute a new way of conceiving the content of mission. For Robert J. Schreiter reconciliation is making peace, seeking justice, healing memories, rebuilding societies. The call of the Church to be communities of reconciliation, the efforts of the Church to engage in moral reconstruction of broken societies, and the Church articulating and living a spirituality of reconciliation may contribute through her mission toward a betterment of the world and a drawing closer of God’s Reign.22

Therefore, it seems that dialogue is subsumed under the broad notion of mission as a principal element within it.

2.3 Further Understanding of Mission, Dialogue, and Proclamation

Two important documents on how to understand and achieve some sort of balance between dialogue and mission are 1) John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) (*RM*) which marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad Gentes* (*AG*), and 2) *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) (*DP*) which was issued jointly by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue23 and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples24 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*. Dupuis made a critical and analytical comparison of *Dialogue and Proclamation* and *Redemptoris Missio*.25 He observed that because both were written at about the same time, the Pope’s encyclical had some influence on the other. The scope of *Redemptoris Missio* is much broader and emphasizes the urgency of missionary evangelization, while the intent of *Dialogue and Proclamation* is more or less restricted to two

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23 The Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions was established by Paul VI in 1964, and later changed its name to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1989 to reflect more the Church’s growing stand on dialogue.
24 Obviously the topic of interreligious dialogue falls under the purview of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the topic of proclamation under the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.
distinct elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission, dialogue and proclamation, both understood as a “single, but complex reality” (DM 13, DP 2).

Following Dialogue and Mission, both Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation develop a broad concept of the evangelizing mission of the Church in which evangelization is made up of many elements, including interreligious dialogue and proclamation. Redemptoris Missio explicitly states that “interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission ad gentes” (RM 55). Both documents stress that mission and dialogue are not in conflict with each other, and the Church has the fundamental duty to link the two in the context of her mission to people of other faiths. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and also their distinctiveness (RM 55, DP 77). Therefore, they should not be confused, or regarded as identical, as though they are interchangeable. For Michael Amaladoss of Asia, mission and dialogue are in a convergent rather than conflictual relationship.26

From the outset Dialogue and Proclamation defines clearly the key terms of evangelization, dialogue, proclamation, conversion and religious traditions (DP 8-13). Evangelization is understood as the mission of the Church in its totality, while proclamation is more specific, being the communication of the Gospel message as an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the Church (DP 10). Proclamation is considered the foundation, centre, and summit of evangelization. According to Dialogue and Mission, dialogue is one of the integral elements of evangelization, distinct from proclamation,

each element having its specific finality, though the witness of Christian life is presupposed in both. Dialogue refers to “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed to mutual understanding and enrichment” (DM 13, DP 9).

These powerful and challenging understandings of dialogue from the Roman Catholic hierarchy point to the fact that dialogue with the followers of other religions is not a tack that the Church has been forced to take in order to get along in the aftermath of Western colonialism, the worldwide renaissance of the world’s religions, or the spread of postmodern secularism. Nor is dialogue to be interpreted from these understandings to be a subtle tactic or strategy to proclaim Christ to others. Dialogue is the only option in the contemporary globalized and polycentric world. Dialogue does and must include an element of proclamation: of Christians to others, and of others to Christians, and may or may not be followed by conversion in religious affiliation. In Christian understanding, in no way does dialogue replace proclamation or the necessity to invite others to Christian conversion.

In Dialogue and Proclamation, dialogue and proclamation are component elements that make up the general mission of the Church, as both are oriented toward the communication of salvific truth (DP 2). The Good News is communicated not just when Christians are proclaiming, but also when they are listening. Dialogue and Proclamation is very clear and insistent in pointing out that both elements, in their real difference, are essential. “There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other” (DP 6). In Asia today, the understanding of mission has to include “listening” and “receiving” because they embody openness of our being to the other. Indeed, it is listening and receiving that make dialogue possible. Listening and
receiving are important aspects of dialogue. Accordingly, “there will be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures. There is no full evangelization if there is no answer to the deep yearning of the peoples of Asia.” Thus, in Asia, mission is dialogue. I will elaborate on this later on.

2.4 Four Forms of Dialogue

*Dialogue and Mission* is perhaps the first official document to acknowledge that there are four forms of dialogue (*DM* 29-35). These are briefly and conveniently summarized in *Dialogue and Proclamation* (*DP* 42) as follows:

- The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

The dialogue of life emphasizes that dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude that implies respect toward the other (*DM* 29). It is an all-encompassing dimension where “believers of different religions bear witness to each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual

values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society” (*RM* 57). Often people of different faiths do not mix with one another or form friendship easily with one another, even though they may live in the same neighborhood. Commitment to a dialogue of life would help people of different faiths intentionally to get to know each other as human beings, as neighbours and fellow citizens. As people begin to see one another not as anonymous people, but as Tom, Dick and Mary, with concrete faces in real life situations, many of the fears and tensions that so often exist among followers of different religions can be dissolved. The interconnectedness of Christian witness and explicit proclamation of the gospel are perhaps expressed most clearly in what Francis of Assisi is purported to have said, “Preach always; if necessary, use words.”  

Witness and proclamation go together. As John Paul II says, “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission” (*RM* 42). Bosch offers a theology of the cross as a theological foundation for mission, not a triumphalistic and paternalistic one, when he says that Christians are called to be “victim missionaries” rather than “exemplar missionaries”, because the gospel is witnessed to authentically when its bearers share the lot of those with whom they live, suffering as they do, yet filled with hope in the midst of adversity.  

The dialogue of action concentrates on deeds and collaboration with others for goals that are humanitarian, social, economic, or political which are directed toward the liberation and advancement of humankind (*DM* 31). Christians and followers of other religions confront

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together the problems of the world, and carry out joint actions arising from religious inspiration for justice, peace and the integrity of creation which are the common values and goals of most religions.

The dialogue of theological exchange confronts, deepens, and enriches peoples’ respective religious heritages (*DM* 33). This dialogue can be an intellectual, spiritual encounter between two or more scholars with the primary purpose of learning, not teaching. It occurs most fruitfully in an environment of mutual respect, sincerity and honesty. It does not attempt to convert the other or undermine the other's faith commitment. For Michael L. Fitzgerald, the participants in a dialogue of theological exchange should be ready to listen in order to understand the inner logic of another religious system, as well as to expound on the truths of their own religion Moreover, the goal of this kind of dialogue is not to create a universal theology showing the unity of all religions.31

The dialogue of religious experience takes place when persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, and faith, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute (*DM* 35). Sharing religious experience is non-threatening, and is an area where many religious traditions seem to converge. When people of different faiths feel they cannot pray together, they can, as John Paul II did at Assisi in 1986 and 2002, come together to pray in their own ways. In this way they can avoid any notion of syncretism.

2.5 The Ambiguity Surrounding Proclamation

The second section of *Dialogue and Proclamation*, “Proclaiming Jesus Christ,” recalls that while the Church’s evangelizing mission has sometimes been restricted to proclamation, gradually a broader understanding of evangelization has evolved, in which the proclamation of the mystery of Christ nevertheless remains central (*EN 27, DP 75*).

Dupuis raised the question as to how interreligious dialogue, prior to, and in the absence of proclamation, can be a genuine form of evangelization, if proclamation needs to be always present as its main foundation, without which evangelization would be incomplete (*EN 22, DP 76*).\(^{32}\) Clearly, the relationship between dialogue and proclamation is not perfectly sorted out here, and some ambiguity has been introduced in the second section of *Dialogue and Proclamation*. For Dupuis, this document certainly teaches that dialogue is not a means for proclamation, and that dialogue and proclamation are not interchangeable.\(^{33}\) Even though the second section seems to lean toward dialogue as part of evangelization, it needs at all times and in any circumstance to be accompanied by proclamation. The third section, “Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation,” claims that dialogue is in itself an authentic form of evangelization, yet remains oriented toward proclamation (*DP 82*). It goes on to show the way in which from dialogue, the Church’s evangelizing mission will eventually take on the form of proclamation. Having discovered the seeds of the Word sown in their hearts and in their religious tradition, those engaged in dialogue will find themselves in the process of seeking explanations from each other. In such situations, Christians have the duty to respond and share the contents of the Christian faith. This is how dialogue is oriented toward proclamation. The desire to share Jesus


\(^{33}\) Ibid., 147.
with others is motivated not merely by obedience to the Lord’s command, but by this love for others (DP 83). It must also be noted that the followers of other religions would desire to share their faith as well.

3. Tension Between Mission and Dialogue in Asia

3.1 Some Preliminaries

Vatican II took the initial step toward recognizing the changing idea of mission, and the role of other religions in salvation history. While Vatican II took a step forward toward affirming the religions of the world, the documents that follow Vatican II both reflect the thinking on mission prior to Vatican II and affirm the thinking of the Second Vatican Council. The tension present in some of these documents is due to the Church’s insistence on maintaining the claim that Jesus is the only saviour while trying to find ways in which the followers of other religions are saved.

Evidently there is tension between the desire to promote the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ among the religions and the need to acknowledge the good elements found in the religions. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) rejects the triumphalistic and exclusive christology from above, which insists upon the explicit proclamation of Christ, but argues for a relational christology from below, rooted in the context of Asian realities. Underlying the tension between christology from above and from below is the need to pay attention to the here-and-now. This is because doctrinal formulations are not formed in an abstract or ahistorical vacuum. It would be simplistic to assume that a particular christology that emerged from an earlier Greco-Roman past could be uprooted and transplanted into the context of the local churches of Asia.
Josephine Lombardi observes that John Paul II was aware of this tension as shown in his various documents and addresses where his language and tone vary. She notes that his letters and addresses to various representatives from other religions are much more positive than what he writes of their religions in his encyclicals and books. In addition she observes that in less formal settings, he presents a more positive approach to the religions of the world, and conversely, when addressing Christians, he is careful to promote the Church’s evangelizing mission.34

Even the FABC admits to this tension when it mentions that “dialogue and proclamation are integral to mission, but remain complementary dimensions of the Church's mission of evangelization.”35 The FABC further concedes that the relationship between dialogue and proclamation is a complex one, and there should be no attempt to reduce one to the other.36 Some Asian theologians (Pieris, Amaladoss) tend to say that dialogue itself is the only authentic form of proclamation since the Church is only one among the many ways to salvation; others tend to say that dialogue is only a step, though with an identity of its own, in the total process that culminates in proclamation. While the former approach robs proclamation of any specific meaning, the latter instrumentalizes dialogue. On the one hand, the FABC does not exclude the explicit verbal proclamation of the Christian Gospel as mission, but it recognizes that context, especially in multi-religious Asia, plays a very important role in determining which is the best approach to mission. For Thomas Joy, while proclamation is the expression of the Church's awareness of a special mission from God to the world, dialogue is the expression of the Church’s awareness of God's presence and action outside its boundaries. There are two poles of divine activity.

36 Ibid., 6.2.
Proclamation is the affirmation of and witness to God's action in oneself, while dialogue is the openness and attention to the mystery of God's action in other believers. For Joy, following Knitter, mission and dialogue cannot be antagonistic. Both have to join in friendship. That is why in this thesis, I suggest that the recognition of the Spirit working in the other religions, and our partnerships of shared concern for eco-human well-being can promote friendship between mission and dialogue in order to ease the tension between them.

Moreover, when in Asia where there are many profound values, one faces the problem of proclaiming Christian values. We find values and goodness in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, some of which are very Christian in nature. Clearly we should take the common elements we share with the other great religions, and build on them. Moreover, can the triple dialogue with the poor, other cultures and other religions proposed by the FABC be considered intrinsic parts of mission? If so, can they replace proclamation?

Evidently the christological and missiological questions about how to proclaim Jesus in an effective and appealing way to Asians is at the base of this tension. That is, how to proclaim the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ as the one and only saviour in Asia in the presence of the Buddha, Mohammad, and other religious founders? More radically, can and should this claim about Jesus still be made? The FABC never says that there is no need to proclaim Christ. The primary concern for the FABC is how to proclaim Christ in Asia. The FABC affirms that “there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus

38 Ibid., 229, 234.
Christ,” and “the proclamation of Christ is the centre and the primary element of evangelization.” The how of proclamation is encapsulated in the triple dialogue.

Another tension arises from the presupposition that proclamation or mission is supposedly objective, whereas dialogue is subjective. Therefore, for Rome, dialogue in Asia is inherently dangerous, because it may lead to a relativization of the gospel in the face of the many values and religious beliefs.

3.2 The Synod of Asia

The above tension was prominently brought to the fore in 1998 in events relating to the Synod of Asia. The theme of the Synod was the evangelization of Asia, where Vatican officials were telling Asian Catholics that their primary task is to proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one and only saviour. The Asian bishops, in return, were saying that the way to proclaim faith in Jesus Christ is to be less declarative, that is, to make the proclamation instead by service and by being in dialogue with the other great religions. The Vatican's view and the view of the Asian bishops delineate a fundamental disagreement between them. There was no question of doctrinal controversies concerning the core belief of the Christian faith. The mystery of the incarnation and the saving mission of Jesus Christ were recognized by all beyond discussion. However, the pastoral approach to evangelization was different from the dogmatic.

More concretely, the Japanese bishops noted that the issues and agenda of the Vatican betrayed the concerns of the Church in the West, did not take into account the real situation of

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Asia, and were therefore unhelpful. They noted that the proclamation of Christ, which was stressed over and over by Vatican officials, must give way to dialogue with other religions. The theological vision of the Church’s mission in the Asian context, consistently elaborated by the FABC over two decades was ignored. Roman officials proposed a narrow ecclesiocentric perspective of mission theology. There was a lack of a solid pneumatology which would permit a more positive valuation of Asian religious traditions and the importance of interreligious dialogue. More importantly, the Japanese bishops suggested radical changes in the procedure of the Synod itself to allow Asian bishops greater autonomy and freedom in determining the overall direction and agenda of the Synod. The Indonesian bishops questioned the underlying assumptions of the Roman guidelines regarding mission and evangelization, and suggested that the focus of the Synod should not be on mission, but rather on Asian spiritualities. According to them, the proclamation of Christ in Asia must take into account whatever was good and true in other religions. For Jonathan Y. Tan, Roman officials emphasized that evangelization has to begin with the proclamation of Christ, and such proclamation is primary, whereas dialogue plays a secondary role in supporting evangelistic proclamation.

41 It is of interest to note that no Asian country, except India and the Philippines, uses any of the languages used by the Holy See, namely, Italian, English, French, German, and Spanish, as its native tongue. Therefore, a much longer time was needed to translate the Lineamenta (agenda for the Synod) which was published in English and French, and the subsequent Instrumentum Laboris (working document of the actual Synod) into the native tongues. 42 Thomas C. Fox gives a summary of some of the responses of the Japanese Bishops in Thomas C. Fox, Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church (Maryland, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 151-154. 43 The Japanese bishops recommended that Synod groups not be divided according to the languages of the West, but according to themes or religious cultures, for example, Islamic, Hindu, Hinayana Buddhist, Mahayana Buddhist, Confucian, etc. The excerpts of the response from the Bishops’ Conference of Japan on the Lineamenta can be found in Peter C. Phan, ed., The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 27-32. 44 The excerpts of the response from the Bishops’ Conference of Indonesia on the Lineamenta can be found in Phan, The Asian Synod, 23-27. 45 Tan, “The Responses of the Indonesian and Japanese Bishops to the Lineamenta,” 64.
The Asian bishops’ responses betray episcopal frustration with the growing centralization of authority in the Church in Rome. The Indonesian bishops even called for a separate patriarchate for East Asia endowed with autonomy comparable to the patriarchates in the Oriental churches of the Near East.\(^4\) Employing the precedent of Vatican II’s call for collegiality, the bishops stressed the FABC’s view of the universal Church as a communion of communities.\(^5\) For them, evangelization efforts not grounded in Asian realities and Asian sensitivities are certain to fail. Therefore, proclamation and mission in Asia need to adapt to the context of Asia. For the Asian bishops, dialogue with other religions comes first and in Asia it is the means of effective proclamation. Yet, the issue of proclamation versus witnessing to the faith was to arise again and again during the Asian Synod.

When Rome revised its agenda, there were some improvements, though it still maintained its defensive tone. Elements of the FABC’s vision were included. The narrow ecclesiocentric perspective was replaced with a regnocentric perspective where action for justice and interreligious dialogue were highlighted. An integral evangelization was more adequately portrayed. Thomas C. Fox argues that a careful comparison between the thinking of officials in Rome and in Asia reveals two radically different ecclesiologies. The Asian bishops worked out of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, while the ecclesiology of the Roman officials reflected a concentration on preaching Jesus as Saviour. At no time did the new document refer to the

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\(^4\) A patriarch has jurisdiction over all bishops, clergy, and people in a territory or in a specified rite (such as Roman, Melkite, Syrian, etc). A patriarchate is an example of subsidiarity in church government. Each patriarch is responsible for the election of the bishops of his patriarchate.

demand of the Japanese Bishops that the Synod format be changed to allow the Asian bishops to take control of the Synod’s agenda and proceedings.48

The Synod sessions focused on the theme of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Rome emphasized dogma over experience. The Asian bishops emphasized the triple dialogue with the poor, cultures and religions, positive approaches to Asian religious traditions, the role of God’s Spirit, the central role of local churches and the ecclesiology of communion, with the laity playing a larger part in the service of the Kingdom of God. Tensions created by differences of views and experiences, especially between the Roman curia and the Asian bishops, were inevitable during the proceedings of the Synod. The Asian bishops insisted on a flexible approach to meet local needs, whereas the Vatican officials advanced a one-size-fits-all approach. Having the ball in their side of the court, the predominantly European curia and Synod secretariat, which controlled the Synod process, responded to the concerns of the Asian bishops by returning to the centrality of Christ as saviour, drawing criticism for being defensive from the Asian bishops. Basically the tension centred on the method of evangelization. Vatican officials insisted that evangelization must begin with Jesus and his unique role in salvation for the peoples of Asia. The Asian bishops, on the other hand, were insistent that in Asia evangelization is through the triple dialogue with the poor, other cultures and other religions of the FABC. However, though persistent, the Asian bishops were always respectful, patient and resigned.49 As one Asian cardinal wryly remarked: “Yes, they have filtered out our proposals, but why become overexcited? When we return home, we shall continue to filter theirs.”50

48 See Fox, Pentecost in Asia, 166.
Following the Synod, the bishops of Asia met for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC with the theme “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service.” Edmund Chia observes that it might not have been an opportune time for the bishops of Asia to have their turn in filtering out what came out of the Vatican – thus the conspicuous absence of the name Jesus or saviour in the consciously chosen theme of the plenary assembly. The Asian bishops cited Ecclesia in Asia, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation promulgated by John Paul II, in their final draft of the plenary assembly, but only when it suited their purposes. For example, the papal exhortation underscored the need for the churches of Asia to inculturate more into Asian society although it effectively denied the Asian bishops the right to have the last word in the development of liturgies or liturgical texts. During the plenary assembly, when addressing the gathering on the first day, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Perfect for the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples, representing the Vatican, informed the Asian bishops that “analysis of Ecclesia in Asia is the main duty” of the plenary assembly. His wish was not fulfilled. Instead, the direction of the plenary assembly went along the lines of the FABC over the past decade, and not by Ecclesia in Asia. On their own soil, the Asian bishops were thus able to determine the flow of the discussion.

For Fox, the Synod ended more with a whimper than a bang on one level, but looked at as a moment, it was historic and revealing because the Asian bishops confidently paraded their pastoral teachings before the wider Church. For Phan, what was new is not what the Asian

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51 Chia, “The ‘Absence of Jesus’ in the VIIth FABC Plenary Assembly,” 899.
53 Fox, Pentecost in Asia, 183.
bishops said, but that they said it, and how they said it at the Synod. According to Phan, if the Asian Synod is to have a lasting transformative effect on the churches of Asia, so that they may become truly of Asia, Asian Catholics must take their Asianness seriously as the context of their being Christian. In particular, the bishops must be concerned not with how a certain policy is conformable to canonical requirements and directives coming from Rome, but rather with how it will respond to the challenges of the Asian social, political, economic, and religious contexts, and how it will effectively help Christians live their faith in fidelity to the gospel in Asia.54

3.3 Ecclesia in Asia

The rich and lengthy post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Ecclesia in Asia, was promulgated on November 6, 1999 in New Delhi by John Paul II as a response to the Asian Synod. Even though Ecclesia in Asia is not a conciliar constitution like Gaudium et Spes, or a conciliar decree like Ad Gentes, or even a doctrinal papal encyclical, it is a strong affirmation of the need for a new drive for evangelizing Asia. The issuance of Ecclesia in Asia was the concluding moment of the Synod of Asia. It became an important signpost of evangelization for the local churches in Asia in the new millennium. An analysis of Ecclesia in Asia highlights three major themes: 1) The challenge of evangelization (5-9); 2) Jesus Christ as the only saviour and his Spirit is the giver of life (10-23); 3) Mission calls for inculturation, interreligious dialogue and Christian witness to the gospel (24-49).

As sort of a compromise, Ecclesia in Asia (EA) contains both the concerns of the Roman officials and of the Asian bishops. The Church can never give up its original mission to proclaim Christ and his work: “There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of

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Jesus as Lord (EA 19). The text continues, “The urgent question now facing the Church in Asia is how to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ” (EA 19). For James H. Kroeger, this apostolic exhortation blends theologies from below and from above.\(^{55}\) For example, there is a good attempt to blend christology from below with christology from above, because there is great respect for the different ways in which Asian people could accept Jesus more readily, as the Enlightened One, the Guru, the Liberator of the Poor, the Contemplative, all images which resonate well with Asian sensibilities (cf EA 20). The Spirit is also acknowledged as present universally, even in ancient cultures, civilizations, and religions, enabling them to promote human dignity, and to do good. However, the Spirit cannot be taken in isolation from the trinitarian economy of salvation, because the action of the Spirit is related to that of the Father and the Son. Moreover, the work of the Spirit blossoms fully in the proclamation of Christ (cf EA 15-18).

However, according to Fox, the principal message of Ecclesia in Asia is the same one that Rome had broadcasted before and during the Synod. In this sense, this final document of the Synod held few surprises. Most of the document deals with proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only saviour.\(^{56}\) In Amaladoss’ view, even though this exhortation is a document for Asia, it is not an Asian document. It is not the voice of Asia, because the tone and style are very un-Asian.\(^{57}\) The method employed is a priori and from above. It is a far cry from any document of the FABC where Asians try to reflect on their faith by starting from their experience of life in Asia and by exploring appropriate pastoral and missionary strategies. For Amaladoss, this approach is

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\(^{56}\) See Fox, Pentecost in Asia, 187.

implicitly questioned in *Ecclesia in Asia*. Even though *Ecclesia in Asia* does evoke the situation in Asia at the beginning of the exhortation, it goes on to make strong *a priori* statements on the mission to evangelize Asia, which are more dogmatic than contextual. For example, dialogue is seen as a method for mission that has nothing to do with context.

Chia makes a comparison between *Ecclesia in Asia* and the response to it by Indonesian Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, the president delegate of the Synod after its promulgation. He notes that from the perspective of *Ecclesia in Asia* the new evangelization is necessary, but for Darmaatmadja, this new evangelization must take on the face of Asia, a process which is meaningful for Asian realities. *Ecclesia in Asia* sees other religions as a great challenge to evangelization (*EA* 2), and states that their teachings and values await fulfillment in Jesus Christ (*EA* 6). In contrast, Darmaatmadja says that other religions are partners in dialogue, and the Church must be open to learning from them. *Ecclesia in Asia* states that there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord (*EA* 19). The cardinal agrees, but for Asia, there can be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions, cultures, and the poor; there can be no full evangelization without an answer to the deep yearnings of the peoples of Asia. Darmaatmadja is suggesting that our mission is really to discover Jesus who has always been present and working in the world, including the world of Asia, rather than to proclaim him as if he had not been in there before. Chia concludes that following John Paul II, the Asian Church should not make a dichotomy between proclamation and dialogue.

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According to Phan, *Ecclesia in Asia* is John Paul II’s typical theological product. It is long, with frequent insistence on complete orthodoxy, abundant citation of the pope’s own writings, and its emotional peroration with a prayer to Mary.\(^\text{59}\) The exhortation has nothing new and important for the churches of Asia, because most of its content has already been said by these churches themselves through the FABC. Sadly none of the exhortation’s citations refer to the documents of the FABC. This does not mean that the Synod and the exhortation have not rendered a valuable service. The issues and concerns of Asia now have been voiced boldly and with candour in a synodal forum and recognized by the Church of Rome, and through it, have been brought to the consciousness of the universal Church. To the universal Church, the Asian bishops humbly but forcefully proclaimed that the churches of Asia not only learn from but also have something to teach the Church of Rome as well as the universal Church, from their own experiences as churches not simply *in* but *of* Asia.

For Amaladoss, the first impression an Asian has in reading the statements on the uniqueness and universality of Jesus in *Ecclesia in Asia* is that they are of an *a priori* nature. It is an affirmation of faith that could have been made anywhere in the world at any time, not only in what it says positively about Jesus and his significance, but also in what it says about other religions. Amaladoss maintains that *Ecclesia in Asia* operates with a linear view of salvation history where Jesus and Christianity are seen as the fulfillment of the other religions. When this Jewish-Christian paradigm is extrapolated on to other religions, it is deemed improper.\(^\text{60}\) Amaladoss claims that today we tend to have a more historical-eschatological view of salvation.


History is a process of struggle between God and Mammon. God is actively involved in this struggle through the Word and the Spirit. In Jesus, God is committing Godself to the battle in a human, historical way by opting for the poor and the oppressed. Other religions have a positive role in the history of salvation. Christians in Asia, without denying that God reveals and gives Godself in Christ, have reason to believe, because of their experience of the people of other religions, that the fruits of the Spirit manifest in other people’s lives that God has also revealed and given Godself to them in their own traditions.

In making sense of the difference in the approach of the Roman officials and the Asian bishops to persons of other faiths, Felix Wilfred argues that the point of departure for a theology of religions is different for the West and for Asia. The West starts from a point of isolation to understand and make sense of other religions. In Asia, Christianity finds itself in a situation in which peoples of different faiths are face to face with each other; religious pluralism is not a theory, but a fact of daily life.  

3.4 Dominus Iesus

Tension between the Vatican vision for the future of Asia and the Asian bishops’ own vision grew substantially with the release of Dominus Iesus by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000, with the notification against Jacques Dupuis’ Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism in 2001, with the censure of Anthony de Mello in 1998, and the

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62 Among other things, Dupuis was accused of separating the Word and the Spirit in the economy of salvation. I will discuss Dupuis’ thoughts in Chapter Two.
63 The work of Anthony de Mello who died ten years earlier was accused of uncritically blending ideas from Eastern and Western traditions, and of promoting religious indifferentism.
excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya in 1997 (rescinded in 1998). Basically, *Dominus Iesus* argues that while followers of other religions can be saved through Christ, they nevertheless live in a gravely deficient situation. *Dominus Iesus* aims to combat the ideology of dialogue in post-Vatican II thinking, and to correct problems it believes flow from relativism that regards all religious positions as equally valuable and legitimate. Also, according to Fox, it is not a very veiled opposition to the Asian bishops’ pastoral initiatives embedded in the triple dialogue of dialogue with the poor, other cultures and other religions.

There are many negative responses to *Dominus Iesus*, and many have seen it as a drastic step backward from post-Vatican II’s commitment to ecumenical dialogue and dialogue with other religions. For Fox, this shows that John Paul II, due to his age, was no longer in charge of the Church. The gap between some of his earlier writings and, more importantly, his gestures of reaching out to the followers of other religions, like the momentous 1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, and the uncompromising nature of *Dominus Iesus* proves the growing influence of the Roman Curia.

4. Conclusion

As we have seen in the dialectic between the Vatican and the bishops of Asia, what the bishops say or seek in dialogue is not supported by what the Vatican says or teaches in doctrine.

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64 Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan, was excommunicated for refusing to sign a profession of faith as a response to his view, among many other things, on the irrepeateble character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, and by placing its presuppositions on the same level as those of other religions.
65 Fox, *Pentecost in Asia*, 192.
More generally, what theologians say about belief in Christ does not permit them to be as open as they wish to be in the dialogue with followers of other religions. Using the idea of Knitter, the lex dialogandi is not properly attuned to the lex credendi.68 The agenda of the Vatican officials is doctrinal with a re-affirmation of Christ as the only saviour. The bishops of Asia with their personal and lived experience as Asian Christians are pastoral in how to ensure the Church in Asia is faithful to Christ while at the same time be in harmonious relationship with the many great and living religions of Asia.

How can the Church in Asia go about proclaiming Christ in view of the tension between mission and dialogue? The ancient maxim Ecclesia semper reformanda means that the Church, which is made up of fallible human beings, must be in a state of constant reformation in order to give more authentic witness to Christ. In Asia, mission and evangelization need to involve the acknowledgement and acceptance of an existential relationship between the gospel and the myriad Asian realities of the poor, cultures, and religions. It needs the inculturation and contextualization of the gospel in the local context, living with other Asian people, and being fully alive and involved in every aspect of life in Asia. This needs a lot of pastoral imagination. Fidelity to tradition should not inhibit the use of the imagination. With this in mind, the next two chapters will examine the helpfulness of Jacques Dupuis’ trinitarian christology and Paul F. Knitter’s soteriocentrism in reducing the tension between mission and dialogue in Asia.

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Chapter Two
“I Recognize the Spirit at Work in Other Religions”:
The Trinitarian Christology of Jacques Dupuis

1. Introduction

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has moved from holding that salvation comes only through the Church and Christ to a position that respects other traditions, even to the extent that it now teaches that the sincere followers of other religious traditions are saved by a loving God, even without them becoming Christians (Nostra Aetate 2, Lumen Gentium 16). For Dupuis, the theological warrant for this understanding is the conviction that the Holy Spirit is active in a distinct manner on a cosmic scale outside the visible Church. The Spirit “blows where it wills” (cf. Jn 3:8), and "was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (Ad Gentes 4). Moreover, the Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals, but also societies and history, peoples, cultures and religions. It is the Spirit who sows the “seeds of the Word” present in various customs and cultures, working not independently of, but in union with the Word.

In this chapter, I will investigate how Dupuis recognizes the Spirit at work in other religions and cultures, while at the same time professing and claiming that Jesus Christ is the one saviour of the world. If the missions of the Son and the Spirit differ, he asks, can we explain the one mission of God’s saving love in the plurality of religions? To find his answer to this question, I will examine his trinitarian christology as found in his Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism.\(^{69}\) I will also examine his concept of inclusive pluralism which aims at

\(^{69}\) Jacques Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997). Dupuis’ later book, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue was written in response to a request for a more accessible book on the same topic, aimed at a broader audience, being “more pastoral than academic, more concrete than abstract” which contributes to a better understanding of his brand of trinitarian christology and inclusive pluralism. See Jacques Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue. Translated by Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books and London: Darton, Longman and
moving beyond the fulfillment paradigm of Vatican II.

In short, for Dupuis, the christological and pneumatological aspects of God’s salvation are inseparable. The cosmic influence of the Spirit is essentially bound up with the universal activity of the risen Lord. The Spirit and the Son are not in mutual opposition, as if they function as two distinct economies of salvation. They are actually two inseparable aspects of one economy of salvation.\(^{70}\) The well-known patristic image of the two hands of the Father is apt to describe this.\(^{71}\) Viewed *ad intra*, there are two different movements within the trinitarian life of God: filiation and procession. Viewed *ad extra*, there are two different, but related movements by which the parental source of life reaches into the world: incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ and the brooding Spirit of God who has hovered over and inspired creation from its very inception. As Frederick E. Crowe puts it, the Son and the Spirit are dual foci, distinct and complementary, within a single ellipse.\(^{72}\)

### 2.1 The Holy Spirit, the Forgotten Person of the Trinity

The Holy Spirit is the forgotten person of the Trinity, the shy member of the Godhead, the left hand of God in the Western Church. In the West today, in many non-charismatic Christian communities, the role of the Spirit is generally overlooked. This oversight renders present-day Christianity a binary religion, a religion of the Father and the Son, with little, if any, awareness of the Spirit’s critically important work in the world. As practical binitarians,

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Christians do not deny the Spirit doctrinally, but act as if they do. The Spirit in Christian experience has consistently been interpreted as subordinate to the Son. To use an image, the Spirit is more like a telephone line to the Son rather than a person in its own right.

On a more scholarly level, a significant number of theologians, like Yves Congar, Hans von Balthasar, Kilian McDonnell, Walter Kasper and Frederick Crowe, have come to emphasize the theological awareness that the Son and the Spirit are inseparable, without having to collapse the one into the other. This is to correct the presence of an excessive christomonism in both Catholic and Protestant theology. A logos-christology and a pneuma-christology together would make the activity of the Spirit and the Word equally important, though maintaining their distinctiveness, in the economy of salvation.

A Spirit-oriented christology as a pneumatologically defined christology can best convey the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his universal significance. If the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ even before the Incarnation, with greater reason can he be called by this title after the glorification of Jesus. During his earthly life Jesus was endowed with the Spirit and led by the Spirit. In the resurrection, Jesus became a "life-giving Spirit," or giver of the Spirit. For Dupuis, a Spirit christology cannot stand without a logos christology, because were this to be the case, Jesus Christ would be reduced to a man in whom and through whom God is present and active. He would not be the Son of God in whom God stands revealed and communicated. In order to be complete, a Spirit christology must stress, on the one hand, the active presence of the Spirit throughout the human event of the man Jesus, and, on the other, the sending of the Spirit of Jesus.

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73 This list of theologians is given by Dermot A. Lane in Dermot A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions: A Christian Theology of Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), 244-245.
to the world by the risen Christ. Christology and pneumatology belong together in the same economy of salvation; on this I will elaborate later on.

The less emphasis on the Spirit in the West is partly due to the filioque issue, with the apparent subordination of the Spirit to the Son. After the Canons of the Council of Toledo in 589, the West inserted the word filioque into the original Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, which had upheld that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. The addition of filioque makes the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father and the Son. As early as the fourth century, some Latin writers already spoke of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son. This understanding was developed further by Augustine in the early fifth century. Therefore, the filioque theology came to be deeply anchored in the minds and hearts of Christians of the West since the fourth century. Since then, the East and West have always been embroiled on this issue of the addition of the filioque. In contemporary times, the possibility of returning to the original wording of the creed has suggested itself to more than one Western church. According to Lukas Vischer, the Old Catholic churches already began to make this change in the nineteenth century, and the Lambeth Conference of 1978 did ask the churches of the Anglican Communion to consider the same change. If the Spirit is from the Father and the Son, as affirmed by the West, this implies that the domain of the Spirit is circumscribed within the domain of the Son, and this explains the dominance of ecclesiology and ecclesiologically

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74 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, 198.
76 Ibid., 6.
defined soteriology in Latin theology.\textsuperscript{77} If however, the Spirit is from the Father of the Son, then the economy of the Son in no way limits that of the Spirit.

Moreover, a look at scripture reveals that the Spirit is not subordinate to the Son. Jesus was begotten by the Holy Spirit in Mary (Lk 1:35). The Spirit led him into the desert to be tempted, and he returned in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14). Jesus gave his first sermon in Nazareth, quoting from Isaiah that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him (Lk 4:18, Is 61:1). He cast out demons by the Spirit of God (Mt 12:28). He healed and worked miracles by the power of God, where the power of God can be equated with the power of the Spirit. The influence of the Spirit throughout the earthly life of Jesus, from his conception down to his resurrection, can be seen in the gospels. Thus, we can see in the life of Jesus that the Spirit is at work. This is what is known as Spirit christology which I have talked about above.

\textbf{2.2 The Turn to the Spirit Since Vatican II}

Since Vatican II, there has been growing interest in the work of the Spirit in the religions of the world.\textsuperscript{78} For instance, \textit{Ad Gentes (AG)} says that the Holy Spirit “was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (\textit{AG} 4). Christians are called to acknowledge the elements of “truth and grace” (\textit{AG} 9) and the “seeds of the Word which lie hidden” (\textit{AG} 11) in other religions, because the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in them (\textit{NA} 2, \textit{LG} 17).\textsuperscript{79} This

\textsuperscript{77} This thesis came from Vladimir Lossky. See Amos Yong, \textit{Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic and UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 87.


can be seen as an activity of the Spirit in preparing people for Christ before his coming. Hence, the religions of the world can be used as a preparation for the gospel (præparatio evangelica).

Another manifestation of the Spirit at work can be seen when the fruits of Christ are applied to people after his incarnation, both to those who have received him in faith and to others who do not believe in him. Gaudium et Spes (GS) speaks of the Spirit “offering to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (GS 22). All can share in the new life, both here and now, and in the world to come. God is at work, offering love and grace to all, and this happens through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. For Crowe, the members of other religions are not so much Rahner’s anonymous Christians as anonymous Spiritans.

Using the language of gift, we are all gifted with the common gifting of the Spirit. The followers of other religions have also been chosen and claimed by God.

John Paul II advanced the agenda of Vatican II on world religions by developing a relevant pneumatology, so much so that according to Gerald O’Collins, the contributions of John Paul II on pneumatology can adapt his title of Vicar of Christ to Vicar of the Holy Spirit. In Redemptor Hominis (RH), he has recognized the role of the Spirit in other religions which can make Christians ashamed for so often doubting the truths proclaimed by the Church (RH 6).

The most explicit text on the economy of the Spirit is John Paul II’s encyclical Dominum et
Vivificantem (1986) (DeV). He talks about the universal activity of the Holy Spirit, before the Christ-event and after, but closely linked to the Christ-event. The saving action of the Spirit is recognized outside the Church today (see DeV 53). In this way, the pope explores the christological and pneumatological dimensions of salvific grace. The theme of universal presence and activity of the Spirit recurs in another of John Paul II’s encyclical, Redemptoris Missio (1990) (RM). Even though “the Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members, nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time” (RM 28). John Paul II is convinced that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart” (RM 29).

But Redemptoris Missio stops short of saying that the religions are ways of salvation. The document, while stressing Christ’s one and universal mediation, recognizes the possibility of salvation through participated forms of mediation by stating, “Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his” (RM 5). The important contribution of John Paul II on the presence and action of the Spirit in other religions is that he laid the theological basis for interreligious dialogue in the Church.

The universal mission of the divine Spirit operates beyond the visible Church and enriches the world’s cultures and religions. This activity of the Spirit reaches and enriches the followers of other religions in and through their religious belief, life, and practice. John Paul II in Redemptoris Missio acknowledges that “[God] does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain ‘gaps,
insufficiencies and errors’” (*RM* 55). It follows that “Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit” (*RM* 56).

Since the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions (*NA* 2), and the Spirit is mysteriously and powerfully at work there (cf *RM* 55-56), adherents of these religions can be implied to be able to reach salvation by following the ways proposed to them. In some sense, their religions are ways of salvation for them. This is further acknowledged by the International Theological Commission in its 1997 document, “Christianity and the World Religion” (*CWR*). It states:

> Given this explicit recognition of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the religions, one cannot exclude the possibility that they exercise as such a certain salvific function… It would have been difficult to think that what the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men [*sic*] taken as individuals would have salvific value and not think that what the Holy Spirit works in the religions and cultures would not have such value (*CWR* 84).\(^8^5\)

It would, however, be improper, or at best secondary, to speak of people being saved through any religious tradition, because ultimately it is God through the Word and the Spirit who saves humans. Therefore, we have seen from church documents that when the Church acknowledges the Spirit at work in other religions, it does not imply that the other religions are ways of salvation *per se*.

However, Dupuis admits that the world’s religions are efficacious ways of salvation. He says that *Dialogue and Proclamation* is the “first among documents of the Church’s magisterium on the subject of members of other religions and their traditions”.

Moreover, it goes beyond whatever Church documents have stated before regarding the role played by religious traditions for their followers. Their traditions are instruments of salvation through Christ. *Dialogue and Proclamation* states that:

The mystery of salvation reaches out to [those who remain unaware that Jesus is the source of their salvation], in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious tradition and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as one (*DP* 29).

Dupuis acknowledges that this admission from *DP* 29 is a “guarded one,” but he also claims that “a door seems to be timidly opened here, for the first time, for the recognition on the part of Church authority of a ‘participated mediation’ of religious traditions in the salvation of their members. With such a statement we seem to be definitely moving from the fulfillment theory to that of an active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the traditions themselves.”

Dupuis summarizes the theological importance of *DP* 29 as meaning that in effect, “the members of other religions are not saved by Christ in spite of, or beside, their own tradition, but in the sincere

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86 Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, 178.
87 Ibid., 178-179.
practice of it and in some mysterious way, known to God, through it.”88 For Dupuis, the world religions possess a lasting role and a specific meaning in the overall mystery of the divine-human relationships.89 The question then is what is the significance of religious pluralism in God’s plan for humankind?

The *de facto* reality of pluralism in the world is one reason that forces Dupuis to seriously question whether this pluralism might not just be a pluralism in fact (*de facto*), but also a pluralism in principle or by right (*de iure*).90 Dupuis contends that faith in a plurality of persons in the one God, or a simple appeal to the plural character of all reality is not sufficient to justify religious pluralism. To stop there would amount to seeking to establish plurality in principle on a truncated view of religion as representing a mere human quest for the divine. If however, religion has its original source in God’s self-manifestation to human beings, the principle of plurality will be made to rest primarily on the superabundant richness and diversity of God’s self-manifestation to humankind. Although the divine economy is only one, it is multi-faceted. It belongs to the overflowing communication of the triune God to humankind.91 God has in every event and from the beginning been searching for men and women throughout their history even before they even thought of looking for him. The religions cannot but contain at least traces of that divine search for humankind.92 On top of that, Dupuis concludes that pluralism *de iure* is a

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89 Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, 211.
90 It is not just the way things are but the way they should be – religious people would say, the way God made them and wants them.
divine grace to be thankful for and an opportunity to be seized – a gift and a task. This pluralism needs to be welcomed and accepted as opportunity for mutual enrichment, cross-fertilization and transformation between traditions themselves.

3.1 Dupuis’ Trinitarian Christology

As stated before, because of the relationality between the Spirit and the Son, any theology of religions that begins with pneumatology must ultimately include and confront christology. In the approach to a theology that is more positive in its assessment of other religions, Dupuis constructs a trinitarian christology as an alternative to the more traditional christomonistic one upon which to build a theology of religions. This christology places in full relief the interpersonal relationships between Jesus and the Father on the one side, and the Spirit whom God sends on the other. He describes it as the distinctly trinitarian rhythm of God’s activity throughout salvation history, in which both the Son and the Spirit are universally present and active, before and after the Christ-event of the incarnation. The universality of the salvific action of Christ cannot be understood without the universal action of the Holy Spirit. In terms of biblical support, Dupuis appeals foremost to the Prologue of John’s Gospel (Jn 1:1-4) which attests to the universal presence of the Word before the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ. For the Spirit, Dupuis refers the action of the Spirit who blows where it wills (Jn 3:8) as

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94 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, 198.
95 Ibid., 205.
universally present throughout human history.\textsuperscript{96} God being a triune communion of persons cannot but communicate Godself in this threefold way – God gives Godself such as God is!\textsuperscript{97}

Is it possible that Christians secure salvation through the economy of the Son incarnate in Jesus Christ, while others receive it through the immediate autonomous action of the Spirit? For Dupuis, the personal distinction between the Son and the Spirit is warrant for the two distinct channels through which God’s saving presence reaches out to people.\textsuperscript{98} That the Spirit is God’s point of entry wherever and whenever God reveals and communicates Godself to people is certain. However, the model that is centred on the Spirit cannot be separated from the christological model, because the action of the Spirit and that of Jesus Christ, though distinct, are nevertheless complementary and inseparable.

The Spirit can be rightly called the Spirit of Christ from the beginning of salvation history. Dupuis follows Rahner in this. Rahner writes, “Since the universal efficacy of the Spirit is directed from the very beginning to the zenith of its historical mediation, which is the Christ-event, it can be truly said that this Spirit is everywhere and from the very beginning the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine logos.”\textsuperscript{99} In this way Rahner comes to the conclusion that “Christ is present and efficacious in the non-Christian believer (therefore in the non-Christian religions) through his Spirit.”\textsuperscript{100} Rahner even suggests that pneumatology might come before christology, and pneumatology could even become the fundamental point of departure for the

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 196.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 227.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 196.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 43.
whole of theology. Rahner also points out that even though the revelation of God in Christ is unique, unsurpassable and unrepeateable, the Christ-event remains incomplete and unfinished from an eschatological point of view, because the completion of revelation is “only partially successful and always exists within a still unfinished history.” The unfinished character of the Christ-event is a feature of the Pauline tension between the already and the not-yet, of what already exists in Christ, and what is yet to come in Christ, in which what has been begun in Jesus is yet to be completed in the final return of Christ. For Dermot A. Lane, “without attention to the dynamic presence of the Spirit in history, there is the danger that the Christian revelation of God becomes frozen in time.”

Pneumatocentrism and christocentrism cannot, therefore, be construed as two distinct economies of salvation, one parallel to the other, but they are two inseparable aspects of one and the same economy. While it is true that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and where the Spirit of Christ is, there is Christ, the reverse is also true: christology does not exist without pneumatology; it cannot be allowed to develop into christomonism. The concept of the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit suggests that there is no distance between the Son and the Spirit. Jesus is the anointed of God: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” (Lk 4:18, Is 61:1). “God has anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Act 10:38). Jesus is anointed with the ointment of the Spirit, in the language of Irenaeus: “He who anoints is the Father, the anointed is the Son, and the Spirit is the unction or the anointing” (Adversus

103 Lane, 207.
Gregory of Nyssa expresses this with a profound and beautiful image. Just as between the surface of the body and the anointing of oil neither reason nor sense knows any intermediaries, so the contact of the Son with the Spirit is equally immediate. Therefore, the person who is about to enter into contact with the Son through faith must of necessity enter beforehand into contact with the oil. Neither part lacks the Holy Spirit.  

Because the Trinity is interpersonal communion among three divine persons, Christ only acts relationally: in obedience to the Father, together with the Spirit, and for humanity. This multi-dimensional trinitarian relationality makes us wonder what it means for Christ to work with the Spirit. For Dupuis, the mystery of the Trinity which implies both unity and plurality, mutuality and sharing, offers the proper key for understanding the multiplicity of interrelated divine self-manifestations in the world and in history. In fact, it is a hermeneutical key which allows for an integral model that can move toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism. God’s economy of salvation is one. The Christ-event is both its apex and universal sacrament, but the God who saves is three-personed, with each of the three persons distinct.

God needs both the Spirit and the Son to achieve fullness of salvation for us. In tradition, the Son and the Spirit have been known as the two hands of God (from Irenaeus, Contra Haereses, IV, 7, 4). According to O’Collins, John Paul II balances well his teaching on Christ and the Holy Spirit with regard to other religions. On the one hand, John Paul II recognizes the treasures the Spirit has communicated in and through the world’s cultures and religions. On the

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104 See “Christianity and World Religions,” in Sharkey and Weinandy, 164.
105 De Spiritu Sancto contra Macedonianos 16, see ibid.
106 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, 208.
108 Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions, 178.
other hand, he maintains the core of Christian faith in Christ, who brings through the Spirit light and life to all people.\textsuperscript{109} So also does Dupuis in his trinitarian christology, as we have seen.

\section*{3.2 The Fullness of Jesus Christ}

The turn to pneumatology cannot ignore christology. According to Dupuis’ terminology, Christ is “universal” and “constitutive” saviour, but not “absolute” saviour,\textsuperscript{110} because only God is absolute.\textsuperscript{111} Dupuis argues that a way must be found to combine and hold together both the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ for a more open theology of religions. For him, without universality, uniqueness is exclusivism, and without uniqueness, universality would lead us down the pluralistic path. In combination, however, the notes of uniqueness and universality are in accord with his inclusive christology, as we shall see.\textsuperscript{112}

For Dupuis, Jesus Christ is among different saving figures in whom God is hiddenly present and operative, but Christ is the only “human face” in whom God, while remaining unseen, is fully disclosed and revealed.\textsuperscript{113} Throughout human history, God has willed to be “in many and various ways” (Heb 1:1) a God-of-people; in Jesus Christ God becomes God-of-the-people-in-a-fully-human-way\textsuperscript{114}, and the Emmanuel, God-with-us. God has become a human being that we may be divinized. But to this end, God must assume all that is human, for what has not been assumed has not been saved.\textsuperscript{115} Christianity then is not merely a religion of the book.

\textsuperscript{110} Dupuis, \textit{Toward A Christian Theology}, 283.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 292.
\textsuperscript{112} See Dupuis, \textit{Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions}, 192.
\textsuperscript{113} Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology}, 283.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 148.
like Islam. Christianity is the religion of a person, the Christ. Furthermore, for Dupuis, the fullness of the revelation in Jesus Christ is a matter not of quantity, but of quality. It is a plenitude that is not one of extension and all-comprehension, but of intensity. It is qualitative because no revelation of the mystery of God can match the depths of what occurred when the divine Son incarnate lived on a human key with a human consciousness. The Word’s humanization is God’s deepest and unsurpassable involvement with humankind in history. Therefore, for Dupuis, Jesus Christ is at the centre of faith in salvation history. However this may be, in the context of the plurality of cultures and religious traditions, the spatial particularity of the Christ-event may be scandalous. That one particular culture could have received, nearly exclusively, the legacy of a solitary salvation event, an event occurring in a particular religious tradition, seems to constitute a belittling of humanity’s other religious traditions and cultures.

3.3 Dupuis’ Inclusive Pluralism

Dupuis proposes a model of inclusive pluralism as a way out, that is, “while keeping to the inclusivist position by holding fast to Jesus Christ as universal saviour, one may affirm at the same time a plurality of religious paths having some salvific value for their adherents; not, however, without being essentially and organically related to the Christ event in accordance with the one divine plan of salvation for humankind.” On the basis of the universality of the mystery of Christ, the uniqueness of Christianity is conceived as a unity of inclusion which

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116 Ibid., 143.
117 Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, 249.
118 Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology As a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” 93 and 95.
119 In the eyes of the Eastern Church, an economy of incarnation as the Western Church understands it could never lay claim to universality.
120 Dupuis differentiates between a paradigm and a model. Paradigms exclude each other, while models can be combined and complete each other. See Dupuis, “‘The Truth Will Make You Free,’” 226 and *Toward a Christian Theology*, 204-205.
embraces all the values of truth and goodness found in other religions. In the words of Dupuis, “two fundamental affirmations which, though apparently contradictory, must be seen as complementary.” He reiterates to his critics that it is “a useful model where one is able to combine and hold together the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation and defend the true positive and salvific value of the other religious traditions for their followers.” In this manner, Dupuis seeks to move beyond a theology of fulfillment.

Within Dupuis’ inclusivist pluralism, Christianity remains uniquely privileged. Joseph H. Wong refers to Dupuis’ inclusive christocentric model as pneumatological christocentrism which is based on Rahner. It is for this reason that Peter C. Phan claims that Dupuis’ idea “is anything but avant-garde, much less beyond the pale of orthodoxy.” According to Lane, Dupuis manages to synthesize two seemingly contradictory categories into a complementary one, namely, Rahner’s two distinct and separate strands of the universal saving will of God (pluralism) and the decisive moment of the Christ-event within history (inclusivism). Inclusive pluralism as put forward by Dupuis, Lane argues, is an advance and development of Rahner’s theology; bringing together the inclusivism and pluralism found within Rahner into a new and higher synthesis.

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122 Ibid., 369.
126 Lane, 111-112, 159-160.
Dupuis’ inclusive pluralism is a contemporary inclusivism according to Terrence W. Tilley. Tilley differentiates between classic inclusivism and contemporary inclusivism.\textsuperscript{127} The classic inclusivism is one that construes Christianity as completing or fulfilling other religions even though it recognizes that other faith traditions can contain divine truth and may serve as ways of salvation for their adherents. This classic inclusivism is represented by Rahner and the position of the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II. The contemporary inclusivist model evolves from dissatisfaction with the classical model of inclusivism among those engaged in interreligious dialogue. Contemporary inclusivism shares many of the same beliefs of classic inclusivism, like the saving activity of God cannot be confined to Christians alone, and God’s gracious gift of salvation includes those who do not explicitly profess faith in Christ.

However, in contrast to classic inclusivism which views Christ as playing an absolute role in the salvation of all human beings, contemporary inclusivism sees Christ as playing a constitutive role in humanity’s salvation. Contemporary inclusivists, like Dupuis, maintain that to speak of Christ as the absolute saviour is not only a barrier to religious dialogue, but is, in fact, simply wrong. For Dupuis, the term “absolute” is uniquely an attribute of the Ultimately Real, and therefore only the Absolute is absolutely.\textsuperscript{128} Dupuis uses the terms like “normative” and “constitutive” to indicate Christ’s role in salvation instead of the term “absolute” or “definitive”.\textsuperscript{129} The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are neither “relative” nor

\textsuperscript{128} Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology}, 292.
\textsuperscript{129} See O’Collins’ discussion of these terms in Gerald O’Collins, “Jacques Dupuis’ Contributions to Interreligious Dialogue,” \textit{Theological Studies} 64/2 (2003): 390-392.
“absolute”, but “constitutive” insofar as Christ holds saving significance for the whole of humankind and the Christ-event is the “cause” of salvation.\textsuperscript{130}

Dupuis acknowledges that his inclusive pluralism certainly needs further elaborations and requires to be studied more thoroughly, because the accepted understanding that Scripture is not monolithic, but multifaceted, and Tradition, in its turn, is not static, but dynamic.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{3.4 The Critique of Dupuis}\textsuperscript{132}

Dupuis got into trouble with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) for his book \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, published in 1997. He was issued a \textit{Notification} on the book on January 24, 2001 which states that there are “notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions”.\textsuperscript{133} The ambiguous points include his interpretation of the sole and universal salvific mediation of Christ, the unicity and completeness of Christ’s revelation, the universal salvific action of the Holy Spirit, and the value and significance of the salvific function of other religions. Dupuis finds that when the \textit{Notification} and \textit{Dominus Iesus} (issued on August 6, 2000 by the CDF) are studied together, the ambiguities in his book centre on the same christological concerns found in \textit{Dominus Iesus}, which cautions against minimizing the role of Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{130} Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology}, 283.
\textsuperscript{131} Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free,” 261.
Dominus Iesus condemns indiscriminately all theologians,¹³⁴ and so Dupuis, who are willing to justify not only a de facto pluralism, but also a de iure pluralism, because it feels that this would lead to relativism where the unique character of Christ’s mediation is called into question (DI 4). But theologians like Dupuis do not surrender to the ideology of a pluralism that despairs of any objective truth as claimed by Dominus Iesus. They hold on to the complete and definitive character of Christian revelation, and the uniqueness and universality of the mystery of Christ. Without claiming to know all the reasons for the multiplicity of ways to God, these theologians are simply seeking to interpret an apparently insurmountable pluralism in the light of what we know of God’s universal will of salvation.

Even though Knitter declares that Dupuis’ trinitarian christology is one of the boldest moves in the theology of religions to bridge the gap between theology and dialogue, he criticizes Dupuis’ constitutive christology. Knitter comments that for Dupuis, Christ still constitutes the privileged channel through which God has chosen to share divine life with humans, and thus loses some of the dialogical gains that he has acquired in his efforts to go beyond the fulfillment perspective of other religions. Knitter also criticizes Dupuis for claiming that even though the Spirit has more to say than what has been said in Christ, eventually all has to be related to Christ as the centre. “Christ, not the Spirit, is at the centre as the way to God.”¹³⁵ In this way, according to Knitter, Dupuis unintentionally subordinates the Spirit to Christ with his inclusive

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¹³⁴ Dominus Iesus does not reprove any authors, books, or theological schools by name, but at about the same time, the CDF issued a Notification that referred solely to one author, Dupuis and his book, Toward a Christian Theology. For more details on these events, see Franz Cardinal König, “Let the Spirit Breath,” in In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis, eds. Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 14-17.

¹³⁵ Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, 197.
plurality.\textsuperscript{136} Whatever Christians may have learnt from the Spirit working in other religions will always be viewed to be essentially only a clarification or a deepening of what they already know in Jesus. Michael Amaladoss observes, “The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. But she does not just repeat what Jesus has done in the Christian community. Otherwise, the other religions would not be different. Perhaps, together with the phrase, ‘the Father is greater than I’, we must take another phrase, ‘The Spirit is not I’, though we may not find it in this form in the Bible.”\textsuperscript{137} Even though the Spirit may be saying something new, something beyond the message of Jesus, it will have to connect with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Knitter offers the notion of \textit{perichoresis}, a dancing together and transformative acting together between the missions of the Son and Spirit.\textsuperscript{138}

Terrence Merrigan agrees, and adds that he is not at all clear if Dupuis has actually managed to move beyond the fulfillment theory.\textsuperscript{139} Amos Yong says that “failure to differentiate between the two missions of the Son and Spirit inevitably risks the subordination of the mission of the Spirit to that of the Son, and ultimately to an ecclesiological definition of soteriology.”\textsuperscript{140} The overemphasis on the superiority of the mission of the Son can result in the necessity of the Church for salvation. For Eastern Orthodox theologians, the dominance of ecclesiology in Latin theology and its ecclesiologically defined soteriology can be traced to the \textit{filioque} issue. If the Spirit is from the Father and the Son (as affirmed in the \textit{filioque}), the domain of the Spirit is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Amos Yong, \textit{Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions} (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 64.
\end{itemize}
circumscribed by the domain of the Son. If however, the Spirit is from the Father of the Son, then the economy of the Son in no way limits that of the Spirit. Yong also speaks of a denigration or domination of the Spirit by the Son.

In his reading of Dupuis, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen also finds that even though Dupuis is open to the salvific value of other religious traditions, he still holds Christ as the ultimate criterion. It follows then that Dupuis most naturally belongs to the inclusivist category, even though his inclusivism both revises and goes beyond that of Rahner, and challenges the inclusivism of Vatican II as not being inclusive enough. With regard to Dupuis’ trinitarian christology, Kärkkäinen sees clearly that Dupuis holds to a high christology. Kärkkäinen admits that Dupuis’ trinitarian christology is the first full-scale trinitarian theology of religions, but notes that Dupuis’ treatment of the relationship between christology and pneumatology in a trinitarian perspective is highly nuanced. Dupuis has offered a needed trinitarian corrective to approaches which have succumbed to any subordination of Christ in its various forms: whether to God in the theocentrism of Hick, or to the kingdom in regnocentrism, or to salvation in the soteriocentrism of Knitter, or to the Spirit in pneumatocentrism. In his way, Dupuis has overcome christomonism with his trinitarian christology.

4. Conclusion

Inclusive pluralism is faithful to the Christian tradition, but because it makes decisions about others prior to engagement, it hinders the ability of Christians to learn from others through

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141 For example, Georg Khodr and Vladimir Lossky. See Yong, Beyond the Impasse, 87.
142 See Yong, Discerning the Spirit(s), 319, 320.
144 Kärkkäinen, Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 49.
145 Kärkkäinen, An Introduction to the Theology of Religions, 211, and Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 55.
146 Kärkkäinen, Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 61.
interreligious dialogue. It predetermines the outcome of dialogue rather than approach others with genuine openness. It embraces others by presupposing similarities between Christianity and other faiths. Other faiths are seen merely as lesser versions of the truth of Christianity. This means that the incentive for dialogue is undercut as Christians lose the point of engagement, that is, to learn from the encounter with difference.\footnote{See Kristin Beise Kiblinger, “Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology,” in The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation, ed., Francis X. Clooney, SJ (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 22-23.} In imposing Christian concepts on others, inclusive pluralists see themselves in others rather than see others on their own terms. They ignore others’ voices and self-descriptions, and presumptuously claim to know more about what they are doing and saying than they do.

More concretely, Dupuis’ inclusive pluralism is based on a dogmatic christology from above. However, for interreligious dialogue in Asia today, the dialogue of life from below is practiced more. With his high christology, Dupuis has privileged the dialogue of theological exchange suitable for intellectuals. It seems that for Dupuis, the theoretical is more important than the practical. Knitter turns away from inclusive pluralism by favouring practice over theory. We move on to the next chapter for Knitter’s theology.
Chapter Three
“We Work Together for Our Common Well-being”: The Soteriocentrism of Paul F. Knitter

1. Introduction

To reduce the tension between mission and dialogue, in contrast to Dupuis, who makes an *a priori* claim for the superiority of Christianity over other religions, Knitter takes a soteriocentric or liberation theology approach by focusing on human suffering and the destruction of the earth. He believes that if a religion has nothing to say about the reality of suffering and oppression in this world, it has lost its relevance to life in the here-and-now. For him, suffering and the well-being of the earth provide common ground and a viable starting point for interreligious dialogue. His soteriocentric, Kingdom-centred, dialogical approach from below is practical and respectful of the faith of others. This chapter will examine Knitter’s approach, offer a critique of it, and reflect on its relevance to the context of Asia.

2.1 Knitter’s Shift to the Soteriocentric Model


moved on in an article entitled “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions” in 1987, and he further concretized his view in his *One Earth Many Religions* in 1995. Here he explored the connection between liberation theology and the theology of religions, which for him is a better option for promoting dialogue. The connection affected his way of doing theology to the point that he could no longer do a theology of religions unless it somehow connects with a theology of liberation. For him, the voices of the suffering Other, both humans and the Earth, and the voices of the religious Other belong together. The voices of the suffering Other have informed and made more comprehensible the voices of the religious Other in that together they deepen their understanding of the hard reality of suffering, and attempt collaboratively to respond to the needs of the suffering. Moreover, they need each other, and one without the other is ineffective.

Knitter is considered the principal figure to bring these two seemingly disparate streams of theological construction together. Theocentrism seeks common ground in the transcendent Other, a religious object beyond human subjects, but soteriocentrism seeks common ground in human

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152 Knitter’s approach gets its basic idea from Edward Schillebeeckx’s paradigm shift from the narrow ecclesiocentrism of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation) to the broader *extra mundum nulla salus* (outside the world there is no salvation). See Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 113. Schillebeeckx describes a worldly process in which everyone on this Earth experiences suffering as part of human existence which he calls a pre-religious experience, and thus is a basic experience accessible to all human beings. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 5.
153 Knitter suggests that the contemporary common scientific understanding of the Earth – how it originates and functions – acting as an ethical story rather than a creation story, can serve as a basis for interreligious dialogue, because of its praxis for the care of our common habitat, and this includes naturally a preferential option for the victimized. See Paul F. Knitter, “A Common Creation Story? Interreligious Dialogue and Ecology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 37/3-4 (Summer-Fall 2000): 285-300. However, D’Costa criticizes Knitter saying that the danger of divinizing the Earth coupled with claiming the Earth’s unitary and authoritative voice is always at the margins of his project. Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 33.
need, the religious subjects. Knitter’s new model of salvation has moved to “what in Christian symbols might be called ‘Kingdom-centrism’ or more universally ‘soteriocentrism’.”

According to Knitter, this model avoids imposing Western notions of God on other religions, and is less prone to ideological abuse. For Knitter, “the absolute that all else must serve and clarify, is not the Church or Christ or even God – but rather, the Kingdom and its justice.”

Knitter’s current view of a theology of religion is rooted in a dialogical soteriocentric model. When religious persons together listen to the voices of the suffering and the oppressed, when they attempt together to respond to those needs, Knitter finds that they are able to trust each other, and to feel the truth and the power in each other’s strangeness. He says, “The suffering Other becomes mediator, as it were, or conduit of trust and comprehension, between differing religious worlds.” The hinge-pin of Knitter’s soteriocentric model for dialogue is: we begin not with conversations about doctrine or ritual, nor even with prayer or meditation, rather we begin with some form of liberative praxis together. Knitter says that the preferential option for the oppressed is not an absolute condition for interreligious dialogue, rather it is to be offered or suggested as an invitation to a more authentic and effective dialogue. He suspects that many

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156 Schillebeeckx is the one who first thought of the “ecumene of world religions and the ecumene of humankind” which include all, including agnostics and atheists, and he calls this combination “the ecumene of suffering humankind.” Schillebeeckx, 189.
157 Knitter, One Earth Many Religions, 13.
158 See Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 34.
religions will want to take up this as a starting point, because one has to start somewhere.\textsuperscript{159}

Moreover, for all religious persons, this truth is appealing because it is practical and transformative.

A theology of religions has to realize that as far as a religion does not address, as a primary concern, the poverty and oppression that infest our world, it is not an authentic religion.\textsuperscript{160} Those religions that deny any relationship between the transformation of this world and personal salvation or enlightenment, that call upon their followers to abandon all concern for this world and concentrate on the next do not qualify for this soteriocentric kind of dialogue.

The soteriocentric approach is where ethical issues and ethical responsibility make it possible to recognize that the needs and sufferings afflicting humanity and the earth are a common concern for persons of all traditions,\textsuperscript{161} and so call for interreligious dialogue.\textsuperscript{162} Knitter favours the soteriocentric bridge, because he thinks that a globally responsible dialogue is most effective for the religions to understand each other and work together. For this bridge, the common ground is reached not by looking within or beneath the various religious traditions, but beyond and around the religions for that which is identifiable, urgent, pressing, and faces them all: the spectre and anguish of suffering in poverty, victimization, violence, patriarchy, and ecology brought about by human choices.\textsuperscript{163} This common ground is established mutually by

\begin{footnotes}
\item[159] See Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” 187-188.
\item[160] Ibid., 180.
\item[161] Knitter lists the forms of oppression and needed liberation that can gather all religions into a new community of concern and conversation: physical suffering, socio-economic oppression, nuclear oppression, and ecological disaster. See Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 27-30.
\item[162] Knitter also speaks of “pastoral moves” where theologians feel the need to explore the pluralist approach to other faiths without pressure from the academic circle. Therefore, there are pastoral reasons for dialogue. Furthermore, he also speaks of “scriptural moves” where the Bible figures among the incentives and paths for a pluralistic theology of religions. It is a new turn of the hermeneutical circle to provide new opportunities to question and be questioned by God’s Word. See Paul F. Knitter, “The Pluralist Move and Its Critics,” \textit{Drew Gateway} 58/1 (1988): 8-10.
\item[163] See Knitter, \textit{One Earth Many Religions}, 56-67.
\end{footnotes}
being discovered within conversation itself by all partners, not beforehand by any one. When
some common ground is discovered, it is important to keep in mind that it will be a terrain on
which we can build, not concrete structures, only tents. Knitter admits that it will be "shaky"
common ground, which will shift and reform as the conversation stumbles on, because his
approach to dialogue and truth is pragmatic.\footnote{Knitter, "Common Ground or Common Response?" 116.}
For Knitter, both human and ecological suffering are common starting points or contexts for conversation that call for a common response. It is not
something within the different traditions shared by all; it is something outside confronting them all.\footnote{Paul F. Knitter, “Making Sense of the Many,” Religious Studies Review 15/3 (July 1989): 207.}
A global responsibility for \textit{soteria},\footnote{A Greek word that encapsulates the concern for human and ecological well-being (salvation). Knitter’s \textit{soteria} is similar to Hans Kung’s \textit{humanum}, the truly human, human values and dignity, for the ground and criterion for religious conversation, to which Knitter adds the \textit{cosmicum}, the ecological. See Knitter, \textit{One Earth Many Religions}, 98-99.} that is, for the well-being of the threatened Earth and all its inhabitants can provide the framework, content, and motivation for dialogue among
religions that would be able to navigate between the issue of one universal absolute truth claim, and the issue of many totally diverse truths. Also, this concern will naturally and automatically
create solidarity that invites to interaction and conversation among the religions.\footnote{Ibid., 79.} Knitter also

\textit{2.2 The Kingdom of God and Liberation Theology}

Perhaps the deepest convergence that links liberation theology with a Christian theology of religions is a shared passion for the widest scope of the Kingdom of God. Knitter believes that the symbol of the Kingdom of God is “clear enough to ‘point to’ a common destination for all religions, but also broad enough to affirm the really different, distinctive, and universally urgent...
ways in which the various communities contribute to this common goal of greater well-being of humans and all sentient beings.”\footnote{169} While recognizing that the terms “Kingdom” and “God” are derived from his own Christian tradition, Knitter is confident that the reality denoted by the Kingdom is not an exclusive Christian possession. The understanding is that everyone of deep religious faith can work together for the well-being of all in the here-and-now, regardless of their notion of God. Moreover, we must also include those who do not believe in God, namely atheists and agnostics. Anyway, the Kingdom is present in the world wherever the values of the Kingdom are lived and promoted. In other words, the Kingdom is characterized by justice and peace in both personal relations and social and economic structures.

What is the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the Church? Dupuis\footnote{170} points out that in the documents of Vatican II, the Reign of God is still identified with the Church.\footnote{171} Only with \textit{Redemptoris Missio} does the notion of the Reign as larger than the Church begin to emerge, but even though distinct from each other, the Reign cannot be detached from the Church (\textit{RM} 18). However, the majority of theologians argue that from Vatican II onwards, the notion of the Church as not equal to the Kingdom had already begun. The Church is considered the beginning of the Kingdom, or “the initial budding forth of that Kingdom”, and “strains toward the completed Kingdom” (\textit{LG} 5). The Reign is an eschatological reality as well; the Reign is \textit{already} established in this world, but it is also \textit{not-yet}, because it has yet to reach its eschatological fullness. Moreover, the Church is a means or sacrament of the Kingdom.

\footnote{170} Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong presents the notion of the Kingdom and the Church based on Knitter and Dupuis in his article, “Crossing the Ethical-Practical Bridge: Paul F. Knitter's Regnocentrism in Asian Perspectives,” \textit{The Ecumenical Review} 63/2 (Jul 2011): 186-199. 
\footnote{171} See Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology}, 334-336.
In the christocentric model, while the Church has always been the servant of the Reign of God, its servant role has been understood as both necessary for that Reign to really take shape in the world and unique among all the other possible servants of the Reign. Outside the Church, the Reign is “an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come” (DP 35). This notion that all manifestations of the Reign outside the Church are ordered toward the Church clearly indicates that this model is a Fulfillment Model. However, the Reign of God is more important and extensive than the Church. How is it possible for the servant to end up telling the master what to do and what is allowed? In the missiology of Kingdom-centred or regnocentric theology, the Church does not place herself at the centre, the Church is not placed at her own service, rather she is entirely oriented toward the Reign of God.

According to biblical scholars, the priority of the historical Jesus was preaching and realizing the Kingdom of God, not simply preaching God. Knitter calls this “the canon within the canon” which deals with the primary concerns of Jesus. Jesus was not ecclesiocentric, christocentric, or even theocentric, but regnocentric. Jesus does not really define the Kingdom of God; he refers to it in parables and similes. It is common to acknowledge that the Kingdom in this world and in history began with Jesus Christ in his earthly life in his preaching. It was only later that the early Christians replaced preaching on the Reign of God with proclamation on the person of Christ. The proclaimer became the proclaimed, because the saving experience of Jesus was felt so strongly by individuals and the community that Jesus became an experience of

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172 Liberation theologians, Jon Sobrino and Juan Segundo, and feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza are examples of theologians who make use of biblical studies to argue for a regnocentric Jesus. Jesus is called the Spirit-filled, self-emptying and dialogical prophet of the Kingdom of God. See Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 117; Paul F. Knitter, “Mission and Dialogue,” Missiology: An International Review 33/2 (April 2005): 202ff.
revelation for them. This is understandable, because the life-giving reality of the Kingdom was being experienced by the early community, and they felt that it was still made possible through the ever-living resurrected Christ. Yet, christocentrism was not meant to replace, but rather to enhance regnocentrism. To emphasize Jesus’ original proclamation of the coming Reign of God is to return to regnocentric theology. But we still hold on to the idea that the Reign of God began with Jesus. This is what Knitter calls soteriocentric christology in which liberationists can understand Jesus in the light of the Kingdom, not the other way round. To understand our christological professions and titles of Jesus really mean to follow Jesus, and work for justice, peace, and love of the Kingdom as Jesus did.

Knitter’s suggestion is also for a dialogical christology in which dialogue with others is not merely an application of an a priori pre-formulated understanding of Christ, but dialogue with others is part of how we see Jesus and determine his meaning for us. In order for christology to be dialogical, it must be regnocentric where the focus of our picture of Jesus today should be the heart of his message: his commitment to announcing and giving shape to God’s Reign on earth. A regnocentric focus is also consistent with christology from below, starting with what we can know of the original message and mission of Jesus, rather than with a christology from above, where we understand Jesus as the revealed Son of God, one person with

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175 See Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 38-42.

two natures. A dialogical christology will also give certain priority to orthopraxis over orthodoxy.

The Church, following the example of Jesus, should foster the well-being of persons, to bring in the Kingdom of God, and change this world. To insist that the Kingdom, taking shape beyond the Church, has to be fulfilled in the Church is to impose the Church on, rather than adapt it to, what God is doing in the broader Reign. From a regnocentric perspective, Christians can look upon religious persons of other faiths as co-workers of the Reign, rather than assistants to be finally fulfilled in Christ and the Church. For Knitter, to avoid misunderstandings about the role of the Church, in order to promote the Reign, missionaries must do many things, like plant the seed of the Christian community, proclaim the Word, and dialogue with other faith communities. All these tasks are essential to the purpose of mission. But in insisting that they are essential, we recognize that they are subordinate to the primary goal of working for the Reign, and they never become ends in themselves.\textsuperscript{177} It is helpful to recall here that for Dupuis, while the believers of other religions perceive God’s call through their own traditions and respond to it in the sincere practice of their traditions, they become in all truth – even without being formally conscious of it – active members of the same Kingdom inaugurated by Christ.\textsuperscript{178} Therefore, we admit that the Church is one necessary means for realizing God’s reign on earth, but the Church is not the only means. There can be, and this is most likely, that there are other very different and fulfilling ways of realizing the Reign of God.

In reflecting on the Reign of God, it is also helpful to recall Dupuis’ trinitarian approach to God and the divine mission. If in the past the Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God

\begin{footnotes}
\item[177] Knitter, \textit{Jesus and the Other Names}, 110.
\item[178] Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology}, 345.
\end{footnotes}
and God’s mission was based almost exclusively on the mission of the second person of the Trinity, the Word, in a regnocentric approach to other religions, this approach now needs to be expanded and balanced by taking into consideration the mission of the third person, the Spirit. If it is true that Christians cannot make sense of God’s mission without Jesus the incarnate Word, neither can they really understand God’s mission without the Spirit. If we recognize the Spirit as “the Spirit of Christ”, we must also recognize the Spirit as genuinely different from the Word, as the Spirit who fills and renews the face of the earth, who has been at work beyond the Church before the incarnation of Christ. Put differently, the Kingdom of God is alive and active in the world through both the Word incarnate in Jesus and the Spirit filling the earth. Both are involved in building the Kingdom, but in different ways. God has two hands, not one. The Spirit is not subordinate to the Word. For Knitter, when a trinitarian theology is applied to missiology and a theology of religions, one can admit that what the Spirit may be revealing beyond the Church, in other religions, can be different from what the incarnate Word has revealed to the Church. This admission is conducive to interreligious dialogue.179

In a Kingdom-centred understanding of evangelization, can Christians be fired by the zeal to convert? Yes, they can, according to Knitter. Conversion remains a priority for everyone. But it is conversion to the Kingdom.180 It is to accept the invitation to fashion human life and society according to the patterns of God’s Reign. Thus to enable people to become members of the Kingdom of God is more important than to make them members of the Church.

179 Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 113.
180 Ibid., 121.
John Fullenbach speaks of the Kingdom as gift and task at the same time.\textsuperscript{181} The Kingdom as gracious gift from God is obvious, especially from the parables of Jesus. Yet the Kingdom, once accepted, becomes one’s task and demands all of one’s abilities. The gift is accepted precisely by carrying out the task entailed in it, which consists of the necessary task of creating and building an authentic community. The building of the Kingdom is a task that must be done together, and according to Knitter, with the collaboration of the followers of different religions.\textsuperscript{182}

Furthermore, for Knitter, in the dialogue with other traditions, a regnocentric hermeneutic will provide us with more practical aid toward determining how far we can go in expanding or adjusting Christian belief and practice; for instance, evaluating new christologies emerging from India and Hinduism not primarily by their conformity with Chalcedon, but by their potential to transform society. Also, we will confront the difficult question of the uniqueness of Jesus by appealing not to verbal statements from the New Testament, but rather, to the “canon within the canon” which is the criterion of Kingdom-praxis.\textsuperscript{183}

The centring on the Kingdom of God rather than on Christ bears fruits in two fields: in the development of a theology of religions and in the theology of liberation.\textsuperscript{184}


\textsuperscript{183} See Knitter, “A Liberation-Centered Theology of Religions,” 36.

\textsuperscript{184} See Fuellenbach, “Kingdom of God as Principle of Action in the Church,” and also John Fuellenbach, \textit{Church: Community for the Kingdom} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 82.
religions, the Kingdom of God furnishes theologians of religions with a broader perspective for entering into dialogue with other religious traditions than the centrality of Christ. If the Kingdom is the goal, then the question is no longer how other religious traditions are placed in the context of Christ or linked to the Church, but rather how the Kingdom is concretely present in these religions. In liberation theology, one can see how work for justice and freedom for the oppressed in the world is intrinsically linked to the struggle to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, in the here-and-now. The work for justice and liberation both inside and outside the Church can now be connected with the wider Kingdom, because the ultimate goal of the establishment of the Kingdom is to transform all of reality.

The Kingdom is meant to have a worldly, fleshly, social, even political dimension. God’s Kingdom is not simply something to be sought in the future. We are called to bring it about in the here-and-now. In the past, we may have been taught to accept the suffering, oppression and injustice of this life because in the next life, in God’s Kingdom where our true home is, we would have our final reward and be set free of our afflictions. No, it is not so. The Church is not telling us to reject the vision of a final Kingdom, but to broaden it. By removing oppression, poverty, disease, and discrimination from the world, we are showing God’s Kingdom and redemptive presence to be manifested in the here-and-now. When we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are praying that the human family and all beings be transformed into a more just and loving community now as well as in the world to come. But such structural change in the world of politics and economics will be short-lived (maybe not even possible in the first place) without internal structural change, that is, without change in the human heart and consciousness. For Knitter, the vision of God's
kingdom to be realized here in this world is, in other words, radically socio-political and at the same time profoundly spiritual. It calls for a change of social structures based on a change of the human heart.  

2.3. Critique of Knitter

Theologians like Knitter are concerned that dialogue is impossible if every person makes an absolute claim of religious superiority, for this would be a monologue, rather than dialogue. No one should make an absolute claim, for all truth is truth for the person who believes it. While the intention of Knitter is no doubt conducive to promoting peace and harmony, this is a spurious harmony, according to Gavin D’Costa, because it takes no one seriously by discounting their absolute claims. This matter concerns relativism.

Recognizing the paramount importance of social liberation for justice for all religions is Knitter’s way to combat relativism. Knitter emphasizes a processive-relational view of truth, while his critics espouse a classicist view of truth. For him, truth is neither a proposition nor a

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187 Knitter agrees with Charles Lindbeck that rather than we first have an experience of God, and then seek a language to express it, it is language that enables the experience, and determines just what the religious experience of God is; “No language, no God.” See Paul F. Knitter, “Toward a Liberative Interreligious Dialogue,” Crosscurrents 45/4 (Winter 1995): 453. Therefore, Knitter suggests that in order to penetrate the content of religious experience, not only must we learn and esteem our own religious language, we must also learn and value other religious languages; in other words, be a theologian of another tradition as well. See Paul. F. Knitter, “The Vocation of An Interreligious Theologian: My Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue,” Horizons 31/1 (2004): 139.
188 Furthermore, even though we can certainly learn many languages, we can only speak one language at one given time. This means that when we speak about other religions, understanding and judging them, we are doing so in one particular religious language. Just as we cannot speak in a universal language, so we cannot be religious, or understand religion, in one universal religious language.
189 Knitter describes relativism with an image: “If we cannot connect, if we cannot communicate and challenge each other, then each particular becomes its own absolute. What is true in my backyard is true for me but not for you; it is true because that’s the way things are in my backyard.” Knitter, “Christian Theology in the Post-Modern Era,” 326.
190 Knitter, No Other Name? 7-9.
correspondence, but a relation; and this truth is discovered empirically, not through a correspondence or classicist method. Religious truth is a disposition that one enters into by means of religious statements and practices. The factuality of beliefs is secondary to the effects they have on those who hold them. Truth, when properly understood, is precisely about bringing people into right and liberative relationships based on justice.\footnote{Concerning relationships, Knitter speaks of the voice of religious friends with shared aims, and the voice of religious activists cooperating with common concern for the oppressed and marginalized. Despite differences, interreligious friends can become interreligious activists. See Paul F. Knitter, “Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition?” in \textit{The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism}, ed., Paul F. Knitter (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 38-42.} From their ethical and soteriological fruits, Knitter claims, we shall be able to judge whether and how much other religious paths are salvific.\footnote{Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” 193.} As James L. Fredericks puts it, by placing his money on the well-being of the poor and nonpersons as the central value for evaluating religions, Knitter is suggesting that the real difference that distinguishes religious believers are not theoretical or doctrinal, but ethical. Proceeding from a soteriocentric position, Knitter effectively advocates a suspension of the search for doctrinal unity in subservience to an ethical mandate, namely, the call to advance a liberation agenda. However, Paul R. Eddy asks on a purely philosophical level: How can one justifiably conclude that orthopraxy in general and the preferential option for the poor and oppressed in particular are the touchstone by which to measure all things? In other words, how from a pragmatic starting point can one declare something to be the right or good by which all is to be judged without an appeal to a source of orthodoxy?
Moreover, Knitter’s emphasis on ethics is reminiscent of Kant’s Enlightenment ethics. Since we cannot agree on age-old contested religious truths, we can be content with easier-to-establish universally held moral truths. But we know that action comes together with belief, which is the narrative that makes the action good. An action is not just good from its outcome (consequentialism and pragmatism), but is good in terms of its inherent and internal particular type of activity (Aristotelian virtue ethics). In other words, an action is good by itself, and is not judged good because the outcome of that action is good. For example, caring for another human person is not judged good based on the beneficial outcome of that care, but judged according to its inherent action flowing from human dignity. Regarding Knitter’s soteriocentrism, Ratzinger asks, “Where do I find a just action if I cannot know what is just in an absolute way?” He further questions orthopraxis over orthodoxy, and criticizes Knitter on the way that “the new foundation of religion comes about by following a pragmatic path with more ethical or political overtones,” rather than following doctrines, based on “the complete, serene faith of the New Testament and of the church of all times.” Therefore, some sort of belief or faith narrative is a necessary basis for ethical propositions. Furthermore, Erik M. Clary, from an evangelical perspective, argues that through his mutualist lens, Knitter has come to see praxis not only as the verifier of religious truth, but also as its originator. As such, Knitter is dependent upon a circular model of truth that holds human experience as the measure of all things, and it is not just any experience, but

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193 D’Costa also argues that Knitter’s proposal is wedded to the Enlightenment project begun by Kant, where a universal ethical imperative is prioritized over metaphysics and religion. See Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 30.
specifically the experience of the modern religious intellectual that is advanced as the standard.\(^{195}\)

Moreover, Knitter, by demanding that no one enters into dialogue with a prepackaged final word, ironically imposes imperialist demands on the dialogue partner. Knitter is aware of this problem, but finds that imperialism on behalf of the poor and marginalized more acceptable than one which acts on behalf of correct doctrine. Such a view is allegedly more satisfactory because it does not impose its own views of God on other traditions, even if it does impose its soteriocentrism upon them.

However, Knitter fails to account for the way in which a tradition shapes its understanding of what the human condition is, and what it ought to be, and what constitutes liberation. For one tradition, it can mean proper adherence to jati (caste); for another, it means obeying the most authoritative interpretation of sharia (Muslim law); for another, it might mean adhering to non-contraceptive forms of sexuality; and for another, it might mean opposing all of the above as contrary to liberative justice.\(^{196}\) Hence, promoting human welfare is an unhelpful common denominator, as it specifies nothing in particular until each tradition addresses itself to what it means to be human, and what is meant by human well-being. In this sense, there is no way in which theory can be bypassed by praxis, they are always in mutual interaction.

Furthermore, apart from the philosophical problems, according to Eddy, what of the practical problems; for instance, can Knitter’s liberative preferential option successfully function as common ground for the numerous religious worldviews? How will this concept serve as an


orienting motif for the traditional Indian Hindu who views salvation in terms of release from the karmic cycle, and not as necessary liberation of the poor and the rejected caught in the crushing jaws of the centuries-old caste system?\textsuperscript{197} For D’Costa, Knitter has no grounds to judge whether another religion conforms to Kingdom values, for this is an imposition upon that religion of values that it does not necessarily extol.\textsuperscript{198} All religions construe the world from within their own normative paradigm. There is no neutral zone. Religions are driven to explain and make sense of absolutely everything in the universe, including other religions, in terms of their central religious vision. In this sense, the Kingdom values may be more Christian than one thinks. Conversely, Eddy judges Knitter’s understanding of \textit{soteria} on solely in existential/anthropological terms, to the utter neglect of the objective/cosmically redemptive emphasis found in Christian scriptures. Eddy claims that Knitter’s notion of salvation-liberation does no justice to the consistent New Testament teaching that the salvation wrought in and through Jesus Christ has ontological implications for the entire cosmos.\textsuperscript{199}

From the outset, the Kingdom-centred approach seems to stress the Kingdom to such a degree as to minimize the role of the Church. Additionally, in doing so, it forgets to bind the Kingdom to Jesus Christ. D’Costa asks how can one speak of the Kingdom without reference to Christ, God and the Holy Spirit?\textsuperscript{200} These are also the concerns of both \textit{Redemptoris Missio} and \textit{Dialogue and Proclamation}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{198} D’Costa, “Pluralist Arguments,” 336.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Eddy, 244.
\end{itemize}
If the Kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the Kingdom of God which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the Kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal… Likewise, one may not separate the Kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the Kingdom of God (RM 18). It is therefore not possible to separate the Church from the Kingdom as if the first belonged exclusively to the imperfect realm of history, while the second would be the perfect eschatological fulfillment of the divine plan of salvation (DP 34).

Moreover, by stressing the Kingdom too much is also to make human welfare the main purpose of evangelization which reduces the role of the Church to social service; it becomes anthropocentric. This renders the Kingdom as an ideological program or a product of human action alone, bordering on Pelagianism in emphasizing salvation by good works only. When human needs are made the focus of evangelization, the Reign is completely secularized, because the focus is on programs and struggles for socioeconomic and political liberation, and the transcendent aspect is neglected. Knitter is well aware of this criticism. In response he claims that even though the Christian and the social worker may share the same goals for liberation, the humanism of the Christian is transfused and animated by the Spirit, where such human works are also spiritual works. Moreover, he trusts that these Spirit-filled works can be more persevering and hope-filled. Furthermore, there is the aspect of the transcendent; the Christian regnocentric approach understands its goal as the Kingdom of God, where the transcendent is an essential part of the Christian witness and effort to Kingdom-building.\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{201} See Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 130-132.
Knitter calls the persons of other faiths anonymous agents of the Kingdom every time they perform an act of kindness or work for social justice, in contrast to Rahner’s anonymous Christians.\textsuperscript{202} For him, this means that in looking upon people of other faith traditions as agents of the Kingdom, Christians are not trying to include them neatly in an already clear and definitive eco-human project and vision of well-being, but in a project that is in an ongoing developmental process. However, the Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God is quite clear, especially in its eschatological fulfillment. By calling the followers of other religions agents of the Kingdom, it is also subsuming them under the overall fulfillment of the Kingdom in Christ.

3. Relevance to the Context in Asia

Asia is a continent teeming with millions of people living in massive poverty, where they struggle each day for mere survival. Even though a number of countries of Asia have made considerable economic progress, there still exist degrading and inhuman poverty, widening inequality, unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. “The Church in Asia then, with its multitude of poor and oppressed people, is called to live a communion of life which shows itself particularly in loving service to the poor and defenseless” (\textit{EA} 32). The FABC speaks of the reality of the poor as \textit{locus theologicus}, that is, those who suffer from massive poverty are privileged resources for theology, as the medium \textit{par excellence} for a God-encounter that draws God’s liberating presence.\textsuperscript{203} The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) upholds that the experience of the struggle of the poor and the oppressed against all

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 120.
forms of injustice and domination in the Third World as a source of theology must be taken seriously, because it provides a new *locus* for theological reflection.\(^{204}\) For the EATWOT, the faith reflection on this experience is authentic theology, where the poor and oppressed themselves are beginning to articulate their own reflections in both verbal and non-verbal form.\(^{205}\) J.C. Duraisingh and K.C. Abraham affirm that genuine theology is born out of a people’s struggle for liberation and therefore no Third World theologian can remain in isolation from the people.\(^{206}\) Phan also calls the struggles of the Asian poor a resource for Asian theology.\(^{207}\) Knitter suggests that “a liberation-centred dialogue among religions can lead both to a more fruitful conversation and to a broader transformation of this world if participants accord a certain ‘hermeneutical privilege’ to the experience and voice of nonpersons.”\(^{208}\) Knitter’s ‘hermeneutical privilege’ for the poor and nonpersons resonates well with the situation in Asia.

An important feature of Asian theology is the primacy of praxis over theology, which Knitter also stresses. For Aloysius Pieris, “theology as God-talk or God’s talk is not necessarily the universally valid starting point, or the direct object, or the only basis of interreligious collaboration in the Third World. But liberation is.”\(^{209}\) For Knitter, the coming together of people of different religions is not primarily to talk about problems within and among religions, but to collaborate on actions to alleviate the problems of poverty, violence, injustice, and environmental degradation. Therefore, the interaction is not explicitly religious, but ethical; not

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\(^{205}\) Ibid., 200.


\(^{207}\) Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 103.


to share our beliefs, but to act out our beliefs together.\textsuperscript{210} This type of action-based and ethical dialogue is the kind that Christians in Asia can involve themselves in through the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action.

Nowhere the theme of the Kingdom achieves the kind of theological and pastoral preeminence than it has with the FABC. Since the reality of the Church in Asia is challenged by massive dehumanizing poverty, yet rich with diverse cultures, and religious plurality, the mission of the Church can no longer be conceived as saving souls, conversion, and planting the Church, rather the main thrust is the establishment of God’s Reign. As the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC states: “Our challenge is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood [sic] in these Asian realities. In short, it is to work to make the Kingdom of God a reality.”\textsuperscript{211} The FABC also speaks of the Church at the service of the Kingdom; “the Church exists in and for the Kingdom.”\textsuperscript{212} Christians can expand what liberation theology calls “basic Christian communities” (BCC) to “basic human communities” (BHC), which gather for interreligious prayer, reflection, fellowship and common action for the good of the neighbourhood. The BHC is what the FABC promotes.\textsuperscript{213} According to Knitter, “participation in such communities is not determined by membership in one particular

\textsuperscript{210} Paul F. Knitter, \textit{Introducing Theologies of Religions} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 243-244.
\textsuperscript{211} Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC: Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium (1.7), in Rosales and Arevelo, 275.
\textsuperscript{212} Other terms includes “the Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church,” “the Church is an instrument for the actualization of the Kingdom.” All are from BIRA IV/2, Final Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue. Rosales and Arevelo, 252.
religion, but by one’s concern for and commitment to the removal of human suffering.” Therefore, Knitter’s soteriocentrism resonates well with the mission and dialogue situation in Asia through the building of the Reign of God. It is the effective way that Christians, infused with the Spirit, can witness to their faith through their dialogue of life and dialogue of action for the common good.

The proclamation of Jesus as unique saviour presents a huge problem in a religiously diverse Asia. The Asian bishops promote Jesus as the servant of the poor in a dialogue of liberation and action; they believe that mutual concern for the poor and oppressed can be a common theme for dialogue. Knitter thinks along the same lines too when he speaks of Jesus not as the only Saviour, but as liberator and compassionate friend of the poor whose “master symbol” is the Reign of God. In this way, the traditional Christian conviction about the universal importance of Jesus is affirmed without diminishing the importance of other religious leaders. The Asian bishops do not consider the centrality of Jesus Christ as an obstacle to interfaith dialogue, but how to proclaim this centrality is. However, Knitter is against absolutist language to depict Christ in interreligious dialogue, and writes on the relational uniqueness of Christ.

4. Conclusion

By putting forth Knitter’s soteriocentrism, I have related it to its usefulness in responding to the mission context of Asia. Pieris states, “Every Asian culture has grown round a soteriological nucleus not yet assimilated into the Christian consciousness.”

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214 Knitter, “A Liberation-Centered Theology of Religions,” 47.
215 See Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religions, 142-146.
though the removal of suffering has a priority in the promotion of dialogue, still there is the clear and strong sense that an effective, enduring, really transformative dialogue with the suffering of the world will have to include dialogue with the world religions. Knitter’s soteriocentrism offers the possibility for developing a more adequate Asian theology that balances between the theology of the poor, and religions; and not only that, but also with the theology of cultures, keeping in mind the triple dialogue of the FABC. His soteriocentric approach can open up new vistas in the Christian theological understanding of salvation through dialoguing with Asian’s rich and diverse religious and cultural traditions in the context of the poor.

Knitter’s soteriocentrism is a better starting point for reducing the tension between mission and dialogue. He is more interested in promoting dialogue from below than in proclaiming dogmas handed down from above. Not surprisingly, even Dupuis admits that it is better for interreligious dialogue to adapt a regnocentric rather than a christocentric approach, an approach which coincides with that of Jesus himself.217

The conclusion presents the major similarities and differences between the approach of Dupuis’ trinitarian christology and Knitter’s soteriocentrism to dialogue between religions. It concludes with some observations relating to the way forward in improving relations between religions in Asia.

Both Dupuis and Knitter\(^{218}\) speak of the Spirit at work in other religions. They follow the documents of the Church on the role of the Spirit in the economy of salvation. Both agree that theologically, our ecclesiology and missiology have been developed principally within the framework of christology, and now have to be re-visioned also within the framework of pneumatology, or more inclusively, in the context of a robust trinitarian theology. The Spirit needs to be recognized as genuinely different from the Word. Though the Spirit fills and renews the Earth beyond the Church, yet the mission of the Spirit is not separate from the mission of the Word. The Asian understanding of creative harmony, not separation, of “both-and”, not “either-or,” is useful to highlight both the role of the Word and the Spirit in salvation. However, both Dupuis and Knitter do not speak of the Spirit at work in people who have no religious faith, in atheists and agnostics, or for that matter, within humanism and secularism, where in Asia, both are slowly exerting influence due to globalization.

Both Dupuis\(^{219}\) and Knitter speak of the Kingdom, which is alive and active in the world through the action of both the Word incarnate in Jesus and the Spirit. The Church is distinct from the Kingdom. The Kingdom is present where gospel values are at work, where human beings are


\(^{219}\) For Dupuis’ writing on the Reign of God and the Church, see Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, 330-357.
respected, and where people are open to the action of the Spirit. The Kingdom can be felt and experienced in two genuinely different ways: through the Christian experience of it as initiated by Jesus and served by the Church, and in the wider Kingdom outside the Church. This Reign of God has already begun, and is taking shape under the Word and the breath of the Spirit, and it rushes toward its eschatological fulfillment at the end of time. The Church is not to be understood as the fulfiller all things, but as a servant, salt, or leaven amidst the dough. For Dupuis, the Kingdom of God to which the members of other religions belong is the same one preached and begun by Jesus Christ. Thus, Dupuis’ regnocentric model cannot avoid the christocentric approach. In spite of religious differences, the followers of various religions are co-members of the Reign of God, even without them knowing it. In contrast, Knitter is more open to a regnocentric model that does not necessarily have recourse to Christ. For Knitter, Jesus is understood in the light of the Kingdom, not the other way round. Moreover, Dupuis focuses more on the eschatological perspective of the Kingdom than Knitter.

For Dupuis, the building of the Kingdom of God demands two inseparable dimensions: the horizontal, where people commit themselves with common accord in the cause of human rights and work for the integral liberation of the poor and oppressed; and the vertical, where religious and spiritual values are promoted. The first is the sign of the second. In Asia, human and spiritual values are closely linked. Integral human development must include all aspects of the human person: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, etc. Dupuis puts greater stress on the God dimension of the Kingdom, while Knitter is more concerned with the

220 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, 345.
222 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, 346.
Kingdom. For Knitter, the well-being of the human person and the Earth is more pertinent to the followers of the different religions. For him, “to seek the Kingdom of God is to seek the well-being of humankind in this finite world.” And “the well-being of humanity and of the Earth demands social transformation, development, political liberation, yes, in some instances, revolution.”²²³ Even though Knitter talks about external transformation of worldly structures, he also speaks of the transformation of internal structures, that is, of change in the human heart or internal conversion.²²⁴ Even though he attaches the term “spiritual” to this internal conversion, I think it has more to do with human values than with the Transcendent.

Dupuis’ theology is a theology from above. He proceeds from the two distinct missions of the Word and the Spirit, and yet stresses on the unity of these two missions. In this sense, Dupuis’ theology is more systematic than Knitter’s, flowing from a priori statements of the Trinity into the pluralistic reality of the world. On the other hand, Knitter works with a theology from below. He starts from the shared reality of suffering in this world and the need to liberate oneself from that suffering to achieve the well-being of the human person and the Earth.

Knitter’s theology is more pastoral and dialogical in his engagement with others than Dupuis’. His focus is on liberation, and how soteria is linked to the Kingdom. Dupuis makes his case for a theoretical theology of religions, whereas Knitter contributes to the more practical process of interreligious dialogue. Employing the four modes of dialogue, Dupuis’ theology leans more toward the dialogue of theological exchange and spiritual experience, because of the intellectual manner of his theology and the shared spiritual movements of the Spirit among different

²²³ Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 116-117.
²²⁴ Ibid., 117.
religious people; while Knitter’s theology has an affinity with the dialogue of life and dialogue of action, because of the common experience of suffering and the common effort to alleviate it.

Dupuis’ theology is still christocentric even though he may say that he is not, because while he is open to the salvific value of other religious traditions, he still holds that salvation is through Christ alone. What is revealed by the Spirit in other religions is always related to Christ, because pneumatocentrism and logocentrism are closely linked. In this way, the Spirit cannot say anything different from what Christ said. Even when Dupuis attempts to construct a theology of religious pluralism which is trinitarian in nature, he does so from a distinctively traditional Christian perspective that upholds Christ as the centre of everything.

Knitter, however, is totally pluralistic in his soteriocentrism; he is not christocentric. For Knitter, the absolutist statements in the New Testament about Jesus are poetic or metaphoric in nature, and are not to be taken literally. The many titles given to Jesus, such as Lord, Son of Man, Word of God, are interpretations of the meaning of Jesus, not ontological claims about his nature. He considers them to be “love language”, the language someone uses to talk about the person who has transformed one’s life and stands at its centre; for example, “You are my one-and-only. There is no other like you.”225 Such language is used in and about a personal relationship. It must be understood as confessional language as well, and not as philosophical or doctrinal language. In Knitter’s commitment to a liberation theology of religions, Christians have a unique relationship with Jesus, the Liberator, while others have unique relationships in their own way with their founders. Moreover, for Knitter, what the Spirit reveals in other religions can be different from that of Christ. The Spirit is independent of the Word, and can work beyond the

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225 Knitter, *No Other Name?* 184-185; *Jesus and the Other Names*, 67-68; *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 133.
boundary of the Church in a way that is different from the incarnate Word revealed in the Church.\textsuperscript{226} Therefore, the Reign of God, as it takes shape under the breath of the Spirit, can be seen as genuinely different from the one made known through the Word incarnate in Jesus. Consequently, according to Knitter, the Kingdom of God beyond the Church is independent, that is, not to be submerged or engulfed or incorporated into the economy of the Word represented in the Christian churches.\textsuperscript{227} There can be, and most likely are, other very different and very fulfilling ways of appropriating the universal activity of God’s Spirit and Kingdom;\textsuperscript{228} the Spirit can establish the Reign in ways unknown to Christians.\textsuperscript{229} In short, for Dupuis, the Kingdom and the Church are distinct yet interrelated, but for Knitter, the Kingdom and the Church are related, yet separate. The Kingdom and the Church are not the same thing for Knitter, and furthermore, the Kingdom is not only more extensive than the Church, it is also more important.\textsuperscript{230}

Dupuis has to be compliant and responsible with official Church magisterial teaching, because he is a priest of the Roman Church under obedience to that teaching. Knitter, however, is not a priest, and thus has more freedom from the hierarchy of the Church in expressing his thoughts in theology. Understandably for Dupuis, “the task of theology does not stop at simply abiding by official doctrinal statements, without ever venturing beyond the official teaching, provided this be done in a responsible manner and on solid foundation. The task of theology implies interpreting that teaching in the context of lived experience.”\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{226} Knitter follows Orthodox theologian, George Khodr on the hypostatic independence (real and effective difference) of the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father. See Knitter, \textit{Jesus and the Other Names}, 113.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 113-114. See also Mong, \textquote{Crossing the Ethical-Practical Bridge,} 189-190.

\textsuperscript{228} Knitter, \textit{Jesus and the Other Names}, 111.

\textsuperscript{229} Mong, \textquote{Crossing the Ethical-Practical Bridge,} 194.

\textsuperscript{230} Knitter, \textit{Jesus and the Other Names}, 108-109.

\textsuperscript{231} Dupuis, \textquote{Christianity and the Religions’ Revisited,} 369.
In the context of Asia’s plurality, I have proposed that the responses of Dupuis and Knitter are the twin tracks of theory and practice in the search for balance between mission and dialogue. Dupuis’ trinitarian christology provides a much-needed theoretical grounding while Knitter’s soteriocentrism works well in the practical action of dialogue and living among people of various faith communities. Both theory and praxis are needed in the building of relationships. In presupposing that the Spirit is at work in the Other and in the Other’s faith tradition, we approach interreligious dialogue with mutual self-mediation. With openness to the Spirit at work in the Other, we can move forward more effectively in our collaborative search for the common good. Conversely, when we work together to alleviate suffering, and for the liberation and integral development of the human person, we can see the Spirit at work in the life and living faith of the Other. The interaction between theory and praxis through dialogue is the way to the future.

Overall, in light of the thinking of Dupuis and Knitter, a Christian theology of religions (from above), which responds to the challenge of religious pluralism, and a liberation theology (from below), which responds to the problem of suffering and injustice, need each other for a productive interreligious dialogue. In view of the massive poverty in Asia, the starting point for dialogue should be from below, not from above. The future of Christianity in Asia calls for a triple dialogue: with the poor (through liberative integral development), with cultures (inculturation), and with other religions (interreligious dialogue). These dialogues are not separate activities, but activities mutually intertwined. Gospel values cannot really transform a culture in a multi-religious situation without entering into dialogue with other religions which also animate that culture, and without challenging the unjust structures to which the culture gives
rise. One cannot liberate the poor from all that oppresses them if one does not succeed in transforming the worldview and value system of the population with the help of other religions. Interreligious dialogue must lead to a mutual collaboration toward the transformation of culture and the liberation of the poor. Thus liberation, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue converge to liberate persons in community. Both Dupuis’ trinitarian Christology and Knitter’s soteriocentrism facilitate the overcoming of a narrow ecclesiocentrism, and thus help to relax the tension between mission and dialogue, because the Reign of God is foremost in dialogue with the poor, cultures, and with the religions.

This study will add to the literature on interreligious dialogue in Asia. The comparison between the theology of Dupuis and Knitter can complement the findings of each scholar, and be useful in fresh appropriations of the understandings of mission and dialogue, especially in Asia.
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